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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.

3-Month Training Prepares 1,200 Florida National Guard Soldiers for Afghan Assignment

The Miami Herald

June 5, 2005

By Phil Long

HATTIESBURG, Miss.-- From blasts and gunfire a few feet from their ears to angry villagers screaming a few inches from their noses, Florida **National Guard** soldiers here are deep in "immersion training."

It's the new, in-your-face preparation for conditions they might encounter when they begin a yearlong assignment in Afghanistan in early July.

Many of the soldiers, such as Andrew Pozada, of Miami, have volunteered to go. Some, such as Trevor Ivey, of Miami Beach, have already served in Iraq. They are part of the second largest call-up of **Florida National Guard** troops since Sept 11, 2001. The largest was nearly 1,800 infantry soldiers who went to Iraq in 2003.

The Guard's job is to train the Afghan army, Florida Guard Adjutant Gen. Douglas Burnett said. What is taught at Camp Shelby, he said, is derived from lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Guard units learn what hostilities and danger to expect and also get schooled in Afghan culture and customs.

The training aims to be as realistic as possible, including mimicking new types of attacks soldiers on the ground in the Mideast may have encountered for the first time just days ago.

One exercise Friday:

A squad of soldiers moved into a "Herat," a hastily built mock Afghan neighborhood, only this one is in the sweltering pine-studded rolling hills of southern Mississippi.

The soldiers split into two columns working their way around homes, businesses and even a mosque. Soon Afghan Americans, Iraqi Americans and three-dozen or so local Mississippians -- all hired by the Army -- showed up and began taunting, screaming, hurling epithets.

"Down, down with the U.S.A!" "Go home, U.S.A!" they yelled, often inches from the soldiers' faces. The "actors" were angry about news reports of the desecration of sacred Afghan documents. In real life, last month a news article about the alleged desecration of the Quran was linked to rioting in several cities.

Soldiers shouted at the protesters to get back, but the villagers did not understand the commands.

A sniper jumped up from behind the railing on the roof of the police station and began shooting at the soldiers.

The crowd scattered.

"On the roof!" soldiers yelled.

The soldiers knelt and opened fire with a withering barrage of blanks. The sniper slumped over the railing on the roof.

The street protesters returned waving fists, screaming louder as the soldiers retrieved a wounded civilian, put him on a stretcher and carried him into the mosque.

Soon, another sniper jumped into the middle of the chaos.

Another burst of bullets, and the sniper fell.

Then the exercise was over.

"It's really scary when they don't understand you and you're this close to pulling the trigger," said Richard Mills, 37, of Hudson, a Guard sergeant and civilian concrete truck driver who participated in a similar drill earlier in the week.

The Florida soldiers are training alongside Guard units from Vermont, Nebraska and Tennessee who will make up the 4,000-member Task Force Phoenix, commanded by Florida Gen. John "Mitch" Perryman.

"The training is very realistic," added Trevor Ivey, 25, a bartender who lives on South Beach and who has been to Afghanistan in the active Army.

"I can bring experience to the team," he said, explaining why he has volunteered to go back.

A big item on the training schedule is explosives: suicide bombers and explosives concealed in a pile of trash, the carcass of a dead dog or the innards of doorbells or cellphones, chief trainer Col. Dan Zajac said.

Earlier in the day, Pozada's patrol discovered a roadside bomb and stopped to investigate. Two thunderous explosions signaled not the bomb going off, but a mortar attack -- an ambush. Gunfire erupted from the two-dozen soldiers on the patrol.

"You keep firing until the enemy can't put their heads up any more," Pozada said.

Pozada, a 21-year-old T-Mobile sales representative and University of South Florida student, is like many of the Guard soldiers at Camp Shelby: a volunteer.

When his wife, Myra, 21, a combat medic got called to active duty with her Guard unit, Pozada worked for weeks to get a transfer into her outfit so he could be with his high school sweetheart.

"If she is going to have to go through hardship," Pozada said, "I want to do the same."

Like most of the soldiers at Camp Shelby, Pozada liked the training.

"It gave us hands-on experience of how we will be working with the locals," Pozada said.

And they know the training might save their lives.

On Friday, five soldiers including Pfc. Robert McLaughlin, 20, assigned to a Lakeland-area field artillery unit, were simulating a patrol through a neighborhood.

Strapped to his head and linked to a sophisticated computer was a set of high-tech virtual reality goggles that put McLaughlin in the middle of a brutal firefight.

As other soldiers studied the unfolding action on a large screen in another part of the trailer, McLaughlin was shot.

As the battle subsided, Zajac asked McLaughlin how it went.

The soldier said he had been killed.

Better in Mississippi in training than in Afghanistan, Zajac replied.

Tips from USAA: Make Family Finances Deployment-Ready

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6-16-2005

By Rich Strickler

Deployment Assistance Program Manager, USAA

6/16/05 – Military families know that deployments are a fact of life. But many families aren't financially prepared to handle the sudden absence of one or even both spouses. Since predicting when or where you'll be called isn't possible, consider the following tips to ensure your household is mission-ready when you receive your orders.

Put It in Writing

If your financial accounts are in your name only, then your spouse may have trouble dealing with issues that arise in your absence. Have your spouse, relative, or trusted friend listed as a joint account holder, authorized to make changes to the account without your signature. Enacting a durable power of attorney will allow your designee to manage legal matters on your behalf.

Insure Peace of Mind

Life insurance can be difficult to discuss. Giving your loved ones financial security will help put your mind at ease. Recent changes to Servicemen's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) raised the coverage to \$400,000. This is likely adequate for many families, though servicemembers with higher incomes or multiple dependents may want to consider a supplemental policy. To be sure you only purchase coverage you need, consult with a financial planner who does not earn a commission on the products you buy.

Another way to protect your family is to obtain debt protection on outstanding loans. If you were to die prematurely, this type of coverage would prevent your family from having to find the funds to pay off debts such as a car loan or credit card balance.

Protect Your Property

If your home will be unoccupied, notify your insurance company. Arrange to store your valuable property with a friend, relative, or in a commercial storage facility. As an

alternative, many servicemembers get a home security system during their absence.

An upcoming deployment may also prompt changes to auto insurance. If someone will drive your car while you are deployed, you may need to add that person to your auto insurance policy. However, if your vehicle will be properly stored, you may be able to save money by reducing your coverage, depending on your state laws.

Keep an Eye on Credit

Being far from home and often preoccupied during deployment, military can often be prime targets for identity theft and credit fraud. That's why it's important to review your credit report at least once a year to correct any inaccuracies. Some banks offer services that monitor your credit report and alert you to suspicious activity.

Track Down Discounts

Sometimes being deployed can actually save you money. Many financial services companies offer special discounts for deployed military personnel, such as no international fees on ATM cards and reduced credit card interest rates. Some banks even offer Reserve and National Guard members the opportunity to defer mortgage payments until they return from duty. This is an especially attractive option for members whose income declines during active duty.

Also, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act of 2004 requires lenders to cut interest rates on existing loans to military members to 6 percent during periods of active duty military service. Consult with your JAG for a full explanation of your protections under the Act. While preparing the homefront for deployment can be a challenge, making important financial, legal, and insurance arrangements ahead of time will help get you get in shape for your next mission. Rich Strickler is Deployment Assistance Program Manager with USAA. He also served 30 years in the U.S. Navy. USAA is a diversified insurance and financial services organization that has served the military community since 1922.

Surviving a Double Deployment

Deploying is difficult enough. It's hard to imagine both spouses being called to serve in different parts of the world at the same time, but it happens. If a double deployment is a possibility in your family, here's some advice:

Be open: Discuss the potential situation with children so it won't be a shock when the time comes. And don't underestimate how long you may be gone. **Have helpers ready:** Make arrangements in advance for family members or close friends to care for the kids, keep pets, and look after financial affairs. **Put routine tasks on auto-pilot:** Set up direct deposits on your paychecks, and have recurring charges auto-drafted from your account.

Go online: Take advantage of technological conveniences to stay in touch with family, make bank transactions, or even pre-order flowers for upcoming birthdays and holidays.

Take time to re-engage: Be realistic about your return home. Take time to reconnect with family and establish normal routines again.

Training Bridges S.D., Mideast

Rapid City Journal

15 June 2005

By Celeste Calvitto, Journal Staff Writer

BELLE FOURCHE - The placid waterway near the Belle Fourche Reservoir seemed light years away from a chaotic Mideast war zone.

But for the **National Guard** soldiers who were building a bridge Tuesday across the inlet, it was an exercise that could be repeated in Afghanistan in the months to come.

The 250th Engineer Company of Putnam, Conn., labored to build and balance the structure as part of Joint Thunder 2005, the South Dakota **National Guard**'s Joint Forces exercise.

More than 2,200 military personnel from throughout the country are participating in the annual training exercise through Saturday, June 25.

"We are putting a medium girder bridge across the gap," Capt. Christina Watson, the unit's commanding officer, said. "In full combat adrenaline mode, it should take four hours. But we are trying to be a little more careful because the ground is still pretty soft, so we are shooting for six hours."

The Guard unit, which could be deployed early next year as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, would be called on to duplicate the process "whenever a maneuver commander would need a bridge to support his offensive operation, such as crossing tank traffic," 1st Sgt. Stuart Topliff said.

Glancing at bridge components of varying sizes and shapes that awaited transport and positioning by the soldiers, Topliff said, "This is the stuff we would bring to combat."

For many of the Connecticut soldiers, it was their first trip to the region.

"We like to get out of state because it is good for morale," Watson said.

But there's a practical reason why it's good to train in a new place, she said.

"It's important because when you deploy, you don't know where you're going and won't be familiar with the terrain. And on top of building the bridge, you have to find it," she said. "You look at all the maps, recon the area and know what you are getting yourself into. The unfamiliarity adds a nice element to it."

Watson has been to South Dakota before as part of a planning conference.

"It's beautiful. I love it here," she said. "We're going to get to see the Black Hills, and that is an added benefit. Not only do you get really good training, but you get to see another part of the country."

The soldiers wouldn't have much time to stand back and admire their work, though. The bridge was to be disassembled and packed up as soon as it was completed.

But they would still get to make a splash, so to speak.

"It's a tradition to dump the C.O. in the water," Watson said, referring to her status as commanding officer. "I've got some spare clothes — it's only water," she said with a grin. "But I am going to ask them to let me take my cell phone off first."

Mississippi Guard Still Able To Assist With Hurricanes

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Sun Herald

13 June 2005

By Michael Newsom

National Guard soldiers had a strong presence in South Mississippi during Hurricane Ivan, but some wonder how deployments to Iraq will affect disaster preparedness this year.

Lt. Col. Tim Powell, a public information officer from the Guard's office in Jackson, said there would be no difference in the Guard's disaster assistance capabilities.

In hurricanes, the Guard utilizes engineering battalions and military police.

The Mississippi **National Guard** has two engineering battalions it uses to clear debris and evacuate people. The 890th Engineering Battalion, based in Gulfport, and the 223rd, based in West Point, would work alongside emergency management agencies, if ordered to do so by Gov. Haley Barbour.

A military police guard group from central Mississippi would help local police with roadblocks and direct traffic.

"We have plenty of assets to pull from. We have more than an adequate amount of soldiers and equipment," Powell said.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency has the ability to summon troops from other states, said Lee Stokes, with MEMA. The troops could be here in a matter of hours in a disaster. The agreement that allows for this, the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), is recognized by emergency management agencies in all but a few states.

"We can use Guard troops or law enforcement from other states. When Florida was hit with hurricanes, we had some (Mississippi troops) go to Florida," Stokes said. "We could do the same thing."

Stokes said the **National Guard** is mobilized long before a hurricane makes landfall, so in the event of a storm that would leave the Coast in a state of emergency, the Guard under EMAC could seek support from units from other states.

"The public is going to get their needs met," Stokes said. Butch Loper, director of Jackson County Civil Defense, said he is not sure how the current deployments would affect the Coast because the system has not been tested.

"Really we haven't been faced with that challenge as much as Alabama and Florida," Loper said.

Loper said the Guard is invaluable during disasters with the manpower and equipment they bring.

DEPLOYMENT

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Pennsylvania Army National Guard Sending Brigade into Combat for First Time Since World War II

The Patriot News

17 June 2005

By John-Michael Stern

More than 2,000 state soldiers will be flying into Iraq after a departure ceremony Thursday at Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Miss. It is the state's largest deployment since the Korean War.

They belong to the 3,500-member 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 28th Infantry Division.

One of those soldiers is Maj. Ted Little, an eighth-grade history teacher at Allen Middle School in Lower Allen Twp.

The 38-year-old Newberry Twp. resident spent his last day in the midstate yesterday at Hersheypark with his wife, Beth, and his 12-year-old son, Teddy. He also said goodbye this week to his students.

"I stopped by just the other day to say goodbye to the kids," Little said. "They were all emotional, not wanting their teacher to go."

Today, he will be rejoining the brigade in Mississippi.

"I'm a little nervous, a little anxious," he added. "We've been training since January, so it's been a long buildup to go and get ready mentally to go."

Other states have put their **National Guard** units in combat, and the Pennsylvania **National Guard** has personnel in Iraq serving a variety of support roles.

But the Pennsylvania **National Guard** chose to send a brigade in a combat role for the first time in more than 60 years because the mission in Iraq requires a Guard unit of its size.

"We have the resources and we have the readiness to meet this mission," said Capt. Cory Angell, a Pennsylvania **National Guard** spokesman.

Until a few days ago, the intensive training of the last few months left Staff Sgt. Michael

Wenrick little time for thinking about his upcoming deployment to Iraq.

"I feel really good about the unit I'm with, about the people I'm with," said Wenrick, 28, of State College. "We're more than ready for whatever gets pushed our way."

But, he said, "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little bit scared."

In the coming weeks following departure, the brigade will be rotating into Iraq from temporary quarters in Kuwait.

Soldiers will be stationed in Ramadi, a city in central Iraq about 60 miles west of Baghdad, to quell insurgents, predominantly Sunni Muslims.

Soldiers who are already there are training the Iraqi army, conducting routine patrols, protecting convoys from attack, cordoning off target areas and searching suspicious vehicles for weapons.

Little said his job will be to plan brigade missions.

"I do a lot of homework," said the middle school teacher, "making sure missions are prepared before they go out and execute it."

Little is not new to war, nor to Iraq. He fought in Iraq in the first Gulf War.

In 1996, he joined the Pennsylvania **National Guard** and served on a yearlong peacekeeping mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2002.

Little said he will return to his teaching post after his one-year stay overseas. He believes this mission, which he said he volunteered for, will be his last.

"This is it for me," he said.

Army National Guard Soldiers Can Attend ASUMH Tuition-Free

The Baxter Bulletin

7 Jun 2005

By Chandra Huston

Arkansas Army **National Guard** soldiers now will be able to attend a local college at a discounted tuition rate.

Maj. Gen. Don C. Morrow, Adjutant General of Arkansas, and Dr. Ed Coulter, chancellor of Arkansas State University Mountain Home, signed an agreement Monday between the college and the Arkansas Army **National Guard** for education benefits.

The benefits are authorized under House Concurrent Resolution 1003 encouraging the state's colleges and universities to waive 25 percent of an Arkansas **National Guard** member's undergraduate tuition.

Eligibility for these benefits is determined by the Army **National Guard**.

ASUMH will honor HCR 1003 and allow the 25 percent waiver for qualifying Arkansas **National Guard** students.

"I am always proud to support our troops and assist them in their educational endeavors," Coulter said.

Army **National Guard** soldiers can attend ASUMH with no tuition cost. Air **National Guard** soldiers can attend the school at a 25 percent reduction in tuition rates, due to the way the Air **National Guard** has its education benefits package set up.

Morrow said approximately 20 colleges in Arkansas are offering reduced tuition to Guard members.

"What a great step for your school to take," Morrow said at the Monday ceremony.

Morrow said the gesture is "tremendously patriotic." He presented Coulter with a minuteman statue to display at the college and a challenge coin.

Sgt. Reggie Watson, Mountain Home recruiter, said there are approximately 12 soldiers in the Mountain Home unit who currently attend ASUMH. He said many soldiers will probably use the opportunity for a free education.

"This is great for recruiting," he said. "We will definitely mention this when recruiting soldiers."

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

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Soldiers Balancing Family, Duty; Local Battalion Readies For Duty In Iraq; Spouses, Community Supportive

The Express Times

13 June 2005

By Jeff Schogol

The Express-Times

It's hard not to notice that Sgt. 1st Class Dan Hillegas is a diehard Eagles fan.

Hillegas, 43, wears an Eagles jersey and sports an Eagles tattoo as he says he hopes he can watch his beloved team while he serves in Iraq.

The Salisbury Township man is one of 241 local soldiers from the Bethlehem unit of the 228th Forward Support Battalion leaving later this month for Iraq.

Statewide, about 2,200 soldiers with the Pennsylvania **National Guard** are heading off to war for a year.

This is the Pennsylvania **National Guard's** largest deployment of the Iraq war and the largest combat deployment since World War II, said Guard spokesman Lt. Col. Chris Cleaver.

Hillegas said he leaves Thursday for Kuwait, where he will spend a few weeks before moving north.

But his thoughts are on a different level of battle. He said he thinks the Eagles have a shot at going back to the Super Bowl this season.

"Maybe they're going to wait until he gets back home," said his wife, Lori.

But Hillegas said the Eagles have to go for it now, because an NFL team can be a dynasty one year and a disaster a few years later.

He said U.S. troops do have Super Bowl parties in Iraq, but alcohol is prohibited, so he is getting all his drinking done before he goes overseas.

Soon he will be in Ramadi, which is part of the badlands known as the "Sunni Triangle."

He said he is not frightened about going to war because "it's the same as going to bad parts of New York City."

But his wife said she can see her husband is nervous.

Hillegas said he is worried about roadside bombs, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, all staples of Iraqi insurgents.

But being separated from his family for so long will be the hardest part about the deployment, he said.

Recently, the soldiers heading to Iraq underwent training for several months in Mississippi and California.

"Those six months have been the longest he's ever been away," Lori Hillegas said.

Sgt. Shawn Barger, 33, said he will most likely be unable to come home this August from Iraq for the birth of his son.

Barger, of Bethlehem Township, Pa., said he has "mixed feelings" about leaving his family.

At the same time, he said he knows his wife can handle the family obligations while he is gone.

"My wife has done a very good job at taking over the daily duties of the household, paying the bills," he said.

Staff Sgt. Remy Santi, 35, said neighbors, family and other people have volunteered to help his family while he is away.

Santi, of Bethlehem, said his mechanic in Allentown treats his wife as a priority when she calls.

His son's sports coaches will also drive Santi's children to practice when Santi is away, he said. And his barber's wife picks up Santi's son to take him for a haircut, he said.

Still, Santi said leaving his family is weighing heavily on his mind. He said he is putting his trust in God and plans to write home when he can.

"One day at a time is all I can do," Santi said.

Rhonda Celoso, head of the Family Readiness Group for 228th Bravo Company, said her group is trying to help soldiers and families stay in contact.

Celoso, 52, said the group is raising money to buy Web cameras so the soldiers and their families can see each other during the deployment.

The Emmaus woman, whose husband, Don, is being deployed to Iraq, said her role over the next year will be to check in on soldiers' families to see how they are doing and direct them to any help they need.

"We're there for the families emotionally. We plan things for them to keep them busy and keep them occupied so they try not to think and worry too much," she said.

Celoso said helping the families keeps her focused, and that will help her get through the upcoming year.

She said the group is proud of the unit, which is going on its third deployment in 10 years.

"Our guys are true soldiers and I have every confidence that they will handle it. They're some of the best," she said.

1st Sgt. Chris Day, 36, said he has full confidence in his men, and after five months of

training in Mississippi and California, the guardsmen are ready for their time in Iraq to start -- so they can eventually come home.

The Forks Township man said he and his men have learned how to avoid offending Iraqis during searches by focusing attention on Iraqi men, not women, he said.

The soldiers also have learned to stay cool by putting ice in their backpacks that hold water, Day said.

And they know they have to clean their M-16s every day because just a little sand will make the weapons useless, he said. "That's your best friend, and it may save your life some day," he said.

Asked what he fears most, he said, "For me as a leader it's 'have we done everything we can to make sure our soldiers are prepared for battle, for what lies ahead?' "

Day took part in the first Gulf War. Back then, fellow soldiers felt the United States should have taken out Saddam Hussein.

Asked if he thought the current war in Iraq would last this long, Day laughs and says no.

"Hopefully, we're on the downswing and it's not going to be too much longer. But we'll see," Day said.

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Deployments More Stressful For Families Far From Bases

Star News

17 June 2005

The Iraq war has seen increased reliance on "citizen-soldiers," **National Guardsmen** and Reservists called away from their jobs and families to serve in the military, often fighting alongside regular forces.

The Department of Defense has developed a support system for the families left behind. It's easily accessible for families on bases. It's a little harder to access for a Wilmington family and even harder for families from outlying areas such as Whiteville.

So the Defense Department, working through universities in this state, is setting up a Citizen-Soldier Support Program, a pilot program that will serve as a national demonstration model.

Crystal Moore, formerly the family assistance center representative for the N.C. **National Guard's** 120th Infantry Regiment, has become this area's community liaison.

Ms. Moore is motivated to help. Before 9/11, she was the court advocate for Domestic Violence Shelter and Services. Her husband, Bill, was security manager at J.C. Penney and a "weekend warrior," drilling with his **National Guard** unit one weekend a month and two weeks every summer.

He was called up in January 2003 and has been to Iraq twice since then. He works full-

time for the Guard now, currently stationed in Ahuskie.

Ms. Moore organized a meeting Wednesday night with representatives of military support groups and organizations such as the Community Boys and Girls Club and the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service. The purpose was to see how to connect military families with services such as child care, health care and financial resources.

She discussed how each stage in the “emotional cycle of deployment” strains a family. Pre-deployment starts with a warning order and includes training. Family schedules are disrupted as the soldier leaves home, sometimes returning for unanticipated visits.

Patti Nance’s husband, Staff Sgt. James Nance of the 120th, trained at Fort Stewart, Ga., before going to Iraq. At Christmas 2003, she thought she wouldn’t see him again until he was about to go to Iraq. Then he was transferred to Fort Bragg, and she saw a lot of him. Children don’t understand why daddy is gone, then home, then gone again.

So there’s actually an element of relief when the soldier is finally deployed. It’s soon followed by feelings of sadness and isolation. And there are the worries: Is the house safe? What if the paycheck doesn’t come?

While a soldier is overseas, the family adapts. New routines are established. If it’s the wife who’s at home, she may become more independent and confident. E-mail is convenient but creates stress. A spouse doesn’t want the soldier worrying about a broken car or a sick child while on a dangerous mission.

When the soldier comes home, the “honeymoon” period is often followed by painful readjustment. Neither spouse is the same. Often, old routines don’t work anymore. Many marriages don’t survive the tests.

“There has to be a lot of love in the house before a soldier leaves for it to still be there when they come back” said Ms. Nance, the family readiness group coordinator for the 120th’s Charlie Company. She lives in Whiteville.

We talked about ways the community can help the families of deployed soldiers. One is to try to get more doctors to accept Tricare, the military health-insurance system. Other suggestions included obtaining discounts from businesses and public agencies; getting churches, groups and individuals to reach out to families; making sure schools are sensitive to the needs of students whose parents are deployed; and creating awareness in the community.

Camouflaged Dads; Combat Duty Makes It Hard For Dads To Have Visible Role

Milwaukee Journal

20 June 2005

By Meg Jones

Samarra, Iraq - Like many dads, Darrin Behne checks his kids' report cards. Evan White sometimes has to tell his 8-year-old daughter to do her homework. And Jeremy Skroch helps his wife pick out presents for his sons' birthdays.

Nothing unusual about that. But Behne, White and Skroch are doing their fathering from 8,000 miles away.

Being a long-distance dad is tough under any circumstances. But for fathers in war zones, it's hard to juggle parenting with combat duties. It's difficult to spend a 12-hour shift on the lookout for roadside bombs and then switch to dad mode when returning to base and calling or e-mailing home.

Then there's the heartache of missing your kids - and missing out on a year or more of their lives.

That means missing first steps and first words, birthdays and holidays, swim meets and father-daughter dances, bedtime stories and fishing trips. It means missing a child's arms around a dad's neck and wet kisses on cheeks.

"When I think about them most is when I'm going to bed at night," said Skroch, 29, who lives in West Bend and has two boys, Simon, 4, and Jessie, who turns 2 this week.

Skroch, Behne and White are members of Charlie Company of the Wisconsin **National Guard** 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry. The 128th is headquartered in Eau Claire. The unit mobilized last year on Father's Day. Now it's another Father's Day, and they still have many months before they're due to return home late this year.

Trying to stay in touch

Ask any father, or anyone for that matter, in Iraq about staying in touch with their families and they'll say: Thank God for the Internet.

The wives of White, Behne and Skroch e-mail photos of their kids. Some families have Web cams so dads can see their kids baking cookies or playing. The families make videos, DVDs and CDs with movies and pictures. Soldiers in Charlie Company can call home for 15 minutes every four days.

Still, it's not the same.

When Behne's daughter Megan turned 5, "I was on the phone with her, and I told her to go get her (birthday present of a) bike out of grandpa's trunk. Then (his wife) Shawn took pictures, so I could see her with her bike," he said.

Behne, who lives in Plover, has four daughters: Megan; Brianna, 4; Kristen, 7; and Alexandra, 8.

White, 25, missed the birth of his son, Aidan, in January. His wife, Erin, was a week overdue, and White kept calling to see if she had given birth. He got through a few hours after the birth. A photo was taken of Aidan lying in a warmer with a cell phone next to him. On the other end was White listening to his boy sleep.

He and Erin also have a son, Austin, who's almost 2, and White has an 8-year-old daughter, Hannah, from a previous relationship. Hannah lives part of the time with her stepmother, who is homeschooling her.

White misses his kids "usually right after I get done talking to them. Actually I miss them all the time. Or when I get pictures I think - 'Whoa, that's not him.' "

Not complaining

Erin White, 24, said "it was a tad overwhelming" going through a pregnancy alone while taking care of a toddler. When she had to get up throughout the night to go to the bathroom, Austin would wake up and cry and "you can't call people at 3 in the morning. I can't call my sister and say, 'OK, now it's your turn' to help with the kids."

She's not complaining - she chose to marry Evan and have their children, she said. It's just that they didn't know his unit would be called up for 18 months. She found out she was pregnant with Aidan a few days after the deployment order was announced.

So she bought a camera phone to snap pictures of Austin dumping his macaroni and cheese on the floor or Aidan making a funny face and to e-mail them to their dad.

In a recent interview at her home, after dressing Austin in a pair of "Batman" pajamas and attaching a black cape to his shoulders, she said she was cleaning out the drawers in Austin's room, switching from the 12-month to 18-month size "and I thought Evan hasn't seen these clothes. He's missed a whole clothing size."

White went home to Oconomowoc on leave in May and got to see Austin's first haircut and attend Aidan's baptism on Mother's Day.

Translation transition

Skroch tries to keep in touch as best he can with his wife, Stacy, 28, and his children.

Stacy positioned a computer Web cam so her husband can see the kids playing in their living room in West Bend.

When Stacy finished her college thesis last month for a bachelor's degree in organizational administration from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she e-mailed it to him so he could read her work.

"It bothers me that I can't be there for them or for her when she needs me. No matter what I want, I can't get this year back," said Skroch, who hung a placard of family photos inside his bunk so he can see his wife and kids before he goes to sleep. "All the videos and all the pictures won't show me what I missed."

Skroch used to take Simon with him to the Laundromat each week to give Stacy a break. It was a time for just the two of them.

They loaded the washing machines, then picked up some food - it was up to Simon to choose McDonald's or Burger King - and sometimes wandered around Menards. Now

Stacy tries to do the laundry while Simon is at day care because he misses his dad.

"There are times when the boys do something special and you want to tell someone and he's not there," said Stacy, as she pulled out markers and paper for her kids to draw on at the kitchen table. "You can't just pick up the phone."

Simon is old enough to know his dad has been away but sometimes he'll talk as if his father will be home this weekend, said Stacy.

At Christmas, Stacy picked out presents for the boys from their dad - a Little People castle for Jessie and a Geo Trax train set for Simon. "I e-mailed Jeremy and told him, and he was like, 'That's exactly what I would have bought.' "

When Skroch left, Jessie wasn't talking yet. Now he can hear him when he calls home. And sometimes Skroch will have to tell Simon, if he's pitching a temper tantrum, to mind his mama.

But Skroch knows it'll take awhile to understand his boys when he returns home by the end of this year.

"I'm going to have to get used to translating what they're saying," Skroch said.

No plastic bubble

When Behne left home he told his wife, Shawn, he wanted to put a plastic bubble over their house in Plover so that everything and everyone would be the same when he got back. Instead, he gets e-mails and packets filled with pictures drawn by his kids, as well as their report cards.

"They've grown a lot. They're huge, especially Brianna" the youngest, said Behne, who picked up his three oldest daughters from school each day. "Two of them learned to ride two-wheeled bikes since I've been gone, and I've missed Girl Scout stuff."

Alex, a third-grader and the oldest, sends her dad letters and e-mails and talks to him when he calls.

"I usually just write him stuff. I'm working on a six-chapter book called 'Crayon Time' because I like coloring, and I told him about that," said Alex.

Shawn Behne, 32, figures she's always had four kids, whether her husband was there or away. With her husband in Iraq, she gets up earlier and goes to bed later and has imposed a limit of two extracurricular activities for the girls.

Some of the girls are Brownies, some take swimming lessons. She's had to say no to some things like tae kwan do or gymnastics because she can only juggle so many schedules.

"You're handed that card. You can't sell them, so you just deal with it," she said, smiling as she watched Brianna turn somersaults in the basement rec room.

The family cat, Moe, watched and purred as the three oldest returned home from school and noisily clomped down the stairs, dumping their backpacks and greeting their mom.

Behne, 36, doesn't mind having so many girls because he figures he has four daughters to walk down the aisle on their wedding days. Besides "I've got plenty of boys here," said

Behne, a sergeant 1st class and squad leader.

This Father's Day won't be any different than other days at Patrol Base Olson in Samarra.

Charlie Company soldiers will pull guard duty and go out on patrols in this city in the heart of the Sunni Triangle, an area north and west of Baghdad that is a stronghold of the insurgency.

The fathers will look at the care packages of cards and gifts sent by their families. They will think about next Father's Day when they'll be home with their kids.

White figures he'll probably get breakfast made for him next year. A few years ago, Hannah woke him up and excitedly told him she had made him breakfast. So he went to the kitchen and saw a bowl of cereal with milk spilled on the table and pieces of cereal on the floor.

"I was like 'Thanks, baby,'" said White. "By the time I get back, she'll be 9 and probably be able to cook me something in the microwave."

GENERAL

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The National Guard Family Program Strives to Enhance Family Support

6-9-2005

By Michelle Bohlen

National Guard Bureau Family Programs

Courtesy of the National Guard Bureau

6/9/05, ARLINGTON, VA — The National Guard Bureau Family Programs (NGBFP) has recently launched a new initiative, the National Guard Outreach and Partnership Program. Formed in December of 2004, the program is designed to strengthen and enhance support for National Guard families and service members by building and reinforcing the capacity of resources from federal, state and local government agencies along with veteran, volunteer and private organizations.

The National Guard Outreach and Partnership Program is not meant to replace existing military support programs or circumvent the chain of command, but augment assistance to families and service members. The mission of the program is to strengthen support services, especially for geography dispersed families who may not have easy access to a military installation.

“Our approach is to rally every organization and agency by informing, activating, and then coordinating their services and activities with National Guard initiatives and programs to connect with and assist military families in their local communities as needed,” said COL Anthony E. Baker Sr., chief of Family Programs.

Baker also noted that the program has the potential to strengthen support systems for

child and youth care services, access to health care services, community support systems, faith based activities, and communication and information dissemination.

The program's most recent accomplishments include developing memorandums of understanding with several veteran service organizations (VSO), making the partnerships official. Following the national partnership model, State Joint Force Headquarters will partner with VSOs in their states and territories as a force multiplier in support of family readiness. Together, these organizations will leverage existing resources—volunteers, veterans services officers, partnerships within the public and private sector, publications, and other activities—to expand services and outreach to National Guard service members and their families.

NGBFP is committed to building strong families and the new Outreach and Partnership program will provide family members with much needed additional support. Having confidence that their families are well taken care of will allow the service member to focus on the mission at hand. "The better we care for our families before a crisis strikes the better prepared they are during a crisis. Building resilient families is critical to future retention efforts; a service member is more likely to remain in the National Guard if he/she knows the most important need was taken care of, which is his/her family," said COL Baker.

DoD Cautions Servicemembers Against 'Loan-Shark' Lenders

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American Forces Press Service

Jun. 20, 2005

By Terri Lukach

WASHINGTON, June 17, 2005 – The Defense Department has launched a new effort to educate servicemembers about the dangers of borrowing from "loan-shark" lending companies and to teach them how to avoid ending up in a spiral of compounding debt, a DoD official said here today.

The most prevalent type of loan-shark lending affecting military personnel is what is known as "payday loans," said John M. Molino, deputy undersecretary of defense for military community and family policy. "A payday loan is essentially a plug -- money that gets you from today to the next payday so you can cover your bills." The problem is that money is very expensive, he said in an interview.

"Typically, a payday loan of a \$100 will cost the borrower \$17 for two weeks. The average payday loan is about \$500, so now we're talking about a fee of \$85.

"By itself, that's not a big problem," Molino said. "However, when you consider that it is not uncommon for that military member to roll the loan over four or five times, that \$85 will grow exponentially to the point where you are paying an enormous amount of money for the relatively meager amount of the loan. "It got you through payday, but if you

weren't able to pay it off, now it's two more weeks, and two more weeks, and you're paying nearly 500 percent interest annually. That's a lot of money to pay," he said.

Considering that about 9 percent of all enlisted personnel and 12 percent of all mid-level non-commissioned officers use payday loans, the potential for detrimental impact on mission accomplishment is very real, Molino said.

"If you're in debt, you have other things in mind. You're doing things other than concentrating on the mission; maybe you're taking on other employment. The effects are long-lasting and go deep into a person's performance; it affects unit readiness," Molino said.

Part of the problem is the proximity of payday lenders to military installations. "If you look at where they position their businesses, they are right outside the gate," Molino said. A recent study of 15,000 payday lenders in more than 13,000 ZIP codes in 20 states that host military installations revealed that payday lenders open their storefronts around military installations.

Molino said the department is taking steps, such as hosting fairs at military installations, to educate military members about the dangers of payday loans and familiarize them with ways to put themselves and their families on a sound financial footing.

"We can make soldiers smarter," he said. "We can make them better consumers; we can teach them how to save for a rainy day, so when they need to borrow they can -- and pay themselves back, at no interest. We are also doing something about payday lenders."

Molino said his office is watching them closely, looking at behaviors and patterns that are inconsistent with state law and encouraging states to pass laws that are not only friendly to servicemembers but also require honesty and discipline on the part of payday lenders.

Molino cited Georgia, Florida and Oklahoma as examples of states that have taken positive action against payday lenders. Last year Georgia passed legislation that eliminated payday lending from the state, he said, while Florida and Oklahoma now require a 24-hour waiting period between payday loans, thus eliminating rollovers and multiple loans.

"We believe we need to work hard to limit the impact of payday lenders, but the real answer is to help our servicemembers and their families get control of their own finances to be in charge of their future," Molino said.

Bill Would Give Military More Time To Vote

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St. Paul Pioneer Press

15 June 2005

By Ryan J. Foley

MADISON, Wis. — Saying too many Wisconsin soldiers are disenfranchised, the state

Assembly passed a bill Tuesday to allow the absentee ballots of military personnel to count as long as they are postmarked by Election Day, not received by then.

Backers of the bill said the absentee ballots of hundreds of Wisconsin soldiers did not arrive by Election Day last November as required under current law, while other soldiers did not try to fill them out because they knew they would not arrive in time.

Before the presidential election Nov. 2, Wisconsin soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan were instructed to mail the ballots by Oct. 22. The bill, which would go into effect by the 2006 elections, would give soldiers and their spouses until Election Day to send their ballots.

Bill sponsor Rep. Brett Davis, R-Oregon, said soldiers "deserve to have a few extra days to get their ballot in if they are on patrol, away from their base, and can't get their ballot in right away."

The Assembly's 79-17 vote sends the bill to the state Senate, where it would have to pass before going to Gov. Jim Doyle to be signed into law.

If the bill becomes law, it could mean that in a close election a final tally could not be completed for days as elections officials wait for all the military ballots to arrive. Backers said the late-arriving results could impact elections like the last two presidential votes in Wisconsin, which were decided by narrow margins.

In October, state Republicans complained that a Democratic-backed lawsuit over whether independent Ralph Nader could run in Wisconsin delayed the printing of ballots by five days and disenfranchised hundreds of reservists and full-time soldiers. Democrats dismissed those allegations as nonsense.

"We had numerous, numerous instances of our military personnel this time around whose ballots were not sent back in time so they weren't counted," said Rick Wiley, executive director of the state Republican Party.

He said Republicans were ready to raise the issue in a legal challenge to the state results, which ended with Democratic Sen. John Kerry defeating President Bush in Wisconsin by 11,000 votes. That challenge was averted when Bush carried Ohio and won the presidency.

According to the state Elections Board, 65 percent of 5,175 military absentee ballots requested were returned. A total of 534 of them were not counted because they arrived after Nov. 2.

The bill would allow military personnel and their spouses to request an absentee ballot as late as Election Day, instead of the Friday before the election. Even if a ballot is missing a postmark or one can't be read, the vote should count "unless established by a preponderance of evidence to the contrary" that it was sent too late, the bill states.

Rep. Frederick Kessler, D-Milwaukee, unsuccessfully asked his colleagues to delete the provision in the bill that gives the spouses of military personnel the extended time to vote absentee. He said that opened a "blatant opportunity for corruption and misuse" by candidates in close elections.

Lt. Col. Tim Donovan, a spokesman for the Wisconsin **National Guard**, which had 481 soldiers and airmen overseas during the election, said they were able to vote, but he didn't

know whether their ballots were received in time to count.

"We'd be grateful for anything that further guarantees that our deployed soldiers and airmen have their votes counted," he said.

End

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