



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>

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)

<http://www.armyds3.org>

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.

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.ang.af.mil.

Homeland Security Grant Adds Infrared Gear

Reno Gazette-Journal

March 1, 2005

By Jaclyn O'Malley

One of the regional RAVEN helicopters flies Tuesday over downtown Reno. The law enforcement helicopter unit is now using an infrared system.

Fast Fact

Reno will serve as host of the Airborne Law Enforcement Association's (ALEA) 35th annual conference and expo July 20-23. The focus will be training. Officials estimate the event's economic impact for the community at hundreds of thousands of dollars or more.

The police dispatcher had just announced a suspicious vehicle was lurking in the area of Arlington Avenue and Rosewood Drive.

Reno police Officer Scott Sorensen — flying a helicopter as part of the Regional Aviation Enforcement Unit (RAVEN) — directed his pilot to the area.

Sorensen used a new infrared system to detect the vehicle whose hood was still hot. The forward-looking infrared system also alerted him to three suspected prowlers who ducked under a tree as a police cruiser drove past them.

Sorensen directed the officer on the ground back to the hiding spot. The trio was apprehended.

"It's almost like cheating," Sorensen said of the new infrared system, acquired through a homeland security grant exceeding \$400,000. "We are truly crime fighters in the sky."

RAVEN was launched in 1997 after the Washoe County Sheriff's Office obtained at no cost four helicopters from the military. The new equipment includes military-issued night vision goggles and radios.

"This lets us do things we've only dreamed about doing," said Reno police officer Scott Armitage, a pilot assigned to RAVEN. "It really increases our ability to work at night and respond in critical incidents."

The forward-looking infrared system has also been used to alert firefighters on the roofs of burning homes that they were standing in dangerous areas.

Sheriff Dennis Balaam said the equipment — along with global positioning systems — increases the unit's ability to patrol areas in the county vulnerable to homeland security risks.

The police helicopter helps deter crimes such as burglary, Balaam said, and suspects on high-speed pursuits are more likely to surrender.

And with the shine of a 30-million-candle spotlight, people engaged in fights, underage drinkers and drag racers quickly scatter.

Lt. Gregg Lubbe, who supervises RAVEN, explained his unit essentially multiplies the area's existing police force.

“With the growth of the community, problems have spilled to the fringes of Reno,” said Lubbe, an experienced pilot, who flies Black Hawk helicopters for the Nevada **National Guard**. “If we're already up and running, we can get there in no time.”

From where RAVEN is stationed at the Reno Stead airport, it would take 17 minutes to reach Incline Village and 38 minutes to Gerlach.

In 2000, Sorensen was awarded a medal — along with pilot Deputy Darren Chrisman — for plucking a glider pilot out of a pit of quicksand in the Winnemucca Lake bed in Pershing County.

“When we go into rescue mode it's a whole different animal,” Sorensen said. “These folks aren't hiding, they want to be found.”

Deputy Tom Delaney, a RAVEN pilot who also flies for the **National Guard**, said the night vision goggles are known to have led to the rescue of a California man whose only light source in a dark area was his watch light.

During the recent heavy snowstorms, RAVEN patrolled the county and was able to spot snow-stranded residents and get them help. “They have such an impact on the community, and I doubt the public even knows how helpful RAVEN is,” Washoe County Commissioner Bonnie Weber said Tuesday while visiting the RAVEN hangar. “This community really needs this.”

REUNION

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Hawaii National Guard Troops Come Home

KHNL-TV

3 March 2005

Lisa Troshinsky

They flew more than five thousand missions in Iraq and their longest flight was the one home. Last night nearly 200 Hawaii **National Guard** Aviators arrived back in home to a local style homecoming.

Hawaiian time went out the window with the crowd of anxious family and friends. Some families were four hours early to this homecoming of Hawaii's true warriors.

"I'm happy because he's coming home," said Carina Iwane who's Dad was coming home after a year in Iraq.

They carried lei, and creative signs to welcome the troops home.

Sargeant Chad Iwane has been missed, especially by his wife Rene.

"We have two daughters so at our house he is truly da man."

Some veteran military wives like Mrs. Kathy Sharkey admit there's a downside to the homecoming. "I'm gonna have to give up the tv remote and half of the bed so it's one of those things."

Leiutenant Governor Duke Iona also joined in welcoming the troops home and thanked them for their efforts. "Thank you for your bravery thank you for your courage thank you for a job well done."

At age 62 pilot Jack Sharkey is the oldest soldier to return home. Kathy Sharkey may not mind giving up that remote after all.

"I thought I was going to be pretty unemotional," Jack said. "I am really happy to see my wife looks so good happy missed her a lot and the whole family."

This homecoming was much different than when he returned from Vietnam.

"The welcome home was not at all like what I had last time I came back from a war so it's real nice to see this welcome for all the troops."

The best part of this homecoming is that none of the 180 Hawaii **National Guard** troops were injured during the deployment.

Now, with the war behind them, these Hawaii warriors can focus on their families.

Guard Unit Has Emotional Homecoming. Troops Reunite with Families after Serving a Year in Iraq

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The Daily Star Online

7 March 2005

By Patricia Breakey

WALTON — Sirens filled the air as a crowd waving American flags lined Walton's main street Saturday to welcome soldiers from the **National Guard** 204th Engineer Battalion Company A home.

A state police helicopter hovered above the three **National Guard** vehicles that carried the soldiers returning after a yearlong stint in Iraq. The unit suffered no fatalities.

"This is small-town America at its best," said one observer as the motorcade passed by the throng of people dressed predominantly in red, white and blue.

Banners proclaiming "Thank You 204th," "Welcome Home" and "Proud to be an American" waved in the sunshine and people carried signs displaying the names of individual soldiers.

A dusty green van carried the message, "Welcome home Uncle Vinny," across the back window.

The parade that traveled from Robinson's Auction Barn on West Street to the Walton Armory on South Street included police cars representing Walton, Delhi, Roxbury, the Delaware County Sheriff's Department, the state police and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection Police.

Fire trucks and ambulances from Walton, Sidney, Oxford, Oneonta, Coventry, Franklin, Trout Creek, Sidney Center and East Worcester rounded out the procession.

A year ago Feb. 24, friends, family and supporters lined the streets of Walton to send off the 204th as it was being deployed to Iraq.

Melissa Frisbee, coordinator of the Family Readiness Group, said she was grateful to everyone who turned out to welcome Company A home.

"I was just amazed at the number of people and all the police and fire departments that showed up," she said. "I was very pleased."

Spc. Rachel Ruggles, who was perched on the back of a Humvee as the parade wound through the streets, said she thought the welcome home was "awesome."

"The helicopter was flying so low over us we had to hold onto our hats," Ruggles said with a laugh.

Lana Hilton, Sgt. Arthur Hilton's mother, was selling blue T-shirts that had been printed with the names of the 204th. The shirts were selling briskly, she said.

"I even sold the one off my back," Hilton said. "A guy wanted it so badly, he gave me his sweatshirt to wear."

American flags and red, white and blue U.S.A. ribbons were being handed out by family members waiting for their soldiers.

Sarah Vadalabene was waiting for her boyfriend, Sgt. Bob Vandewerker of Richmondville. She said she enjoyed meeting the people her soldier had been serving with in Iraq.

"It's great being able to see him and it's nice to meet the people he has been talking about for the last year," Vadalabene said.

Two carloads of members of the Clark family from Oxford traveled to Walton to welcome home their cousin, Woody Brown.

"I'm excited," said Kelli Clark, 10. "I can't wait to see him."

Sharon and Dave Ruggles were anxiously waiting for their cell phone to ring so they would know how much longer it would be before the bus carrying their daughter, Rachel, pulled into Walton.

"It's been a rough year, very stressful," Sharon Ruggles said. "It's been hard on my nerves."

Amanda Ruggles, Rachel's sister, said she was thrilled that Rachel was finally coming home.

Rachel Ruggles said the family bought Wilson's barbecued chicken before they left Walton to head home to East Meredith. She said they ate it with her mother's vegetable

lasagna.

"It was so good to be home," Rachel Ruggles said. "It's great not to have to worry about wearing shower shoes. It's going to take me a while to adjust, but I can't wait to drive again."

Rachel said the chicken was "awesome" but she is still looking forward to getting to Burger King for her favorite food, a Whopper Jr. with no tomatoes and no onions.

Frisbee's husband, Spc. Michael Frisbee of Davenport Center, said it was great to be home with his wife and children, Amber, 13, Gannon, 7, and Mara, 4.

"It feels great, just wonderful to be home," Michael Frisbee said. "I will never be able to thank everyone enough for all the support we had."

Melissa Frisbee said when they got home, the family found that a neighbor had cooked dinner for them and brought it to their house.

"We enjoyed dinner, the kids watched television and Michael watched the kids," she said Sunday.

Michael Frisbee said the dinner was wonderful, but the foods he had been looking forward to enjoying included things that weren't available in Iraq.

"I don't know how many times I heard people say they wished they had a cold glass of fresh milk," he said. "Cheese is a big thing. We couldn't get that. And simple things, like vegetables and fruits."

Michael Frisbee said the members of the 204th are technically still on active duty for the next two or three weeks, so it will be a while before they return to their jobs and settle into their former lives.

Spc. Lionel Anderson of East Branch returned to a welcoming committee that included his mother Natalie Anderson, his sister Isabel Hernandez, his brother-in-law Ray Maldonado and his nephew Joseph Maldonado, 11.

"I'm excited," Joseph said, as the time for the buses arrival neared.

Natalie Anderson said she was fixing all of her son's favorites for dinner.

"We are having lots of food. Everything he likes, string cheese, rice and beans, quiche and stuffed grape leaves," she said.

Lionel Anderson said Sunday that he ate tons and tons of food when he got home, but he is still looking forward to having a "real New York pizza."

He added that he hasn't been home for more than a year, so it felt really good to go to sleep in a comfy bed.

Hawaii's 29th Brigade Officially Begin Duties in Iraq

The Associated Press

March 4, 2005

HONOLULU - The Hawaii Army National Guard's 29th Brigade Combat Team officially began its yearlong mission in Iraq this week.

The 81st Brigade Combat Team of Washington state formally transferred its authority to the 3,600 Hawaii soldiers during a ceremony Thursday in Balad, near Baghdad.

"The soldiers of the 29th BCT have been provided a unique opportunity to write the next chapter in the history of this war on terror," said Brig. Gen. Joe Chaves, commander of the 29th Brigade Combat Team.

Nine soldiers from the 81st Brigade Combat Team were killed in the past year.

"Throughout the year, the brigade has fought terrorists, former regime elements and anyone trying to destabilize Iraq," Brig. Gen. Oscar Hilman said.

The Hawaii flag was raised above the brigade's tactical operations center at Logistical Support Area Anaconda to mark the change of command. The 15-square-mile air base will serve as the headquarters for the citizen soldiers.

The 29th Brigade is comprised of units from California, Oregon and Minnesota and members of the Army Reserve's 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry, from Hawaii, Saipan, Guam and American Samoa.

TRICARE Retiree Dental Program Sweetens Benefit for Members of the National Guard/ Reserve

Advance News Release

Contact: Jeff Album

March 3, 2005

(415) 972-8418

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TMA grants waiver of 12-month waiting period for full scope of services

Sacramento – **National Guard** and Reserve personnel who elect to enroll in the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP) within 120 days after retirement are now eligible to skip the 12-month waiting period normally required for certain TRDP benefits,

according to Delta Dental, the program's administrator.

Effective February 1, 2005, TMA authorized a waiver from requiring retired National Guard/Reserve men and women who meet the criteria to be enrolled in the TRDP for 12 months prior to gaining the maximum allowed benefits for cast crowns, cast restorations, bridges, dentures and orthodontics for both adults and children.

Additionally, this new waiver will be applied retroactively to February 1, 2004 for any Guard and Reserve enrollees who can document their enrollment in the TRDP within 120 days after their retirement effective date. Delta will process any claim adjustments resulting from this retroactive waiver, upon notification from the enrollee and submission of the appropriate documentation.

All new enrollees seeking to obtain the waiver should submit a copy of their retirement orders together with their application.

The nation's largest voluntary, all-enrollee-paid dental program continues to offer coverage for diagnostic and preventive services, basic restorative services, periodontics, endodontics, oral surgery, dental emergencies and a separate dental accident benefit with no waiting period. The program currently covers over 800,000 retired members of the uniformed services, including National Guard and Reserve personnel, and their families.

"We are working in partnership with TMA to offer a comprehensive dental program with the fewest possible restrictions in the first year of enrollment," said Lowell Daun, DDS, senior vice president for Delta's Federal Services division. "We are also working to keep premiums affordable for members of the National Guard/Reserve."

Eligibility for the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program extends to all retirees of the Reserve and Guard and their family members, including "gray area" retired Reservists who are entitled to retired pay but will not begin receiving it until age 60. Although eligibility for this group has been in effect since the TRDP first began in 1998, many retired Reserve and Guard members, and even more "gray area" retirees, still do not realize they are eligible. It is important to note that as with all new retirees, the 120-day period during which a "gray area" retired Reservist can enroll in the TRDP to qualify for the 12-month waiting period waiver begins with his/her retirement effective date, not the date he/she reaches age 60.

The TRDP, first authorized by Congress in 1997, continues today to offer one of the few affordable, comprehensive dental benefit programs available to the nation's Uniformed Services retirees, as well as to retirees of the Reserve and Guard. The TRDP is a nationwide, combined fee-for-service/ preferred provider program that offers enrollees access to any licensed dentist in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Canada.

Enrollees may seek care from any licensed dentist, with optimal benefits available when choosing a participating "Delta Dental PPO" dentist in over 80,000 locations nationwide.

The TRDP carries a \$50 per person annual deductible. The program also includes a family deductible cap of \$150 and an annual maximum amount of \$1,200, against which preventive and diagnostic services are not counted. In addition to the annual maximum, the TRDP also has a separate dental accident annual maximum of \$1,000 and a lifetime

orthodontic maximum of \$1,200.

Eligible retirees and their family members can find answers to their questions about the program as well as enroll using Delta's dedicated TRDP web site at www.trdp.org or by calling the toll-free number at 1-866-567-1658.

Delta Dental of California belongs to a larger holding company system, formed jointly with Delta Dental of Pennsylvania and several affiliate companies, covering nearly 21 million enrollees in 16 states and the District of Columbia. Both the California and Pennsylvania Delta Plans are members of the national Delta Dental Plans Association, which collectively covers 43 million Americans.

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

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Dayton Hears Military Families' Concerns

Associated Press

March 07, 2005

ST. CLOUD, Minn. - Caring for wounded soldiers and the difficulty of obtaining information about those serving in the Middle East were among concerns expressed to Sen. Mark Dayton during an emotional meeting with military family members.

About 40 people attended Saturday's two-hour meeting at the St. Cloud Civic Center to speak to Dayton; Maj. Gen. Larry Shellito, the Minnesota **National Guard's** adjutant general; and Sue Mills, the family readiness group leader for the Minnesota **National Guard's** Bravo Company, 434th Main Support Battalion. The unit is serving in Iraq.

"We're here to listen," Dayton said. "Your soldiers define patriotism and valor as I understand those words. Whatever I can do, I wish I can do more." Length of deployments, the soldiers' access to the Internet and telephones in Iraq, and taking care of the wounded were among the topics discussed. The families also wanted to know how they could make sure their soldier is alive and well when there are media reports of soldiers being killed.

Some people were upset that the media reported the Feb. 21 deaths of three Minnesota soldiers killed by a roadside bomb when military families couldn't get information. Some families attended the meeting for support. Lisa Newcomer, an Anoka woman whose husband is serving in Afghanistan, said the most important thing is to support and care for the soldiers. "You have to take care of these soldiers," she said. "It's about taking care of the soldiers and making them feel like they're taken care of. That's how you build your military."

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH AFTERMATH

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The War Comes Home; They're Back from Iraq, but Are They OK?

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

March 7, 2005

By M.L. Lyke, Seattle Post-Intelligencer Reporter

EPHRATA -- A guardsman walks into a local Wal-Mart, freaks, does a 180, and walks back out again. Even after seven months, he can't stand the crowds. Another jerks awake in the middle of the night, holding an imagined gun at his wife's temple.

"Uh ... honey?" she asks.

The soldiers tear down highways, swerve to avoid trash in the road. The bag that held a Big Mac could now hide a bomb. One still jumps if you touch his neck. Others refuse to sleep in beds. Those who do may awake in a sweat.

They're members of the Ephrata-based 1161st Transportation Company, the close-knit **National Guard** unit that returned from Iraq seven months ago to a happy little town dolled up in yellow ribbons and townsfolk who breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Everyone in the town knew someone in uniform. The 130 citizen soldiers -- from age 18 to 60 -- were the region's postmen, tractor mechanics, lab technicians, firefighters and weekend warriors called to war.

"There was this sense of something missing when they were gone," says Wes Crago, city administrator of Ephrata, population 6,980. "Now, watching the news, hearing about roadside bombings, there's not the weight, not the burden.

"Our people are back home."

All of them. The unit had no casualties, only three wounded. Driving was extreme-danger duty in Iraq, but the 1161st managed to complete more than 14,000 missions, covering more than 1 million miles.

Some call it "The Miracle Company." But if no one paid the ultimate price, the deployment still came at a considerable cost.

Although some citizen soldiers have slowly eased back into routines, others still feel like strangers in their own lives seven months after troops touched down.

They landed. And crashed.

"You talk to someone and they say, 'You're fine now, you're home, so everything's good.' You want to say, 'No. It's not good. I'm feeling lost,' " says Spc. Keith Bond, a 31-year-old explosives specialist and father of two.

Some nights he goes to bed not even thinking about Iraq. "Others I lay down and 'Bam!' " The face of a young Iraqi boy who aimed a gun at his truck haunts him. Bond drew a

bead on him, almost took the kid out before he realized the gun was a toy. He says it felt like 45 minutes. It was probably 10 seconds. It's still messing with his head.

"What if I had shot that boy?"

How, ask soldiers, do you explain that to civilians? How do you explain anything -- the claustrophobia of being close, the anger that lashes out of nowhere, the desire to hole up?

"For a while I just wanted to sit home and do nothing," says Spc. Steve Hurt, whose son, Tanner, was four days home from the hospital when he left. "I was tired of talking about the war, tired of hearing people ask, 'Did you shoot anybody?' I didn't want anything to do with anybody -- and here I was with a wife who wanted attention, and a 2-year-old son who was walking."

Seven months after his return, Hurt and wife, Michelle, both 26, are still quarreling. "We fight over stupid things, like disciplining Tanner and paying bills," he says. "I wasn't used to having to deal with all this stuff."

The small 1161st unit -- closely tracked by larger **National Guard** battalions with new waves of soldiers coming home -- could still sniff the gunfire when it arrived in Iraq in May 2003.

The company was one of the first on the ground, one of the most poorly equipped and pulled one of the longest deployments, with two tough extensions. The soldiers -- some call themselves "guinea pigs" -- found out about the last extension from newspapers, a problem higher-ups vowed not to repeat.

"The military has said they hoped to learn by mistakes made with our unit," says Sheila Kelly, wife of Spc. Edward Kelly.

With training and extensions, the unit was gone from families for more than 18 months, finally arriving at Fort Lewis at the end of July. The military had prepped soldiers and spouses on possible reintegration problems. But nothing, some say, could fully prepare them for what was to come.

After the tractor parades, the award ceremonies, the celebrations and chili feeds died down, it was all quiet on the eastern front. In some households, eerily quiet.

Sheila Kelly says her husband locked himself in the bathroom to dress when he first got home. He'd become a smoker. He cursed. He was reclusive. He didn't want to be kissed, hugged -- it felt "suffocating." When she threw a big dinner party, he bolted.

"They say it's like a roller coaster, and sooner or later the ride comes to an end. But it doesn't. There's always another ride that begins," says Sheila Kelly, 41, tears spilling onto her cheeks.

Even after seven months, Spc. Kelly, 42, still craves privacy. "For me the hard part is getting back to the day-to-day, re-establishing my feelings and emotions," says the soldier, a lab technician in civilian life. "It's like you have this little buffer zone around you -- and you don't want to let anyone in."

Kelly doubts he'll ever be "old normal" again.

But who defines "new normal?"

"I keep trying to bring back the old me," says Bond. "I bring him back one day, and the next I have to try to find that person all over again."

One 1161st mother says her son left a boy and came back a man.

Sgt. Jeff Elliott, 35, left a kid at heart, and came back feeling "like a 60-year-old man."

The father of five is one of three Guardsmen in the unit decorated with a Purple Heart. He was wounded in June 2003, when a bomb in a black plastic bag hit the truck he was driving. He was in medical hold at Fort Lewis until last November, undergoing treatment for an injured back and anxiety, with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

He came home with an electronic box on his hip to interrupt pain signals to his back. It flashes like the light on a pursuing cop car. "We've been in hell. After you've been in hell, nothing's ever really the same again," he says.

He can't tolerate crowds and avoids restaurants -- unless his buddy Bond is there to cover his back. Like other soldiers accustomed to strict discipline, he's often impatient with the kids. "It's Daddy wants it done now, and he wants it done right now. If it's not, it pushes his button," says Penny, his wife of 15 years.

Elliott's family wonders what happened to the outgoing baby-faced dad who laughed and joked with the kids, chasing them through the house, rolling around on the floor with them.

This other dad hurts, and he's angry. "There's a mentality in the military that, if you complain you're hurt, you're faking it, you're slacking," says the sergeant. "So 99.1 percent of the time you suck it up, don't complain."

There was plenty to complain about in Iraq in 2003. The unit arrived to no running water, no sanitation, no air conditioning and a sheep camp with blood and feces on the wall for a base. The "guinea pigs" often felt like sitting ducks with no armor for their trucks, and inadequate flak gear for their bodies. Sweltering in 120-degree heat, they steamed when officers in air-conditioned SUVs rolled down their electric windows to bark orders.

For some, serving in Iraq was a matter of pride; for others, a waste of time. "I lost almost two years in my children's lives for something I see as a total waste of time and money and effort," says Spc. Kelly.

For Kory and Melissa Brown, it has been an exercise in togetherness. The husband and wife shipped out together, returned together. Although they couldn't touch or show affection in camp -- they stole a kiss or two -- they shared the same experiences. It's made readjustment simpler.

"She knows where I'm coming from ..." says Kory, 29.

"And he knows where I'm coming from," says Melissa, 28, completing the sentence.

She's a dental hygienist in town, and, like others in the 1161st, found re-entry into the civilian work force challenging. Away almost two years, she was rusty, and it took her several months to get her skill level back. There are still procedures she has to learn again. "I thought I would come back and just jump right into things," she says.

At least she came home to a job. Some soldiers didn't, including Spc. Hurt. He had to quit

his old job when his wife moved to Ephrata. He came home from an 18-month deployment to a long, seven-month hunt for work. He applied everywhere and had only two phone calls, he says. "I felt like, after serving the country for 18 months, I come home, and I couldn't even get a job. That got to me.

"I started thinking, 'Maybe they're not hiring me because they know I could be redeployed.' "

Redeployment is a touchy topic in this little town, where remaining yellow ribbons are now faded by sun, frayed by wind.

With guard enlistments falling 30 percent short of recruitment goals, and members of the reserve and guard providing at least 40 percent of personnel in Iraq, the pressure's on. "When soldiers call to ask me what are the chances we'll go back, I tell them 50-50," says Sgt. 1st Class Merle McLain, the 36-year-old readiness manager for the 1161st and father of 3-year-old twins Alex and Sara.

They were 20 months old when the tall sergeant with the booming voice left for Iraq. He missed the "terrible 2s," potty training, his son's bout with pneumonia and emergency surgery. He tried to get home and was denied -- a low point.

Wife, Marcee, 32, who heads family support for the unit, says the kids are still working to reconnect with Dad. They bawled the first time he raised his voice and still run to Mommy for comfort. "The kids have to regain the trust that the parent is going to stay."

Is he?

Mom doesn't like to think about the troops going back.

But, like everyone else in the "Miracle Company" family, she can't help it.

"It's always in the back of my mind," she says softly.

HEALTH ISSUES

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Healthcare Access; New U.S. Army Program Gets Injured Soldiers Medical Help Close to Home

Obesity, Fitness & Wellness Week

March 12, 2005

Sgt. Chris Dunbar was nursing a shattered jaw with a liquid diet on the plane ride home from Iraq. Upon arriving at Fort Stewart, Georgia, he realized he would be stuck at the base for more than a year until his teeth and mouth fully healed.

What would be better, the reservist thought, is if the Army would let him go home to recover.

The Army agreed.

Through the Army's new community-based healthcare initiative, Dunbar was allowed to return home to Tampa, Florida, where he is being treated by an Air Force doctor and has family help while remaining on active duty. "This is really a godsend," Dunbar said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

The program in Florida is one of five established since January 2004 to serve injured **National Guard** and Reserve soldiers in 23 states. A center opened in Birmingham to evaluate the healthcare needs of soldiers in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky.

"The purpose is to allow soldiers to come back to their communities and receive medical care instead of at a military installation," said Alabama Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Bob Horton.

Each center has case workers who evaluate the soldiers' eligibility to return home and a nurse to monitor their progress.

The indefinite nature of the Iraq war, mounting injuries and multiple returns to combat by Guard and Reserve troops forced the Army to re-evaluate its healthcare policy, said Lt. Col. Ken Braddock, who oversees the community-based healthcare programs for most of the eastern United States.

"We're not the Army we were 20, 30 years ago," Braddock said. "The demands of the Army and needs of soldiers are changing. The old concept was everybody is mobilized, they all come to war, they either win or lose and come back. The war on terrorism is a long-term war. ... We've reached scales we haven't seen since World War II."

Fighting the war against terror is forcing part-time soldiers to take on full-time duties in Iraq. Army officials anticipated that the increasing injuries would surpass capacity at Army installations, though they haven't yet, said Col. Barbara Scherb, who manages the program from Forces Command.

"Initially, that's why the Army looked at a community-based option, to augment the medical capacity," said Scherb, who estimated the administrative costs of the nationwide program would reach \$23 million this year.

But now the Army is seeing benefits for the treatment of soldiers, as well. Allowing troops to be treated near home can "get them to heal quicker," Braddock said.

In order to be eligible for community-based healthcare, soldiers must remain on active duty. While they are treated near home, they also take on a military job so they get out of the house and adjust to living in a civilian environment.

Dunbar took on work at the community-based healthcare center in Tampa, where he helps soldiers from Georgia and his home state.

"I've come a long way. (At an Army installation) you don't have as much to do. Here I have structure," Dunbar said. "It's just so much better, you get to reconnect."

Once soldiers have recovered from their injuries, they are released from active duty until their next scheduled mobilization.

Since January, 2004, community-based healthcare centers have been established in Florida, Arkansas, California, Massachusetts and Wisconsin to serve Guard and Reserve

members in 23 states and have helped more than 1,100 injured soldiers. With upcoming community-based healthcare centers in Alabama, Virginia and Utah, every state will have access to the community-based healthcare case workers, Braddock said.

Scherb said the program should be able to help the majority of injured soldiers, but it's not for everybody.

In the two-phase process, military doctors first determine whether an injured soldier will benefit from being treated close to home. Then, case workers at the centers decide if the soldier will be near a doctor, either military or civilian, who is capable of treating the injury. Adequate transportation by the soldier or his family is also mandatory to ensure visits to the doctor, who accepts TRICARE, the healthcare provider for the Department of Defense.

Sometimes meeting all the criteria is especially challenging for soldiers who live in rural areas where doctors and specialists are often scarce.

"This program is not for everybody, but it fits the needs of most soldiers," Braddock said.

Typically, soldiers who benefit most are those who have sustained ligament tears and broken bones in combat, conditions that a local doctor or specialist is accustomed to treating. Soldiers with maiming injuries often fare better at military hospitals, such as Walter Reed Army Medical Center, which specializes in treating amputees and soldiers in need of prosthetics, Braddock said.

Scherb also said getting to be close to home is sometimes a trade off for the urgent medical services the Army is used to treating. "We cannot dictate to the civilian community how fast they have to see the soldiers," she said.

But soldiers like Dunbar couldn't be happier. He praised the Army for coming up with a program that helps heal physical wounds while also taking emotional scars into consideration.

"When I got back from Iraq, it was a shock to the system anyway. And then to be injured and not know anyone around me, that was hard," he said. "But this, this is the best thing they ever did."

This article was prepared by Obesity, Fitness & Wellness Week editors from staff and other reports. Copyright 2005, Obesity, Fitness & Wellness Week via NewsRx.com & NewsRx.net.

Military Family Relief; Tax-Form Checkoff Eyed

Press Republican.com

2 March 2005

By Ottaway News Service

ALBANY — Supporting the troops may soon be as easy as checking a box on your state tax form.

A bill in the legislature would create a state Military Family Relief Fund to help out the families of more than 7,500 New York reservists and **National Guard** members on active duty.

"Creating this fund would be a tremendous help to these men and women who are already sacrificing to defend our country," said Sen. Bill Larkin (R-Cornwall-on-Hudson), the Senate sponsor of the bill. Sen. Betty Little (R-Queensbury) is a co-sponsor.

Assemblyman Darryl Towns, a Brooklyn Democrat and Air Force veteran, is introducing a companion bill in the Assembly.

The fund would provide grants of up to \$2,000 a year for military families hit by the loss of civilian paychecks. It would also provide a \$1,000 benefit for Guard members and reservists injured while on active duty and a \$5,000 death benefit.

To be eligible, a reservist or Guard member must be called up to active duty for at least 30 days and be stationed at least 100 miles from home.

Ten states have already established similar funds, and legislation to create the funds is pending in 21 states, including New York. If the bill is approved and signed into law, the checkoff boxes will appear on next year's tax forms

Nextel Wants Help Supporting The Troops[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Idaho State Journal

3 March 2005

By Journal Staff

IDAHO FALLS - Local wireless service provider Nextel Partners Inc., has launched Operation: Adopt a Soldier to send necessary daily items to troops deployed in the Middle East.

According to a press release from Nextel, working in conjunction with the Idaho Falls **National Guard** Armory, items will be collected from the public until March 31. A "care" package will be sent to the 116th Calvary Brigade, currently stationed in the area.

All-Star Wireless, 315 River Parkway, Idaho Falls, is the drop-off site for eastern Idaho.

Items requested include school supplies, disposable mechanical pencils, hard candy and toiletries. For a longer list of requested items, call All-Star Wireless at 522-6135 or Beverly McLendon, family assistant coordinator of the Idaho Falls **National Guard** Armory at 522-0715.

Nextel Partners also is taking part in the American Red Cross Donate a Phone program which supports the Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Service to relay messages between military personnel and their families. The company is helping collect, recycle or refurbish the phones; proceeds benefit this American Red Cross program.

Child Care Relief Comes for Families of National Guard and Reserve Members Serving in Global War on Terror

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PRNewswire

March 03, 2005

Operation: Military Child Care to Provide Support for Families of Deployed Guard, Reserve and Active Duty Service Members

WASHINGTON, March 3 /PRNewswire/ -- **National Guard**, Reserve and Active Duty military families with service members serving in the Global War on Terror will begin receiving financial assistance and help locating quality child care in their communities thanks to the launch of a joint initiative between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) announced Thursday.

Operation: Military Child Care (OMCC), which will be administered by NACCRRA, will provide financial relief and assistance locating quality child care for eligible military families who do not have access to the DoD's on-base child care options. The program will serve families and child guardians of **National Guard** and Reserve Service members mobilized or deployed for the Global War on Terrorism.

"It can be a challenge for any parent to locate affordable, quality child care in their community," said Linda Smith, executive director of NACCRRA. "For the spouse of a deployed Guard or Reserve service member who may now be looking at a reduced income with a larger need for child care support, the process can be even more overwhelming. Operation: Military Child Care will bridge the gap to provide affordable, quality child care options for these families."

The largest employer-supported child care program in the nation, the DoD's child care program serves more than 200,000 children. While the program has been hailed as a model of child care quality, a large number of military families, particularly Guard and Reserve, are not located near bases and need to find comparable care in their own communities.

"Child care is among the top concerns we continue to hear from military families across the country," said M.-A. Lucas, director, Army Child and Youth Services. "Deploying

Service members worry about the extra child care support their spouses will now need while they are gone serving our country. And Guard and Reserve members called to active duty have the added concern of how their families will afford the added child care they need."

"This program is an essential step in the evolution of how the Department of Defense is reaching out to support the child care needs of geographically dispersed military families who do not have access to the high quality child care services offered on military installations," Lucas added.

The OMCC initiative will be administered by a network of NACCRRA member agencies that will walk families through the process of locating a qualified care provider. Once approved, NACCRRA will provide financial support directly to the provider on behalf of DoD, so that Service members' fees can be reduced.

The amount of financial assistance will vary for each family and will depend upon factors such as total family income, geographical location, military services child care fee policies, available funding, as well as certain family circumstances. Eligible families can call the Child Care Aware hotline at 1-800-424-2246 or go online at <http://www.childcareaware.org/> for help with applying for the subsidy and location assistance.

About Child Care Resource and Referral: Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies help families find, select, and pay for child care, as well as provide training and support to child care providers and help communities and states meet their child care and parenting needs. Through the Child Care Aware(R) program, funded through a cooperative agreement with the Child Care Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nearly half a million families each year are connected to their community Child Care Resource and Referral agencies through the national hotline and Web site, <http://www.childcareaware.org/>.

About NACCRRA: Child Care Aware(R) and Operation: Military Child Care are two of NACCRRA's many initiatives to improve the development and learning of all children by providing leadership and support to state and community Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and promoting national policies and partnerships that facilitate universal access to quality child care. NACCRRA is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., representing a network of more than 850 state and local Child Care Resource and Referral

Quilts to Soldiers Are Hugs from Home

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The Joplin Globe

4 March 2005

By Mike Pound

Columnist

Every once in a while, people wanting to do something nice come up with a neat little idea that turns into something great.

People such as Ann Jones and her mother, Kerin Hatch, for example.

Last fall, Ann and Kerin, who are from Nevada, were looking for a service project for their quilt guild. About the same time, the Nevada community got word that 153 members of Company A, 735th Main Support Battalion, Army National Guard, would be deployed to Iraq.

What a neat thing it would be, Ann thought, if her group could make a quilt for every member of Company A. At the guild's September meeting, she floated the idea to the other members, and it was quickly endorsed.

Sometime between September and October, reality set in, Ann said.

"We realized that with only about 20 active guild members, making 153 quilts was going to be a little overwhelming," she said.

Here's where things start to turn great. Kerin decided that maybe they should take the quilt idea beyond the guild and get the community involved.

The group got the local paper, the Nevada Daily Mail, to help get the word out. Guild members appeared on the local radio station, and they took advantage of a vast network of friends and relatives. As it turns out, just about everyone who heard about the idea thought it was a cool thing to do and wanted to help.

And not just quilters. A trust fund was set up at a local bank, and people who couldn't quilt donated money for materials.

Kerin said the response overwhelmed her.

"I think I was surprised by the amount of involvement," she said.

How much involvement was there? Quilts or help in one form or another poured in not just from Nevada, but from all over the state and even from as far away as Las Vegas, Nev., and southwest Florida.

Volunteers from El Dorado Springs showed up to quilt, and so did a group from Rich Hill. The FFA chapter in El Dorado Springs got involved, and one FFA member spent Halloween trick-or-treating to collect money for the project.

It's sort of safe to say the quilt project caught on.

Before long, that 153-quilt goal was a memory. By the time the quilting project was

officially over, 417 quilts were completed. That was enough quilts not only for the members of Company A but also for soldiers in Company D.

The quilts were stored in an office at the Nevada Optometric Center, which is owned by Kerin's husband and Ann's father, Ron Hatch.

Ron didn't just lend the guild office space. He organized the folding and bagging of the quilts, and prepared them for shipping.

Earlier this week, I zipped up to Nevada to meet Kerin, Ann, Ron and guild members Sharon Kamla (Kerin's sister), Joni Hatch (Kerin's daughter and Ann's sister), Janice Almquist, Betty Beeman and Marilyn Greer. Also on hand was Sgt. Robin Junker with the 735th Battalion. Robin served as a liaison of sorts to help ensure that the quilts made it to their destination.

Kerin showed me one of the quilts, and I must say that at first glance, it struck me as a little plain. But, as it turns out, there's a reason for that: The color scheme is purposely bland, a mix of neutral tans and off whites.

"We wanted to make them a desert camouflage color so the soldiers wouldn't become targets," Kerin explained.

Although the quilters are used to dealing with brighter and more vibrant colors, Kerin said the quilts "got prettier the more we worked with them."

You see, the original idea was for the quilts to be what the guild members call "utility quilts." And by some standards, the soldiers' quilts are small, just big enough for a military cot. Evidently, there are not a lot of king-sized beds for the soldiers in Iraq.

"We figured they would be used and forgotten," Ann said.

But the quilts won't be forgotten. The soldiers in the 735th are crazy about them. Imagine being far from home, separated from your family and stuck in a hostile environment. Then, in the mail, you get a handmade quilt, a quilt made by someone who really cares for you, part of what the quilters call a "hug from home."

How would that make you feel?

So far, it's made more than 400 members of the 735th feel awfully special.

In time, these quilts will be more than a hug from home. They will become family treasures, heirlooms to remind generations of their family's unselfish commitment to their country.

As the women talked about that, they nodded their heads. And they just beamed.

Is that great or what?

End

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