



## NEWS YOU CAN USE

Weekly News for National Guard Families

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Missouri Guard Unit Holds Appreciation Day

America Supports You: Sears Earns Defense Freedom Award

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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](mailto:Michelle.Bohlen@ngb.af.mil).**

## Fighter Squadron Scours Washington's Busy Skies

Los Angeles Times

August 8, 2005

By Stephen Braun

WASHINGTON — The sound is jarring and unmistakable, an electronic trill that pilots of the 121st Fighter Squadron recognize in a quickened heartbeat. Nearly every day, the warbling alarm reverberates through bunks and hangars in a remote corner of Andrews Air Force Base, signaling trouble in the sky above the nation's capital.

In seconds, the airstrip tenses with choreographed vigilance. Inside a trailer at the runway's edge, pilots wrestle into their flight suits. Mechanics dash into the hangars to inspect the fully armed F-16 fighters before firing up their deafening engines. Ready within minutes, the pilots are out on the runway while the jets whine, waiting for final takeoff orders.

"When that 'tweedle' goes off, everything stops," said Lt. Col. Bob Montgomery, mission commander for the Capitol Guardians, a team of Air **National Guard** pilots deployed to respond to air alerts over Washington. "The first time you hear it, it sounds kind of funny, like a high-pitched bird call. But from then on, it's automatic: just drop and run."

With the daily crush of commercial jets, military aircraft and small planes filling the region's air corridors, the 121st is placed on alert more often and intercepts more approaching aircraft than any other air defense unit in the nation. From Sept. 12, 2001, through the end of 2004, flight path incidents around Washington accounted for 43% of the 3,400 airspace violations recorded across the U.S., the Government Accountability Office reported last month.

When their luck holds, the chaos is resolved within minutes and the 121st's pilots stand down. But at least three times in recent months, they have raced skyward into nerve-racking confrontations with civilian planes that blundered near prohibited airspace over the White House and Capitol grounds. There have been other incidents that have not been disclosed. "We have more intercepts than the public realizes," Montgomery said.

In May, two pilots from the 121st fired four warning flares near an errant Cessna from Pennsylvania that had come within three miles of the White House before veering away for a forced landing.

In June, Montgomery and Lt. Col. Mike Synoracki — another F-16 pilot from the 121st — intercepted a Cessna that had strayed into the 16-mile-wide restricted zone around Washington. In the tense minutes before the pilots escorted the small plane to a Virginia airfield, the White House went on red alert, evacuating President Bush and his staff and ordering a mass exodus of the Capitol.

Three days later, the squadron's pilots headed off another intruding plane.

"We only hear about the evacuations when we get back down," Synoracki said. "That's when we realize how freaked out people are on the ground."

Ever since terrorists caught the capital's air security off guard nearly four years ago, the pilots of the 121st have been preparing themselves for the day they receive a Defense Department order to use their firepower against civilian aircraft. But they also have found themselves thrust into the unlikely role of air traffic enforcers.

"It's not supposed to be the Wild West up there," Montgomery said, "but we've had more than our share of tough days."

Unnerved by the repeated Capitol evacuations, House lawmakers recently proposed legislation aimed at reducing incidents by increasing fines on errant pilots. If the bill passes, violators who breach the restricted zone around Washington could be fined up to \$100,000; pilots straying into a 50-mile-wide area could be fined \$5,000.

But the financial threat is unlikely to have much effect on the daily congestion as passenger jets and business shuttles descend on Washington's airports and military aircraft sweep over the region on drills and surveillance rounds.

The GAO study found that 88% of the "no-fly" zone violations logged by the Federal Aviation Administration involved business jets and small civilian aircraft.

"A lot of these incidents occur because the pilots don't realize they're heading into restricted airspace," said Davi M. D'Agostino, the GAO official who led the study. "The boundaries of the zones are complex, and it's difficult to know whether you're in violation or not."

So difficult, in fact, that even military pilots have veered into airspace reserved by the FAA for commercial flights. At least 7% of restricted zone incidents have been traced to military pilots, D'Agostino said. The 121st's own F-16s have veered into civilian lanes on occasion, setting off brief alarms and scrambling fellow pilots.

But errant civilian planes remain the most vexing problem. They come out in force on sunny days, when visibility is high, luring joy riders and student pilots from hundreds of miles away.

"We only catch a break when it rains," Montgomery said.

The breaks rarely last long. On a typical day, the alarm sounds at least once or twice, Montgomery said. Several times over the last four years, the 121st's pilots have had to scramble as often as six times in a 24-hour period.

"We're like Pavlov's dogs when the bell rings," Lt. Col. Gary Akins said. "Your heart jumps and you're out the door."

One morning last month, just hours after terrorists had bombed London's transit system, Akins and Lt. Col. Timothy Lehmann began their 24-hour shift, standard for the squadron. On the runway, flight crews tested the engine of Akins' F-16, throttling it from a shuddering roar to an ear-splitting howl. Facing a long night of flight drills, Akins and Lehmann retreated to the mustard-colored trailer that houses pilots when they are on duty.

The trailer is the 121st's version of a bachelor pad, with a big-screen television, stereo

system and sunken leather lounge chairs.

But it also is wired to alert the two pilots on duty inside, equipped with the same insistent alarms that echo around the base. Five large strobe lights are affixed to the living room wall, set to flash during an alert. Each bulb is a different color, representing a rising threat level: from transparent, the unit's all-clear notification, to white, yellow, green and finally red — the "go" signal for an airborne interception.

Air Force guidelines require the F-16 pilots to be in the air within 15 minutes after an alert sounds. The pilots say they routinely shave minutes off that mark, although their actual times are classified.

"Sometimes when the horn goes off at night, I'm already in my boots before the wall lights start flashing," Lehmann said.

Two portable phones by the trailer door connect with air defense officials. Once the alert sounds, the pilots are in constant contact with air traffic controllers at the Northeast Air Defense Sector in Rome, N.Y. They also coordinate with North American Aerospace Defense Command headquarters at Cheyenne Mountain, Colo., and with FAA controllers stationed at the defense posts. They all can instantly tap in with other air and security officials through a nationwide "phone bridge" set up after Sept. 11.

The FAA's controllers advise Defense officials about any looming intrusions into the Washington region's flight restriction zone, but NORAD officials have final authority to send up the F-16s. "We're in charge of restricting the airspace," said Laura Brown, an FAA spokesman, "but the military has control over protecting the airspace."

When aloft, the F-16 pilots maintain contact with military and FAA controllers on the ground. But there have been communications glitches. During several recent alert situations, the 121st pilots were unable to immediately connect with U.S. Customs and Coast Guard helicopters also responding to the intruders.

In the May incident, F-16 pilots aiming for a clear path to the errant Cessna from Pennsylvania had to contact ground controllers to relay warnings to the helicopters below. "Our pilots knew the copters were there," Montgomery said, "but we had to get word to them to clear out of the way so we could get in." Direct communication lines, he added, "are being worked out."

As the 121st's mission commander, Montgomery, 43, oversees the squadron's alert logistics, assigns duty rosters and flies regular missions. Like most of his fellow Air Guardsmen, Montgomery is a civilian pilot, furloughed from his full-time job flying for Federal Express after the Air Force instituted 24-hour patrol flights in the immediate aftermath of Sept. 11.

Montgomery was in Detroit on a Federal Express layover when the hijacked passenger jets flew into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in New York. "From that moment, we knew everything changed," he said. "We knew it was on us from now on. No one wanted this to happen again."

Only two pilots from the 121st made it into the air in the critical minutes after the attacks, delayed because they lacked live weapons and adequate fuel.

Now five F-16s loaded with antiaircraft missiles sit in secure hangars on the airstrip,

prepared for takeoff. And two dozen commercial pilots who previously flew part-time for the Air Guard are with the 121st full time.

When the U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003, 25 F-16 pilots from the 121st were deployed to the war effort, flying bombing runs along the country's western corridor between Baghdad and the Syrian border.

Synoracki and several others found that their stepped-up posture in Washington's air lanes had honed their flying skills.

"It sharpened our focus. We were acutely aware of how every decision impacted the troops and civilians on the ground," Lt. Col. Dave Miles said. "We had to make absolutely sure our ordnance wasn't falling on our own guys. It was a lot like the decisions we have to make here — only in Iraq, it was obvious who the enemy was. Here, it isn't. You can never be sure that harmless-looking Cessna isn't carrying a terrorist crew."

The combat missions they flew during their four-month tour in Iraq, the pilots said, also helped them deal with the possibility of having to use weapons in the skies over Washington.

"If we have a real threat and we need to take them down, we're ready to do that," Montgomery said.

"You don't want to hurt any innocent people, and I'm sure I'd lose a lot of sleep if I did, but we can't let it inhibit us from going up there fully prepared for our mission."

But their abiding sense of duty and love of flight make it no easier once the alarm sounds.

"Even when you get called back without intercepting anyone, you can't just turn it off," Synoracki said. "It takes a good while to get back to sleep. Your heart's still pounding a long time after you land."

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## **New Center to Focus on Port's Security; Governor on Hand for Tour, Ceremonies**

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Union-Tribune (San Diego)

July 28, 2005

By Kelly Thornton

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger helped inaugurate a maritime operations center yesterday that allows federal, state and local agencies to respond together to security threats around San Diego's port.

The center, at the Coast Guard station across from Lindbergh Field, is staffed by the Coast Guard, Navy, **California National Guard**, San Diego Harbor Police and the Department of Homeland Security.

The governor was taken on a brief tour of the new facility, which resembles a NASA-style control center. It is outfitted with rows of desks and computers, all facing a wall

covered with multiple screens of live pictures from security cameras positioned around the port.

Also on the wall are two plasma televisions, one of which was tuned to Fox News, the other to the Weather Channel. A side wall has a large window overlooking the bay. Radar equipment, infrared devices and about 30 cameras are positioned around the bay to detect intruders and alert officials at the command post.

The new facility operates around the clock and merges local and federal monitoring and surveillance systems for vessels, swimmers and divers. It also serves as a dispatch and command center for all port security activities.

Rear Adm. Jose Betancourt, commander of the Navy's southwest region, told Schwarzenegger that the new center is a model for the nation meant to "leverage the resources of different agencies."

The governor remarked that he was impressed by the technology. He then was escorted out of the center and announced a \$5 million grant to improve security at 11 California ports. San Diego is set to receive \$750,000.

The port of San Diego is considered a potential terrorist target, mainly because it is home to a third of the Navy's fleet, valued at more than \$400 billion. Recreational vessels, cruise and merchant ships operate in close proximity to the Navy, providing a unique security challenge.

The governor arrived by boat, after taking a tour of San Diego Bay and observing a drill in which teams of federal agents rappelled from helicopters to a Coast Guard vessel. "I felt like I was back in one of my action movies again," he told several dozen officials at a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

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## **National Guard Troops to Begin Firefighter Training**

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Associated Press

August 5, 2005

By Sarah Cooke

HELENA -- Gov. Brian Schweitzer on Thursday declared an emergency for wildfire danger because of current bone-dry conditions and forecasts for continued hot, dry weather, authorizing National Guard pilots to begin training to fight wildfires. "We will pray for rain and prepare for the worst," he said.

Department of Natural Resources Director Mary Sexton and Adj. Gen. Randy Mosley, who heads the **Montana National Guard**, requested the Guard activation, writing in a memo to Schweitzer that current fire and weather conditions "indicate strong potential for significant wildfire activity" in the state within the next 60 days.

They warned of shortages in "critical resources" like helicopters and ground crews in the next week if fire conditions continue to worsen, which is expected in the next seven to 10 days.

Under the first phase of activation, National Guard helicopter crews will be trained early next week to fight fires in conjunction with regular monthly training, Schweitzer said.

The Guard helicopters, in compliance with federal law, will be deployed only if comparable resources are not available from local, state and commercial sources, he said.

"The fire season is probably going to be over in the next 50 days, but those next 50 days are going to be critical. We want to be ready to respond," Schweitzer said.

Starting Aug. 12, the Guard's Blackhawk helicopters will be made available for initial attacks on wildfires in the Helena, Kalispell and Missoula areas, although other areas could be added if necessary, said Col. Brad Livingston, Mosley's chief of staff. The aircraft will also help with larger fires.

More helicopters, as well as Guard troops and other equipment, would be activated under the final phase of mobilization. That, however, will only occur if needed, Livingston said.

"That's when the National Guard would be activated in large numbers, providing additional helicopters ... and hand crews, where people are trained to go out and fight fires," he said.

Livingston stressed the Guard was not being deployed en masse, and that crews would be called out only if needed. Currently, about 1,300 Guard troops and four helicopters would be available to fight wildfires, he said.

Schweitzer warned of the possibility for a wildfire "blowup" earlier this year, and in March asked the National Guard to return some of Montana's 1,500 Guard troops and aircraft in Iraq and elsewhere for the wildfire season. He claims the Defense Department has turned a deaf ear to his request, although military officials say no state has been left with less than half of its Guard strength and stress that should be enough.

More than a dozen small fires were burning around the state Thursday, the largest being a 300-acre blaze near Philipsburg that was 75 percent contained. Firefighters continued to mop up hot spots and work toward containment of the lightning-caused Frog Pond fire in southwestern Montana's Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.

"This is a blue-collar operation," incident commander Dave Larsen told crews Thursday morning. "There is still lots of work to be done finding spots and working on them -- nothing glamorous about it."

Four 20-member crews were being sent home from the fire Thursday, officials said. The fire has cost about \$1.5 million to fight to date. In the Lolo and Bitterroot national forests, firefighters were kept busy with small, lightning-caused fires

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## **A Changing Role for Reservists**

Newsday

August 8, 2005

By Liam Plevin (contributions by William Murphy, Michael Rothfeld and Emi Endo)

Douglas Luback had served as a reservist in the U.S. Navy Seabees for 18 years - starting as an enlisted man and later becoming a commissioned officer - before he saw a moment of combat.

Last year, that changed in Iraq. Summoned to active duty, Luback traded his job as a supervisor in the New York City Department of Sanitation for a post as liaison to the Marines that involved dodging incoming fire daily.

"I've had rounds knock me down," said Luback, 49, whose civilian job is to keep the city's garbage fleet rolling. "I've seen people get killed right around me."

Under normal circumstances, reservists drill one weekend a month and two weeks a year, and some had never belonged to the active duty military or been deployed to a war zone.

But as the military simultaneously tries to fight terrorists in Iraq and stabilize Afghanistan, national guardsmen and reservists are playing a major role. People who are usually part-time warriors are being called away from their jobs and families for a year or more, and sometimes taking on perilous assignments. In Iraq, guardsmen and reservists make up approximately 35 percent of the U.S. force of about 140,000 troops.

And in Iraq, reservists account for a significant number of the casualties, as underscored by the deaths last week of an NYPD officer and Army reservist from Centereach in Suffolk County and of 21 Marines assigned to reserve units - 14 of them in a single bomb blast.

More Marine reservists have been utilized since Sept. 11, 2001, than in any conflict since World War II, according to a spokesman for the Marine Reserves.

And Army reservists are being mobilized for 18 months at a time, about a year of it boots-on-the-ground. Eighteen months would have been unusually long in years prior to Sept. 11, according to Steve Stromvall, a spokesman for the Army Reserves.

In the Gulf War, Stromvall added, reservists often filled in for troops who had been sent into the theater of war. "This time we're doing very little of the backfill, and most of our people are in the theater," he said.

The change is bringing some signs of strain, as both the Army Reserves and the Army **National Guard** are at risk of falling short of their recruiting goals for this year. Right now, the Army Reserves - which helps pay for college for people who sign up - are several thousand reservists short of full strength.

"Obviously, a good deal of it can be attributed to the war," Stromvall said.

Some reservists are also thrown by the reality of their service, adopting the mentality that this is not what they signed up for, said Luback, who said he is not one of that group. "They won't re-enlist," he said.

And even reservists who don't express those feelings say getting mobilized roils their lives. As of June, 1,514 city employees in the reserves have been called to active duty at some point since Sept. 11, the majority from the Police Department. In Nassau, 56 county employees have taken time for military leave. In Suffolk, 14 county employees are currently on military active duty.

"The toughest thing is family separation," said Luback, who is married with three children and lives in Brooklyn.

Alvin Amezquita, who also works for the sanitation department, in the enforcement division, and lives on Staten Island, said, "Our lives get pulled upside down sometimes." Amezquita, who had served both in the active duty military and in the Army National Guard from 1989 to 1998, said he was out of the military altogether on Sept. 11. But he returned in November 2002, at a time when the threat of war in Iraq loomed.

And last year, he was sent to Iraq and served in Samarra, in one of the most threatening parts of Iraq for American troops, from February to December. Amezquita, who is also married and has three children, said his life was in danger every day. "I had no problem with going," he said. "I know that there will be somebody else getting a break."

Fernando Gongora, another city sanitation worker who serves in the Army National Guard, served in Iraq from April of last year until April of this year and worked as a gunner guarding convoys. Last August, one of the convoys was ambushed with a rocket-propelled grenade and confronted insurgents attacking from in front and behind, but Gongora and the other troops managed to fend off the enemy without losing any men.

Shortly after he came back, Gongora said, he signed up for two more years. "Truth is, I love my country," said Gongora, 49, who is married with five children.

Unlike an enlisted reservist, Luback said that - as a commissioned officer who did not go through the Naval Academy - he could opt to resign his commission at any time. But Luback, a lieutenant, said, "I believe in the cause."

But, he added, "It's a whole different world from 19 years ago."

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## **Guard Units Staying Busy; Every West Virginia Unit But One Has Seen Overseas Duty**

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Charleston Gazette (West Virginia)

July 28, 2005

By Rick Steelhammer

Every **National Guard** unit in West Virginia, with the exception of the tiny, Morgantown-based 249th Army Band, has been called to active duty at least once since

the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

"Most of our people have done one tour already. Very few of our soldiers have not gone overseas," Lt. Col. Mike Cadle, head of public affairs for the state adjutant general's office, said Wednesday.

Cadle, speaking to reporters during a media day event on the eve of the Charleston-based 130th Airlift Wing's 12th consecutive 60-day deployment to Southwest Asia, said National Guard officials in Washington are establishing new goals to make future deployments more manageable.

"The goal is to get the National Guard on a deployment rotation of one year out of every six," he said. The idea is to have at least 50 percent of each state's National Guard force serving in their home states at any given time, insuring an adequate force to respond to state emergencies like floods and hurricanes, Cadle said.

Another 25 percent of each state's National Guard force would be training for upcoming deployment missions, while no more than 25 percent would be placed on active duty and deployed.

At the time of the Iraq invasion, more than 2,000 of the state's 6,200 Army and Air National Guard personnel were called to active duty. As of Wednesday, that number had dropped to 287, due in part because there are few fresh units left to tap.

About 30 members of the 130th Airlift Wing were scheduled to depart Yeager Airport aboard one of the unit's C-130 transport planes at dawn today for a 60-day rotation to Southwest Asia.

Around the time of the Iraq invasion, about 350 members of the 130th, along with six of the unit's C-130 aircraft, were on active duty in Southwest Asia for nine months, where they flew missions to Iraq and Afghanistan from a base in Saudi Arabia.

"We had the highest-trained crews, so we drew the most dangerous missions flying into northern Iraq," Col. Tim Frye, wing commander of the 130th, told reporters attending Wednesday's media day at the Air National Guard base.

While two non-flying members of the unit were injured in the line of duty while serving as gunners on truck convoys in Iraq, "To date, everyone's come back home alive," a fact with which Frye said he is "incredibly pleased."

In addition to flying missions in Southwest Asia, the 130th makes flights to Bosnia, Kosovo, and undertakes activities as diverse as supporting anti-drug efforts in Colombia, scientific research in Antarctica and medical missions in Peru.

While the 130th has been flying C-130s for 30 years, the aircraft now in use by the unit were built in the mid-1990s and carry state-of-the-art avionics and radar, as well as missile-evading systems making use of flares and aluminum chaff.

Maj. Gen. Allen Tackett said in his 10 years as the state's adjutant general, National Guard units, including the 130th, have been called to active duty 57 times to respond to state emergencies like floods and fires.

He said Pentagon planners overlooked the state mission of the National Guard when they recommended closing or downsizing Air National Guard units – including the 130th - in

29 states. Current recommendations call for transferring all eight of the 130th's aircraft to Pope Air Force Base at Fayetteville, N.C.

Tackett said adjutants general in all states and territories have signed a letter that was sent to the Pentagon on Friday, complaining that Base Realignment and Closure legislation does not allow the Air Force to deactivate units or relocate equipment from one state to another.

The state National Guard commanders also argued that under law, bases could not be closed or realigned without the advice and consent of governors in the affected states.

Tackett said five of the 130th's C-130s, along with a National Guard civil support group, were placed on standby alert following the recent bombings in London. Aircraft from the Charleston Air Guard base have been given the task of bringing civil support teams to respond to possible biochemical incidents across the East and Midwest, and have several classified emergency response roles in Washington, D.C., as well.

"The Air Force didn't consider the 130th's homeland security role when they made their BRAC recommendations," Tackett said.

Capt. Patrick Berry, a pilot aboard one of two C-130s who flew training missions with reporters aboard on Wednesday, said he doubts many pilots will transfer to the nearest remaining Air National Guard C-130 base in Louisville, Ky., to continue their military flying careers, if the BRAC recommendations become law.

"We just bought a house in Charleston, so I won't move," Berry said. "I think whatever the BRAC Commission decides will decide things for a lot of people here."

Berry, one of the younger pilots in the unit, finished flight training in 2001 - just in time to get in lots of flying time over Iraq.

"I got to see the whole sandbox," he said with a smile.

Berry said there are two main reasons why he belongs to the 130th: "It's a way to serve and it's a way to fly. And flying with the 130th, the missions are so diverse."

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## **BENEFITS**

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### **Emergency Funds Available for Mississippi Soldiers' Families**

The Mississippi Press

July 31, 2005

By Natalie Chambers

PASCAGOULA -- Financial help is available for families of **Mississippi National Guard** and reserve troops who are experiencing emergency hardships while their primary

breadwinners are overseas.

The Mississippi Military Family Fund, created by the Mississippi Legislature in May and signed into law by Gov. Haley Barbour in June, provides emergency grants to military families.

Funding comes through voluntary contributions from individuals, organizations and businesses.

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## **Guardsmen Get Free Tuition at NWACC**

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The Daily Record

3 August 2005

BENTONVILLE — Following in the footsteps of more than two dozen schools in the state, Northwest Arkansas Community College signed an agreement Tuesday with the **Arkansas National Guard** to waive tuition fees for guardsmen.

Several members of the National Guard landed at NWACC in a Blackhawk helicopter Tuesday morning to formally sign the tuition waiver. "It's really part of a national movement of tuition waivers," NWACC President Becky Paneitz said. "I would like to say that we are the first to do this, but we are not."

Twenty-four colleges — both two-year and four-year schools — across the state have signed similar waivers for Arkansas National Guardsmen.

Maj. Gen. Don C. Morrow, adjutant general of Arkansas, said the waiver will be significant for northwest Arkansas. "It's great for our Guard members, and certainly I applaud the school for taking this step," Morrow said. "I think all of you in this part of the state realize several of your friends and neighbors are deployed or will be deployed in the near future."

Becky Paneitz said Tuesday's announcement will likely bring more National Guard members to the school. "I suspect that after this today, we will get a lot of interest," she said. "We know this is going to be a great opportunity for our students."

Jan Thomas, a member of the 296 th Medical Co., called the waiver "astonishing" and said it would help her focus on her education at NWACC rather than on how to pay for her education. "This enables myself and other soldiers alike the ability to reach our educational goals," she said. "I am so appreciative of Northwest Arkansas Community College and the National Guard."

Thomas is a 2004 graduate of Rogers High School and is enrolled in the NWACC nursing program. A nursing degree will advance her status in the National Guard.

Currently, 38 active-duty National Guardsmen or their dependents are enrolled at NWACC.

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**Father, Sons Serve Together in Iraq**

4th Brigade Combat Team

Aug. 2, 2005

By U.S. Army Pfc. Dan Balda

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A young Chris Cartwright and his older brother John Cartwright Jr. are racing around on a tank with their father, John Cartwright, during his **National Guard** unit's drill weekend.

They are having the time of their life, but as young boys, they're oblivious to the impression this ride will make on their lives down the road.

Fast forward 20-odd years, and the boys, like their father, are serving with the National Guard in Troop F, 278th Regimental Combat Team, and are deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 3.

They still ride on tanks with their father. There's just one caveat: despite the fact that both boys have grown up to be noncommissioned officers — Chris a sergeant, Junior a corporal — their dad is now their first sergeant.

Both sons enjoy working with their father despite the good-natured ribbing they endure for being the first sergeant's kids.

Junior is stationed in a different area because the unit does not want all the family members serving in the same area for security reasons. But that doesn't mean he is exempt from the teasing.

“We catch heat all the time for being the first sergeant's kids, even though I am hundreds of miles away,” Junior said. “It hasn't really affected me at all. I just work hard, and I know I've done my job.”

The family is used to working with each other. Their father owns a construction and contracting business in their hometown of Bristol, Tenn. He employs Chris and works with Junior whenever the job permits. “They've been working with me since they were boys,” John said.

Chris enjoys working for his father saying, “It helps bring us closer together.”

Talking to all three men, it is easy to picture them at a job site, sharing a cup of coffee and a joke. They tease each other with the reckless abandon only family members can know.

But the jokes stop when dad dispenses the wisdom gained over a lifetime of service to his country.

John has been in the Army for 35 years and has been with the unit 25 years, making him the longest-serving member of the troop. He sees his whole troop as family.

“We've always wanted to be deployed together,” John said. He feels that the unit

cohesion goes a long way in making the time go by faster. "The whole unit feels like a family, so having my boys here is just an extension of that."

John's wife is a little worried about them all being deployed together, but as he says, "There is not much she can do about it."

This is the longest Junior has been away from his father and brother.

"It's weird being stationed away from them and wondering what they are doing how they are handling everything," he said. "They are always wondering what I'm doing. We have instant messenger so that helps a little bit."

The brothers don't worry about being in danger so much but their father is a little worried about his boys.

"It's a lot harder on me, being a first sergeant and a father, than it is on them," John said. "I haven't run into it yet, but it could be hard sending my boys out on a dangerous mission."

"He couldn't keep me off a mission if I really wanted to go out," Junior said. "I'm going out one way or another."

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## **HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT**

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### **DAV Pledges Support to National Guard, Families**

U.S. Newswire

August 8, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) has signed a memorandum of understanding with the **National Guard** Bureau Family Programs Office to facilitate the exchange of information to assist military families.

"This partnership will allow the National Guard and the DAV to share information materials and resources, and work collaboratively to build a stronger network of volunteers to meet the needs of military families," said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director David W. Gorman. "This agreement calls for each of the 88 DAV National Service and Transition Service Offices to cooperate with state National Guard headquarters in working with the family services representatives to assist needy military families."

Under the agreement, DAV Departments in each state will promote community support for military mobilizations and demobilizations. Local DAV Chapters will seek volunteers to help serve the National Guard State Family Programs Family Assistance Centers. Also DAV will encourage its more than 17,000 volunteers to join other volunteers in support of families of service members.

"DAV's outstanding and professional service programs are in place to assist all veterans and their dependants in obtaining state or federal benefits for service to our nation," Gorman said. "We will also encourage the DAV Auxiliary to support the National Guard volunteer programs."

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## **Leech Lake Area Resorts, Businesses Thank Deploying National Guard Troops with Free Vacations, Other Gifts**

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The Pilot-Independent

July 26, 2005

By Gail DeBoer, Staff writer

This summer and fall, dozens of Leech Lake area resorts and other businesses will be saying "thank you" to **Minnesota National Guard** troops and their families in a very tangible way.

They will be offering free vacation-gift packages to be used prior to the troops' deployment to Iraq.

From 4,000 to 4,500 National Guard soldiers are set to deploy in September or October, the largest in the state since World War II.

The vacation "thank you" package is offered through First Lady Mary Pawlenty's Military Family Care Initiative, a program that provides care and support for National Guard families.

Major Jim Swanson, director of the National Guard's family programs and his staff will choose the families to receive the free vacation packages.

"When we contacted Mary Pawlenty about our idea, she was very enthused," related Warren Anderson of Northland Lodge. "She said nobody had done anything like this before." District 4 State Sen. Carrie Ruud also has been involved in the program to support Guard families.

Although the list is not complete, Anderson said every resort contacted thus far has offered a free stay — a total of 200 vacations — ranging in length from a weekend to a whole week.

Most resort vacations will be taken from Aug. 20 through Oct. 2, although some resorts have extended the time frame through mid-June 2006 in order to accommodate every family.

In addition, several area motels and bed-and-breakfasts also are offering multiple night stays.

Many businesses have already contributed to the vacation packages. Offers include FireSide Restaurant, free meal to each family; Fleet Sails, half day sailboat outing; Wilderness Trail Golf Course, full family golf package with cart; Eric Myhra Ford, free

oil change (with rain check); and Cass County Museum, free admission for families. Anderson envisions gift baskets that will be presented to each family when they arrive at their resort, motel or B&B containing the various gift items and certificates.

He noted that a separate "thank you" component will be created for National Guard members who live in the Leech Lake area. Some already have been offered getaway vacations at Leech Lake resorts.

Any lodging establishments or businesses that want to contribute to "thank you" vacation packages for National Guard troops should contact the Leech Lake Area Chamber at 547-1313.

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## **HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH AFTERMATH**

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### **Connecting Veterans with Employment Fairs Aimed at Aiding Soldiers**

Washington Post

August 4, 2005

By Michael S. Rosenwald

When veterans come home from war, one of the first things counselors often tell them is to find a good job. And quickly.

"When they are in the military they have a job -- the military," said Wayne Miller, a team leader and counselor at the Silver Spring Vet Center. "When they get out there's a lot of concern and stress. It's very important they get a job immediately so they can continue their life's process. It gives them consistency and keeps the family unit together."

With that in mind, MontgomeryWorks, the county's one-stop career center, recently sponsored a federal job fair for veterans. About 100 veterans attended, many having served recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some could no longer walk.

On hand to discuss job opportunities were more than a half-dozen employers, including the **Maryland National Guard**, the Department of Homeland Security, Montgomery County government and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

The veterans job fair was the first in a series of job fairs for soldiers that will be held around the state.

Miller, who attended the recent job fair, said getting veterans together in the same room and with the same goal is an important part of what he called "the reentry process." "It gives them a sense of dignity and pride and duty and country," said Miller, who was disabled in the Vietnam War. "You have veterans helping other veterans. It's like taking them out of one family and putting them in another."

## **Law Firm Promotes Two**

Paley Rothman, a Washington law firm with offices in Bethesda, has promoted two of its attorneys to principals in the more than 30-year-old firm.

Aubrey Moss, a Bethesda resident, one of the new principals, is a member of the firm's litigation and family-law practice groups. She handles a variety of cases, including divorce, property, support and child custody.

The other new principal is Howard Soypher, also a member of the firm's litigation and family-law practice groups.

His focus is on family law, commercial and business disputes, and estate litigation. He lives in New Market.

## **Working Farms Still Alive**

With Crown Farm near Gaithersburg recently being sold and with thousands of houses going up in Clarksburg, it may seem that all the farms in the county are disappearing.

But maybe not.

Late last month, county officials hosted the Annual Farm Tour and Harvest Sale, providing visitors an opportunity to experience life on a farm and to buy farm-fresh products -- from working farms, not farm stands set up on developed property that used to be farms.

Some of the farms on the tour were Phillips Farm, in Germantown; Homestead Farm, in Poolesville; and Butler's Orchard, in Germantown.

## **Networking and Recreation**

Business people looking to beat the heat -- and network at the same time -- may want to think about an upcoming "Business After Hours" event hosted by the Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce.

On Tuesday, from 5:30 to 7 p.m., the organization is hosting an evening of bowling, networking and complimentary refreshments at Strike Bethesda. Admission is free for chamber members and \$10 for guests.

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## **Community Chips In to Rebuild Injured Iraq Vet's Home**

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

August 2, 2005

By Holbrook Mohr, Associated Press Writer

JACKSON, Miss. - Spc. William E. Brooks in Southaven is not one to brag about his service in Iraq, but the soldier's selfless attitude about the explosion that took both his legs has inspired the people around him.

Nearly 50 construction companies and subcontractors in north Mississippi recently

completed a free renovation of the home Brooks shares with his family in the Memphis suburb.

Martha Fondren, vice president of Southaven-based Reeves Williams Builders, says that when the 23-year-old soldier is released from Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, he and his family will return to a virtually brand new home, complete with an additional room, widened doorways and handicapped accessible showers.

"He's really an inspiration to me," Fondren said. "I heard him on the radio and he said, 'I'm just a jerk that ran over a land mine, the real heroes are still over there.'"

"And I thought, 'Wow, what an amazing attitude is that.'"

Brooks, a Mississippi State University student, lost both legs above the knee when a roadside bomb ripped through his Humvee just south of Baghdad on March 29.

Other soldiers in his unit have said Brooks volunteered to go on the mission that day, despite having a sprained ankle, so one of his friends could get some rest.

But even before the explosion that injured Brooks and three other members of the **Mississippi Army National Guard's** 155th Brigade Combat Team, the Brooks family had seen its share of hardships.

Only two years earlier, the soldier's father, Larry Brooks, was left partially disabled in a devastating car accident.

The soldier's mother, Carolyn Brooks, a former algebra teacher at Southaven High School, takes care of her husband full-time and tutors students on the side to help the family get by.

While the parents were visiting Brooks in the Washington hospital, builders put the family's belongings in storage and went to work.

Fondren said the project started out as renovations to the 20-year-old home but as more people volunteered their time and labor the renovation gained momentum.

"We gutted it and started from scratch. Not only did we gut it, we redid all the wiring, all the plumbing. So it's better than renovated," Fondren said. "The only thing original about the house is the slab and some of the brick."

Brook's mother has said the soldier will likely require months of rehabilitation but doctors expect him to walk out of the hospital with prosthetic legs.

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## TRIBUTE TO OUR FALLEN HEROES

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### **Tribute to Slain G.I. at Fort Dix**

New York Daily News

August 2, 2005

By Maggie Haberman, Daily News Staff Writer

A G.I. from Queens who died in a Baghdad roadside bombing in March is to be honored this week when a military barracks will be renamed in his honor, officials said yesterday.

Spec. Azhar Ali, 27, a Pakistani immigrant who died March 2 fighting for his adopted country, will be one of three soldiers remembered Thursday at Fort Dix, N.J.

"It's like a big honor for the whole family," said Ali's big brother, Zulfiqar, 34.

Ali, of Flushing, was killed instantly in a roadside ambush on his armored Humvee in Iraq. He was riding with his best friend, Spec. Wai Lwin, another Queens resident, who also was killed.

A member of Manhattan's famed Fighting 69th Infantry Regiment, Ali was one of nine kids and dreamed of becoming an NYPD cop someday.

The buildings being renamed will be used for training and education, officials said.

Zulfiqar Ali said he'd been trying to bring over some family members from Pakistan, but they've been sitting in Islamabad for five days waiting for visa clearance.

He also said his family continues to struggle with its loss.

"Things are not the same like before," he said, adding the most pronounced impact has been on his parents, who have become withdrawn. "It's not easy, not easy."

The other two soldiers being honored are Spec. Nichole Frye, 19, of Wisconsin, and Lt. Col. Mark Phelan, 44, of Pennsylvania.

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## GENERAL

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### **Tennessee National Guard Changes Structure, Not Personnel**

The Daily Times (TN)

August 8, 2005

The **Tennessee National Guard** will be changing its structure later this year and reducing positions, but for soldiers at Maryville's HOW Battery, 278th Regimental

Combat Team, that means a change in unit name only.

``Shouldn't have any change as far as equipment or personnel," Tennessee National Guard spokesman Randy Harris said Monday. ``Just change of names."

Later in the fall, the 278th RCT will become the 278th Cavalry Brigade Combat Team. For soldiers drilling locally, HOW Battery, 1st Squadron will become Battery B, 3-115.

The Guard announced a reduction of 1,300 positions last month, but Harris said the positions planned for cuts are ones that are not filled.

The headquarters of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, currently deployed to Iraq, will remain in Knoxville, with subordinate unit headquarters in Cookeville, Henderson, Kingsport, Winchester, Lebanon and Smyrna.

Chattanooga's 196th Field Artillery Brigade Headquarters, currently deployed to Afghanistan, will be replaced by a Sustainment Brigade, while the 30th Troop command headquarters will move from Smyrna to Tullahoma.

In a press release Monday, Maj. Gen. Gus Hargett, Tennessee's Adjutant General, announced the proposed transition for the Tennessee Army National Guard.

``We have spent many months reviewing Tennessee's military structure, and how we can best transition into the force needed to meet both today's threats, and tomorrow's challenges," said Hargett. ``We believe that the changes we are implementing enhance our command and control, the ability for our units to train together, and the ever-changing demographics of our state.

``All of these factors affect our ability to fulfill both our wartime and state emergency response missions. The transition of units throughout the state will enhance our ability to respond in the event of natural disaster, civil disturbance or Homeland Security events. The changes will also allow recruitment of females in areas where we have not been able to do so in the past."

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## **Discounts Ahead for Soldiers and Families Operation Homefront Recruiting Businesses**

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Concord Monitor

August 02. 200

By Margot Sanger-Katz

A group that supports the military is trying to rehabilitate the image of that dreaded first weekday.

Military Mondays, a program of the organization Operation Homefront, is hoping to make Monday a welcome day -at least for soldiers and their families. The program was designed to encourage businesses to offer discounts to active-duty soldiers and their families. Operation Homefront provides a registry of participating businesses on its Web site, and will provide businesses with window decals, designed by the wife of a

**Massachusetts National Guard** member, to advertise military-friendly specials.

Gov. John Lynch endorsed the discount program at a press conference yesterday. "In New Hampshire we recognize and appreciate the sacrifices that members of the military and their families have made," he said. "We need to be there for them."

The announcement marked the official launch of the program, but nearly 25 businesses statewide have already signed up. Organizers hope to expand the program coast to coast within the year.

Though "Military Mondays" has a nice alliterative ring, Operation Homefront is not requiring that businesses restrict their offers to Mondays. "It was one of those things where it sounded good," said Chris Carragher, the organization's communications director. "It's not a program just for Mondays, there are businesses that offer these discounts several times a week."

The organization also does not require any particular discount be offered. Participants offer everything from 10 percent off purchases at stores, to free meals at restaurants, to room upgrades at hotels.

Three local businesses are already participating. Makris Lobster and Steak House in Concord offers 15 percent off meals on Mondays through mid-September. Patrick's Pub and Eatery in Gilford offers half price appetizers and discounts on drinks every afternoon. At Wits' End Computer Solutions, an Epsom-based software company, is offering 10 percent discounts at all times to active duty soldiers and their families.

Dax Duclos, the company's owner, heard about the program on the radio and decided to participate right away. "I thought, 'What a great idea.' There's no better way to show appreciation for what they do than to get in on that."

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## **Monument Honors National Guard Unit**

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The Sun Herald

August 1, 2005

By Pamela Luke, Sun Herald

PICAYUNE - Soldiers of the **Mississippi National Guard** Company A, 890th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy) of Picayune and Lumberton, stood at attention recently at the unveiling of a monument dedicated to their service in Iraq.

"We want to give special thanks to our family support group and the city of Picayune," said Horizontal Platoon Sgt. Sampson. "They stood behind us while we were deployed to Iraq. Our family support group worked hard to raise the money for this monument, and Floyd Williams of Picayune Monuments did a great job. He would have given it for free if he could have."

The 890th was deployed on February 7, 2003. By April, the unit moved from Kuwait into Iraq, spending most of its time near Fallujah. The company did not sustain any casualties until September 12, when an attack on their convoy wounded five members. Six soldiers

from the 890th received Purple Hearts for wounds received during their 13 months in Iraq.

The 890th was the first unit to reinforce its vehicles with scrap metal to protect soldiers from bombs placed along roads. The unit's ingenuity soon spread across Iraq, as other units sought ways to protect its soldiers from hidden explosives. Company A successfully completed 850 missions and returned home on March 22.

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## Missouri Guard Unit Holds Appreciation Day

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

August 1, 2005

NEOSHO, Mo. -- Members of the **Missouri National Guard's** 203rd Engineer Battalion showed off their equipment over the weekend.

The occasion was community appreciation day at Camp Crowder on Saturday, and it was a way to help the public understand the Guard's role.

"Many of the soldiers recognize that civilians don't always know the soldiers' duties," said 1st Lt. James Vaughn.

Many of the unit's members are still adjusting to life after service in Iraq.

Spc. Justin Forrest, of Webb City, said it can be helpful just to talk to people about experiences in Iraq.

His adjustment was easy - at first - he said.

"You're psyched up because you're home," he said. "You're in a dreamlike state, a whirlwind. Then you're home for a month, and reality starts, and you have to go back to work and dealing with people on the civilian side, not the military side."

Forrest and Spc. Michael Byers, 22, of St. Louis, agreed that civilian interest helped soldiers make the transition from war to home.

Spc. Gary Daniels, 21, of Exeter, handled a light machine gun called a squad automatic weapon in Iraq, where he was constantly watching for threats to his convoy.

After returning from Iraq, he found himself watching over his shoulder whenever he got into his car.

"Little military routines are sometimes hard to break," he said.

First Lt. Peter McCann, of Lee's Summit, said many soldiers find it difficult to adjust to family members who have learned to get along without them.

"The feeling of being intrusive or disruptive to the daily routine is taxing on soldiers," McCann said.

McCann has been back for more than a year and believes that he has made a good adjustment, but it hasn't been easy.

He works at a life insurance company and no longer focuses on the pictures he brought back.

He also no longer finds himself spontaneously telling stories whenever something kindles a memory. Now, he said, he keeps those memories to himself.

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## **America Supports You: Sears Earns Defense Freedom Award**

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American Forces Press Service

Aug. 1, 2005

By Samantha L. Quigley

WASHINGTON,— Excellence deserves to be recognized, and an **Alabama National Guardsman** made sure it was when he nominated his employer for support above and beyond what the law requires.

Sears Auto Center customer service adviser John Winkler, center, nominated his employer for a Defense of Freedom Award through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve organization. District automotive center manager Lee Dierkes, left, and Glenn Bledsoe, manager of the auto center at the Huntsville, Ala., Sears store, both said they're proud of Winkler and Sears policies regarding the nation's servicemembers.

Army Spc. John Winkler nominated the Huntsville (Ala.) Sears, Roebuck & Co. store where he works as a customer service adviser in the automotive department for the support they have shown him when he drills or is deployed. The nomination was made through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve's Web site, and when ESGR officials checked out the Sears corporate policy toward Guard and Reserve employees, officials decided the company as a whole should be recognized.

"Every time I have been called up, or if I've got drill, they never give me a problem with it," Winkler said. "There's pay when I get back. Sears ... make the difference between what I get paid, my basic pay, and then what I would make if I was here for that two weeks. ... They've always made that up to me." Winkler, part of the 128th Military Police Company under the 31st Chemical Brigade, has worked for Sears, and for automotive center manager Glenn Bledsoe, for nine years. It's only been the last three years, however, that he's also been in the Alabama National Guard.

Basic training and advanced individual training took nearly a year, and while he was absent from his job, Winkler said, he was impressed by the support from Sears. During his initial training, the differential pay never made it into his bank account. While it was an initial problem, Sears quickly remedied that, he said.

"In 2002 when I went on active duty when I was gone (for his initial training), that difference did not get paid to me," he said. "When I got back to the store and brought it to the (human resources) representative, they back-paid me for the whole time I was gone."

And it was not chump change that Winkler had missed out on. He ended up with back-

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pay differential of nearly \$9,000. The support also has been there during his regular drill periods and his two stateside deployments, he said. The first was on less than eight hours' notice to assist with efforts during hurricane Ivan. The second was an in-state deployment to Browns Ferry nuclear plant in Athens, Ala., when the national security threat level was raised to orange.

"(Sears) has always made sure that I was taken care of when I was gone," Winkler said. "They never give me any flak about it. It's a good place to work for. They take care of me, and I take care of them."

Bledsoe said that he's pleased to have Winkler as an employee.

"It hasn't been a real issue to work around him being gone, and he's helping defend our nation at home," Bledsoe said. "He's a good dependable guy, willing to take responsibility -- you know, step up when I'm not here to do whatever needs to be done to keep the auto center running."

Both are proud of the Defense Freedom Award that will be presented to Sears later in the year, as is district automotive center manager Lee Dierkes.

"I think it's a great honor to be chosen out of (all the nominees)," Dierkes said. "I'm proud that (Winkler) is representing our district and that he's representing our country as well."

Bledsoe said others on the 23-person staff step up and pitch in when military duty calls Winkler away.

While it was Winkler's experience working for Bledsoe at the Huntsville store that led him to nominate his Sears, his supervisor was humble about the award, saying that it's Sears' policy that makes it easy to support Winkler in his service to the country as part of the National Guard.

According to the Sears, Roebuck & Co. Web site, those policies include military pay differential that fills in the gap between military pay and employer pay. This policy was instituted in 1990 for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Eligible employees called to duty in the National Guard or Reserve also can elect to continue life insurance and medical and dental benefits.

Sears also continues to give its National Guard and Reserve employees annual merit pay increases, incentive pay and stock options, and holds a comparable position for deployed employees for up to five years.

Records indicate Sears provided support to employees serving in the military as early as 1916, the company's Web site said. Additionally, Sears sponsors Operation Purple, a series of summer camps for children of deployed military personnel.

Thousands of companies were nominated for the Defense Freedom Award, according to Air Force Maj. Robert P. Palmer, public affairs officer, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

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## Home Is in the Mail for Deployed Soldiers

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Washington Times

August 5, 2005

By Ayla Kremen

For soldiers fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan or trying to heal at rehabilitation centers, Lorraine Leacock delivers a little piece of home when they need it the most.

Mrs. Leacock, of Herndon, is the founder of "Gifts for Heroes," a donation program that sends supplies to soldiers to make them comfortable during their deployment.

"Simple things that you and I take for granted, like a candy bar [are what they want]," Mrs. Leacock said. "It's just a little piece of home that makes them more comfortable and know that the people back home are thinking about them."

Mrs. Leacock said she founded the program because she wanted to help the soldiers. Her husband, Army Brig. Gen. Edward A. Leacock, the **Maryland National Guard's** assistant adjutant general, suggested she start a donation program.

"I discovered soldiers were asking for comfort items, and so I thought it was something I could fix," she said.

Mrs. Leacock said she understands how difficult deployment can be for soldiers and their families.

"I've been a military wife for 16 years," she said. "I know what it's like to send your soldier off to points unknown."

Since its beginning in June, the program has collected about 4,000 stuffed animals for children of the servicemen and women and "cartons and cartons of food" that have been sent to soldiers, Mrs. Leacock said.

She also has received donations from 10 states and jurisdictions, including Virginia, Maryland and the District.

Some of the items that the soldiers requested are Under Armour T-shirts, Gold Bond Medicated Foot Powder and greaseless sunscreen and bug repellent so that the sand and dust will not stick to the soldiers.

Gifts for Heroes has mostly spread by word of mouth.

Mrs. Leacock said that she received most of her support from friends, neighbors and customers of her company, Finishing Touches by Lorraine, which specializes in event and wedding planning.

While there has been a lot of local support for the program, Mrs. Leacock hopes that she can generate more from other sources.

"I'm going after large corporations, but it's a long process," she said. "Almost 98 percent of the support is just [from] regular neighbors and regular people."

Gifts For Heroes volunteer Jon Dorough can't see why more people are not helping.

"I can't see any reason not to help; it's supporting the people that are fighting for them," he said. "These are our husbands, wives, sons and daughters that are out there and they need to be comfortable."

But despite its recent beginnings, the program is on a roll, Mr. Dorough said.

"It's getting big fast," he said. "We need help in that it's going to get to the point soon that we're not going to be able to handle it all."

Mrs. Leacock hopes that with the addition of corporate sponsors, the program will grow quickly.

"Basically in two months' time, I've covered 10 states by word of mouth and e-mail," she said. "I'm pretty sure that if I can do that in two months I can get it to be national by Christmas."

She also hopes that when it expands, the program can focus on all servicemen and women, including firefighters and police officers.

"If they're in a uniform, and they're risking their lives for us, then they're a hero and I want to help them," she said.

Mrs. Leacock also would like to help the canines in the military, which she said are often forgotten.

"There are a lot of police dogs that don't have bulletproof vests and the canine soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, they have special needs, too," Mrs. Leacock said. "If you think it's bad sitting in Iraq in the heat now, imagine sitting there in a fur coat."

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