



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 National Guard, Air Force, and Coast Guard Reserve

<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/esgr/index.jsp> (Note to those viewing this page in Word or PDF format: You may have to copy this address and paste it into your browser's address window.)

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://www.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 chat rooms for kids.

<http://www.militarystudent.org>

Disabled Soldiers Initiative (DS3)

This website provides information on the new DS3 program. Through DS3, the Army provides its most severely disabled Soldiers and their families with a system of advocacy and follow-up.

<http://www.armyds3.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 Michelle.Bohlen@ngb.af.mil.

CST Support

HOMELAND DEFENSE

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU

ARLINGTON, VA

12 JAN 05

Contact: Master Sgt. Bob Haskell, (703) 607-2647, Cell (202) 438-4115

By Master Sgt. Bob Haskell

National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. – “The 43rd CST from the SCNG has been placed on ‘stand-by’ for possible support to this incident.”

That is a mouthful of a statement that was included in all of the executive summaries that **National Guard** officials prepared in the aftermath of a tragic train wreck that rocked the western South Carolina community of Graniteville, near Augusta, Ga., early on the morning of Jan. 6.

It speaks volumes about how the Guard’s CSTs, civil support teams, are considered a ready and reliable asset for homeland emergencies – and for homeland security.

For the record, the South Carolina National Guard’s 43rd Civil Support Team was not called out to help civil authorities deal with the wreck that occurred at 2:40 that Thursday morning.

It resulted in nine deaths, all apparently from chlorine gas that leaked from a ruptured tank car, after a 42-car freight train struck another train that was parked at a crossing beside a plant where workers were making denim and other fabrics, according to press reports. More than 250 people were sickened from the toxic vapors. It was described as one of this country’s deadliest chemical spills in years.

“Our civil support team did not respond,” said Lt. Col. Pete Brooks, spokesman for the South Carolina Guard. “The team’s members were told to stay in range, to stay close to their cell phones and pagers.

Still, Guard officials considered it significant that the civil support team was considered as a possible source for support. That, officials maintained, further validates the teams and the fact that Congress has made it possible for every state and territory to have at least one.

Each civil support team has 22 members of the Army and Air National Guard who are trained and equipped to respond to weapons of mass destruction, to rapidly deploy and test a disaster site for deadly chemical, biological, radiological or explosive agents that could be harmful to other emergency responders.

They assist responders by “determining the nature of an attack, provide medical and technical advice, and pave the way for identification and arrival of follow-on state and federal response assets,” the Department of Defense has explained.

Eleven new teams have been funded in the Defense Appropriations Act for this fiscal year. That will bring the total number to 55 when the new teams are fielded and certified.

The new teams will be located in the District of Columbia, Delaware, Guam, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Puerto Rico, South Dakota, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Vermont and Wyoming, Defense officials have recently told Congress.

Congress authorized the first 10 teams in 1999. There are now 32 teams throughout the country with 12 more working toward certification. The 11 new teams will blanket the country with National Guard troops primed to respond to a domestic crisis more deadly than the train wreck that occurred in Graniteville, S.C., early on Jan. 6.

Program Permits Army Retirees To Re-Enter Active Duty

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USA Today

January 13, 2005

By Gregg Zoroya, USA Today

WASHINGTON — The Army, stretched thin by the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, is dipping into one of its last resources for wartime duty: retirees on a military pension.

The Army is expanding a little-known program to bring back retired officers and enlisted soldiers who expressed a willingness to join again, particularly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

At least 320 retirees signed up last year under this program. Probably more than 500 will go back on active duty this year, says Lt. Col. Karla Brischke, a personnel manager. They range in age from mid-40s to late 60s and possibly older, and each has at least 20 years of military service.

“It doesn't mean that we're scraping the bottom of the barrel,” says Lt. Col. Bryan Hilferty, a spokesman for the Army personnel department. “It means that we're doing a prudent thing with American resources.”

After 9/11, about 15,000 retired soldiers contacted the Army to offer their services. From that group, the Army last year assembled a list of 4,500 who completed the application process.

In a separate program, Hilferty says, the Army compiled a list of 3,000 retired soldiers and began asking whether they would volunteer to be recruiters or civil affairs officers. The Army has found 616 retirees willing to fill 442 jobs as civil affairs officers in and around Iraq. They would help rebuild schools, hospitals and roads. At least 10 agreed to rejoin as recruiters.

The Marines have a similar program and have rehired 66, 1st Lt. Darlan Harris says.

Activating retired soldiers is the latest step by the Army to bolster troop levels. Other efforts include extending overseas tours from 12 to 15 months, tripling bonuses for new enlistees and **National Guard** members who re-enlist, and mobilizing about 4,000 soldiers from the Individual Ready Reserve. The IRR is an infrequently used pool of former troops who still have contractual obligations to the military.

“I’m no spring chicken,” says James Barren, 54, of Detroit, who is rejoining the Army to train Iraqi police. “I think training is something that I can have some impact on. If I can do something to save one person’s life, that’s my motivation.”

The Army told the retired Detroit policeman last month that his skills are valuable now in Iraq. “If they have that much confidence in me, I thought I would give it a shot,” Barren says. He could be in Iraq as early as February.

“I think it’s just another signal that the Army is stretched very, very thin, if not overextended,” says Bob Scales, a retired Army major general and former commandant of the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa. “It’s amazing how creative everybody has been lately in trying to sort of patch this Army of ours together.”

The 4,500 retirees fall into three categories. The most valuable to the Army are 1,000 healthy retirees who have been out of service less than five years. A second group of 2,000 are in good health, out of the military no more than 10 years and 60 or younger. The third category of 1,500 retirees are older than 60 or have disabilities.

Retired soldiers who rejoin would serve up to a year, although they could agree to more or volunteer for another assignment.

“Here I am, in the golden years of my life at 70, still hoping that I can help somehow,” says Gerald Garcia of Spokane, Wash., a retired chief warrant officer in the **National Guard**. “I want to be part of it, before it’s too late for me.”

Garcia — 5-foot-10 and 155 pounds, about the same as when he was a soldier — volunteered last year and is on the Army’s list but hasn’t been called up. “I still do my 25 push-ups every night. I do a lot of walking and get a lot of exercise,” he says. “Hopefully, I can get involved.”

Hub Ready For Terror Drill; Fake `Hijacking' Will Put City To Test

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The Boston Herald

January 15, 2005

By Dave Wedge

Some time in the next six months, an international flight will be ``hijacked' ' and forced to land in Boston by **National Guard** fighter jets, touching off one of the largest public

safety scares in Hub history.

But none of it will be real.

“It is one of the most - if not THEmost - complex exercises ever attempted,' ' Carlo Boccia, director of Mayor Thomas M. Menino's Homeland Security office, said.

And one of the most expensive. The cost of the terrorism drill: \$700,000 in public funds shared by the city and Massport.

The comprehensive exercise, dubbed Operation Atlas, will involve 50 local, state, federal and private agencies but is expanding and may include officials from Chicago and San Francisco, foreign countries and international authorities.

The plan is a work in progress but will involve the staged hijacking of a plane flying to several United States cities from Europe. Passengers and crew will be role players knowingly involved in the drill.

The plane's forced landing and the practice emergency response will have no effect on daily traffic at Logan International Airport, Boccia said.

The goal of the anti-terrorism drill is to test emergency preparedness as well as the efficiency of information sharing and interdepartmental communications. Even the media will be part of the drill with ``reporters" being brought into the fold to test the release of public information during a real attack.

``These exercises are very important," said David Hagy, director of local coordination for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. ``(By being prepared) you save more lives, you save more property and you recover quicker."

The drill, which is one of a series of planned Hub anti-terror exercises, was conceived by the city and Massport.

Similar drills that were smaller in scope were done in preparation for the Democratic National Convention, including one that involved a simulated attack on the MBTA. Officials said the new exercises were not hatched based on any known threats.

DEPLOYMENT

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Utah Army National Guard Arrives In Nicaragua To Help Build Schools

Associated Pres

13 January 2005

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) - Soldiers from the Utah Army **National Guard** are in Nicaragua as part of a humanitarian aid program.

The assignment is part of the New Horizons 2005 program, a cooperative effort between the United States, Nicaragua and five other countries to provide humanitarian assistance.

The soldiers will oversee the construction of four schools and two clinics in the western part of the country. They also will operate three temporary medical clinics.

The group will distribute medical and school supplies along with about 10,000 Spanish language books that have been donated by individuals, groups and schools in Utah.

The Utah soldiers are expected to run the mission through its completion in May. **National Guard** Reservists from other states will also rotate through the country to help with the projects as part of their annual two week training.

The New Horizons program began in the mid-1980s as a way to combining U.S. military training and humanitarian assistance.

Guardsmen Help With Tsunami Relief

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FDCH Federal Department and Agency Documents

REGULATORY INTELLIGENCE DATA

January 11, 2005

1/11/2005 - ARLINGTON, Va. (AFPN) -- Alaska and Hawaii, the two closest states, are supporting American relief efforts by sending Air **National Guardsmen** and resources to the region devastated by the Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunamis, Guard spokesmen said.

Guardsmen are supporting the unprecedented relief effort for Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and the nine other countries around the Indian Ocean that were hit by one of the most terrible natural disasters in recorded history, officials said.

The death toll surpassed 150,000 two weeks after the event. Countless more people were still unaccounted for, homeless and subject to the life-threatening effects of disease and lack of food and water, officials said.

The guardsmen are undertaking this mission at the same time that many others are heavily engaged in the war against terrorism at home and abroad, said Maj. Mike Haller, spokesman for the Alaska **National Guard**.

About 150 Alaska Air Guardsmen were involved or prepared to take part in the tsunami relief efforts, Major Haller said.

Brig. Gen. James Robinson, the Alaska Air Guard's chief of staff, has been assigned as second in command for the joint U.S. military assistance group for Thailand. He is responsible for the daily activities of the joint relief effort, Major Haller said.

Three C-130 Hercules from the 144th Airlift Squadron at Kulis Air **National Guard** Base, Alaska, are on duty in Japan, assigned to support airlift operations for the recovery. About 25 guardsmen are involved in that mission.

About 120 guardsmen from the 210th, 211th and 212th Rescue Squadrons at Kulis are standing by to take two HC-130 rescue tankers and three HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters to the afflicted region if they are needed.

Meanwhile, Maj. Russell Wilmot III, an Alaska Air Guard intelligence officer, has

served in the hard-hit Thailand resort town of Phuket with six people from the Anchorage Fire Department.

Major Wilmot is familiar with Thai military forces and speaks the country's language so he could offer the firefighters the necessary coordination to ensure their skills are properly used, Major Haller said.

The Hawaii Air Guardsmen are also helping, said spokesman Maj. Charles Anthony.

A KC-135 Stratotanker has flown a Department of Defense forensics team to Thailand to help identify victims. Two combat communications Airmen have been sent to the same country, he said.

Thirty-nine security forces Airmen will provide security for U.S. forces in Indonesia, Major Anthony said.

This, however, is just the beginning of what world officials said they believe will be a long relief effort.

BENEFITS

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R.I. Lawmaker Wants Life Insurance Benefits For National Guard Members

News 12 Fox

10 January, 2005

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) -- A Rhode Island lawmaker says he'll propose legislation to establish a life insurance benefit for **National Guard** soldiers and their families.

The proposal from Senator Leonidas Raptakis would provide 250-thousand dollars in state-funded life insurance for all Guardsmen. The state would need to kick in about 200-thousand dollars annually to keep the program solvent.

Raptakis, a Coventry Democrat, says his bill would be modeled after one in New Mexico. There are 863 Guardsmen serving overseas.

Life Insurance For National Guard Bill

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KWWL-TV

January 11, 2005

A Senate Republican President from Ankeny says he'll file a bill that would help Iowa **National Guard** Members serving on active duty get a free \$250,000 life insurance policy.

He says lawmakers must put action behind their words and that the legislation would serve as a small token of thanks to the guard members.

More than 4,000 Iowa **National Guard** members have been activated for duty, giving the state one of the highest rates of guard mobilization in the country.

Legislator Wants To Fund Life Insurance For Pa. Guard

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Philly Burbs.com

Jan/11/2005

By Mark Scolforo

HARRISBURG, Pa. - State government would spend nearly \$1 million a year to fund life-insurance coverage for all Pennsylvania **National Guard** soldiers and airmen on active federal duty under a legislative package being unveiled Wednesday.

Similar initiatives were announced in the past two weeks in at least three other states - Iowa, Rhode Island and New Mexico.

The proposal by House Minority Whip Mike Veon, D-Beaver, would pay the \$16.25 monthly premiums for \$250,000 worth of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance coverage. About 4,500 guardsmen would qualify this year, most of them serving in Iraq.

"These men and woman are getting called up to active duty. We should give them the peace of mind that if, God forbid, something were to happen, their families would be taken care of," said Veon's spokesman, Bob Caton.

Veon scheduled a news conference for Wednesday to outline details of the legislation. Caton said it would likely provide tuition assistance and may include a waiver of hunting and fishing license fees and other provisions.

The "vast majority" of guardsmen - but not all - purchase coverage under SGLI, which is sponsored by the federal government and sold on terms more favorable than those available on the open market, said Lt. Col. Chris Cleaver, a Pennsylvania **National Guard** spokesman.

"We welcome any program to benefit soldiers and airmen of the Pennsylvania **National Guard**, and picking up the tab on the SGLI program is noteworthy," Cleaver said.

Steve Miskin, a spokesman for House Majority Leader Sam Smith, R-Jefferson, said the Republican caucus will wait to see the details of Veon's proposals before rendering judgment. The General Assembly passed a law last year that provides up to five years of tuition at state universities and colleges to the dependent children of guardsmen and reservists killed overseas.

Gov. Ed Rendell said his staff is working on a package of bills to address what he says are inequities in benefits between the **National Guard** and military reserves.

"I think we're seeing a new U.S. military that's going to increasingly rely on guardsmen

and reservists and I think we have an obligation as a society to give them ... and their families the most protection we can," Rendell said.

In New Mexico, Gov. Bill Richardson announced Jan. 4 he wants the state to pay for \$250,000 in SGLI coverage for all of its 4,000 Guard members - not just the 800 serving in Iraq or on domestic military bases. He also supports a state income-tax exemption for military retirees and the establishment of a relief fund for needy military families.

A Rhode Island state senator has proposed having the state pay for SGLI coverage for all of its guardsmen. In Iowa, the state Senate president said Monday he backs a bill to cover life insurance premiums for the 4,000 activated members of his state's **National Guard**.

The federal government pays the families of those killed in uniform \$12,000 and underwrites six months of their housing costs.

Hatch Vows Increase For Deceased Vets' Families ; Iraq Deaths: He Wants Compensation In Line With The Payments After 9-11

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Salt Lake Tribune (Utah)

January 14, 2005, Friday

By Christopher Smith , The Salt Lake Tribune

WASHINGTON -- Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch is vowing to boost the federal payments families of service members killed in Iraq receive to bring the amount closer to the multimillion-dollar government awards to the families of Sept. 11 victims.

"I personally resent the lack of financial support we give our military with regards to the deaths of young men and women in the field," Hatch said in an interview. "Contrast that with how we treated the 9-11 victims' families. I'm going to do everything in my power to rectify that."

The average award to families from the government's Sept. 11 Victims Compensation Fund was \$ 2.1 million, although the nearly 3,000 death benefit payouts from the fund ranged between \$ 250,000 to \$ 7.1 million. Nearly 2,700 payments were made to people injured in the 2001 terrorist attacks at an average of \$ 400,000 each, ranging between \$ 500 and \$ 8.6 million.

Congress created the fund in part to protect the airline industry from crippling lawsuits. Eligible families who accepted the lump sum payments signed away their right to sue any U.S. entity over the 9-11 deaths.

In contrast, surviving unmarried spouses of U.S. military service members who die on active duty or whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease receive a monthly payment from the Department of Veterans Affairs of \$ 993. The benefit, which is adjusted annually for the cost-of-living, also pays \$ 247 monthly per surviving dependent child up to age 18. If a surviving spouse remarries before age 55, the VA payments stop.

The VA also allows survivors to retain active-duty military health and dental care benefits for three years from the date of the service member's death, provides a \$ 680

monthly educational benefit to surviving dependents attending college between the ages of 18 and 26, and makes veteran home loan benefits available to unmarried surviving spouses.

Hatch has not yet drafted legislation and couldn't specify how much he would raise the benefit level or how the increase would be funded. **National Guard** personnel and reservists killed in combat would be eligible under the plan.

But he said the current federal compensation package for families of soldiers killed in action is woefully inadequate.

"I believe we ought to take care of widows and children of the young men and women who give their lives for us and we ought to do so in a reasonably strong fashion," he said.

Military service organization officials said they welcomed Hatch's pledge to hike death benefits for active duty members. But they expressed skepticism that such a dramatic jump in entitlement funding would jibe with the fiscal austerity preached by Republican congressional leadership and the White House.

"With the deficits they are facing and now with Congress talking about freezing VA benefits and even reducing benefits, I don't know if the atmosphere is receptive to something like that," said Doug Robertson, national legislative director for the American Legion, the largest veterans' organization in the country. "At the same time, I love Senator Hatch to death and I doubt you would find any veterans' organization saying this is terrible idea."

Hatch isn't alone in calling for better financial security for military service members' families. When Congress reconvenes later this month, Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., and Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., will introduce their Honoring Every Requirement of Exemplary Service (HEROES) Act to increase the maximum life insurance coverage for service members to \$ 400,000 from the current \$ 250,000 cap. It would also raise the death gratuity paid to families of service members killed in combat to \$ 100,000.

Hatch said his quest to have the federal government do more for veterans' families stems from his personal experience. The World War II death of his older brother Jesse Morlan Hatch, a B-24 nose-gunner who was killed on a mission to destroy Nazi oil supplies when Hatch was 10 years old, profoundly affected him.

Iraq War Vets Fight An Enemy At Home - Experts say up to 30% May Need Psychiatric Care

San Francisco Chronicle

January 17, 2005

By Julian Guthrie, Chronicle Staff Writer

The nation's military system is quietly preparing for one of its toughest missions in decades: ensuring that soldiers who return from Iraq get the help they need to deal with the stress and horrors of war.

Military officials and mental health providers predict that up to 30 percent of returning soldiers will require psychiatric services -- a number not seen since the end of the Vietnam War.

And, after several years of double-digit increases in federal funds for veterans health care, the 2005 inflation-adjusted budget is only 1.5 percent higher than last year's.

"The system is tremendously challenged," said Fred Gusman, who founded the nation's first combat stress center in 1977 and is director of the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Menlo Park.

In coming months and years, new combat veterans will struggle to adjust to life back home, to go from leading troops to managing a family, from trusting no one to confiding in someone.

There are returning soldiers who feel weakened, off balance. New veterans may go out of their way to avoid crowds. They may drive through red lights, because stopping in Iraq meant potential ambush. Most soldiers will quickly regain their footing, but others will need help, some for a lifetime. All will need time and understanding, experts say.

Gusman, who is a Vietnam veteran, said the nation should feel a deep responsibility to "those who gave their all and now might need our all."

The Pentagon estimates that as many as 100,000 new combat veterans nationwide will suffer from mental issues ranging from depression and anxiety to the more debilitating post-traumatic stress disorder, characterized by angry outbursts, flashbacks, nightmares and hypervigilance. An estimated 900 service members have been evacuated from Iraq since the start of war due to psychological problems, according to the Defense Department.

Military hospitals and clinics will be challenged, as will the families and communities of returning soldiers.

"You can't be in a war zone and not need readjustment when you come home," said Kuuipo Ordway, a trauma specialist with the Concord Vet Center.

"When they get into a combat arena, they are in a survival mode," said Ordway, who since October 2003 has met with soldiers returning from Iraq. "The neurons in the soldier's brain shift. When they're in a war, the soldier has to hear and smell and do everything better. They repress a lot, but their memory is keeping track."

Jack Stowe spent a year in Iraq, returning home May 1, 2004. Stowe, a member of a **National Guard** transportation unit out of San Bruno, was the commander of a company that provided convoy escorts to Army trucks around Baghdad, Tikrit and Mosul. His unit constantly came under fire from insurgents and navigated roads sometimes rigged with improvised explosive devices.

When he returned, his family was thrilled to have him home and the company where he worked installing alarms welcomed him back.

He thought he was fine. He was alive. He had all of his limbs. He was lucky, he told himself.

Soon, though, the problems began. He had nightmares. He felt numb. He couldn't connect with his wife, daughters, or sisters. Driving to work, he would see a pile of dirt on the freeway and swerve. A bump in the asphalt made him picture insurgents setting a trap.

"Over there, you do your job, you keep feelings to yourself," said Stowe, 37, who lives in Antioch. "You have to show you are a good leader. If you show fear, your troops will reflect that. I needed to power up to be who the Army put me in the position to be. When I got back, I just shut down."

Katie Stowe recalls a party on the Fourth of July. Her husband's sisters were there, as were members of her family. Kids ran around. Everyone was having fun.

"Jack couldn't even be in the same room with the group," Katie Stowe said. "I was kind of keeping an eye out for him. I can only imagine what it's like trying to kill anyone who tries to kill you, being in this mode of always watching and fearing and living in dirt and sand and then coming home and you're supposed to mow the lawn."

She says that her husband's numbness finally led to a call for help. "Jack was scared something was seriously wrong with him. He didn't want me to tell anyone. He was initially very embarrassed. He said, 'I didn't lose a leg. I didn't lose an arm. Why should I need help?'"

Since that point, the two have attended therapy and counseling sessions at the Concord Vet Center. Katie Stowe says her husband is getting better. The nightmares and night sweats persist but seem less intense.

"Jack finally told another soldier he was going to get help and the other soldier said, 'Oh, so am I and so is so and so.'"

The plight of soldiers who survive war but suffer from its memories is not new. The psychological wounds have been chronicled from ancient Greece to World War II, from Vietnam to the first Gulf War. Names given to the mental traumas afflicting soldiers have included "Soldier's heart," during the Civil War, and "battle fatigue," during World War II. The term post-traumatic stress disorder came about in 1985 and was used to describe

the tens of thousands of struggling Vietnam veterans.

The military's mental health system is taking steps to reduce or avert the psychological wounds of war. Soldiers are screened for psychological problems before and after deployment. Unlike in past wars, the military now has combat stress specialists in the war zone.

Sandy Moreno, a psychiatric technician who spent a year in Iraq, worked with troops in the field. She is an Army reservist who was a part of the 113th combat stress company out of Southern California.

"We dealt with a lot of home front issues," said Moreno, who now works at a veterans center in Sacramento. "We did debriefings with people who had been in critical situations, such as when a unit got ambushed or a unit member was killed."

She said one of the toughest things for soldiers in Iraq is the reality that there is no safety zone.

"You don't trust anyone when you're over there. You live by the idea that you can deal with anything, handle anything."

Stephen Robinson, a 20-year Army veteran who is now executive director of the National Gulf War Resource Center, an advocacy group, said: "I know for a fact that the military health care system is ill prepared to deal with the psychological impact of war."

A study published in July in the New England Journal of Medicine indicated that roughly one in six soldiers returning from the war in Iraq will need psychological counseling as a result of wartime service. Robinson believes the number will rise to one in three.

Jimmy Norris, the chief financial officer for the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system, said in an interview that the federal budget for veterans health care this year is around \$30 billion -- a 1.5 percent inflation-adjusted increase over 2004.

"Last year there was no anxiety over the budget," Norris said. "We had a 10 percent year-to-year increase. That was feast time. This year we will be challenged. The bottom line is that we will continue to provide the highest quality of care for veterans. We won't compromise that."

Newly returned veteran Antonio Hernandez, who is 35 and lives in San Jose, said he is coping with the night and day changes in his life. He says he is not in treatment, but wouldn't resist if he began having problems.

Hernandez, an Army reservist who spent 16 months in Iraq, was always on guard. Every day, every night, there was danger. As a convoy escort, he came under constant fire.

Now he manages a Hollywood Video store.

"I do feel lucky to be home," he said. "But I never get rid of the gory images. I lost my ability to trust. You see cute kids coming at you in Iraq. That could be a decoy. The same with women in their burkas. My kids and wife will never understand what I went through. I'm in my homeland, but I perceive life differently. Every day, there is something that reminds me of what I have been through."

Guard General Says Steps Now Will Prevent Future Crisis

American Forces Press Service

January 13, 2005

By Donna Miles

WASHINGTON— The United States "should never go to war without its **National Guard**," the chief of the National Guard Bureau said during an interview today on CNN's "American Morning."

While stressing that he supports the National Guard's key role in U.S. military operations, **Army Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum** said during CNN interviews aired today and Jan. 12 that it's critical that political and military leaders take measures now to ensure the Guard is manned, trained and equipped to keep up its current pace.

The general said he's requested \$20 billion for the **National Guard**. Three-quarters of it is to cover equipment shortages he said hamper the Guard's readiness and the rest is to boost recruiting and to sustain the Guard's overseas operations during the next three years.

About 120,000 citizen-soldiers and airmen are currently deployed all over the world, and the National Guard and reserves will soon make up a full 50 percent of the combat force in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We're being used as an operational force both here at home and abroad," **Blum** said.

This operational tempo has left the Guard short in several respects, with recruiting falling short of goals and equipment wearing out quicker than planned.

While acknowledging that he's "very concerned," about shortfalls, **Blum** said the Guard will recover relatively quickly, given the equipment and resources it needs, "so that we can be always ready, always there when our nation needs us."

The general said he's "optimistic" that changes under way -- from increased signing bonuses to new mobilization policies -- will help boost recruiting and retention, possibly as soon as this summer.

And despite his concerns, he insisted that the Guard is not in a crisis mode, and that taking steps now will prevent it from going into one down the road.

"We're far from (being) 'in crisis,'" **Blum** said. "What I'm trying to do is alert our political leaders and our military leaders and our policymakers that if we do not take some measures now, and we ignore the problems that are starting to develop, we could be in crisis."

These measures will help ensure that the United States has "a ready and fully equipped

National Guard" capable of responding when it's called to duty, he said.

Blum said America's founding fathers never intended that the nation's active forces shoulder the full load of the nation's defense alone. They "clearly wanted a strong citizen militia that would augment a small regular Army so that the citizenry would be behind the American soldiers when they had to go into harm's way," he said.

"When you call up the Guard, you call up America," Blum said. "And I think that has a significant impact and sent a strong message to our adversaries."

End

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