



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Weekly News for National Guard Families

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Websites:

National Guard Family Program
 Online Communities for families and youth: <http://www.guardfamily.org/>
<http://www.guardfamilyyouth.org/>

TRICARE website for information on health benefits <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/>

Civilian Employment Information (CEI) Program Registration for Army and Air <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/esgr/index.jsp>

National Guard, Air Force, and Coast Guard Reserve

Cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve who are currently on active duty

<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2004/d20040331ngr1.pdf>

Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) contains links and information about schooling, distance education, scholarships, and organizations devoted to the military family

<http://militarychild.org/index.cfm>

Militarystudent.org is a website that helps military children with transition and deployment issues. It has some great features for kids, parents, special needs families, school educators, and more—even safe chatrooms for kids.

<http://www.militarystudent.org>

Have an article, announcement, or website that you'd like to share with the National Guard Family Program Community? Send your suggestions in an e-mail to Richard.Flynn@ngb.af.mil.

FEATURE ARTICLE

This section features contributions from you, the NGB-FP staff.

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Spouse Orientation: A ‘Mobilizing’ Experience

by Connie Myers, *Wing Family Program Coordinator, 186th Air Refueling Wing*

At 0700 hours on 7 March 2004, twenty-five excited spouses gathered in the dining facility at Key Field Air National Guard Base in Meridian Mississippi for an experience of a lifetime. They had been mobilized!

Actually, they weren’t mobilized for military duty, but rather for a spouse orientation flight. After receiving their “personnel folder” complete with a copy of their invitational travel orders and dog tags, they made their way to the supply warehouse to get outfitted with a Kevlar helmet and web belt. Then it was on to the mobility line where representatives from Personnel, Legal, Medical, Military Pay, Chaplain and the Family Program Office briefed the spouses on deployment issues and mission requirements.

With helmets and web belts on, they went to Operations for their Intel, Medical, and pre-flight safety briefing. They were also treated to a chemical warfare suit demonstration with one of our spouses as a model.

Then it was finally time to board the KC135 and fly off to refuel a B52 bomber. The spouses were thrilled to be allowed to be in the “boom pod” to watch the actual refueling.

After a short 3-hour flight, we arrived back at Key Field safe and sound. One of the highlights as we touched down at Key Field was to be greeted by the husbands and children and members of the Student Flight holding welcome home signs and waving flags.

All of this would not have been possible without the tremendous support from the personnel at Key Field. The events of that day confirmed what we already suspected—that in the Air National Guard, there is no job more important than another. The men and women of the 186th Air Refueling Wing are professionals who work as a team, demonstrating that there is certainly more to the mobilization and deployment process than just packing a suitcase and leaving home. From the Security Forces who checked our ID cards at the front gate to the young men and women in the Student Flight, they all have a common goal —completing the mission or task assigned.

A very special thank you to all the men and women, from the briefers to the airplane crew, who took such special care of us and made that a day we won’t soon forget.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

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April 8, 2004

Army Sees Little Sign of Retention Crisis

By Harry Levins, Post-Dispatch Senior Writer

Common wisdom holds that on the horizon for the armed forces lurks a dark cloud called a retention crisis - the loss of experienced soldiers weary of nonstop deployments.

But in this region, military people make two points:

It's too soon to tell whether the cloud will turn into a storm of soldiers quitting.

So far, anyway, some evidence points in the other direction.

"Our facts right now suggest that we're doing well in retaining soldiers," says Lt. Col. Christopher Lawson, commander of recruiting and retention for the **Illinois Army National Guard**.

The flare-up in fatalities this week remains an unknown factor. Sgt. Maj. Richard L. Grant handles recruiting and retention for the **Missouri National Guard**. From his office in Jefferson City, he says:

"A lot of soldiers balance the fact of 480,000 soldiers in the Army with 600-plus killed in Iraq against the total of deaths here from auto accidents and convenience-store stickups. They take a pragmatic approach: 'When your time is up, your time is up.'"

Will the spate of fatalities this week in Iraq hit soldiers' families harder than it hits the soldiers themselves? Grant says, "It increases the worry level for *everybody* - spouses and the whole community. Everybody hopes it ends quickly."

In the **Army National Guard** in Missouri, 18 percent to 23 percent of its people get out in the typical year. But in the 12 months that ended Sept. 30, the Guard lost only 16 percent.

Grant concedes that some soldiers who might have quit *couldn't* quit. Their units are on active duty, and they're in for the duration of that active duty, plus 90 days - what the armed forces call "stop-loss" status.

Only when they get home from active duty, and then sweat out the 90 days, will anybody know for sure. Most people involved in the process think four to six months must pass before the picture becomes clear.

Army Reserve soldiers in Missouri fall under a headquarters in Wichita, Kan., where Lt. Col. John Ligon handles re-enlistment affairs.

He says that of the 2,500 soldiers mobilized after Sept. 11, 2001, only a bit more than 10 percent have opted out - about half the normal loss rate.

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"But we have a big unknown piece," he says - soldiers who just spent a full 12 months in Iraq. Only now is the first batch getting home.

Ligon says that only time will tell whether enough of those soldiers will elect to stay.

From his personnel office in the Pentagon, Army Lt. Col. Franklin Childress says that all of the five divisions that saw combat in Iraq have met their retention goals - or come extremely close - in the first half of the current fiscal year.

"And if the trend runs the other way, we'll take steps like added incentives," he said. "We want to keep these people who have 'seen the elephant' - who have seen combat."

And the Missouri Guard's Grant says, "It reminds me of going to summer training when I was a young artilleryman in the Guard. We'd be up late on night firing exercises, and we'd be out in the rain and tired, muddy and hungry. At the end of the two weeks, people would say, 'I'm getting out!'"

"And then back home, at the next drill at the armory, they'd be laughing and telling war stories about the rain and the mud.

"I think we might see that on a larger scale now. They'll reintegrate quickly with their families and put the hardships behind them."

Despite the shooting in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army recruiting has held up well.

From Recruiting Command headquarters at Fort Knox, Ky., spokesman Doug Smith says the Army is well on track to meet the current fiscal year's quota of 77,000 recruits for the Army, plus 21,200 more for the Army Reserve.

And locally, Lt. Col. Bruce Foreman of the St. Louis Army Recruiting Battalion says, "Most people would think the propensity to join might be off, but not for us."

Each month, from eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois, Foreman expects his recruiters to find 160 recruits for the Regular Army and 60 more for the Army Reserve. By and large, the recruiters come through.

Still, the all-volunteer Army has a saying: "You enlist the soldier, but you *re-enlist* the family."

In other words, enlisting a soldier is easier than persuading the same soldier to stick around for a second hitch.

From his office in Springfield, the Illinois Guard's Lawson explains why.

"When we recruit somebody 17 to 19 years old, that young man or woman is looking at starting a career. It's easy to match their choices" - with college benefits and specialized training.

But after six years, the enlistment runs out. "By that time, they're likely to be in college, or married, or parents. And balancing all of that with military service is a more calculated decision."

The services strive to re-enlist a certain percentage of their people. That way, they are spared the cost of training replacements. The military benefits from the old hands' experience. "And they give a unit the continuity and leadership skills that any organization needs," Lawson says.

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But hanging on to the soldiers means hanging on to the soldiers' spouses, too.

"If the spouse isn't happy, the soldier isn't happy," says Master Sgt. Clint Conklin, a career counselor at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Conklin encourages soldiers to bring their spouses along to his re-enlistment pep talks. He has reference material showing the spouse what every Army post in the world has to offer in terms of housing, schools and other "quality of life" factors.

One happy spouse is Becci Aho, 23. Her husband, Sgt. Wilfred Aho, 24, recently re-enlisted at Fort Leonard Wood - even though he has been in Iraq, and even though he'll head off soon to a second tour in Korea.

"I think it's wonderful that he re-enlisted," Becci Aho says. "I can't see him doing anything else."

Although the Army makes spouses stay home when soldiers go to Korea, Becci Aho is philosophical. "We've done it before," she says. "We can do it again."

Unlike the Army's Aho, the citizen-soldiers in the National Guard and Army Reserve must balance their military service against their civilian lives. Even so, says one Army Reserve spokesman, they're managing to juggle things.

"The retention people here say they're on their 'glide path' for the year," says Sgt. Tony Lindback, whose headquarters in Fort Snelling, Minn., controls reservists in Illinois and five other Midwestern states.

Lindback says, "They're not seeing the mass exodus from the military that many people had feared."

"The pay isn't bad"

Echoing Lindback is Walter Schumm, who specializes in the armed forces as a sociologist at Kansas State University, close to the Army's Fort Riley.

"I would have expected a much bigger hit on retention than I'm hearing about," he says. "But I see four factors at work.

"First, the pay isn't bad.

"Second, the soldiers believe in the validity of their mission.

"Third, unlike Vietnam, there are no draftees. The people who are in today are less likely to mope and groan."

Finally, he says, soldiers see in President George W. Bush "a patriot with a sense of moral standards."

Schumm says, "They're putting intense demands on the soldiers." But he tells of a student in his classes whose husband just got back to Fort Riley from Iraq. He'll return to Iraq next year - and even so, he just re-enlisted for six years.

"He's happy to have a year back," Schumm says.

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Some of the most intense demands fall on military police soldiers, who are much in demand and short in supply.

All four Military Police companies in the **Missouri National Guard** are on active duty - and three of those companies are on their second such stint since Sept. 11, 2001.

"It's too early to tell whether we'll have a retention problem," says Lt. Col. Wendul Hagler, commander of the Fulton-based 175th MP Battalion. He notes that even before deployments of recent years, Guard units turned over perhaps one-fifth of their people every year.

Hagler himself got home in February from a nine-month stint in Kosovo. He cited one of his soldiers, Sgt. Glen Smith of the St. Louis area, as an example of why soldiers serve.

"After Desert Storm," Hagler says, "he got out of the Guard as a staff sergeant. But then, when Sept. 11 hit, he got back *in* - even though he had to take a one-stripe cut in rank."

And from Wichita, the Army Reserve's Ligon says that among returning reservists, "We see a 'Band of Brothers' deal. They've been together for up to 18 months, and a lot of them have been shot at together. It's a unique team-builder - and some may feel that if they get out, they're letting down their military 'family.'"

The Myrtle Beach Sun-News

April 9, 2004 Friday

South Carolina State News in Brief - Reorganization Threatens 700 Guard jobs

COLUMBIA

South Carolina can expect to lose up to 700 **National Guard** positions as the Army increases its forces in Iraq, the head of the state **National Guard** told a state Senate budget panel Thursday.

Adjutant General Stan Spears told a Senate Finance subcommittee of the expected cuts as he discussed state spending on Army and Air Guard operations.

Senators quizzed Spears about lengthy deployments Guard troops face in the nation's ongoing missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"When's it going to end? I wish I could tell you," Spears said.

A reorganization effort is expected to reduce the size of the state **National Guard** from 9,200 to 8,500 people.

"It's all under study at the **National Guard** Bureau and the Department of the Army," Spears said after the hearing.

For Guard leaders, "it makes us scratch our heads because we don't know what's coming next," he said. "If we reduce our strength, that means we're going to have to give up units and close armories as well. It puts us in a bad situation."

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The Army and **National Guard** have been studying eliminating unfilled slots, Army spokeswoman Alison Bettencourt said. There are about 388,000 slots in the force, but only about 350,000 are authorized to be filled, Bettencourt said.

DEPLOYMENT

Philadelphia Inquirer

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Camden School Salutes Faculty Leaving for Duty

The send-off was hush-hush. Tears and hugs followed the music, dance and drama.

By Edward Colimore; Inquirer Staff Writer

The whole student body and faculty of the Creative Arts High School were in on the secret.

They had decorated the dance-drama studio in red, white and blue, and quietly prepared a program to salute two staff members who were leaving for military duty.

When the music, dance and dramatic performances ended yesterday, the surprised soldiers tried to thank the students. But they found saying goodbye difficult - amid so many tears, hugs and students' cries of "We love you."

"I don't have children, but you become my children," said Mark Boogaard, a math teacher and major in the New Jersey Army **National Guard** who will be deployed to Iraq. "... I know there will be times, at my lowest low, that I'm going to be drawing on your strength, inspiration, courage and love."

Catherine Johnson, an Air Force reservist and social-service coordinator at the school, dabbed her eyes with tissue as she addressed the students: "I, too, do not have children, but I want to thank you for letting me share you with your parents."

Boogaard, 40, of Camden's Cooper Plaza section, and Johnson, 38, of Willingboro, were saluted yesterday by about 200 students and faculty members at the high school in South Camden. They listened to a student's poem, "See You Later, Not Goodbye," written by Se Mona Camper, 18, of East Camden:

... Go knowing that your presence is indelible and you have something to come back to.

Just when you can, please come back.

They later watched an hour of performances, highlighting the best the school had to offer.

"I don't know where to start," Boogaard said. "This is totally unexpected. I can't tell you how thankful I am for your support and heartfelt love."

Boogaard asked the students to e-mail him during his service, expected to last 12 to 18 months. "I will wonder how you're doing in school," he said. "... You've touched me in ways it's hard to describe. In this case, the teacher became the student."

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Johnson, an Air Force technical sergeant who will be stationed at McGuire Air Force Base for six to 12 months, told the students she would try to write them. "I'm going to miss my hugs," she said, crying.

"I love you all," she said. "I thank God we're all strategically placed for a reason."

Many of the students, some in tears, lingered after the program to embrace Boogaard and Johnson, who, they say, have been a set of extra parents in their lives.

Camper said Boogaard "has been like a father to me. He's helped with trigonometry - and life. It was important for them to know we appreciated them [Boogaard and Johnson]." She then turned to Boogaard for a hug before going to her class.

"My daughter, my daughter," said Boogaard, who looked at the students around him and added: "I'm so blessed. You all become my adopted children."

Other students surrounded Johnson with hugs. "This was beyond surprise," she said. "I had no idea. To think they could keep a complete secret like this. It was very emotional, unbelievable."

Martina Nwoga, 16, of East Camden, said Johnson had been her role model: "She's a mentor, and I'm sad to see her go."

Boogaard and Johnson were presented framed copies of Camper's poem and quilts covered with messages and signatures from the students.

"I'm going to hang it [the quilt] up in my hooch when I get there [Iraq]," Boogaard said.

JaQuae Taylor, 17, of South Camden, said Johnson and Boogaard are examples of what's good about the city. "There are few positive things that come out of Camden," he said. "But it's been a privilege to attend school with them."

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF 7 APRIL 2004

This week all of the Services report decreases in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization. The net collective result is 1,098 fewer reservists on active duty than last week.

At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 151,412; Naval Reserve 2,678; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 13,604; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,098; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 1,586. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve on active duty to 174,378 including both units and individual augmentees.

A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve who are currently on active duty can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2004/d20040407.pdf>

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

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April 10, 2004

Extra Troops Would Mean Tough Choices

By Harry Levin/ Post-Dispatch Senior Writer

** Options include sending newly returned soldiers back to Iraq and tapping the **National Guard**. Concerns about morale are raised, but some see few problems with reinforcing.*

If the United States needs to bolster its occupation force in Iraq in a hurry, it can scrounge up the soldiers - but only after making some hard choices.

That's the consensus of a string of interviews this week with think-tank analysts and others versed in military affairs.

The United States already has extra soldiers in Iraq - 24,000 of them, thanks to an overlap between veteran units that are headed home and replacement units that just arrived. Those 24,000 bring the total force to about 134,000 soldiers and Marines.

And because of this week's flare-up, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested Wednesday that the cushion of 24,000 would stay in place until things calmed down. On Thursday, Gen. John Abizaid of the U.S. Central Command said the same thing - and suggested that soldiers just home from Iraq could be turned around and sent back.

If the extra people already on hand in Iraq are kept there, 24,000 soldiers who had been counting down the days until their departure will be held back, probably at a price in morale.

"Morale already seems to be suffering," said Charles Knight of the Project on Defense Alternatives, a liberal think tank in Cambridge, Mass. He suggested that longer tours would hurt morale even more.

Another source of reinforcements could be units just back from Iraq, as Abizaid suggested Thursday. Knight's view on morale problems would seem to extend to those units as well, should they be turned around and shipped back to Iraq.

But an old soldier who once led American soldiers in Bosnia said the Army could minimize any hit on morale.

"If I were doing it, I'd do it only temporarily, and I'd explain it to the troops," said the retired officer, David Grange, once a two-star general and now head of Chicago's McCormick Tribune Foundation.

"If they send the troops over there only temporarily - for psychological impact - I think it would be acceptable."

Some of those interviewed saw few problems with reinforcing.

"If you needed 10,000 people in a hurry, you could get them," said analyst Jack Spencer of Washington's Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. "If push came to shove, you could get more boots on the ground in Iraq. It's not the most optimal time - but wartime never is."

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A similar view came from William Nash of the Washington office of the Council on Foreign Relations. Like Grange, Nash once commanded U.S. soldiers as a two-star general in Bosnia. And like Grange, Nash said he thought reinforcing the soldiers and Marines in Iraq was feasible - "but not in quantity," he cautioned.

Others cited the problem of trying to stretch an already stretched Army.

Rep. Ike Skelton of Missouri is the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee. For most of the past decade, he has been urging a boost of 40,000 in the ranks of the Army, now about a half-million strong.

Today, almost all of the Army is either in Iraq or Afghanistan - or just back from those two places and rebuilding.

Skelton said Wednesday: "We have a serious problem in Iraq. Let's hope the conflicts we're in now end successfully, so we can get back to a lower level of patrolling and policing."

Missouri also has a voice on the Senate Armed Services Committee, that of Republican Jim Talent. A spokesman for Talent, Rich Chrismer, said Wednesday, "His focus has been on the issue of end strength, on increasing the force size," by 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers.

When Talent served in the House, he worked with Skelton on the Armed Services Committee and generally shared the Democrat's view that the Army needed more people.

National Guard option

The Army has a big combat reserve - the citizen-soldiers of the **National Guard**. In fact, the Guard already has almost a division's worth of soldiers in Iraq or on the way there, with a second division's worth planned to go next year.

But Guard units can't be dispatched overnight as emergency reinforcements. "We're talking 90 days of training time first, if the unit has the latest equipment - and a lot of them don't have the latest equipment," said John Goheen of the **National Guard** Association, a Washington-based private advocacy group.

Goheen suggested that NATO might be a source of quick reinforcements. Congress' Skelton said he hoped NATO could get involved but added, "That doesn't look as feasible as it once did."

In fact, Rumsfeld said Tuesday in Norfolk, Va., that NATO's first priority had to be expanding its peacekeeping force in Afghanistan.

The Marine Corps has only one of its three divisions in Iraq and was cited by Nash and others as a potential source of quick reinforcements for Iraq.

But retired Marine Col. Makubin "Mac" Owens said the Marines had manpower problems of their own.

"We're basically short one infantry battalion for each division," said Owens, who teaches strategy at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

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"If they reinforced Iraq with Marines, it would disrupt several other things" - for example, the expeditionary units that the Marine Corps keeps at sea for six months at a time to handle brush fires in places like Haiti.

"And then," Owens said, "there's the problem of maintaining a rotation base - one for three."

This one-for-three rule holds that for every unit deployed to a place like Iraq, the Army and Marines need two more units of equal size.

The second unit is the one just back home, which must rebuild itself. The third is the unit next in line to go, which must train for what it will find when it gets there.

But in reality, many rotations now work on a one-for-two rule. For example, the 3rd Infantry Division is back home in Georgia - but has been told it will return to Iraq next year.

Along with that division in the capture of Baghdad a year ago was the 1st Marine Division. A few months later, the Marines came home to the United States but now are back in Iraq for a second stint.

A few weeks before the war in Iraq, Gen. Eric Shinseki - then the Army's chief of staff but already on the way out of that job - told Congress that pacifying Iraq would require at least 200,000 soldiers. That estimate sat poorly with Rumsfeld.

Three months later, Shinseki retired. In his farewell address, he said, "Beware the 12-division strategy for a 10-division Army." Now, with the flare-up in Iraq, that 10-division Army has its work cut out for it.

"We have our hands full - we've stretched our military," Skelton said. "But they're performing very, very well. They're the finest military we've ever fielded."

REUNION

The Associated Press

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April 5, 2004

Guard Troops Return Home

DATELINE: PHOENIX

Thirteen members of the Arizona **National Guard** who controlled air traffic over Kuwait and Iraq for nearly a year came home Sunday.

The cheery homecoming was the same day that seven U.S. soldiers were killed in fighting with Shiite militiamen in the Baghdad neighborhood of Sadr City.

The 13 returning soldiers are the third Guard contingent to return to Arizona within a week. They are the remainder of Company G of the 285th AVN, which released most of its members in November.

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Including their return, 270 Arizona Guard members have come back since Tuesday.

An additional 500 remain in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Leaf-Chronicle (Clarksville, TN)

Families Prepare for Troops

Chantal Escoto, Staff

Family readiness groups learn about resource to help with return problems

About 150 Family Readiness Group leaders gathered at the Campbell Club Tuesday to learn more about preparing hearts and homes for their returning soldiers.

Nearly 18,000 101st Airborne Division troops deployed to Iraq early last year and are slated to return within the next three months. More than 600 soldiers from the division's advance party are arriving this week to prepare for the return.

The news of the Screaming Eagles' return continued to stir excitement Tuesday as spouses listened carefully about how to use a new information tool called Army One Source.

Military members and their families will have a one-stop source by telephone or via the Internet for topics from anonymous counseling to finding a car repair shop in a city where an Army family is relocating.

A company called Ceridian, headquarters in Minneapolis, Minn., secured a \$2.3 million contract with the Army last year and will offer help to active duty, **National Guard** and reserves and their families on just about anything concerning the military. Relocation, financial matters, education, schooling, health, deployment, family support and relationships are among the topics.

"It's great because it's a live person, not just automated - and it's anonymous," said Lisa Harrison, wife of Col. Will Harrison, 159th Aviation Brigade commander. About 80 of the brigade's soldiers will be on one of the flights coming in today. "This is a good other resource."

Although the asset has been available since August 2003, it's not usually publicized until the Ceridian representatives come to the military installation to explain the services offered. The company also has contracts with the other service branches.

"Usage usually goes up after each visit (to post)," said deputy program manager, Kurt G. Kampfschulte. Most of the calls received by subject experts are for those with emotional problems, but many questions are also about parenting and child care issues.

Kampfschulte said whenever he briefs spouses, they tell him how relieved they are to know their husbands have somewhere to turn if they have problems, and it doesn't have to go through their commander.

But Kampfschulte also said some officers have voiced worry to him that such circumvention could risk the safety of the unit if there's trouble they don't know about.

"That really hasn't happened because the counselors talk to the soldiers and (advise) them to bring it to their chain of command," he said. "They'll respect them for solving their own problems."

Deborah Malloy, Family Readiness Group leader for 2nd Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, wished she knew about Army One Source earlier because deployed soldiers could have used it via the Internet.

"A lot of guys won't go to counseling, so this being anonymous is great," Malloy said. As for preparing for the homecoming, most of the units already held their redeployment briefings and are eager for the soldiers' return.

"We've decorated our company areas and put welcome home signs on the barracks' doors," Malloy said. "The wives are doing a great job. It would have been a very hard deployment if we didn't have each other."

Contra Costa Times (California)

April 8, 2004 Thursday

Officials Prepare for 'Operation Welcome Home'

By Danielle Samaniego; STAFF WRITER

DATELINE: PITTSBURG

As the city awaits the return of the members of the **National Guard** 870th Military Police Company this month, officials are preparing for "Operation Welcome Home."

Following in the footsteps of Danville, Pittsburg officials plan to honor returning service members for their patriotic duty with a proclamation upon their return.

The ongoing program will recognize every member of the military from Pittsburg who has served overseas, been wounded in combat, completed enlistment and has been honorably discharged, graduated advanced military training or graduated from a military academy, a city staff report states.

"I feel that every city should honor the men and women that fight for our country," said Mayor Aleida Rios. Known as the "Sentinels of Freedom Program -- Operation Welcome Home," the City Council voted 4-0 on Monday in favor of the proclamation program. "This is just another way of showing our respect for these individuals." Councilwoman Yvonne Beals was absent.

Many members of the 870th military company have spent the better half of three years in active duty, including much time spent in Iraq. The company's 86 members returned to American soil Tuesday following an extensive duty in the Middle East. They are scheduled to return to the Bay Area sometime next week or so.

Their role has been key to a military plan that will see **National Guard** and reserves slated to make up nearly 40 percent of the stabilization force in Iraq come spring.

Pittsburg is steeped in past and present military activity, with its armed forces history dating to the heyday of Camp Stoneman. Once a hub for service members in Eastern Contra Costa County, Camp Stoneman served as a training facility for troops awaiting transportation for overseas duty. More than 1.5 million troops were processed and shipped through the camp, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"We're trying to put an emphasis in showing support for our troops actively involved overseas and elsewhere," Councilman William Glynn said of the proclamation program. "We're trying to increase our visibility here in regards to the service men and women."

In addition to the proclamation program, Pittsburg officials are working with the United Veterans Council to put on an Armed Forces Parade on May 15 that could warrant hundreds of participants and attendees. The event is a large attempt to recognize Armed Forces, Memorial and Veterans Day under one celebration.

Associated Press

April 9, 2004

Largest Homecoming of National Guard since World War II

By RUKMINI CALLIMACHI / Associated Press

The **Oregon National Guard's** 1st Battalion 162nd Infantry was away for 14 months — so long that 32 babies were born in their absence.

Young mothers held up their tiny infants and hundred of others cheered as nine chartered buses carrying the 400 troops swept into the fairgrounds here in what is the largest homecoming of the **Guard** since World War II.

"I suddenly became a single mother — it was horrible," said Zoe Arnold, 29, of Warren, whose husband, Sgt. Jason Arnold was deployed when she was four months pregnant with their second child.

Wearing jeans and makeup, Tracy Wassenberg, 21, held up a "Welcome Home" sign and scoured the chaos, as the troops filed out of the buses.

"Say Daddy," she whispered to her eight-month-old son, as Isaac Wassenberg walked up, slid off his camouflage backpack and took his baby in his arms.

In Kuwait, Wassenberg had arranged to have a video conference with his wife as she began her labor — but the message to call was delivered to him eight hours too late. "He called and tried to start coaching me," said Tracy, laughing. "I had to say, 'Honey, you have a beautiful baby boy.'"

The battalion was stationed in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq. They took part in Operation Rio, providing security to coalition contractors rebuilding the Ramallah oil fields.

The battalion suffered no casualties or serious injuries — "a miracle," said Maj. Keith Ensley, the battalion's executive officer.

While there were no purple hearts, almost all of the arriving troops wore the discrete flintlock rifle logo of the Combat Infantry Badge and Combat Field Medical Badge — honors given only to those who have come under enemy fire.

"That's the badge that when you see, you say, 'Wow.' It's the one that says — he was really there," said Maj. Arnold Strong, the guard's spokesman.

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The Oregon-based 2nd Battalion of the 162 Infantry arrived in Iraq last week. With the spiraling violence following the mutilation of four U.S. contractors in Fallujah, families here are doubly thankful.

"I'm so relieved," said Lindsey Lyons, 23 of Portland, who married Sgt. Nathan Lyons in a makeshift military ceremony at Fort Carson in Colorado, just weeks before he set off for Kuwait. She threw herself around him as he emerged.

"We're looking forward to having a real wedding — a real dress, real bridesmaids, real groomsmen. No camouflage. No mud," she said, laughing.

"They say the first year of marriage is always the worst," joked Nathan Lyons. "We got to skip over it and move straight into the good years."

The fact that the 1st Battalion suffered no losses is doubly significant given the **Guard's** traditional role. Historically, the **National Guard** has not been used in combat situations.

"When he first joined, he said 'Don't worry, Mom. I'll be doing security at Portland Airport,'" said Marsha Lyons, Nathan's mother.

Zoe Arnold's husband spent eight years as a U.S. Marine — including serving in Somalia. She says she found the last year of waiting by far the most excruciating.

"I was scared — at the end of the pregnancy, I moved in with my dad. It was too much on my own," she said, standing next to her husband.

He held his eight-month-old infant, Tyler in his arms — and admitted that his own son does not know who he is.

Norwich Bulletin

April 9, 2004

Connecticut Guard Returns Home

WEST HARTFORD -- Sgt. Howard Smith of Brooklyn called it luck.

"We lucked out," he said. "If we stayed another month, we would have been extended."

Smith, a Connecticut State Police Trooper assigned to Troop K in Colchester, returned home Thursday along with 149 other members of the **Connecticut National Guard's** 143rd Military Police Co. For the past 12 months, he and the other members of the unit patrolled the streets of Baghdad -- a city that during the past four days has seen an increase in hostilities against coalition forces by insurgents and radical Muslim groups. Nearly three dozen American soldiers and civilians have been killed since last weekend.

"I think it's going to be a long haul," Smith said.

The 143rd departed Iraq last week, just days before the increase tensions erupted into violence. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested Thursday that other units scheduled to return home over the next month may remain there longer.

"That does not look like it will have any effect on the 247th or 248th," said Maj. John Whitford, public affairs officer for the **Connecticut National Guard**.

The 247th Engineering Detachment based in New London and the 248th Engineering Company out of Norwich are scheduled to return home in May.

"They are still scheduled to come home," Whitford said. "We haven't received any official notification otherwise."

No decision has been made yet by the Pentagon regarding troops scheduled to return home or increasing the number of troops to be sent to Iraq. There are 20,000 troops scheduled to return to the United States in the next four to six weeks.

"Only time is going to tell," said Sgt. Martin Sullivan, another Connecticut State Police trooper from Troop E in Montville and member of the 143rd.

"I'm not there, so I don't know," he said when asked what his thoughts were of the current situation. "But I feel badly for those who are there. I know some of those guys, and I would have rather stayed."

The Associated Press

April 10, 2004

More than 200 Guard Troops Return Home after Duty in Iraq

DATELINE: NORTH KINGSTOWN, R.I.

Rhode Island **National Guard** Sgt. Brian LaPierre's family wore their welcome on their chests on Saturday, as they gathered Quonset Air **National Guard** base.

Sons Chase, Aidan and Trevor sported T-shirts reading "Welcome Home Daddy," and bearing LaPierre's picture. The last time LaPierre saw the youngest, Chase, the now nine-month-old baby weighed just five pounds.

"He's all done now," said LaPierre's wife, Christina.

LaPierre's unit, the 119th Military Police Company, and the 118th Military Police Battalion returned home on Saturday after spending 12 months of a 14-month deployment in Baghdad.

About 205 troops arrived on two military transport planes. It was the largest number of Rhode Island **National Guard** troops to come home in a single day since the Korean War, according to guard officials.

The units were also part of the largest single deployment since World War II.

Another unit, the 115th Military Police Company, will be returning on Tuesday.

Members of the 118th and 119th were greeted by thousands of family members and friends, hundreds of signs and banners, and a group of Rhode Island dignitaries that included the governor and three members of the state's Congressional delegation, as well as an official

welcoming committee made up of a dozen women in yellow T-shirts and blue jeans, and a Del's Lemonade Cart emblazoned with an American flag.

U.S. Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., visited the troops in Iraq and has served himself as an Army paratrooper. He said the homecoming brought back a lot of memories.

"It's a beautiful, sunny, gorgeous day and, for the moment anyway, all is right," Reed said.

Sandy Johannes of Lincoln came to Quonset Point to meet her husband, Robert, arriving with his parents, uncle and aunt, brother, sister-in-law, goddaughter, and son Robbie, among others.

Robbie was born while his father, who has served in the guard for 20 years, was in the Persian Gulf during the first Gulf War.

All of Brian Johannes' family and friends wore squat top hats with a bunting design.

"He said, 'Make sure that you stand out when I get home,'" Sandy Johannes said.

The Rhode Island **National Guard** currently has 756 members stationed in locales including the Middle East and Cuba, and on homeland security duty in the United States.

The Associated Press

April 10, 2004

Cape May Army National Guard Unit Homeward Bound

DATELINE: CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE, N.J.

New Jersey's first Army **National Guard** Unit deployed to Iraq will soon be homeward bound after a year of duty with Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Retired Sgt. Maj. Michael Hughes, a family support coordinator for the 253rd Transportation Company, said the unit's 160 soldiers were in Kuwait preparing to return stateside.

An arrival date for the unit based in Cape May Court House has not been provided, Hughes said.

Some family members have been busy planning welcoming celebrations, while others are contemplating quieter reunions. Plans have been dashed twice before when the unit's tour of duty was extended.

"You're waiting for him to come home and he doesn't come home," said Veronica Perez, of Hammonton, referring to her husband, Luis.

"They got out just in time, because now there is so much more unrest," she said.

The past week in Iraq has proved costly to U.S. forces, with 46 killed in skirmishes between coalition forces and insurgents. Since the March 2003 invasion, 647 U.S. soldiers have died in Iraq. The increased attacks prompted the Pentagon to put the brakes on some units' orders home.

The 253rd's soldiers suffered no casualties during their tour of duty.

The unit was mobilized in February 2003 at Fort Dix, arriving in Iraq that April to carry out supply missions. Its impending return comes as part of a major rotation of 125,000 U.S. troops.

The 3rd Battalion of the 112th Field Artillery, which has an armory in Cherry Hill, and the 117th Cavalry, which has an armory in Woodstown, also went to Iraq in February. They were retrained for security duty.

Meanwhile, 300 troops from the New Jersey **National Guard's** 114th Infantry will be activated for duty in the Middle East sometime next month.

The mobilization includes unit companies from Woodbury, Mount Holly, Freehold and Burlington.

Some are expected to be deployed to the Arabian Peninsula, while others have orders for the Sinai Peninsula.

BENEFITS

Q&A: Deployment Issues for Mobilized Students

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LTC Ruth Anderson, MNANG Community manager, discusses the impact of deployment on activated college students regarding college loans and health insurance

National Guard members who are college students were interrupted from their college studies for up to two years. They were activated for federal military duty and deployed. A couple of adverse things can happen to them: 1) Their college loan repayments kick in, and/or 2) When their two years of military duty are over, they are past the age when their parents' health insurance policies can still cover them.

Q: *How can college students get relief from needing to start repaying their college loans?*

A: To address this issue, here is a link to info on student loan repayment for mobilized members:

<http://www.nslp.org/pdf/militarymobil.pdf>. This explains the latest info on Federal Student Loans and ramifications of new HEROES Act (Dec 2003) from the National Student Loan Program (NSLP). This act protects our college students from repaying their student loan during the time they are mobilized.

Q: *Regarding health care, what options do college students have for the following:*

a) Getting covered by their parents' health insurance, in spite of the age change, when they were involuntarily activated for military duty?

b) Finding alternative good, inexpensive, health insurance coverage?

A: Acquiring health insurance is a personal responsibility and options would depend on the individual that was mobilized.

For additional questions contact:

RUTH A. ANDERSON, Lt Col, MNANG

Community Manager, 133rd Airlift Wing

Phone: 612-713-2435

ruth.anderson@mnstpa.ang.af.mil

Retired Guard & Reserve - Concurrent Receipt

Reserves Encounter CRDP Difficulties

If you are retired from the National Guard or Reserve with a VA rating of 50% or better, no matter what you have been told in the past, you may still qualify for **Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP)**, formerly Concurrent Receipt, even if you were medically retired under Chapter 61.

Up until recently DFAS has been telling Guard and Reserve retirees that they had to have a minimum of 7200 points to qualify for CRDP. However thanks to the efforts of one man, namely Robert Trinkle USAFR Ret., DFAS has now realized their error. Specifically that any retired reservist or guardsman that has "20 Good Years" and meets the remaining eligibility requirements is eligible to get their CRDP benefits just like their active duty counterparts. The hang-up in the past was that DFAS was using 7200 points as the determinant factor.

Here are the CRDP basics:

The 2004 National Authorization Act (NDAA) includes provisions for a ten-year plan to eliminate the offset of retired pay for VA disability compensation for those with 50-100% disabilities. The program has been renamed to Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP).

Eligibility for the CRDP includes: ALL chapter 61 medically retired personnel with twenty years of service whether their service was twenty or more years of active duty or twenty or more "GOOD YEARS" for Reserve Retirement (section 12732 of US Code 10). The new law does not require 7200 active duty points or any number of points, just 20 good years for Guard/Reserve retirement. Each good year requires a minimum of 50 points.

Go to (<http://www.dod.mil/prhome/crsc.html>) to get more information directly from the DoD.

Retirees who have not receive payment by April 1, 2004, but believe they qualify, should contact their Military Department or DFAS to determine the reason for non-payment.

What you need to do next:

Unfortunately as an eligible Reserve or Guard Retiree you must take action to ensure that you start getting your CRDP. You need to take the following steps:

- Gather all of your documentation including your letter of Retirement Eligibility ("20 Good Years Letter") and your last point summary.
- Call the DFAS Cleveland Office at: 1-800-321-1080 even if you have been turned away in the past.

- Check back with DFAS on a regular basis.

Robert Trinkler has personally taken on this battle to ensure that he and fellow retired members of the Guard and Reserve get the benefits they have coming. If you have any questions or need assistance getting your benefits started you can contact Robert Via E-mail at:

trinkler@worldnet.att.net

The News & Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina)

April 9, 2004 Friday

Bowles Proposes More for Guard

The Senate candidate wants to extend federal benefits to members, families.

By Rob Christensen, Staff Writer

CARY -- With **National Guard** troops taking a larger role in the fighting in Iraq, Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Erskine Bowles on Thursday proposed broadening federal government benefits to members of the guard, reservists and their families.

Bowles put forth a plan to cover the pay differences between civilian jobs and active duty, to allow all reservists and Guard members to enroll in the military's health care system, to double the Child Tax Credit for activated guardsmen and their families and to extend the Family Medical Leave Act to reserve families.

"We can afford this and I think, morally, we can't afford not to do this," Bowles said at a news conference at the N.C. **National Guard** Association headquarters.

Bowles said his plan would cost an estimated \$2.6 billion over 10 years. Bowles said he would pay for the proposals by closing tax loopholes, by cutting pork-barrel projects, by reducing the size of the federal work force and through other savings.

About 5,000 members of the N.C. **National Guard** are in Iraq, the state's largest mobilization since World War II.

After the news conference, Bowles held a discussion with a number of guardsmen and their spouses.

Several family members said the military health care system is inadequate because it doesn't cover the costs of trips to the doctor and because it requires patients to pay the costs and file for reimbursements, which are often not made in a timely fashion.

"It's just not working the way it was intended to work," said Wanda Boyette of Fuquay-Varina, whose husband, Lt. Col. Allen Boyette, is serving in Iraq.

According to the General Accounting Office, 40 percent of junior enlisted reservists and 20 percent of all guard members do not have health insurance.

TRICARE, the military's health care program, is now available for reservists who have been activated, but only for a limited time around their deployment. Because of those limits, 90

percent of the guardsmen and reservists with private health insurance continue their personal coverage. Bowles is proposing that all reservists have permanent access to TRICARE.

Bowles is also proposing to make reserve families eligible under the Family Medical Leave Act, which requires employers to give up to 12 work weeks of unpaid leave to an employee who has a new child or a serious illness in the family.

Rebecca Wilkins, whose husband, Maj. Cliff Wilkins, is in Iraq, said she liked the idea of spouses getting unpaid leave time from their jobs to deal with child-rearing emergencies while their their husbands are on active duty.

Bowles, a Charlotte investment banker and former White House chief of staff, will likely face Republican Congressman Richard Burr of Winston-Salem in the race for the seat now held by Sen. John Edwards, a Raleigh Democrat.

Burr has been asked by members of the state's congressional delegation to push for similar proposals for the **National Guard**, said Paul Shumaker, a campaign aide.

"What Erskine has put on the table is very similar," Shumaker said. "It sounds like a 'me too' proposal."

GUARD IN IRAQ

The Associated Press

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April 5, 2004

Mississippi Soldiers Training New Iraqi Army

DATELINE: JACKSON, Miss.

Ten soldiers from Mississippi are training an Iraqi infantry battalion, adding hope that the creation of the Middle East nation's defense could expedite the Americans' return home.

The 10-member unit of Mississippians is comprised of a team of U.S. Army Reserve officers and noncommissioned officers. It deployed in mid-February and has been spending the past few weeks training the Iraqi army.

"We live with the Iraqis," said Maj. Chuck Jackson of Jackson, the team commander. "We eat with them, train with them and work with them. We patrol the Iranian border, intercept terrorists and smugglers, clear roads of explosive devices and find and confiscate arms caches and explosives being used to construct improvised explosive de vices.

"If you've seen the John Wayne movie The Green Berets, you've got a pretty good picture of what we're doing operationally."

Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton is in charge of building the Iraqi army, which was abolished last May. He says his unit's goal is to create a three-division, nine-brigade, 27-battalion army of about 40,000 soldiers within the next year.

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The wife of one American soldier is hoping for a homecoming soon.

"It's all about stabilizing the country," said Flora native Amanda Smira, whose husband Kevin was deployed in January with the Mississippi **National Guard's** 112th Military Police Battalion in Canton.

"If we can stabilize the country and get them to where they can run themselves, then we won't have to be there," she said.

But one expert cautions that the U.S. troops might not be returning home as quickly as thought.

"It depends on your expectations," said Michael O'Hanlon, Foreign Policy Studies Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington. "The country needed an army, and if they didn't get one, we'd have to be there forever. But overall, the progress is slower than expected, and just because they have their own army doesn't mean American troops still won't need to be there, too."

The News & Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina)

N.C. Guard Brigade Having Quiet Time, So Far

Jay Price, Staff Writer

While uprisings and desecrated dead elsewhere in Iraq make headlines, life for recently arrived N.C. **National Guard** troops northeast of Baghdad is settling into a quiet routine.

Too quiet for some.

"I'm spinning my wheels," Sgt. Matthew Stevenson, 37, said Monday in a telephone interview from the 30th Heavy Separate Brigade's Camp Caldwell. "If this place is as calm as it seems to be, then we should be sent somewhere else where we're needed."

Patrols of cattle and sheep country and villages have yielded little action, he said, and some soldiers "feel like they're twiddling their thumbs" when they're given tasks such as guarding ordnance left over from the Iran-Iraq war.

The four bases that are home to the 30th Brigade combat team's nearly 5,000 troops for the next year are near the Iranian border. Soldiers are responsible not only for patrols, but also for working with Iraqi police, civil defense corps and border patrols. The U.S.-led occupation has been trying to tighten border security to prevent insurgents from slipping in and out.

The Guard troops have seized weapons caches and found some roadside bombs. But their area has a peaceful reputation.

This sits badly with some, such as Stevenson. He's from Moyock, the small Currituck County town that's home to the company that employed four security workers killed last week in Fallujah. Two of the workers' charred bodies were lashed to a bridge.

"I want to get to Fallujah something awful," Stevenson said. And not for a social call.

The countryside around Camp Caldwell, the 30th Brigade's headquarters, is mostly dry and dusty this time of year, Stevenson said. A typical patrol takes his unit through several small villages, many of just 12 to 15 houses.

"When the kids come out and the men and women aren't scared, that's a good feeling," he said. "But when you see predominantly young men of army age, and you get that look, that's not good."

Cpl. Jason Spencer of Clayton, 29, a Southeast Raleigh High School science teacher, said he misses his wife of six months and his students. While not driving a Humvee, he is planning lessons on Iraqi culture and the reconstruction for them.

"I want them to understand it's not as bad as what they're seeing on television," he said, "and that there are actual people here just like them, living their lives and trying to better themselves."

Staying in touch

Spencer is helping the Guard assess the needs of schools. He has also begun working with officials at his Southeast Raleigh school to collect supplies for Iraqi children. His wife, Jennifer, a teacher at Clayton's River Dell Elementary School, and his parents in Four Oaks are doing the same in Johnston County.

By e-mail and phone, Jennifer Spencer tries to keep her husband up on personal and local news. "I wasn't too happy when I heard he would be going," she said. "No matter how I felt, it was going to happen. ... I've got to support Jason because that's what he needs more than anything right now.

"Sometimes when he calls, you can just kind of tell from the tone in his voice that it's been a hard day," she said. "You just have to keep saying, 'This will be over soon, and you'll be home before you know it.' "

Spencer was among several soldiers who had their pictures taken Monday with the brigade's first visitor from home, 2nd District congressman Bob Etheridge, who dropped in by helicopter to talk with soldiers, eat lunch and get a briefing.

"Guard units like that really bring a lot to the table, because they deal with civilians every day," Etheridge said in a telephone interview from Baghdad.

Etheridge took the brigade a banner signed by hundreds of North Carolina schoolchildren, and when he left, he carried mail from the soldiers. It takes two weeks or more for mail to travel the normal route.

With a full year in Iraq ahead, Spc. Darrell Mayer, 31, of Raleigh thinks often of his girlfriend of six months. He's eager to return to his job as an intern with a Hillsborough Street architectural firm.

Privations, privileges

Most soldiers are still sleeping in tents, though at the headquarters, on the site of a never-finished Iraqi army base, soldiers will probably move into buildings about the end of the month.

Several soldiers at Camp Caldwell said food -- a perennial military issue -- had been improving steadily, and they now have hot breakfast and dinner and must eat the packaged Meals Ready to Eat only for lunch. They expect a dining hall operated by Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg Brown & Root to open in July.

Thanks to a military facility with about 10 telephones and 20 computers, and two Iraqi-owned shops on the base with phone and Internet service, the soldiers have easy, cheap and frequent contact with their families. The locally owned shops charge \$2 an hour for Internet use and 50 cents a minute for calls home.

The three smaller bases each have at least one such Internet cafe and a similar military setup.

Access alone doesn't guarantee time to call. Sgt. Marvin Garvey, 44, of Hampstead said that after getting up at 4:30 a.m., he is so busy supplying missions with ammunition that he has been able to contact his wife, Sonya, only once or twice a week.

Also, when you move around camp, you have to take a "battle buddy" with you, he said.

"We're always on edge" looking for improvised explosive devices, Garvey said. "And we're always on our toes watching the personnel who are working on the base."

A few hundred local employees are building up the base and providing services, he said, and the troops can't help but wonder how well they were screened.

Soldiers heard the news from Fallujah and about the Baghdad uprising over the weekend, Garvey said. "It makes me very concerned about Iraq itself, about the ability of Iraq and the government they're trying to make to be successful," he said.

The violence has made some in Camp Caldwell, including Garvey, wonder whether the peaceful times will last. "It's quiet and a lot of people are friendly," he said, "but it made me think that something's on the horizon."

ARNEWS

Engineers Build Place in Iraq for U.S. Soldiers to Worship

by Spc. Bryan KinKade

BAGHDAD, Iraq (Army News Service, April 7, 2004) – From the ground up, a 200-seat chapel in Iraq is being built to give U.S. Soldiers a place to worship.

Engineers from the **Missouri National Guard**, put their carpentry and masonry skills to the test.

"These Soldiers are hungry for services," said Lt. Col. David Moran, a chaplain from 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas. "When I got here a little over four weeks ago, it was a level concrete pad."

The structure will be ready to its full potential by April 15. Services will include Contemporary Protestant, Catholic Mass and Lutheran.

"We've been at a steady pace and everyday we make progress," said carpenter, Staff Sgt. Clifford Bailey, with the Missouri National Guard. "We're well ahead of schedule and we've had no problems with the building materials."

"This building would not have been started by now, but they wanted a real project they could look back on and know that they took care of the Soldiers spiritual needs," Moran said.

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Even though the building isn't complete, the chaplains haven't let that get in the way of their services.

"We used a large cardboard box as a make-shift altar," said Maj. Grant Johnson, the deputy division chaplain for 1st Cav. "We also used a laptop so people could read songs, and we gathered in a circle for prayer and worship."

The 203rd engineers have built many other structures throughout the Iraq area, since their June 2003 deployment, to include a live-fire search and seizure training building, showers, a water tower and living quarters.

(Editor's note: Spc. Bryan D. Kinkade is a staff writer for the 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs Office.)

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

Aberdeen American News (South Dakota)

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Families Keeping Eye on Situation; Aberdeen Mothers Have Sons Stationed in Hot Spots of Arab Nation

By Scott Waltman; American News Writer

Pam Ernst thought her days of sweating through TV newscasts were over.

Her son, Matthew Kopecky, is a private with the Marines. He was sent to Iraq in January 2003 and volunteered to stay until September - two months longer than the rest of his unit. When he returned, her worries about his safety subsided. But now he's back in Iraq and she's again nervous.

Kopecky, 20, is stationed in the Falluja area. The town was where four American civilians were killed last week.

"I'm always watching (the news)," Ernst said. "I probably shouldn't, but I do."

Both Kopecky and his mother hoped one Iraq tour would be enough. But Kopecky and the rest of the 7th Engineer Support Battalion, based at Camp Pendelton in San Diego, were sent back to Iraq on March 3 for what is supposed to be a seven-month tour.

The first time over, Kopecky helped dispose of explosives. This time, "He's doing what, I don't want to know," Ernst, of Aberdeen, said.

Karen Severson of Aberdeen also knows what it's like to have a family member serving in Iraq. Her son, Jeff, 34, of Aberdeen, is an engineer with the Army Reserve's 452nd Ordnance Co. based in Aberdeen. While Jeff is in Iraq, the rest of the 452nd remains in Aberdeen on alert status. But it's unclear if the outfit will be deployed.

Severson said her son is currently based in the Baghdad area, though he was recently in Germany for several days and she's unsure whether he's back in the Arab nation yet or not.

For the younger Severson, it's his third overseas deployment. He was deployed to the Middle East for Operation Desert Storm and also sent to Hungary. "I worry every minute of the day. I can't help it," Karen Severson said.

Usually she said she catches up on war news by reading the newspaper and watching television at night.

"You can go crazy (if you do nothing but watch the news). You have to hope and pray that everything is going to be kept safe," she said.

Ernst said learning that her son was being re-deployed to Iraq was aggravating. After Saddam Hussein was captured, she thought another trip would be avoided. At least Kopecky has been able to call home about once a week. However, Ernst said, that may change in the near future.

Falluja is about 35 miles west of Baghdad. And it's a location where there's a fair amount of anti-American sentiment. So when there's trouble, as there has been recently, she gets especially nervous.

Severson keeps in touch with her son mostly by e-mail. Jeff Severson is more apt to call his two sons when he has a chance to use the phone, his mother said.

Knowing there are other people in town with loved ones serving makes it more bearable, Severson said. She works at Plymouth Congregational Church and other families have loved ones in the South Dakota **National Guard's** 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery. The Aberdeen-based unit is also in Iraq.

If she can't find another person to talk to, Severson will talk to God. "I work at the church," she said, "and if I ever have a bad day, I can always go sit in the church."

The Myrtle Beach Sun-News

Iraq Stirs Anxieties for Local Families; Reactions to Violence Vary

By Kelly Marshall; The Sun News

Some Grand Strand families are watching the situation in Iraq with a growing sense of unease.

The recent deaths of civilian contractors and other violence against soldiers in Iraq has frightened them, or strengthened their belief that the United States should have troops stationed there.

Dianne Hendrix' daughter, Brenda Sim, is in the 111th Signal Unit, a **National Guard** troop from Myrtle Beach.

The 2002 graduate of Aynor High School is stationed at Fort Benning, Ga., while awaiting orders.

"They're preparing for the worse and hoping for the best," Hendrix said.

"As long as she is at home, I'm OK. I'm just wondering what it will be like in a month or two."

Despite the continuing loss of U.S. troops, Hendrix thinks it's too late for the United States to pull out of Iraq.

"If you jump off a bridge, you're going to land somewhere," she said. "If you're going to commit, then finish the job."

Hendrix says her daughter has volunteered to go to Iraq.

"She feels like as long as she has had the training, she should keep on going."

Loris resident Kathy Utter, on the other hand, does not feel the United States should have a presence in Iraq. Her son, David Andrews, is in the Marine Reserve and is supposed to train at Camp Lejeune, N.C., in July.

"I look at it this way," she said. "I'm afraid that if he goes over there, something will happen. I'm like any other parent.

"They're killing all our guys, they don't appreciate anything that we're doing. I think that we should pull our guys out of there."

Kathy Milstead of Ocean Isle Beach, N.C. said her son-in-law, Kerry O'Connell, is in the Marines. He returned from Afghanistan last month.

Her son, Jimmy Milstead, returned from Korea in December. He left the Army, but is thinking of joining the reserves.

She thinks the United States is doing the right thing by staying in Iraq.

"We're trying to get those people back on their feet," she said. It's going to cost a few lives, but when you go in the military, that's what you expect, she said.

"My family could be called at any time. It makes me nervous. It's not just Iraq anymore. There is so much unrest everywhere. You never know what will happen next. It's nice to know we have the military to protect us."

Baltimore Sun

April 8, 2004

Military Families on Edge as Iraq Erupts

Fear: The possibility of more casualties and more call-ups has many concerned.

By Ariel Sabar, Sun Staff

When Debbie Pratte spoke yesterday to her son, a 19-year-old near the end of a one-year Persian Gulf tour with the **Maryland National Guard**, they talked not of war, but of cell phones.

Pratte had heard about the American contractors burned by an Iraqi mob and strung from a bridge last week. She knew about the 12 Marines killed Tuesday and the widening Shiite revolt that has jinxed American plans for an orderly transfer of power.

But it was easier, somehow, to concentrate on the features of the new cell phone that she was buying Spc. Alaine Pratte II as a welcome-home gift.

"Although I want to know, I don't want to know," Pratte, 43, a carpenter from Deal Island, says of her son's vulnerability to the new violence and to a last-minute tour extension. "That's my baby over there," she says. "He's coming home in three weeks, and that's all I want to know."

As insurgents have spread a new wave of violence across Iraq, with at least 34 Americans killed since Sunday, the families of **Maryland National Guard** members and reservists are grappling with a complicated mix of emotions.

Families whose loved ones are back home expressed relief, but also anxiety about future call-ups and sorrow for the families of fallen troops. Those with relatives still in the Middle East pray that the growing chaos does not postpone long-awaited homecomings, or worse.

Several families interviewed yesterday said their support for the war had not wavered.

But Pratte is angry. She thinks that President Bush hoodwinked Americans into a conflict that put her youngest child in harm's way, as a gunner with the Crisfield-based 1229th Transportation Company.

"It's not right that I have to sit here worrying about my son for something the president lied about," she said, alluding to White House claims about weapons of mass destruction. "If it takes everything I have, I will never let him go back there."

Roughly 2,500 Maryland guard members and reservists are on active duty in connection with the Iraq conflict and the war on terrorism, down from about 4,300 a year ago, according to Pentagon figures.

Maj. Susan Sancilio La Count, 42, of Catonsville, returned last August from six months in Kuwait with the 424th Medical Logistics Battalion. She retired her uniform, after 20 years in the Army Reserves, almost as soon as she got back.

At the breakfast table yesterday morning, her husband, Peter La Count, who had raised their 3-year-old daughter alone in Susan's absence, looked at the newspaper headlines and had a few simple words for his wife.

"Boy, I'm glad you're not over there," he recalled telling her. "She agreed. She was just sort of shaking her head. It's upsetting. It's just upsetting."

Susan La Count, a speech pathologist with the Howard County schools, is happy to be through with the air-raid alarms that sent her unit scurrying for their bio-chem warfare suits as many as a dozen times a day. Now, she can focus on taking her daughter Grace to the swings at the park, going to art films with her husband, and plotting an Easter egg hunt.

"As a mother, I am just glad to be home," she said. "I am proud I served the time I did. I just think it would be a very difficult time to be back there."

Gayle Saunders-Christopher, 57, of Harford County, felt a nearly constant anxiety during her husband's tour in Baghdad last year with a Special Operations unit of the Maryland National Guard.

"Any time bad news came across, you just waited that evening for his e-mail to come through that he was fine," she recalled.

But since Master Sgt. Richard Christopher's return in November, she says, "it's not as personally stressful."

What troubles her now is his possible return to the Middle East next year. She has been fretfully parsing the news of the past week for signs of a prolonged American presence in the region.

"I'm watching, for him, to know what he's going to be walking back into," she said. "I'm hoping that the Iraqis will be able to have their police and their soldiers ready to take over."

Saunders-Christopher, an animal shelter supervisor in Baltimore County, has been trying to cram in all the things they missed during their year apart. They have visited their double-wide mobile home outside Daytona, Fla., three times in the past few months, passing the hours casting a fishing line into the St. John's River.

"It's certainly a relief that he's here now," she says.

Army Lt. Col. Robert Appleby's trip into Baghdad early last year with the Upper Marlboro unit of the 11th Psychological Operations Battalion was a mixed blessing. The dangerous assignment qualified him to return home to his family in Bel Air after just seven months. But because his original orders were for two years, he may be called back.

"It worries me that he would have to go back and be part of what's happening there on a day-to-day basis," said his wife, Melissa Appleby, 34, who gave birth to her fifth child, Camron, the same day her husband left for Kuwait.

The past week's news has intensified her fears of another long separation of her husband from their children, ages 1 to 8. But her support for the war has not faltered with the news of increasing American casualties. Flare-ups like those in Ramadi and Fallujah are unavoidable in a country making so abrupt a transition from dictatorship to democracy, she says.

"Not a lot of people understand why we're over there," says Appleby, who is vice president of an appraisal firm. "I do."

All the same, she has shielded her children from the news, and from the likelihood of their father's redeployment. "What they don't know at this point, they don't need to know," she said.

Washington Post

April 10, 2004

Military Families on Edge as Iraq Erupts

By Jonathan Finer, Washington Post Staff Writer

CONCORD, N.H. -- For Doug and Barbara Bowen, the anguish of having a son at war in Iraq was supposed to be over by now.

Sgt. Iver Bowen, 20, choppered in with the 101st Airborne Division more than a year ago. In November he came home, signed on with the **New Hampshire National Guard**, and asked his father to teach him construction so he could take over the family business one day.

But much to his surprise, Bowen's 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain) was called to active duty in January. Less than two months later, he was back in Iraq.

"We let our guard down, and life went back normal," Doug Bowen said from his home in Hancock, 40 miles southwest of Concord, the state capital. "Now we're going through it all over again."

New Hampshire's weekend warriors -- firefighters and police officers, auto mechanics and teachers -- have been sent overseas in record numbers this year, part of this state's largest National Guard call-up since World War II. They expected to be gone no longer than 18 months, but that was before military officials said this week, amid a rash of violence in which more than 40 U.S. troops were killed, that some deployments could be extended. The Guardsmen left behind families unaccustomed to dealing with the grinding anxiety and an uncertain future.

"I've made it through 95 days, and, yes, I am counting," said Deanne Westgate of Penacook, whose husband, Spec. Brandon Westgate, deployed in January. Last week she sent him a care package filled with supplies he had asked for and a T-shirt drenched in her perfume.

"We were totally blindsided when they said he was going" to Iraq, she said. "Of course I know it's getting worse there. I start crying for no reason, just walking down the street or in the supermarket. I am doing the best I can to hold it together."

The Granite State's National Guard -- which includes air and Army units -- dates to Colonial times and was deployed to both the European and Pacific theaters during World War II. But like most National Guard forces across the country, it has seen little combat since the Vietnam War, when about 500 members were called up and six were killed. Two New Hampshire Guard troops died while deployed for the 1991 Persian Gulf War but in a noncombat vehicle accident, said Capt. Gregory Heilshorn, a Guard spokesman.

Today, more than a third of the 2,700-member force is overseas, including 60 in Afghanistan and 800 in Iraq, where National Guard troops make up about a quarter of all U.S. forces. At the end of March, Army Sgt. Jeremiah Holmes of North Berwick, Maine, was killed when his truck struck an explosive device near Ramadi, west of Baghdad -- the New Hampshire Guard's first combat fatality since the Vietnam War.

Bowen e-mailed his parents yesterday to say he had been in firefight this week and returned to base in a Humvee full of bullet holes.

"What's going on right now, it scares me half to death," Doug Bowen said. His son's infantry unit spent two months at Fort Dix, N.J., retraining to be military police. "I never thought I'd say this, but it's harder for me now than it was before. More unpredictable. These guys are trying to get up to speed, but they're serving as policemen, which is not what they always trained for. I sure am looking forward to having him back for good this time."

No matter when they return, said Stephanie Mills of Concord, it will not be soon enough. Mills, 27, a chiropractor, was recently named Mrs. New Hampshire. But her husband, Bradley, an Army sergeant, will not be there to escort her onstage at the national pageant in September. "I guess I'll have to walk out by myself," she said. "But that's okay, as long he comes home safe."

In a rural state of 1.3 million people, with small armories scattered among 20 cities and towns, many Guard families said that when the deployment orders came they felt very much alone. Several said their children are the only ones in school with a parent serving overseas.

"Active-duty folks go through same thing, but on a base they have a built-in support group, a culture that takes care of each other. Here your neighbors are not in the same situation," said Tom Flaherty, who spent 10 years in the New Hampshire Guard and now owns a software consulting company in Brookline.

To help meet families' needs, Guard officials set up an extensive support program, hiring six civilian contractors to help administer it and establishing a 24-hour hotline.

"Before mobilization, getting them ready to perform their mission was the number one priority," said Maj. Gen. John Blair, commander of the New Hampshire National Guard. "Now, priority one for us is taking care of families that are not used to separation. The stress on them, when you add the fear they have after recent events, is overwhelming."

The hotline received 51 phone calls last month, including suicide threats, medical emergencies and requests for help filing tax returns. One woman called to say that her husband had left her with 17 pregnant goats and that she did not know how to deliver them. Another needed help obtaining a passport for her daughter, who was robbed while traveling in Australia.

"We've really just gotten used to being ready for anything, anytime; it's problem-solving as much as anything else," said Army Sgt. Mark Forster, a chaplain's assistant at the Guard headquarters in Concord.

Family members in each platoon have been asked to serve as points of contact and were assigned to host monthly informational meetings. Jackie Ceurvels, who is responsible for 32 families in the 172nd Field Artillery Brigade, chose a particularly timely topic this month.

"We talked about how they would be notified in the case of a casualty," said Ceurvels, whose husband, Jim, is in Iraq. "A lot of people had been panicking every time the phone rang, until I told them that if something really bad happens, the Army will send people to your door."

April Stone of Bow said she has hardly slept since watching a recent news broadcast that talked about the danger of traveling Iraqi highways by convoy. "I know that's how he's getting around over there," she said of her husband, Paul, a cook in a local Italian restaurant and a member of the 172nd Field Artillery Brigade. She and her three young sons moved in with her husband's family while he is overseas. "Daddy is fighting the bad guys" is all they really know about his mission, she said.

She does not know much more. After hearing about Holmes's death, she said, she stopped watching television news and reading the newspaper. Now on sleepless nights, she sticks to infomercials. "It's sometimes easier to be totally ignorant of what's going on," she said.

The Associated Press

April 10, 2004

National Guard Families Watch, Pray, Worry

By REBECCA COOK, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: SEATTLE

At Melissa Turnage's office, the normal morning gossip about work issues and weekend plans has given way to news about troop movements and casualties in Iraq.

A few months ago, Turnage left her job as director of a battered women's shelter in Oak Harbor to fulfill her duty as a sergeant in the 81st Brigade of the Army **National Guard**.

Her brigade arrived in Iraq this week, just as U.S. troops faced the fiercest fighting since the official end of the war. In her workplace and across the country, friends and family of **National Guard** soldiers are hoping and praying for their safety.

"Especially right now with things seeming to escalate over there, we're really concerned," said Diane Jhueck, executive director of Citizens Against Domestic Violence, where Turnage works.

More than 40 U.S. servicemen and women have been killed in Iraq this week. The increased violence began with the March 31 slaying and mutilation of four U.S. civilians in the city of Fallujah. More than 640 U.S. soldiers have died in Iraq since the war began in March 2003.

Jhueck said she's heard her staff talk often about their fears as they compare notes from different news reports, trying to figure out where Turnage is and if she's OK.

"It made this whole thing more real than anything else I've heard about the war," Jhueck said.

Calls to the Family Support Center for the Washington **National Guard** have spiked in the past week, as families desperately seek information about their loved ones.

Men and women in the Army **National Guard** normally commit to one weekend a month, and one two-week training each year. Now they, and their families, are staring down a yearlong deployment in Iraq.

Denise Whitten, a family assistance coordinator for the Support Center, grew up as an Army brat and married a Navy man. Now she helps **National Guard** families navigate the unfamiliar stresses of military life, from health insurance to separation anxiety.

"They're used to drill weekends. They're not used to dealing with the military," Whitten said.

The 81st Brigade includes about 3,200 guardsmen. About 80 percent live in Washington state.

Dick Dahlgard feels confident his 21-year-old daughter, Spc. Paige Dahlgard, can handle herself in tough situations.

"Let's put it this way - she's wearing an expert badge on her uniform that says 'grenade,'" Dahlgard said with a chuckle.

Still, he's a dad, so he worries when he reads about Iraq casualties in the newspaper. Paige Dahlgard, a mess cook, was about to transfer from community college to the University of Washington when she was activated for duty in October.

"She went over with a positive attitude and she's not front line combat, but I'm praying every day that she's safe," said Dahlgard, who owns a camera store in Burien. "It's the type of thing where you hope that everybody around you is as good as you are."

Faced with the unknown, many **National Guard** families find strength in their religious faith.

"He has guardian angels around him," Verlene Wilson said of her husband, Lt. Col. Steve Wilson, a brigade chaplain.

Steve Wilson normally serves as the pastor of Light and Life Christian Fellowship in Post Falls, Idaho. In his absence, Verlene Wilson is handling the administration and children's ministry, while others do the preaching to adult members of the congregation.

"The congregation has been wonderful," she said.

The couple have two grown sons, two grown daughters and 10 grandchildren in the area.

"The grandchildren miss grandpa," she said. But despite the often grim news from Iraq, Verlene Wilson said she doesn't fear for her husband's safety.

"It's the Lord's will that he go over there," she said. "When the Lord is ready to take him, it doesn't matter if he is going down the freeway or there in Iraq."

Associated Press Writers Kristen Gelineau and Nick Geranios contributed to this article.

HEALTH ISSUES

New York Daily News

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April 5, 2004

Army to Test N.Y. Guard Unit

Hillary demands that all veterans of Iraq get checked

By Juan Gonzalez

Army officials at Fort Dix and Walter Reed Army Medical Center are rushing to test all returning members of the 442nd Military Police Company of the **New York Army National Guard** for depleted uranium contamination.

Army brass acted after learning that four of nine soldiers from the company tested by the Daily News showed signs of radiation exposure.

The soldiers, who returned from Iraq late last year, say they and other members of their company have been suffering from unexplained illnesses since last summer, when they were stationed in the Iraqi town of Samawah.

Dr. Asaf Durakovic, a former Army doctor and nuclear medicine expert who examined and tested the nine men at The News' request, concluded four of them "almost certainly" inhaled radioactive dust from exploded depleted uranium shells fired by U.S. troops.

Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), after learning of The News' investigation, blasted Pentagon officials yesterday for not properly screening soldiers returning from Iraq.

"We can't have people coming back with undiagnosed illnesses," Clinton said. "We have to have a before-and-after testing program for our soldiers."

Clinton, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said she will write to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld demanding answers and soon will introduce legislation to require health screenings for all returning troops.

During meetings with Pentagon officials last year, Clinton said "one of the issues we raised was exposure to the depleted uranium that was in the weapons, and how they were going to handle it."

She was assured then that troops would be properly screened.

But the soldiers from the 442nd contacted The News after becoming frustrated with how the Army was handling their illnesses.

Six of them say they repeatedly sought testing for depleted uranium from Army doctors but were denied.

Three who were tested in early November for DU said they had been waiting months for the results. Two of those finally got their results last week - both negative.

Testing for uranium isotopes in 24 hours' worth of urine samples can cost as much as \$1,000 each.

But late last week, after learning of The News' results, the Army reversed course and ordered immediate testing for more than a dozen members of the 442nd who are back in the U.S.

The rest of the company, comprising mostly New York City cops, firefighters and correction officers, is not due to return from Iraq until later this month.

"They ordered all of us who are here at Fort Dix to provide 24-hour urine samples by 1 p.m. today," one soldier from the company said Friday.

Late Friday, Pentagon spokesman Austin Camacho said he could not confirm or deny that new tests had been ordered for the soldiers of the 442nd.

"It's hard to imagine, theoretically, that these men could have harmful exposures," Camacho said, because none of them had been inside tanks during direct combat.

Army studies of depleted uranium have concluded that only soldiers who suffer shrapnel wounds from DU shells or who were inside tanks hit by DU shells and immediately breathe radioactive dust are at risk.

Even then, Camacho said, studies of about 70 such cases from the first Gulf War have shown no long-term health problems.

But medical experts critical of the use of DU weapons, as well as some of the Army's own early studies of depleted uranium, say exposure to it can cause kidney damage. Some studies have shown that it causes cancer and chromosome damage in mice, according to the experts.

Depleted uranium, a waste product of the uranium enrichment process, has been used by the U.S. and British militaries for more than 15 years in some artillery shells and as armor-plating for tanks. It is valued for its extreme density - it is twice as heavy as lead.

Amid growing controversy in Europe and Japan, the European Parliament called last year for a moratorium on its use.

Sgt. Agustin Matos, a member of the 442nd Military Police of the **New York National Guard** and a city correction officer in civilian life, has all-too-vivid memories of his stay in Samawah, Iraq.

"The place was filthy; most of the windows were broken; dirt, grease and bird droppings were everywhere," he said. "I wouldn't house a city prisoner in that place."

He recalled a mandated morning run of about 3 miles on a sandy track near a train depot.

"Every time I ran I felt my throat burning and my chest tightening," he said.

Now, Matos, 37, believes his symptoms may be the result of radioactive dust he inhaled from spent American shells made from depleted uranium.

The Long Island man is one of four Iraq war veterans who tested positive for DU contamination, according to a Daily News investigation.

The soldiers and other members of the 442nd say they are suffering from physical ailments that began last summer while they were stationed in Samawah.

Matos, who was assigned to the 4th platoon's 2nd squad, arrived in Samawah last June, two weeks ahead of the rest of the company.

His advance team had orders from Capt. Sean O'Donnell, their commander, to ready a huge depot in a train repair yard on the outskirts of downtown Samawah as a barracks for the unit.

Once the entire company arrived, each platoon was assigned its own space inside the depot, which was bigger than a football field.

A locomotive that straddled a repair pit and an empty train car sat in the middle of the sleeping area, with two platoons assigned to bed down along one side of the train and two others along the other side.

Just outside the depot, two Iraqi tanks, one of them shot up, had been hauled onto flatbed railroad cars.

The company was so short-handed, according to the soldiers, that the commander would evacuate a G.I. only if he could no longer physically function.

Matos was sent home last year for surgery for a shoulder injury suffered in a jeep accident.

Since his return, he has had constant headaches, fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, joint pain and excessive urination. After he recently discovered blood in his urine, doctors at Walter Reed Army Medical Center gave him a CAT scan and discovered a small lesion on his liver.

A 1990 Army study linked DU to "chemical toxicity causing kidney damage."

"Before I left for Iraq, they tested my eyes and I was fine," Matos said. "Now my eyesight's gotten bad, on top of everything else."

Another member of the company who tested positive for DU is 2nd platoon Sgt. Hector Vega, 48, a retired postal worker from the Bronx who has been in the **National Guard** for 27 years.

Since being evacuated to Fort Dix for treatment for foot surgery, Vega said he has endured insomnia and constant headaches. And like many of the sick soldiers, Vega said, "I have uncontrollable urine, every half hour."

One day, during a trip a few hours south of Samawah, he and another soldier stopped on the side of the road to photograph and check out two shot-up Iraqi tanks.

"We didn't think anything of walking right up to those tanks and touching them," he said. "I didn't know anything about depleted uranium."

As for the railroad depot where they slept, Vega recalls it as "disgusting. Oil, dirt and bird droppings everywhere, insects crawling all around us."

And then there were the frequent dust storms.

"They would blow all that dust inside the depot all over us when we were sleeping or eating. It was so thick, you could see it."

Deployed Troops Step Up Anti-Malarial Protections

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, April 8, 2004 -- It's peak mosquito season in Iraq, and U.S. troops deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom are taking steps to protect themselves against malaria.

The high-risk season for malaria in Iraq runs from April 1 through Nov. 1, according to Army Col. Fredric Plotkin, preventive medicine and force health protection officer for U.S. Central Command headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla. The highest-risk areas are in the northern, eastern and southeastern provinces, Plotkin said. Baghdad and much of western Iraq are malaria-free.

The high-risk period for malaria in Afghanistan runs from March through November, and malaria is a high risk year-round in the Horn of Africa.

Service members in high-risk areas are required to take anti-malarial medication. The type of drug prescribed varies depending on the region, based on the malarial strain present, Plotkin said.

Chloroquine, the drug most commonly prescribed to service members in Iraq, requires only a weekly 500-milligram tablet and has fewer side effects than other anti-malarial drugs, Plotkin said.

Other anti-malarial drugs frequently used by deployed U.S. service members are mefloquine and doxycycline. These drugs generally are used in areas where malaria is resistant to chloroquine or for service members who can't take chloroquine.

Although U.S. Central Command issues general guidelines about how anti-malarial drugs are prescribed, Plotkin said unit surgeons on the ground are authorized to tailor these guidelines based on local conditions.

Use of anti-malarial drugs continues for four extra weeks after the exposure to malaria, Plotkin said, to ensure that malaria parasites are cleared from the blood. In addition, service members take primaquine for two weeks to kill any malaria parasites in the liver, he said, adding that a blood test is required before primaquine is prescribed.

Anti-malarial drugs serve as a second line of defense in the event that other protective measures fail, Plotkin said.

These measures include using an insect repellent containing DEET (diethylmethyloamide) on exposed skin, blousing pants into boots, wearing sleeves down, treating uniforms with permethrin and sleeping under a permethrin-treated bed net, he said.

These measures also protect service members against other insect-borne diseases, such as leishmaniasis, for which anti-malarial drugs are not effective, Plotkin said.

According to an Army message issued to the field in November, no cases of malaria have been reported among coalition troops in Iraq, and encountering a strain of malaria that is resistant to chloroquine is considered to be unlikely in Iraq.

Malaria is a major health problem in tropical climates, with an estimated 500 million new cases causing at least 1 million deaths every year. Malaria usually is fatal in only the very old, very young and those with weakened immune systems, officials said.

Symptoms of malaria include a slow-rising fever that lasts several days, followed by shaking chills and rapidly increased temperature. Victims often feel malaise and suffer headache, nausea and profuse sweating. Plotkin said the cycle of chills, fever and sweating typically repeats itself every one to three days.

Plotkin said malarial symptoms may appear long after a service member has redeployed from the affected region. For this reason, he said, service members are counseled to advise their doctors that they served in an area where malaria was present if they develop a flu-like illness within a year or so after redeploying.

TRIBUTE TO OUR FALLEN HEROES

Savannah Morning News

April 5, 2004

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New Details, But No Cause Yet, in Military Pilots' Crash

One of the two captains named was well known to Savannah's 165th.

By Eric Williamson, Savannah Morning News

The flags weren't at half staff, but a symbolic tribute of an empty pair of boots and a helmet resting on a rifle hinted to **Georgia Air National Guard** visitors Sunday of the tragedy that happened Saturday morning.

Two Moody Air Force Base pilots in a small training plane crashed seconds after takeoff from Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport. Both men apparently were killed instantly.

The cause of the crash is still unknown, but the pilots' names have been released.

After recovering the bodies and notifying the pilots' next-of-kin, the Air Force announced that training pilots were Capt. Judson "Jud" Brinson, 35, of Thomasville, Ga., and Capt. Lee Moore of Valdosta, Ga., 33.

One of the men was well known for his Savannah service.

'We've lost him twice'

Brinson had served in the 165th Airlift Wing of the **Guard**, which has its Combat Readiness Training Center at the airport.

Major David Simons, a 165th spokesman, said Brinson was a friend who will be remembered by many at the training center for his sense of humor and his talent as a pilot.

"He was one of the best and brightest we had," Simons said.

Col. Steven Westgate also released a statement on Brinson's death: "We were very sad to see him leave to join the Moody unit and now, it feels like we've lost him twice.

"I, and the men and women of the 165th Airlift Wing, are deeply saddened by the horrible accident that took this fine young man's life."

Brinson worked at the Savannah unit from November 1993 to November 2002, when he transferred to Moody in Valdosta to become an instructor for the T-6A Texan II planes, the same model Brinson and Moore crashed in at 9:17 a.m. Saturday.

Brinson died doing what he loved.

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"I was one of the kids who that's all I wanted to do," Brinson had told the Valdosta Daily Times. "When a plane flew over, I looked up in the sky, (and) that's when I knew I wanted to be a pilot."

Brinson is survived by his wife and young daughter.

A proud military heritage

Moore wasn't as well known in Savannah as Brinson, but his family is prominent in Bulloch County, according to Derek L. Duke of Statesboro.

"My wife's a lifelong friend of his mother. We've known him since he was born," Duke said.

"He was an extremely accomplished, well-thought-of pilot and a very professional officer."

Moore's grandfather also was a decorated military pilot. His father was a Green Beret.

"Lee had that heritage," Duke said.

A spokesperson at Moody did not immediately return phone calls.

The doomed flight

The T-6 aircraft was assigned to the 479th Flying Training Group here, but the men were part of Valdosta's 39th Flying Training Squadron.

They were on a training mission that involved hurricane evacuation.

Simons said planes have to be moved out of Savannah in case of a hurricane, so routine training is necessary to make sure that is done as efficiently as possible.

The men had finished their work and were on their way back to Valdosta, Simons said, correcting a previous statement.

Whatever caused the crash, it happened quickly.

According to Simons, the plane cleared the north-south runway and was banking when it dived out of control.

There was no communication from the pilots.

The plane hit hard and much of the body virtually disintegrated. What appeared to be a wing and portion of the fuselage remained visible in the burned airport clearing Sunday.

Those pieces were the largest the 40 to 50 investigators had to examine.

The team, including safety inspectors from Moody, placed white flags to indicate debris. The teams worked in rows, making sure they didn't miss potentially crucial evidence.

Work was expected to continue into Sunday night with the help of some powerful, portable floodlights.

But Simons said he didn't expect findings from the crash to be available any time soon.

In Honor of ...

Fallen National Guardsman Fought in Iraq to Build Peace

By [Erin Hayes](#)

ABC NEWS

KENTWOOD, La. April 1 — The Taylors' photo album is the album of a happy family: three smiling boys, David, Nate, and Christopher, each two years apart, and always together.

Of their three sons, Mike and Priscilla Taylor believed Chris was the least likely to ever join the military. He was the peacemaker among the boys, the one who watched out for them. He was a child who'd rather take a punch than throw one.



So it surprised them when Chris announced he would join the Louisiana National Guard right after high school. His brothers tried to talk him out of it, to no avail. "I told him he was crazy," David said, laughing at the memory of Chris just smiling back at him then, his mind already made up.

Once in the Guard, Chris began volunteering for missions, many of them humanitarian missions. He signed on for a six-month tour in Honduras to help the victims of Hurricane Mitch. This time his family was not surprised. Even as a child, they said, Chris was always looking for somebody he could help.

"If you ever needed a hand, he was there to give you a hand," David explained. Nate chimed in, "He'd give you the shirt off his back, you know."

They nod, then look to one another, and grow quiet. It is hard to talk about Chris in the past tense. "Being so close, you know, we never thought —" David's voice broke. "We talked about having barbecues together and stuff, when we grew up."

He and Nate were silent again, the memories washing over them. "Still kind of hard to believe, you know," Dave said softly. "I still think he's coming home."

The boys were close even as adults because Chris was home quite often. For several years after high school, Chris bounced between his missions with the Guard and a job back home with his dad. Mike Taylor works at the Alabama State Docks and said he had found working with his adult son a true delight.

"We had a really good relationship. We actually had a lot of fun. We've always had a lot of fun working together." He stopped and smiled. "I smile when I talk about Chris, you know."

He went on, recalling that Chris, at the age of 24, was still sorting out just what he wanted to do with his life. He talked of going to college after he got out of the Guard. Thought he might try to be a U.S. Marshal, or do something in law enforcement.

Huge Presence, Huge Heart

Chris, his dad said, did know two things for certain: He would keep his Christian faith strong. And he would be unrelenting about his physical strength. A lean and lanky child, Chris had decided in his early teens that he had to toughen up — at least on the outside — and he joined the local gym. By the time he was 20, he could bench-press 400 pounds. He was 6½ feet of solid muscle, a huge and imposing presence.

At the gym, they called him "Goliath." His fellow soldiers would later call him "Big T." And, wherever he was deployed, the locals soon called him that, too.

Major Robert Kyger remembers that many, upon first seeing Chris, were often afraid of him. Until he smiled. "His personality was so warm, he was a true joy to be around," Kyger said.

Staff Sergeant Jeff Barnes, who also served with Chris, thought of him as a "gentle giant." "Big, huge guy," Barnes explains. "Scare you to death if you were small. But then he'd look at you and give you that smile, crack a joke, and he'd put you at ease."

Chris was deployed to Baghdad with his unit last year. In many of the photos taken of him there, he looks stern, enormous, intimidating in his uniform and dark sunglasses. But his friends and family say they have more accurate pictures of Chris: the photos of Chris with his arm around local Iraqi kids, grinning and kidding with them. They show the Honduras pictures with Chris in the midst of one smiling Honduran family after another.

This, they say, is Chris Taylor — a man who firmly believed it was his duty, wherever he was — to make things better.

‘We’re There Making a Difference’

Mike said that when Chris came home this past Christmas for a two-week break, he got in a debate with his son. Mike questioned the wisdom of the U.S. presence in Iraq, of sending National Guard soldiers into such treacherous duty. Chris quickly set his dad straight. Many of the Iraqis, Chris said, were grateful for the Americans.

"He said 'we're there because we need to be. And we're there making a difference,'" Mike recalled. "He loved what he was doing. I mean, he loved making a difference."

There is a letter from Chris that Mike and Priscilla take out once in a while to re-read. It is dated October, 2003, four months before a roadside bomb in Baghdad would claim their son's life.

"Mom and Dad," Chris began, on an evening when he felt the need to explain why he was thousands of miles from the people he loved most. Why his presence in an uncertain country now made him certain of so many things.

"Sacrifice is a word I learn more about every minute, every hour, and every day that I'm here. Freedom is not free," he wrote, "a quote that I find very true. It is an honor to wake up every morning a United States Army soldier and to share another day with my brothers-in-arms."

Mike looked away for a moment. He, too, still finds it hard to accept that Chris will never again walk through that front door. He won't cradle his mom into his huge arms as he loved to do, won't tease with his brothers, grow old with his friends. Those friends, Chris' National Guard

unit, are scheduled to come home from Baghdad in May. Chris was supposed to have been with them.

Mike doesn't know if he'll make it through the ceremony. But he and his family will be all right, he says. They have come to accept Chris' death as part of his service. A service he freely elected to give.

"It was done for love. And love for a lot of things," Mike said. "Love for family. Love for country. And love for the people around him."

All around him.

The Associated Press

April 8, 2004

New Hampshire Guardsman Remembered

By MIKE RECHT, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: DOVER, N.H.

Sgt. Jeremiah Holmes, the only New Hampshire National Guardsman killed in Iraq, was remembered as a hero to family, friends and his country.

Speaking at a Mass of Christian burial, Army **National Guard** Chaplain William Paige said Holmes "was a hero long before he was deployed" to Iraq.

He said Holmes was a hero to his wife; his son, whose first birthday is Thursday; his brothers and sisters, his friends.

"He was a hero to us," he told the standing-room-only crowd of about 450 at St. Joseph Church. "He protected the ideals of freedom and democracy.

"It's hard to say goodbye to a hero."

His wife, Kimberly, later tearfully read a poem of remembrance.

Holmes, 27, who was born in Dover and lived in North Berwick, Maine, was killed March 29 when a bomb rocked the truck in which he was riding in a convoy.

Three regular Army soldiers from New Hampshire also have died in the Middle East, two in Iraq and one in Kuwait.

He was a member of the Army **National Guard** 744th Transportation Company with headquarters in Hillsboro, N.H., and detachments in Claremont and Somersworth. His unit was deployed for training in late December, and sent to Iraq in February for 18 months.

Of the 2,700 Army and Air **National Guard** members in New Hampshire, about 1,000 are serving in the Middle East.

About 75 members of the Air and Army **National Guard** were on hand for Wednesday's service in the church where Holmes was baptized. They lined the entrance to the church at

attention as his flag-draped coffin was carried inside by nine guard pallbearers, and again was it was brought out to the mournful skirl of a single bagpiper.

Holmes, who was promoted posthumously to sergeant, was buried at St. Mary New Cemetery, where his mother was buried after she was murdered in 1990.

New Hampshire Adjutant Gen. John Blair, a Vietnam combat veteran, presented Holmes' wife with the folded flag from the coffin and the Bronze Star and Purple Heart that Holmes was awarded "on behalf of a grateful nation for the dedicated ... and heroic service of your husband."

Dozens of friends and family members, led by Holmes' wife, each placed a single flower on the coffin.

After the graveside service, Blair said every guard member knows the day could come when the country calls, and he or she is asked to respond.

But ever since hearing the news of Holmes, he said he has been thinking "how I prayed this day would never happen, and when it happened, that it would never happen again."

And Wednesday, his thoughts also were with the families of those guardsmen still in Iraq.

"Their fears can only be heightened now," he said.

He and his wife were among them. Their son is stationed in Turkey.

The Associated Press

April 9, 2004

Soldier from Bauxite Killed in Iraq

By CRISTINA RODRIGUEZ, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: BAUXITE, Ark.

An Army sergeant who was shot in Iraq was also a "real soldier" at his workplace, said a manager at The Heritage Company in Bryant.

James Kelley said co-workers close to 45-year-old William Labadie called him "Wild Bill" because he was so enthusiastic about his job, which involved raising money for nonprofit agencies.

"He was a true motivator in every sense of the word," Kelley said. "They know he's looking down on us, telling us to keep pushing and keep on getting it."

Labadie was even more eager to serve in Iraq, his mother said.

"This has honestly been his goal all of his life," Cheryl Winters said. "He knew this was his last shot at 45 years old. He told his commanding officer: 'Give me a shot.' It was like he was going to Disneyland."

Labadie was shot in the chest during fighting Wednesday, just two weeks after being deployed. Labadie was assigned to the 1st Cavalry, 39th Brigade, Troop E151 Cavalry at Camp Taji in Kuwait.

Cheryl Winters said she was notified by an Army chaplain and Labadie's commanding officer, who came to the family home the night before.

Labadie had been living with his parents, Cheryl and Carl Winters, for about a year. He had plans to build a home across from his parents, and move in his wife, Sunnie, of Del City, Okla., and their son, Bryan, 23, Cheryl Winters said.

On Thursday, the Winters' home displayed an American flag at half-mast. Several family friends were on the front porch and inside, comforting the couple. Two tall white candles burned on the dining room table, and arrangements of yellow flowers and ribbons were set in a corner.

Labadie joined the Marines right after high school and stayed for eight years, then later joined the **National Guard**, where he served 14 years.

At home, Labadie was an active member of the First Presbyterian Church in Benton, his mother said. He taught Bible study once a week to children in third through fourth grades.

"He had a lot of plans to get back and start a Boy Scout troop and lots of other things, but of course he didn't get to come home," Cheryl Winters said.

A memorial is planned in the church, and family members plan to cremate Labadie and scatter his ashes, his mother said.

Gov. Mike Huckabee said in a statement Thursday that he spoke to Cheryl Winters by phone and conveyed his sympathy on behalf of all Arkansans. He said he and first lady Janet Huckabee met Labadie before the sergeant left for Iraq.

"Janet and I had met Sgt. Labadie and visited with him when we went to Fort Hood in January prior to the deployment of the unit to the Middle East," Huckabee said. "I called to extend comfort to Mrs. Winters, but was instead comforted by her as she expressed her confidence in the Lord's care for her and His salvation for her son."

The Associated Press

April 11, 2004

Fighting Claims Wisconsin Woman with Sisters also in Iraq

DATELINE: NEW BERLIN, Wis.

One of three Wisconsin sisters serving in Iraq has been killed.

Pvt. Michelle Witmer, 20, died Friday when the vehicle in which she was riding came under attack, family members said.

Witmer had been stationed in Baghdad since March 2003 with the 32nd Military Police Company of the Wisconsin **National Guard**.

Her sister, Rachel, 24, who is with the same unit, will come home early and won't be sent back, according to a statement released Saturday by the Witmer family. Michelle and Rachel had about six months of their active-duty obligation remaining.

Charity Witmer, Michelle's twin sister, is a medic with Company B of the Wisconsin Guard's 118th Medical Battalion, and she also is stationed in Iraq.

The Witmers are appealing to the Army to permit Charity to finish her service elsewhere.

"Michelle believed in her mission and she made a difference in the lives of many people, both American and Iraqi, by serving her country with honor," the family statement said.

"We are grateful to the Army **National Guard** for the compassion and urgency they demonstrated in making arrangements for Charity and Rachel to bring their sister home," the family said.

The women's parents are John and Lori Witmer, who declined to comment.

Michelle was the 16th Wisconsin soldier to be killed in Iraq.

Michelle joined the **National Guard** in November 2002, signing on with the same military police unit Rachel was in, and was sent to Iraq four months later.

But Michelle and Rachel worked separately in Iraq and did not see one another there, said Jan Pretzel, their grandmother.

Though Michelle didn't enlist with the idea of serving in Iraq, "she thoroughly believed in what they were doing there," Pretzel said Saturday.

All three sisters, though not necessarily happy about going to Iraq, "were proud to be doing their share for their country," she said.

She recalled their two-week visit home last Christmas and said the war experience had changed Michelle and Rachel.

"They left as young girls and came home mature adults," she said.

They both helped train Iraqi police. For Michelle, that often meant driving a Humvee and "laying down ground fire," Pretzel said.

Her e-mails home described some close calls involving gunfire, bombings and rockets.

By February, Michelle had an inkling that her unit might soon ship out of Iraq because members were told to tell their families to stop shipping packages. An e-mail reflected her joy at the prospect of going home.

"This is a REALLY GOOD SIGN!!" she wrote. "The redeployment process (though it may be long) is finally beginning! There is finally a light at the end of the tunnel!"

After visiting an Iraqi orphanage for disabled children, Pretzel and other relatives and friends back home sent supplies and treats for the children.

"She wanted to help the women over there, she wanted to help the children," Pretzel said. "She was very tender-hearted."

GENERAL

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

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ILLINOIS STYLE: Woman's Missing Flag Returns after Patriotic World Tour

By MAYA TARTER, (Peoria) Journal Star

DATELINE: BARTONVILLE, Ill.

After a nearly worldwide journey that included many stops to perform patriotic duty, a missing flag has found its way home to Peoria County.

Some time before Sept. 11, 2001, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, a small variation of the American flag disappeared from its place of display next to Rosemary Gray's mailbox in Bartonville.

Initially, Gray, 45, who had bought the flag only two weeks before, was miffed.

"I thought, 'Who the heck stole my \$2 flag?'" Gray said recently. "There are teenagers around, so I blamed them at first."

But when Gray found out what really happened to her flag, it brought tears of joy to her eyes.

The flag reappeared on Gray's doorstep one night in early March, along with a letter of apology.

"I was out for about an hour or an hour and a half ... and came back to find my flag sitting propped up against my front door," she said. "At first, I thought I had a stalker. It was creepy until I read the letter."

According to the letter, the flag was taken to spread patriotism to the families at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and then wound up traveling the world with American GIs. The letter said the little flag was displayed in base housing in Germany, flew with soldiers during humanitarian food drops in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East, visited vacationing soldiers in Guam and China, and even made an appearance at a Pizza Hut in Luxembourg.

The letter told Gray of the flag's comforting presence overseas.

"Please know that this flag was also taken to Landstuhl (Medical Center in Germany) when the troops were injured and brought a lot of joy to the men it visited," the letter's anonymous authors wrote. "This flag was loved and respected when we couldn't show an American flag in a foreign country."

But why was Gray's particular flag taken?

According to the letter's authors: "We were home on leave and could not find an American flag to take back to Germany. It was impossible to find one in Germany, and a lot of Americans were depending on us to bring one back. We saw your lawn ornament and took it with us."

Gray thinks the flag's unusual look may also have been appealing.

"It's not a traditional flag," she said. "It's about the size of my hand and has two propellers, one big star and two red and white stripes. I think that's why it was taken - for the uniqueness of it."

Along with the letter, Gray got some other items to show and tell about, including eight foreign coins from eight different countries.

"It adds to the authenticity," she said.

Although no names were on the letter - it is signed: "some American families and military members from Ramstein Air Base in Germany" - Gray suspects members of the Air **National Guard** installation down the road in Bartonville of being responsible for the heist. But she holds no grudge.

"It wasn't stolen; it was just borrowed," she said.

While the flag has returned home, Gray does not plan to return it to its original location.

After its long journey, the flag is now officially retired from active duty.

NASCAR Salutes Army Guard, Reserve Troops and Employers

American Forces Press Service

ARLINGTON, Va., April 6, 2004 – Richard Childress Racing and Bobby Labonte, the 2000 NASCAR Cup Series champion, joined forces with Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve at the Texas Motor Speedway April 3 in the first of a NASCAR "Dream Team" lineup of drivers.

Labonte drove the ESGR No. 29 Army National Guard/Army Reserve car in a first of five Busch Series Races to salute supportive employers of National Guardsmen and reservists.

The program's driver lineup, announced at the Daytona International Speedway in February, also includes Tony Stewart, Ricky Craven, Kerry Earnhardt and Kevin Harvick.

Stewart is scheduled to compete May 1 at the California Speedway, representing the Marine Corps Reserve. Craven will run July 10 at the Chicagoland Speedway for the Navy Reserve. Earnhardt will follow Sept. 25 at the Dover (Del.) International Speedway in the Air National Guard/Air Force Reserve car, and Harvick will wrap up the program Nov. 2 at the Homestead-Miami Speedway, representing the Coast Guard Reserve.

Also, Richard Childress Racing's No. 2 AC Delco Chevrolet, driven by Ron Hornaday, will carry the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve logo on its rear deck lid for the entire 2004 NASCAR Busch Series season.

"It's a great opportunity to get back in the Busch Series in a very unique situation, driving a car for Richard Childress, which is not like driving for Joe Gibbs or one on my own," said Labonte. "Texas is the only planned race for me to be in the ESGR car this year. That makes this unique because it's a one-time deal for me."

"I really appreciate Bobby starting the ESGR program for ESGR and RCR," said Childress, president of the racing team that bears his name. "It makes sense to have him do this in his home state of Texas. This program is about honoring the employers who have signed statements of support for the ESGR, and are doing everything they can to support their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve."

---End---



Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy



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New Retired Benefit Programs

The Department of Defense has two programs designed to reduce the reduction in retired pay due to receipt of Veteran Administration compensation, for certain disabled retirees.

Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP) provides a 10-year phase-out of the offset to military retired pay due to receipt of VA disability compensation for members whose **combined disability rating is 50% or greater**. Members retired under disability provisions **must have 20 years of service**.

Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) pays added benefits to retirees who receive VA disability compensation for **combat-related disabilities and have 20 years of service**.

Select one of the following topic areas:

- [General Information Paper](#) on New Retired Benefit Programs
- [CRSC Information Paper](#) Updated January 2004
- CRSC Application (DD FORM 2860) Eligible for the CRSC Program effective May 31, 2003.
 - [Fillable Adobe PDF Form](#)
 - For [Perform Pro and FormFlow 2.0](#) please link to the Department of Defense Electronic Forms Website
- CRSC Application (DD Form XXXX) Eligible for CRSC Program effective January 1, 2004, Application will be available soon.

Veterans must apply to their own branch of Service for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) benefits. **Applicants are urged to contact their own branch of Service for additional information.** Link to your Service web site:

[ARMY](#)

[NAVY & MARINE CORPS](#)

[AIR FORCE](#)



NATIONAL GUARD FAMILY PROGRAM ONLINE COMMUNITY



Welcome to the National Guard Bureau Family Site!

Whether you're a National Guard service member or a member of a National Guard family, we are here to help. We are developing an on-line community to share information and provide links to resources that will address your financial and emotional needs and improve your well-being.

Connect

Do you need help or know someone who does? Contact your [Joint Force Headquarters State Family Program Coordinator](#) for help and information on resources in your area.



Points of Contact for resources near you:

State:

[Joint Force Headquarters State Family Program Coordinators](#)

Local:

[Air National Guard Wing Coordinators](#)

[Family Assistance Centers \(FACs\)](#)



Give us feedback. [Contact us](#) and let us know about your needs.



[Join our community!](#) Sign up to receive emails about site updates and upcoming events.

Surveys and Polls

The Red Cross Survey is complete. [View the results.](#)

Do you have an idea for a poll? [Submit a question.](#)

Hot Topics and News

Unresolved Pay Issues

The Army National Guard Financial Services Center (NGB-ARC-F) is the point of contact for soldiers who experience pay issues that continue to be unresolved.

1. Toll-free Hotline:

1-877-ARNGPAY
(1-877-276-4729)

2. E-mail your question or problem:

[NGB-ARC-F](#)

News You Can Use (4/06/04)

A weekly collection of news articles specifically relating to the family and National Guard.

[Microsoft Word File](#) (186K)

[PDF File](#) (281K)

[HTML Format](#)

[Newsletter Archives](#)

Family Resources

[Army One Source](#)

(Confidential help for life's problems)
User ID: army
Password: onesource
Phone: 800-464-8107

[Air Force One Source](#)

(Confidential help for life's problems)
user id: airforce
password: ready
Phone: 800-707-5784

[Army Families Online](#)

(Deployment, Readiness, Well Being)
1-800-833-6622)

[Reserve Affairs Family Readiness](#)

[National Military Family Association](#)

[Healthy Parenting Initiative](#)

[Tricare](#)

[National Guard Youth](#)

Deployment Resources

[American Red Cross](#)

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Separation handbooks
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[9-12 year olds](#)
[13-15 year olds](#)

Military Links

[Army Community Service](#)

(Deployment, financial, employment, relocation, volunteering & family)

[Army Legal Services](#)

(Personal legal affairs)

[Air Reserves Family Assistance Program](#)

(Contacts for benefits & services)



www.guardfamily.org www.ngb.army.mil [Contact](#)

This Community is for you...

If someone in your family is away from home serving our country, we want you to know that we are here to help.

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Check this out:

[NASA website](#): play games and learn.

Did you know?

You can [mail packages](#) to soldiers overseas. Find out what the rules are.

There is a website just for kids about when your parent is stationed away from home. Check out the [kid's deployment website](#).

Where you live.



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