



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Weekly News for National Guard Families

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Websites:

National Guard Family Program Online Communities for families and youth:

<http://www.guardfamily.org/>

<http://www.guardfamilyyouth.org/>

TRICARE website for information on health benefits

<http://www.tricare.osd.mil/>

Civilian Employment Information (CEI) Program Registration for Army and Air National Guard, Air Force, and Coast Guard Reserve

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

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

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

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

<http://www.militarychild.org/>

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 Training

KVAL-TV

June 27, 2005

By Jennifer Winters

About 2000 **Oregon Army National Guard** soldiers are back home from two weeks of intense training in the Idaho desert. They're preparing to deploy to Afghanistan next year.

The Oregon Guardsmen are on a training mission like no other, as they train for convoys with live ammunition.

The trainer explains "This run is so you can see what will happen, then we go hot." In the desert outside Boise, Idaho the soldiers come face to face with the unpredictability of desert travel. Convoys in Iraq and Afghanistan face ambushes, explosions, even angry mobs.

The lead trainer, Staff Sgt. John Paul Salazar, says "All the scenarios that are on this rant, all six are scenarios that our company encountered time and time again in Iraq."

And while the scenarios are staged the ammo is real. Staff Sgt. Salazar says "It makes it much more realistic and more serious, it sets them in the mind set."

They learn to shoot on the run, and negotiate a safe course.

One trainer explains to a soldier about the psychology behind running a convoy. "As the gunner up here you need to be looking mean, trying to wave people out of your path."

Captain Kevin McCrae, from Brookings, Oregon says "Now we're dealing with people who look just like regular people on the side of the road and it's not an identifiable threat."

When a rock explodes, one soldier must decide whether to fire back or take cover.

He decides to fire at another moving target, and makes the right call.

The soldiers say the training gives them confidence.

Captain Nathan Kimzey of Grants Pass says the training is an adrenaline rush, and the best training he's had.

"Pretty much we just rolled through, took care of the contact as it came. Our mission is to get through."

Capt. McCrae says "I'm glad they've started to initiate training like this because it is so realistic."

And when battle goes from realistic to real, the goal is to stay alive.

Staff Sgt. Salazar says "It is what is absolutely crucial for the survivability in the ever changing battlefield."

Base's Air Guardsmen Will Train Young Forces

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Associated Press

July 3, 2005

EASTOVER, S.C. - National Guard installations around the country are bemoaning shutdowns and cutbacks under the Pentagon's base closure plans, yet veteran pilots and crew chiefs at a small Air National Guard unit in central South Carolina are celebrating.

Instead of being closed or wrapped into an active duty base, the Air Force's so-called weekend warriors at McEntire Joint National Guard Base are set to train young, full-time service members under the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closure plan.

"This is new," said Lawrence Korb, an assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration. "But under this BRAC, everything that was done was new. This allows the active duty to be deployed and the Guard to stay back and be used as a training force."

Mr. Korb, a senior fellow with the Washington, D.C., think tank Center for American Progress, called the proposal "a very creative idea."

Brig. Gen. George Patrick, the head of the South Carolina Air National Guard, said he was able to convince Gen. Michael Moseley, confirmed as Air Force chief of staff this week and a former commander at nearby Shaw Air Force Base, that the McEntire crews had a lot to offer full-time, active duty military men and women.

"We told the Air Force, 'Send us your inexperienced people, and we can season them,'" Brig. Gen. Patrick said. "We hope they will come straight out of technical schools, straight out of pilot training."

Part-time National Guard and Reserve forces provide nearly half of the U.S. force in Iraq and most of the U.S. peacekeeping contingent in Kosovo.

While most senior active duty pilots and crew chiefs are moved frequently and usually are promoted to deskbound, managerial jobs, the Guardsmen are able to live in the community and forge longtime bonds with a particular unit.

Tech Sgt. Tony Heidenreich, 43, said he knows active duty crews that come to work at McEntire will be loath to leave "because we treat people well. They know it's a partnership."

"The one downside to all of this is that everyone who comes here to train will be sad to leave. And I guarantee it, some of them will leave active duty and come back to the Guard," he said.

Col. Mike Hudson, a squadron commander with a 2,000-hour flight patch, agreed. "We fish together. We hunt together. I know when I walk out on the flight line and Tony has handled my plane, I know it's good to go if he says so," he said.

"We are a part of the community. We know one another," he said.

Of the unit's three dozen Guard pilots, their average age is 39. Nine are graduates of the Air Force's fighter weapons school. The average McEntire Guard pilot has 2,269 hours in a jet fighter, 1,838 hours in an F-16 and 207 hours in combat, Brig. Gen. Patrick said.

National Guard Is Ready to Help Preparations Under Way

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Sun Herald

8 July 2005

By Michael Newsom

National Guard soldiers are keeping an eye on Dennis, and could be deployed to South Mississippi before the storm makes landfall, bringing trucks and manpower to help with relief efforts.

In hurricanes, the Guard uses engineering battalions and military police when asked to do so by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. 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 directing traffic.

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

Powell also said the Guard is ready.

"Right now, we are just monitoring the storm trying to get some determination of its path," he said. "If it comes to Mississippi, we will establish a military presence along the Gulf Coast."

The National Guard had about 1,200 troops on the Gulf Coast for Hurricane Georges, Powell said.

Powell said the soldiers would be set up at the National Guard's Combat Readiness Training Center in Gulfport if they are summoned by MEMA.

Gov. Barbour, in the event of a hurricane or strong storm, would declare a state of emergency, and then authorize MEMA to use National Guard troops to help with relief efforts.

Lee Stokes, spokeswoman for MEMA, said preparations are already being made in South Mississippi.

"We are working with the Guard now to prepare some things at Camp Shelby," Stokes

said Thursday morning.

Most states' emergency management agencies have the ability to summon troops from other states, Stokes said. The troops could be here in a matter of hours in a disaster. The agreement that allows for this, the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, is recognized by emergency management agencies in all but a few states.

Stokes said MEMA has already been in contact with EMAC, as they prepare for Dennis.

"We're already talking with EMAC in their corporate office in New York. They are saying we will have all the things we might need," Stokes said.

Stokes also said that some MEMA resources and equipment could be sent to neighboring states under EMAC if Dennis slaps high wind and rain against their shores and causes damage.

She said the MEMA mobile operations bus has been sent to other states in previous hurricanes.

DEPLOYMENT

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D.M. Air Guard Unit Sends 400 to Persian Gulf; for the Most Part, Members of the 132nd Fighter Wing Will Be Supporting Ground Troops in Iraq

Des Moines Register

1 July 2005

REGISTER STAFF WRITER

About 400 members of an Iowa Air National Guard unit from Des Moines are being deployed to the Persian Gulf region to fly F-16 warplanes in support of U.S. troops on the ground in Iraq.

The airmen serve with the 132nd Fighter Wing, based at the Des Moines airport. About 350 members of the unit are being assigned to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, while about 50 airmen will serve in Iraq or other countries where they are needed, said Col. Gregory Schwab, the wing's commanding officer.

The primary assignment of the 132nd Fighter Wing in Qatar will be to help U.S. ground forces in Iraq, but the unit could also launch aircraft in support of American combat troops in Afghanistan if necessary, Schwab said.

Qatar is on a peninsula in the Persian Gulf, bordering Saudi Arabia.

Most of the Iowa airmen left Des Moines on Wednesday night and were scheduled to arrive in Qatar on Thursday. They were preceded by a smaller advance party that left Iowa last week, Schwab said.

"They are ready to show their stuff," said Lt. Col. Dyann Edwards, the wing's executive officer. She said the 132nd Fighter Wing received an excellent rating last October in an inspection of the unit's operational readiness.

Unlike Army National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers - who typically are mobilized for about 15 months of active duty - the Air National Guard members will have a much shorter tour overseas.

The Iowa airmen, all volunteers, will serve one to four months in the Gulf, said Lt. Col. Gregory Hapgood, the Iowa National Guard's public affairs officer. Most will come home after about 45 days overseas, officials said.

The Iowa unit is part of a 120-day rotation of Air National Guard units in the Gulf region that also includes fighter wings from Toledo, Ohio, and Tulsa, Okla.

Pilots from the 132nd Fighter Wing already have experience flying over Iraq. Between 1996 and 2002, the unit was deployed six times to Turkey and Kuwait to patrol "no-fly" zones over Iraq, Hapgood said. The zones were set up after the 1991 Persian Gulf War to protect Kurds in the north and Shiite Muslims in the south from the Baghdad government.

The Iowa Guard's F-16 aircraft are armed with radar-guided missiles, heat-seeking missiles and laser-guided bombs. The detachment includes pilots, mechanics, and specialists in aviation electronics, weapons and other technical areas.

"The threat of being shot down is pretty minimal" over Iraq, Schwab said. The biggest concern of the Iowa-based pilots will be accurately using their weapons in support of U.S. ground forces battling insurgents, he said.

"They are trying to make sure that they put a bomb in the middle of the bad guys and don't hit the good guys," Schwab said. That can be a challenge because of difficult circumstances that can occur during the fog of war, he said.

BENEFITS

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General Services Administration to Sign "5-Star" Statement of Support for the National Guard and Reserve in Washington, DC

New Age Media Concepts

June 27, 2005

ARLINGTON, VA, (NAMC) - Mr. Bob Hollingsworth, Executive Director of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), an agency of the Department of Defense, announced that Mr. Stephen A. Perry, Administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) will sign a "5-Star" Statement of Support for the National Guard and Reserve at 10:00 AM on Wednesday, June 29, 2005 at the

GSA Central Office Administration Building, 1800 F Street, N.W., in Washington, DC.

The “5-Star” Statement of Support confirms that GSA:

Signed a Statement of Support publicly demonstrating its support for its employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

As a federal employer, promises to safeguard job positions, support continuation of medical and dental benefits for family members, grant leaves of absence for military service without penalty of lost vacation time to those employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve, to the extent allowed under applicable laws.

Ensures men and women who serve in the Guard and Reserve will not be denied employment with GSA nor will there be limited or reduced job and career opportunities due to service in the Guard or Reserve.

Is an advocate for employee service in the National Guard and Reserve.

“Today, supportive employers are critical to maintaining the strength and readiness of the nation’s National Guard and Reserve units. I am asking all of America’s employers to review and amend their current human resources policies to ensure compliance with the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act Law (USERRA), said Hollingsworth. “This is a significant event not only for the GSA, but for all Federal Civil Service Employees”, added Hollingsworth. “The Federal Government is one of the largest employers of National Guardsmen and Reservists in the country.”

By meeting the ‘5-Star’ Statement of Support criteria, the management of GSA stands proudly with their Guard and Reserve employees, who like the Minute Men before them, continue to answer their nation’s call to defend our way of life. Their personal sacrifices are essential to the strength of our nation.

“We are indebted to those GSA associates serving in the National Guard and Reserve. When they are called to active military service, they need to know that while they are protecting our country, their families’ health benefits are continued and their jobs are secure,” said Administrator Perry. “As they protect our way of life, we protect their way of life.”

GSA is a centralized federal procurement, property management and policy agency created by Congress to improve government efficiency and help federal agencies better serve the public. It acquires, on behalf of federal agencies, office space, equipment, telecommunications, information technology, supplies and services. It also plays a key role in developing and implementing government wide policies.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a Department of Defense agency established in 1972. The mission of ESGR is to gain and maintain active support from all public and private employers for the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve. ESGR volunteers provide free education, consultation, and if necessary mediation for employers of Guard and Reserve employees.

GSA is a centralized federal procurement, property management and policy agency created by Congress to improve government efficiency and help federal agencies better serve the public. It acquires, on behalf of federal agencies, office space, equipment, telecommunications, information technology, supplies and services. It also plays a key

role in developing and implementing government wide policies.

As the 1.2 million members of the National Guard and Reserve continue to perform an increasing number of unique missions that require extraordinary actions on the part of everyday citizens, ESGR will continue to be the informational agency for the employers of America's Patriots.

15 New State Laws Will Aid Military Veterans

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The Daily Herald

7 July 2005

By Jerry Cornfield

OLYMPIA - The state will crank up its support for veterans this month with a batch of new laws that boost benefits for soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and increase aid to those who fought in previous military conflicts.

Much of the legislation expands existing programs such as tuition credits for college, tax exemptions for housing, health care for war injuries and cash vouchers for indigent veterans.

One law creates a conservation corps for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, and another makes specially designed license plates available for sale, with proceeds channeled back into veterans programs.

In all, 15 laws will take effect starting July 24.

"That is unprecedented," said John Lee, director of the state Department of Veteran Affairs. "With a country at war, there is a sincere and earnest desire that we are paying attention to those veterans currently serving."

State Rep. Barbara Bailey, R-Oak Harbor, who serves on the Joint Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, said lawmakers felt a responsibility to those who serve in the military.

Among the new laws is one that will provide property tax relief to widows and widowers of veterans who die as a result of service-connected injuries.

Fran Agnor of Everett, a survivor of the Bataan Death March in World War II, proposed the idea more than a decade ago. Though he has since died, the Veterans Legislative Coalition made it a top priority this year. Gov. Christine Gregoire vowed to sign the bill if passed, and it did.

A related bill broadens income-based property tax exemptions for veterans with 100 percent service-connected injuries. "We continue to look at our property tax issue to be sure people are not taxed out of their homes," Bailey said.

Snohomish County's director of human services, Janelle Sgrignoli, said the new laws will help her agency better serve veterans of conflicts dating back to WWII.

"The laws were all needed," said Sgrignoli, whose department runs an assistance program for veterans.

The county has 64,000 veterans, and last year 8,000 of them contacted the program for direct services, financial aid or referral to other programs. Of those, 800 honorably discharged veterans in financial straits received cash to cope with emergencies such as buying food and gas, paying rent and utility bills, and helping with burial costs.

Sgrignoli said the county will spend \$477,000 on the program this year. The money comes from a state-allowed property tax assessment of 1 1/8 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

One of the new laws, established by House Bill 1189, requires every county to offer this type of program.

The conservation corps established by Senate Bill 5539 is only for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or a related mental health ailment linked to their military service. Those who join could work on habitat restoration, salmon recovery and similar projects.

House Bill 1065 specified that license plates be designed for each branch of the military services and the **National Guard**.

GUARD IN IRAQ

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Military Chaplains Bring Counsel and Comfort to Battlefield

Knight Ridder News Service

July 7, 2005

By Mark Washburn

CAMP ANACONDA, Iraq - (KRT) - When the Red Cross messages arrive at the command center, they usually contain the worst: a death, illness or injury in a soldier's family back home. Within minutes, day or night, the message is delivered to Lt. Col. Gus Thomas, Army chaplain.

In civilian life, Thomas is senior pastor of Mineral Springs Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., a role that rarely requires him to break such news. But for military chaplains, this goes with the territory, one of the many unusual challenges of the job.

On call 24 hours. Making death notifications. Ministering to varied religions. And they must deal with long-distance problems among their parishioners, 6,000 miles from home.

"I try to find a quiet, neutral place and I sit down and tell them, `Look, your wife has been in a traffic accident and she's fine, the kids are fine, but you need to get home.'"

Recently, he was awakened and told that an infant son of a soldier in his unit had died of

spina bifida, a birth defect. Hard news, made worse by the long separation, a frustration Thomas knows well.

"If you were home, you could deal with it on the spot," says Thomas, chaplain for the Charlotte, N.C.-based 30th Engineer Brigade of the **N.C. Army National Guard**.

But the military expedites home leave in such cases. "I delivered that message to him at 4:30 a.m., and he was on a plane home at 9 a.m.," Thomas says.

Camp Anaconda is a massive garrison, baking in the harsh desert 60 miles north of Baghdad. About 23,000 military men and women live and work here.

Its diversity reflects the religious tapestry of the American population. There are about 25 chaplains on the base from the Army and Air Force, selected in part for their faiths - Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and beyond.

A chaplain from the **Hawaii National Guard** conducts weekly services in Samoan. A flight surgeon serves as an imam, ministering to Muslim soldiers. Services range from orthodox formality to hand-clapping gospel.

Chaplains face the same issues as those from any congregation - routine family and spiritual matters - and those specific to war. Thomas regularly meets with soldiers heading out the gate on convoys, where they are most susceptible to attack.

"We have scripture and prayer. Sometimes they go to dangerous places and they know God will be with them." Sometimes Thomas rides along.

Thomas counsels soldiers who have faced the deaths of comrades and offers a course in combat and stress, focusing on mortality. He's also planning a course to be called "Marriage Retreat - Minus One Spouse."

Marital problems and family issues are compounded by the distance and inability of soldiers to deal directly with problems as they arise. Sometimes, Thomas says, all he can do is advise them to wait until they're in a position to deal with it personally.

"A lot of times, it's just problem-solving - what they can do to solve it," he says. "A lot of times it involves putting things on hold until they can get home and work it out."

Soldiers returning home get counseling on reintegration into the home, suicide awareness, anger in their children over their absence, and general stress.

"Our greatest fear is: The soldier serves honorably, and the first weekend he's back home, he's dead in a car accident, drunk," says Lt. Col. Tom Evans, of the 18th Military Police Brigade. Evans is a chaplain at Camp Victory, Baghdad.

Reintegration became a prime issue in the summer of 2002, after five slayings at Fort Bragg military base in North Carolina involving recently deployed soldiers. The Army concluded the couples had long-standing problems that led to violence, but programs were begun to address family issues.

The Army offers couples counseling and marriage retreats now to strengthen family bonds.

Chaplains are circuit riders. Evans recently traveled 300 miles to Camp Bucca in southern Iraq just to fill in on a Sunday for the chaplain on leave.

Catholic priests do a lot of traveling to conduct Mass because they are always in short supply.

"We have about 100 and could use 300," says Nella Hobson, managing editor of The Army Chaplaincy magazine at the Army chaplain school at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C.

In all, about 100 faith groups and denominations are represented in the Army, and religious pluralism is part of the training. If a chaplain can't minister to a soldier because of a difference of religion, that chaplain finds one who can. "They have a motto of 'perform or provide,'" says Hobson.

"Chaplains go where the soldiers are," says Thomas, who conducts a weekly service at a base office building for soldiers working Sunday mornings.

"It's a ministry of presence. We'll go do it on a hill. If there are three people there, we'd do a service.

"In the Army, we have a policy: Any day is Sunday."

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

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Kentucky Group Aims to Soften the Blow of Deployment in Iraq

By Jim Warren

LEXINGTON, Ky. _ Terry Muir got a phone call last week from a woman who was frantic after several days without word from a family member serving in Iraq. She feared something terrible had happened.

Muir, a volunteer family readiness leader with the **Kentucky National Guard's** 2113th Transportation Co., did some checking, then told the woman to relax because all was well.

"One of the things we do is try to squelch rumors and calm everybody down," Muir said. "But when I got the call I was sick with worry at first that something might have happened because our unit already has lost one soldier."

Sgt. James Sherrill, 27, of Meade County, died April 3 while serving in Iraq with the 2113th. Muir also had a personal reason to worry: Her son, Sgt. John Muir, is in Iraq with the 2113th.

Seven Kentucky National Guard members have lost their lives in Iraq, five since mid-March. The most recent, Spec. Ryan J. Montgomery, 22, of Greensburg, was killed July 3 when his vehicle struck a homemade bomb while returning from a convoy mission near Baghdad. Two other Guard members in the same vehicle were injured. Montgomery was

a member of Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 623rd Field Artillery, out of Campbellsville.

Authorities say 25 members of the regular armed forces with Kentucky hometowns of record also have been killed in Iraq, plus more than 60 from Fort Campbell on the Kentucky-Tennessee border.

No one feels that risk more than those who must wait and worry at home while the soldiers toil in harm's way.

Sarah Boothe of Owenton slept on the couch while her husband, Sgt. Michael Boothe, was in Iraq with the Kentucky National Guard. Sarah Boothe also is a Guard member and understands a soldier's life, but that didn't calm her fears.

"I just couldn't bring myself to sleep in the bedroom while Mike was away," she said. "Our oldest daughter said she sometimes wished he could get hurt just a little bit I not bad enough to really hurt him, but enough to bring him home."

Now, Michael Boothe is home on a two-week emergency leave, granted because the couple's youngest child is seriously ill and might need a liver transplant. There is a chance he won't have to go back to Iraq. But Sarah Boothe said that could mean that she might be called up and sent to Iraq, essentially filling in for her husband. It's a prospect they don't like to think about.

"Since these recent fatalities, I think it has made everybody kind of open their eyes and realize how dangerous it really is," she said.

Lawrenceburg's Mechelle Boatman, another National Guard volunteer family readiness leader, said many soldiers and their families probably didn't realize the extent of the danger in Iraq until the surge in fatalities this spring. Her husband, Sgt. Robert Boatman, serves in Iraq.

"Of course, we knew it was a bad situation," Boatman said. "But until it hit home we didn't realize the severity of it. I think my husband is there for a good reason and I'm proud of him. But for him to be over there, losing friends and seeing the things he's seeing I it's scary; it's heartbreaking."

The stresses are beginning to show. There are stories nationally of rising divorce rates in the regular service and in guard units. Some families, their incomes sharply reduced while the principal breadwinner is on active duty, struggle with financial problems.

"I think it's because it's gone on so long," Terry Muir said. "This is a different kind of war."

Family members say the Guard's Family Readiness Program is one thing that helps them cope.

Under the program, each guard unit has its own family readiness group, usually made up of soldiers' spouses and other family members. When families are in need, the group reaches out with various kinds of assistance, the idea being that Guard members on deployment can do their jobs better if they know their families are taken care of.

Assistance can take many forms, from helping with shopping to finding a doctor. Terry Muir says her readiness group provided child care advice for a man whose wife, a Guard

member, had been called up, leaving him home alone with five children.

But with Guard fatalities climbing this spring, readiness groups have helped many just by providing reassurance and moral support.

Spouses and other loved ones help each other through rough spots by exchanging calls and e-mails, often late at night.

"If you can't sleep, you message someone," Boothe said. "These people have been my lifeline."

Terry Muir's group, like some others, has started a program for the parents of soldiers, who seem to need the most support. Spouses seem to cope more successfully, as long as they can communicate regularly by cell phone or e-mail.

"We get together with the parents once a month," Muir said. "We look at pictures the soldiers send home, tell stories, kind of lighten each other's spirits."

Families say that community support has grown, even as fatalities have increased. Muir tells of the National Guard wife who recently stopped at a restaurant in Shelbyville and returned to find neighbors had left notes on her car thanking her family for their sacrifices in Iraq.

"I tell my husband I don't know whether to bust my buttons out of pride," Muir said, "or cry out of fear for our son."

HEALTH ISSUES

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House OKs Cash for Veterans; Democrats Get Military Victory

Washington Times

July 1, 2005

By Stephen Dinan, The Washington Times

Democrats celebrated a rare Capitol Hill victory on military affairs yesterday, crowing over having forced House Republicans to rush to pass an emergency spending bill for a \$1 billion shortfall in veterans health care coverage.

"We said a year ago, and five months ago, and two months ago this budget was going to provide a shortfall for funding," said Rep. Chet Edwards, Texas Democrat, who led his party's efforts on the issue.⁹

And House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat, who on Wednesday promised to make the issue "too hot" for Republicans to ignore, said Republicans had to be forced to support veterans.

"Time after time, Democrats have put forward proposals to increase funding for our

veterans," she said. "And time after time, Republicans have voted them down. We have had straight party-line votes."

After first saying the shortfall could be handled by shifting funds, the Bush administration yesterday sent up an emergency spending request for \$975 million. The House passed the bill 419-0 last night, with 227 Republicans, 191 Democrats and one independent making up the unanimous vote.

Asked what changed, Rep. James P. Moran, Virginia Democrat, was blunt: "Politics." He said Republicans simply became scared.

"Members were coming up to their leadership and saying, 'What are you doing to us? We've got July 4 coming up, and we're going to go home and say to the veterans, 'We love you, but sorry' '?" Mr. Moran said.

The funding still faces a fight for final passage. Senators voted unanimously to add \$1.5 billion for veterans health care to another spending bill earlier this week, and yesterday called on the House to pass a bill at that level. House Democrats tried but failed on a procedural vote to match the Senate's level of funding.

The Bush administration defended the new request as the best estimate of what is needed in fiscal year 2005, which runs through September.

Office of Management and Budget director Joshua B. Bolten said initial estimates had been based on a 2.3 percent estimate increase in 2005, while the actual increase appears to be 5.2 percent.

The spending request was a complete switch. On Tuesday, administration officials and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Texas Republican, said the problem could be taken care of by shifting funds and delaying capital projects.

Yesterday, Mr. DeLay said they have since realized that was flawed.

"Looking into it and how to solve the problem, it was obvious to us that just slipping around monies creates a bigger price tag for '06, and we're trying to stay within the budget for '06," he said.

He also said Republicans handled the situation responsibly.

"We've been notified of this issue, a week or so ago, have been looking at it, asking the proper questions, holding the proper hearings and coming up with the proper solutions," he said. "If the Democrats had their way, they'd just run out there and throw \$1.5 billion at it without knowing what they were doing."

Democrats said the legislative coup was the result of years of work.

Mrs. Pelosi has a working group that handles veterans affairs and a staffer dedicated to veterans issues. Democratic staffers said they knew months ago about the shortfall, based on their conversations both with national veterans groups and with veterans at the local level.

That left them poised to capitalize when the Department of Veterans Affairs announced it had discovered the shortfall in its midyear review.

"They worked very closely with us," said Joseph A. Violante, national legislative director

for Disabled American Veterans. "They've seen from the beginning, like we've seen, that the appropriations bill that passed in November 2004 was totally insufficient for VA's purposes.

They've been attuned to information coming out across the country on a local level on shortfalls from VA facilities."

Democrats forced a fight on veterans health care money last year, as well, with the support of Rep. Christopher H. Smith, the New Jersey Republican who was Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman at the time. Mr. Smith subsequently was ousted as chairman.

Veterans voted in 2004 for Mr. Bush over Democratic nominee Sen. John Kerry, a decorated Vietnam combat veteran, 58 percent to 41 percent, according to one exit poll. And earlier this month, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, Minority Whip Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, angered veterans groups by comparing interrogation tactics at U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the Soviet and Nazi regimes.

But Mr. Violante said Republicans probably will end up losing some steam among veterans.

"When these veterans are unable to access health care in a timely fashion, and we're getting back to a point in time where waiting lists are growing for health care, there are huge backlogs in the claims area for benefits, it has to hurt the party in power," he said.

The issue prompted a broader political fight, with Rep. David R. Obey, Wisconsin Democrat, offering what he called a "truth serum" amendment to a spending bill yesterday that would have linked funding for administration officials to whether they were truthful to Congress.

"The administration was lying through its teeth on what the needs were on the VA," Mr. Obey said. He said the same thing happened when the administration withheld its estimates of the Medicare prescription-drug bill's costs.

But Mr. DeLay said the amendment was all about politics.

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America Supports You: Returning Troops Get Gift of Golf

American Forces Press Service

8 July 2005

By Terri Lukach

WASHINGTON, July 7, 2005 – Soldiers serving in the sands of Iraq but dreaming of fairways on a golf course back home may soon get their wish, thanks to a new program

called "The Long Drive Home."

The project is a joint venture by Bridgestone Golf and the American Legion, who have teamed up to provide free golf equipment for returning veterans of the war on terror.

Just how much equipment is donated will be determined by how well Bridgestone Tour Team member Scott Hend hammers his tee shots. Hend is the driving-distance leader of the current PGA Tour.

For every yard over 300 that Hend averages per week on the PGA Tour, Bridgestone will provide one full set of golf equipment -- drivers, fairway woods, irons, wedges, etc. -- for some lucky vet, the company said. In addition, Bridgestone will donate one dozen golf balls for every yard Hend averages over his nearest PGA Tour competitor per week.

Hend, a native Australian, said the idea to use golf to do something positive for the troops stemmed from his experience with the military as a child. "My dad was in the (Royal Australian) air force for 23 years. I started playing nine-hole on a military base in Australia.

"Dad said he always enjoyed being out with the (American) boys," Hend said of his father's participation in joint U.S.-Australian exercises in the Philippines. "And when I used to live in the middle of the Outback and U.S. forces would come over for their exercises, I would see American planes flying around. It was awesome.

"Obviously, the longer I hit, the straighter I hit, the better it is for everybody," Hend added. "And we can bring a bit of joy to people who have been sacrificing months, and in some cases years, of their lives to go out and do their job."

The Long Drive Home program commenced with the Booz Allen Classic golf tournament on June 6 in Potomac, Md., and will run through Oct. 21, the end of the 2005 official PGA Tour season.

At the Barclays Classic tournament, which ran from June 20 to 26 at the Westchester Country Club in Harrison, N.Y., Hend's average driving distance was 304.3 yards -- 4.3 yards over the 300-yard mark. For that 4.3 yards, Bridgestone donated \$2,000 worth of equipment to returning troops.

At the Cialis Western Open in Lemont, Ill., Hend again averaged 304 yards, racking up another \$2,000 worth of equipment for the troops.

Hend will not participate in the current tournament, the John Deer Classic, today through July 10, in Silvis, Ill., but is on his way to the famous St. Andrews links in Scotland to gear up for the British Open July 14-17.

"We're expecting to see some big numbers over there," Bridgestone spokesman Jared Kelowitz said. "We've already given away \$4,000 worth of products, and I think it's going to increase."

Following the British Open, Hend is scheduled to play in the U.S. Bank Championship, in Milwaukee July 18-24; the Buick Open, July 25-31 in Grand Blanc, Mi., and the International, Aug. 1-7 in Castle Rock, Co.

Herd said the fact that he's playing on behalf of the troops doesn't place any undue stress on his game. "I'm just doing my job. Fortunately, I do it easily, and other people can

benefit from it. I don't really think about hitting the ball," he said. "If, on occasion, I get lucky enough to hit it even farther, then even more people are going to benefit from it -- and that's the best part."

In a personal message to U.S. troops, Hend said he wants them "to keep their heads up, keep safe, get back in one piece, and that we appreciate the job they are doing.

"Just because they are on the other side of the world doesn't mean that we forget what they're doing," he added.

All of the donated Bridgestone equipment will be shipped first to the American Legion's national headquarters then distributed via local posts to predetermined returning troops.

In announcing the program, Bridgestone marketing director Dan Murphy said, "We are very pleased about the opportunity to show our appreciation for the men and women who so valiantly serve the United States abroad.

"We realize that while overseas, golf may be the farthest thing from soldiers' minds, but upon their return we think they'll yearn for life's pleasures so many of us take for granted on a daily basis, such as playing golf."

Murphy praised the American Legion for their part in making the project possible.

"Without them helping with much of the logistics of this program, it would have been difficult to bring The Long Drive Home to fruition."

"We are delighted to work with Bridgestone Golf in recognizing these outstanding men and women of our armed forces who have served in harm's way on our behalf," American Legion National Commander Thomas P. Cadmus said. "We are proud to facilitate the presentation of these welcome home gifts to America's newest veterans."

Riders Raise Money for National Guard Families

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Channel 3

July 11, 2005

ST. ALBANS, Vt. About 90 motorcycle riders roared through Franklin County to help raised money for the families of Vermont National Guard members on active duty.

The riders participated yesterday in a 90-mile "poker run," a leisurely countryside tour combined with a card game.

The run required riders pay five dollars for a five card poker hand. They had to then visit four locations across northwestern Vermont where their cards were punched.

The best hand won half the pot. The other half went to the Guard's family assistance program.

More than 12-hundred Army Guard members are on duty in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. The event raised 295 dollars for the Guard.

New Mexico Native Responsible for Getting Supplies and Food to Troops in Iraq

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

July 11, 2005

By Ollie Reed Jr., The Albuquerque Tribune

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- When John Alvarado, not long out of Las Vegas Robertson High School in northern New Mexico, joined the Army in the early 70s, he was just looking for something to do.

He found that - and then some.

Three decades later, Alvarado, now 51 and a colonel in the Army Reserve, has plenty to keep him busy - like supplying America's troops in all of southwest Asia, including combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Alvarado is the man responsible for getting 1.5 million liters of bottled water per day and 1.1 million gallons of fuel per day to troops in Iraq, not to mention body armor, ammunition and food.

"Twenty-five percent of our ground transportation is dedicated to getting bottled water to the troops," Alvarado said. "About 60 percent of our ground transportation is devoted to moving fuel."

He said 606 million prepared meals have been shipped to Iraq since the war started.

"That could feed the entire U.S. population for nearly a day."

Alvarado is now the chief logistics operations officer for the largest military movement of supplies and troops in history. That's the history of the world, not just America.

"It's a great source of satisfaction and pride," Alvarado said during a phone interview from Central Command headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla., where he is stationed.

But with satisfaction and pride come challenge and frustration.

"The biggest frustration right now is providing security for the convoys and drivers transporting supplies to the units throughout Iraq," he said.

"We are working to reduce the number of resupply convoys on the roads by flying as much as we can to the units in Iraq. This reduces the exposure of combat service support troops to explosive devices and ambushes."

Alvarado himself has served two rotations in Iraq. His duties there did not put him in combat situations, but he has talked to troops who are fighting and is impressed by their spirit.

"Morale has not been an issue," he said. "Our people have purpose and are dedicated to doing what they are doing out there."

Alvarado grew up in Las Vegas, N.M., the son of John and Nora Alvarado.

His father, a Navy veteran, served on the battleship USS Mississippi in the Pacific during World War II. Both his mother and father are retired after more than 30 years as teachers in the West Las Vegas School District.

As a youngster, Alvarado dreamed of getting a college education and traveling.

"I think that I always wanted a career in the military from a very young age," he said.

But after that first hitch in the Army, Alvarado returned to civilian life to get his college education. He earned his undergraduate degree in Spanish literature and physical education from New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas in 1977 and his master's in secondary school administration and bilingual education from Highlands in 1980.

For a time, it looked as if he were destined to follow in his parents' footsteps as a teacher. He taught in the Chama Valley schools for eight years and in the Las Vegas city schools for three.

But the lure of the military life never really faded.

After his stint in the Army, Alvarado had joined the **New Mexico National Guard**. He went full-time with the Guard in 1986 and moved to Rio Rancho in 2000. In July 2001, just months before the terrorist attacks on the United States, Alvarado transferred from the Guard to the Army Reserves.

"I thought it would give me better opportunity for promotion," he said.

He got that right. He was mobilized in support of the war in Iraq in April 2004 and now has all the responsibility anyone could want.

Just keeping the troops moving in Iraq is a daunting task.

"We have consumed 1.74 billion gallons of fuel since the war started," Alvarado said. "That's mostly ground fuel for trucks."

Alvarado's job is not just geared to the support of U.S. efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, however. He is responsible for supplying troops in 27 countries, including Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti, a country in East Africa.

"It's an 18-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week job," he said.

He does look forward to a time when he can be closer to his children - a married son who lives in Rio Rancho, a daughter who is graduating from Denver University in June and has been accepted into graduate school at Harvard, a daughter who is a freshman at Denver University and a son who will be a high school senior in Espanola next year.

"It's time to see my family more often," he said. "And I definitely miss New Mexico. There is nothing like its blue skies and mountains."

Troops' Families Supported During the Long, Tense Wait; Kentucky National Guard Program Helps in Many Ways

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Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader

July 11, 2005

By Jim Warren, Herald-Leader Staff Writer

Terry Muir got a phone call last week from a woman who was frantic after several days without word from a family member serving in Iraq. She feared something terrible had happened.

Muir, a volunteer family readiness leader with the **Kentucky National Guard's** 2113th Transportation Co., did some checking, then told the woman to relax because all was well.

"One of the things we do is try to squelch rumors and calm everybody down," Muir said. "But when I got the call I was sick with worry at first that something might have happened ... because our unit already has lost one soldier."

Sgt. James Sherrill, 27, of Meade County, died April 3 while serving in Iraq with the 2113th. Muir also had a personal reason to worry: Her son, Sgt. John Muir, is in Iraq with the 2113th.

Seven Kentucky National Guard members have lost their lives in Iraq, five since mid-March. The most recent, Spec. Ryan J. Montgomery, 22, of Greensburg, was killed July 3 when his vehicle struck a homemade bomb while returning from a convoy mission near Baghdad. Two other Guard members in the same vehicle were injured. Montgomery was a member of Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 623rd Field Artillery, out of Campbellsville.

Authorities say 25 members of the regular armed forces with Kentucky hometowns of record also have been killed in Iraq, plus more than 60 from Fort Campbell on the Kentucky-Tennessee border.

The Kentucky National Guard has 1,380 soldiers in Iraq and will probably send 200 to 300 more, according to Maj. Gen. Donald Storm, Kentucky's adjutant general.

"Our risk is greater now than at any previous time," Storm told the Associated Press last week.

No one feels that risk more than those who must wait and worry at home while the soldiers toil in harm's way.

Sarah Boothe of Owenton slept on the couch while her husband, Sgt. Michael Boothe, was in Iraq with the Kentucky National Guard. Sarah Boothe also is a Guard member and understands a soldier's life, but that didn't calm her fears.

"I just couldn't bring myself to sleep in the bedroom while Mike was away," she said. "Our oldest daughter said she sometimes wished he could get hurt just a little bit ... not bad enough to really hurt him, but enough to bring him home."

Now, Michael Boothe is home on a two-week emergency leave, granted because the couple's youngest child is seriously ill and might need a liver transplant. There is a

chance he won't have to go back to Iraq. But Sarah Boothe said that could mean that she might be called up and sent to Iraq, essentially filling in for her husband. It's a prospect they don't like to think about.

"Since these recent fatalities, I think it has made everybody kind of open their eyes and realize how dangerous it really is," she said.

Lawrenceburg's Mechelle Boatman, another National Guard volunteer family readiness leader, said many soldiers and their families probably didn't realize the extent of the danger in Iraq until the surge in fatalities this spring. Her husband, Sgt. Robert Boatman, serves in Iraq.

"Of course, we knew it was a bad situation," Boatman said. "But until it hit home we didn't realize the severity of it. I think my husband is there for a good reason and I'm proud of him. But for him to be over there, losing friends and seeing the things he's seeing ... it's scary; it's heartbreaking."

The stresses are beginning to show. There are stories nationally of rising divorce rates in the regular service and in guard units. Some families, their incomes sharply reduced while the principal breadwinner is on active duty, struggle with financial problems.

"I think it's because it's gone on so long," Terry Muir said. "This is a different kind of war."

Family members say the Guard's Family Readiness Program is one thing that helps them cope.

Under the program, each guard unit has its own family readiness group, usually made up of soldiers' spouses and other family members. When families are in need, the group reaches out with various kinds of assistance, the idea being that Guard members on deployment can do their jobs better if they know their families are taken care of.

Assistance can take many forms, from helping with shopping to finding a doctor. Terry Muir says her readiness group provided child care advice for a man whose wife, a Guard member, had been called up, leaving him home alone with five children.

But with Guard fatalities climbing this spring, readiness groups have helped many just by providing reassurance and moral support.

Spouses and other loved ones help each other through rough spots by exchanging calls and e-mails, often late at night.

"If you can't sleep, you message someone," Boothe said. "These people have been my lifeline."

Terry Muir's group, like some others, has started a program for the parents of soldiers, who seem to need the most support. Spouses seem to cope more successfully, as long as they can communicate regularly by cell phone or e-mail.

"We get together with the parents once a month," Muir said. "We look at pictures the soldiers send home, tell stories, kind of lighten each other's spirits."

Families say that community support has grown, even as fatalities have increased. Muir tells of the National Guard wife who recently stopped at a restaurant in Shelbyville and

returned to find neighbors had left notes on her car thanking her family for their sacrifices in Iraq.

"I tell my husband I don't know whether to bust my buttons out of pride," Muir said, "or cry out of fear for our son."

Hot Line Gives Returning National Guard Veterans Legal Advice

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Associated Press

July 3, 2005

By Michael Gormley

ALBANY, N.Y. -- Brian Gillis rejoined the National Guard after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and in December completed 15 months of active duty for the National Guard, almost a year of it 35 miles north of Baghdad. But when he returned to his upstate home in December, he faced another battle, this one involving laws and bureaucracy over \$8,000 in owed military service pay from his employer.

"I knew I had it coming. It just really irritated me," said Gillis, 44, of Greenwich. "They told me I wouldn't receive the pay and benefits I thought I was owed," said the mechanic with 2nd Battalion of the 108th Infantry of the **New York National Guard**.

To collect his pay guaranteed under the state Patriot Act and Civil Service Law, the Washington County corrections officer sought help from a county supervisor and the county veterans' office. He said that despite support from his sheriff, both officials told him that he was owed nothing beyond the job the county kept open for him.

Then Gillis contacted state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, whose team of military law attorneys consulted with the county. The result is payment to Gillis and the recomputing of all military leave owed to other employees of the rural county government in northeastern New York.

He said he kept thinking untold other veterans must be facing the same bureaucratic roadblock, and they might not know the law as well, or where to turn for help.

Spitzer on Monday is opening a toll-free hot line to answer similar legal questions from citizen soldiers regarding military leave, re-employment, compensation and benefits. The number (800-996-4630) will also be used to field any reports of veterans losing their jobs or penalized for their military service.

Spitzer spokesman Marc Violette said the office received other calls from veterans, "enough to indicate there may be more cases like this that we simply haven't heard about."

Veterans groups welcomed the hot line.

"Reservists called to active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan are putting their lives on the line to protect our nation's interests," Spitzer said. "We must do all we can to ensure that these

citizen soldiers receive the benefits to which they are entitled under state law."

He said military and state law can be complex for employers and how they intersect can be an even thornier issue. But he said his staff trained in military law will help resolve conflicts. He credited Washington County for its cooperation, and Republican Assemblyman Roy McDonald, a decorated Vietnam veteran from nearby Saratoga County, for referring Gills' case.

Gillis was compensated by a state law that requires public employees on military leave to be paid their salaries for up to 30 days.

"One day they are in the desert fighting and the next they are back home trying to get back to their job," said Gary Flaherty of the New York State Non-Commissioned Officers Association. "Offering this hot line to help resolve job-related problems is a superb idea."

Gillis isn't scheduled to return to war, but he could in a few years because he just re-enlisted for another six years.

"A veteran shouldn't have to go look for that when they come back," Gillis said.

"Everyone should do it. I think there's probably a lot who just don't know what they are entitled to when they come back."

End

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