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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/>

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.

National Guard Ready For Hurricane Season, Despite Deployments

The Associated Press

May 12, 2005

With the start of the 2005 hurricane season just three weeks away, the Louisiana **National Guard** is ready to respond to a natural disaster even though 3,000 of its members are in Iraq right now, the state's adjutant general said.

"I can tell you without reservation - absolutely," Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, commander of the Louisiana **National Guard**, said at the Gulf Coast Military Expo Wednesday.

There are still 8,000 Guardsmen and women in Louisiana, which could also get help from neighboring states if more troops are needed in a catastrophe, Landreneau said.

Louisiana has mobilized 8,600 Guardsmen and women since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, he said, noting that 19 Louisiana **National Guard** soldiers have died in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"They're great Americans, great American heroes," he said.

Landreneau said more than 400 of the currently deployed Louisiana Guardsmen and women have extended their service in the Guard for another six years and retention is at an all-time high.

Recruiting, however, is "more difficult," Landreneau acknowledged.

"Our recruiters have to work harder at it. Recruiting offers its challenges," he said.

Landreneau's remarks to expo participants followed a panel discussion that focused on the role of the Reserve and Guard in homeland security and homeland defense. Stephen Duncan, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, said 40 percent of the U.S. troops in Iraq are reservists.

"Today we're using Reserve forces as if there's no distinction between active-duty and Reserve forces," said Duncan, author of "A War of a Different Kind: Military Force and America's Search for Homeland Security.

The two-day, second-annual Gulf Coast Military Expo, co-hosted by the Marine Corps Association and the U.S. Naval Institute, wrapped up Wednesday.

Troops Take Joy In Comforts Of Home During Parade Walk

Palm Beach Post

16 May 2005

By Rochelle Brenner

RIVIERA BEACH — There's no running water. The food is bad. The stray dogs are rabid. Bumpy potholes turn every drive into a headache. And enemy rockets fly by about every two weeks.

That's life in the war zone of Afghanistan.

"Imagine that and multiply it times 10. That's how bad it was in Afghanistan," U.S. Army First Sgt. Darrell Brooks told hundreds of people at Bicentennial Park in Riviera Beach Sunday afternoon. Despite the conditions, Brooks, of West Palm Beach, said he worked on a rebuilding mission that churned out about 40 schools and 40 wells for villagers.

Brooks' service, along with other troops who returned from Afghanistan on Mother's Day, was honored at Sunday's ceremony and parade.

After 12 months of that punishing lifestyle, he and seven other guys were happy to be on a paved street in their camouflage uniform, being cheered by hundreds of onlookers.

And they weren't marching in the parade. They were strutting.

All except for the two female soldiers. They rode in an air-conditioned sport utility vehicle.

It was a luxury that Staff Sgt. Shawanna Brown, 30, sorely missed. Life in Afghanistan was a daily struggle, she said.

Even though the battles in Iraq get more media attention, Brown, of South Bay, said troops were constantly shot at in Afghanistan. "Sometimes every day, sometimes every two months," she said. "It was very scary. You just know when to run."

Now that she's back, Brown said she hopes to spend time with her three sons and open a day care. She said she was happy to see such support in Riviera Beach. Most of the 300 soldiers who came back last week skipped the parade, probably because they were traveling or back in their hometowns all across the state.

"I want to show our appreciation to the city for putting this together, supporting us," Brown said. "There's no place like home."

One soldier from their Florida National Guard unit didn't make it back. Pvt. Brandon Wadman, 19, died in a vehicle rollover a week into the deployment. The others came home with a reminder of his sacrifice: his name on a bracelet.

Committee Reviewing Military Pay Package

American Forces Press Service

12 May 2005

By Donna Miles

WASHINGTON, May 11, 2005 – A new committee is studying the military compensation system to come up with ways to bring it more in line with what servicemembers want and operational needs demand.

The Defense Advisory Committee on Military Compensation held its first public meeting today to explain its marching orders from Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld: to take a look at the current system and recommend how to make it better.

The committee will look at the whole compensation program for men and women in uniform in both the active and reserve components, explained retired Navy Adm. Donald Pilling, committee chairman and former vice chief of naval operations.

This includes basic, special and incentive pays; benefits ranging from housing to medical care; and deferred pay that includes retirement pay and survivor benefits, he said.

The committee will attempt to strike the best balance between cash and benefits, current and deferred compensation, and the need for flexibility during peacetime as well as war, Pilling said.

It will also consider the best way to compensate members of the **National Guard** and Reserve, who are deploying more frequently than ever before to support military operations, he said.

The goal is to ensure that the armed forces continue to attract and retain top-quality, highly motivated men and women and to ensure they and their families receive the compensation they deserve. Pilling said that's particularly important when they're burdened by multiple deployments and family separations.

One issue the committee will deal with is the fact that many military members are more interested in cash in hand than retirement or other benefits. "They tend to value current compensation more than compensation that they will not receive for 10 or 20 years, or maybe not at all," he said.

Retirement benefits become more important later in a servicemembers' career, when they become critical to military retention, Pilling said.

During May 10 meetings with service leaders, committee members heard "a range of views about specific changes" in the compensation package, all to be considered during the committee's deliberations, he said.

But one particular message came through loud and clear. "All asked for an architecture that allows flexibility rather than mandatory changes in compensation," Pilling said.

Flexibility will be a key goal as the military undergoes its longest period of sustained conflict since the all-volunteer force was conceived in the early 1970s, he said.

The committee plans to present Rumsfeld an interim report of its recommendations by late September and the final report in April 2006. The next of its public meetings is scheduled for June 7.

Taking Care Of The Survivors

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Pittsburg Leader Times

12 May 2005

By Michael Miller

The last thing state Sen. Jim Ferlo, D-38th, wants the spouses of military personnel killed in the line of duty to worry about is whether there will be enough money to pay the bills.

Ferlo, who represents the southern portion of Armstrong County, proposed legislation Tuesday to exempt surviving spouses of regular forces, reserve and **National Guard** killed in action from paying property taxes to their borough or township, county and school district.

“I don’t think it’s too much to ask to waive property taxes for these individuals,” said the senator, who is seeking co-sponsors for his bill.

Ferlo introduced the legislation in response to a resolution by the American Legion at its state convention last month asking for the measure.

Exemptions would be subject to one-time reviews by the state Veterans Commission to determine whether the surviving spouse is eligible for the benefit, which would apply for life if approved.

The Veterans Commission currently allows permanent and totally disabled veterans to be exempted from property taxes, but contains no such provision for surviving spouses of those killed in action, according to the American Legion resolution.

“I think the property tax abatement would be tremendous,” said Dr. James Nemeč, a retired Army colonel from Kittanning, who has had four children serve in the Armed Forces. “The fact that they’re trying to do something is terrific.”

“I think it’s an excellent bit of legislation,” he added.

The bill would apply to the spouses of those killed in action since Sept. 11, 2001, and would be retroactive to that date, according to Ferlo.

Nemeč said it would help reward military personnel and their families, who he said are “brave and generous” and give them “tremendous reassurance” that they’d be taken care of if something were to happen.

“It’s not like the average soldier has this store of money in his footlocker to take care of

his family," he said.

State Sen. Don White, R-41st, said yesterday that he'd just received word of the bill, and wanted to look at the fiscal impact it might have before weighing in.

White, who chairs the Senate's Veterans' Affairs committee, said it's something that perhaps should have been done a long time ago for widows of those killed in World War II, the Korean War and in Vietnam.

"We really need to look into it," White said. "I'll do anything I can for veterans."

Ferlo, who has been an outspoken opponent of the war in Iraq, said the issue goes beyond politics and is simply "paying respect and tribute" to those who die in the line of duty.

"(One's political views on the Iraq war) really has nothing to do with this bill," he said. "It is not too much to ask that we find small ways of honoring the family members of those that have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving their country."

Ferlo said he expects the bill to be introduced within the next few weeks.

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HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

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Report: Small Businesses Hit Hard When Reserves Are Mobilized

The Associated Press

May 12, 2005

By The Associated Press

A funeral home operator in Bangor, Maine, knows first hand about the problems small businesses can face when the people who work for them are called up for lengthy deployments with the **National Guard** and reserves.

Larry Audet, a longtime member of the Army **National Guard**, was sent to Afghanistan in 2003, forcing him to hire temporary workers to help his son run the Greenlawn Memorial Funeral Home.

"I was one of the fortunate ones," said Audet, 58. "But if I hadn't had my son in the business, I don't know what I would have done."

Congress has begun to take notice of the problem. A Congressional Budget Office report released Wednesday said small businesses often suffer lower profits and have problems adjusting to vacancies when military reservists are called to duty.

"I think what we need to do is find a way to reduce the hardships," said Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, who requested the study as chairman of the Small Business Committee.

"Obviously when you've got a small business, you don't want them to shut down."

The report found that 35 percent of Guard and reserve members work for small businesses or are self-employed, while 26 percent work for large businesses and 36 percent for government.

Because 98 percent of businesses in Maine are small, deployments can hit hard.

"We have to find a way to work with these companies," said Snowe, who is pushing legislation to help ease the burden.

Reserve call-ups have increased sharply since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The Pentagon called up 410,000 reservists between September 2001 and November 2004.

One-third of the troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan in November 2004 were reservists. At one point last year half of Maine's 2,200 Army **National Guard** troops were deployed overseas - one of the highest percentages of Guard soldiers on active duty in the nation.

Adding to the problems are a lack of advance warning about mobilizations and uncertainty about how long the workers will be gone.

"The current trend toward longer and more frequent reserve deployments ... raises questions about the ability of civilian employers, particularly small businesses, to absorb the costs they experience when their reservist employees are called up," Douglas Holtz-Eakin, the CBO director, wrote in the 31-page report.

Options to reduce the effects of deployments include: compensating businesses with payments or tax credits, subsidized loans, subsidized insurance or exempting certain workers from call-ups.

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH

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War Stress Heavier On Women

Chicago Sun-Times

May 8, 2005

By Cheryl L. Reed, Staff Reporter

In a war marked by the most female troops ever to face daily combat, women service members appear to experience war differently from men, according to a Defense Department health questionnaire that tests the mental stability of half a million returning troops.

The post-deployment questionnaire — the first health analysis administered during a war — shows that serving in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars may have harmed women's health more than men's and that a greater percentage of women see wounded and dead bodies

and report having nightmares. More men fired their weapons and felt they were in danger of being killed.

Defense Department officials say the gap stems from the different roles women and men are still assigned to serve in war today, but soldiers point to differences between the sexes and a reluctance on the part of troops to be honest with the government.

"Women are more likely to be in support roles, especially medical roles," said Col. Joyce Adkins, the Defense Department's program director for operational stress and deployment mental health. "They would be more likely to see people who are wounded or dead if they are serving in medical function than if they are discharging their weapons."

525,019 troops answered survey

The Defense Department began issuing its post-deployment health assessment in June 2003. Since then, 525,019 troops have answered the 24-question survey. Designed to assess the mental and physical well-being of those returning from war, the analysis provides an unprecedented snapshot into the minds of troops fresh from battle.

Among the biggest gender differences: 70 percent of the 60,000 servicewomen reported seeing someone wounded, dead or killed, while 54 percent of the 466,000 servicemen said the same.

Although there are more women in combat today than any other time in history -- nearly 10 percent of those in Iraq and Afghanistan are women -- servicewomen still are barred from infantry troops, special operations forces and heavy artillery units.

In the last four decades, the female presence in battle has increased. In Vietnam, women — mostly nurses — made up 2 percent of troop force, and in the Persian Gulf War, they accounted for 7 percent. Still, with only one out of 10 troops a woman, the female war experience remains exceptional.

"I was the only female in my squad," said Sherri Perales, 29, a gunner with the Army **National Guard** assigned to the 333rd Military Police unit out of Freeport. "They always said I was a little weird for a chick because I like knives and smoke cigars and was in pretty good shape."

Different approaches

Perales, stationed near Baghdad, was injured when a semi hit her Humvee head-on in December 2003. Her injuries continued to worsen after she returned home, and for the last five months, she has been confined to a wheelchair.

Perales says there are some differences between the way women and men soldiers operate. Although it's true more women are in support and medical roles, Perales says she thinks fewer women fire guns because they are more cautious.

"Men are more aggressive and trigger-happy," Perales said. "We have a lot of younger guys -- 18-, 19-year-old guys -- who can't wait to get their first kill. Women don't look at death that way. We would rather solve the situation. If somebody has to die, then nobody really wins."

Perales agrees with the Defense Department's analysis that all women, regardless of whether they are in the military, tend to report symptoms of ill health more than men.

That may account for 24 percent of women saying their health worsened while deployed. Eighteen percent of men said the same thing.

From June 2003 to March 2005 -- the data the Defense Department provided to the Chicago Sun-Times -- 13 percent of all returning troops said they were easily startled as a result of a war experience that was "frightening, horrible or upsetting." Those experiences caused 11 percent of women to have nightmares and 9 percent of men.

Stephanie Stretch, 21, a gunner with the Army **National Guard** and assigned to the 233rd Military Police out of Springfield, began having nightmares in Iraq last year after she saw a crude bomb explode on her fellow soldiers.

Stretch and other soldiers talked to each other about their emotional difficulties, but they refused to admit it to the Defense Department.

"We just kind of brushed everything off and said nothing was extremely important at the time because we wanted to go home," Stretch said. "If you say you have health problems or mental health problems, they are going to end up keeping you there longer."

Hard to ask for help

Stretch said she doesn't know anyone who answered the questionnaire with complete honesty: "You kind of know what you can admit to without them raising an eyebrow," she said.

Both men and women appeared reluctant to ask for help with emotional issues. Only 4 percent of males and 6 percent of females said they wanted help with "stress, emotional, alcohol or family problems." During their interview with a health provider, only 8 percent of women and 5 percent of men admitted they had or would seek therapy.

"I could have seen a psychiatrist before I left Germany. However, in order to do that, I would have had to stay in the Army for another three weeks," said William Scissom, 26, of Joliet, who returned with a purple heart from Iraq last September. Scissom suffered panic attacks, crying fits and extreme paranoia that had him hiding behind doors with a shotgun for months after he came home.

Adkins says military members may not be lying, since troops often don't realize they have a problem until months or even years later, which is why the department is about to start a new program in which service members are contacted three to six months after returning home.

Only when Stretch had been back several months and was still plagued by nightmares and insomnia did she realize how serious her problem was. After family members noticed the change in her personality and pressed her to seek help, Stretch saw a counselor. She has since been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Like Stretch, Perales has been diagnosed with PTSD, but she, too, declined therapy on her questionnaire. Although she recognized the symptoms at the time -- the Army showed a video outlining the signs of PTSD -- Perales said she thought she would get better.

'Suck it up and drive on'

"As soldiers, we are trained not to admit weakness," she said. "In the Army, you are always told to suck it up and drive on. If it wasn't for my husband and my children, I

would be out drinking with the rest of the guys now, trying to forget what happened."

Only after Perales began having marital problems and her husband pleaded with her to see a therapist did she seek treatment.

"You can't be a good person and a good soldier at the same time," said Perales, who has an 8-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter. "You become like a machine. It's the only way to survive, especially when you're in a combat zone. In Iraq, you learn to turn off your emotion. Then, when you get back, it starts catching up with you."

'Cowboy' soldiers

Perales says she knows many "cowboy" soldiers who will never admit they have a problem and will never seek treatment. She worries the military isn't reaching them if it relies only on self-admission on a questionnaire.

Dr. Ron Davidson, director of the Mental Health Policy Program at the UIC psychiatry department has doubts about the survey results.

"Men tend to deny more than women when it comes to acknowledging any emotional trauma," Davidson said. "I'm not saying that everybody who is in the military and who experiences combat and sees dead bodies ought to be on a couch seeing a shrink, but if only 5 percent of people answering say they would see a counselor, I suspect that's artificially low."

Davidson points to a military culture documented in a 2002 Defense Department study in which the majority of military personnel questioned said seeking mental health treatment would damage their career. The study also showed that 5 percent had considered suicide but only half had sought help.

Perales said she also was reluctant to admit her emotional issues to the Defense Department, for fear it would make her appear a weak soldier: "In Iraq, if someone had some emotional issues, then they were taken off duty for a little while and their weapons were taken away," she said.

The Defense Department questionnaire also echoes an Army and Marine study issued last summer in which 23 percent to 40 percent of those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan showing signs of mental disorders actually sought treatment.

The Defense Department acknowledges that with one foot nearly on the plane back home, military members don't always report honestly how they are doing for fear that such answers will keep them from returning home and keep them from advancing in their military career.

"We recognize this is a problem," said Col. Tom Burke, M.D., head of mental health for the Defense Department until he retired last week. "We feel it is still important to screen at that time because this is the last time that all of those soldiers are going to be together as a unit."

Guardsman Returns From Iraq In Time For Child's Birth

Greenwich Times

16 May 2005

By Keach Hagey
Staff Writer

Maj. Ric Anderson was in Tikrit, Iraq, the day his wife checked into Greenwich Hospital with labor pains.

Ann Anderson's contractions turned out to be a false alarm, but they were enough to alert the Red Cross, which helped Ric Anderson procure an emergency leave from his post as a communications electronic officer for the Division Support Command of the Army's 42nd Infantry Division.

After nearly two days of travel through Kuwait and Germany, the exhausted soldier arrived at his wife's side Monday afternoon. Twelve hours later, she went into labor for real.

"It was like the baby waited for him," Ann Anderson said.

The birth was not an easy one. Around 8 a.m. Tuesday, doctors noticed that the baby's umbilical cord was bunched under her chin, requiring an emergency Caesarian section.

Ric Anderson was awed by his wife's resiliency.

"I would never be able to do what she did," said Anderson, a 20-year **National Guard** veteran who hears gun and mortar fire every day from his post in Saddam Hussein's hometown. "Men are not even in the club."

Ann Anderson tried to play down the drama of the situation.

"It was scary, but the doctors and the nurses didn't make us fear for anything," she said. "They told us it wasn't life-threatening, and we just had to wait our turn."

When 6-pound, 1-ounce Madison Elizabeth Anderson appeared at 12:48 p.m., the birth of the couple's first child capped a year that has been full of unexpected events for the couple.

Ric Anderson, 40, was working as an administrator at a private Manhattan girls school when his brigade was mobilized. He began training at Fort Dix, N.J., in May, and the couple married the next month during his weekend leave.

When they learned they had a baby on the way, Ann Anderson, a 37-year-old Cos Cob native, decided to have it at the hospital where she was born. They gave up their Upper East Side apartment, and Ann Anderson, a freelance sign language interpreter, moved in with her parents, Stephen and Angelina Gauruder, in Cos Cob.

"When Ric got called up, we decided, once our lease ended, to come up here just so I

would have family and support in case he couldn't come back," she said.

Before Christmas, the couple prepared for Ric Anderson's January deployment by taking a customized crash course in birthing at the hospital. Registered nurse Karen Barone boiled the normally six-week class down to a two-hour session that would keep the long-distance couple connected during the last months of pregnancy. Hospital employees were so touched by the story that they collected \$75 that day for Ric Anderson to buy a phone card to stay in touch.

"I think they are the kind of couple that just goes through everything together," Barone said. "This is really what she wanted, just to have him there."

Ric Anderson's emergency leave lasts two weeks. He is not sure when he'll be coming home for good.

"My orders say November, but there's a lot of stuff going on," he said. "It's killing me that I have to get back on that plane."

Camp Atterbury Receives National Award for Deployment Excellence in DC

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Courtesy of Joint Forces Headquarters – Indiana

Office of Public Affairs

5/16/05, EDINBURGH, IN - The Adjutant General, former Post Commander and leaders of the Indiana National Guard received word from the Department of the Army that the local training site in south-central Indiana won and will be presented a national award at our nation's capitol this week.

MG R. Martin Umbarger, COL Kenneth Newlin and members of the Joint Force Headquarters received word and are pleased to announce that Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center is being awarded the 2005 Army Chief of Staff's Combined Logistics Deployment Excellence Award on Wednesday for their efficient and expedient troop mobilization efforts as part of the global war on terror.

Senior leaders from the post will attend the official awards ceremony hosted by the Army Vice Chief of Staff and the Deputy Chief of Staff for logistics on May 18th in Washington D.C.

Camp Atterbury was awarded first place in the Supporting Unit category, placing it above all other National Guard supporting units. COL Newlin and MAJ Felicia Brokaw, the Installation Transportation Officer, will accept the award during Army Logistics Week in D.C.

"Camp Atterbury has risen from a relatively low impact training location to being one of the nation's premier military training sites that is proving to be an economic engine in south-central Indiana," said MG Umbarger. "The leaders, soldiers and workers at Camp Atterbury are the key reason Indiana earned this honored award and I commend them for their professionalism, competency and outstanding work," he said.

The award is especially significant because the soldiers had to start with almost nothing when the camp was activated as a mobilization site in February 2003, said COL Newlin. "I think it is amazing what these soldiers have accomplished in so little time. They literally established logistic functions from nothing more than some rough plans, with initially only minimal and, in some areas, no supporting infrastructure," he said.

End

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