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Websites:

National Guard Family Program Online Communities for families and youth:

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

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

The **TRICARE** website provides information on health benefits.

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

This website supplies **Civilian Employment Information (CEI) Program** registration information for Army and Air National Guard, Air Force, and Coast Guard Reserve.

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

This website provides a **cumulative roster** of all National Guard and Reserve who are currently on active duty

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

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

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

Militarystudent.org helps military children with transition and deployment issues.

<http://www.militarystudent.org>

The Disabled Soldiers Initiative (DS3) website provides information on the Army's new DS3 program, which provides its most severely disabled Soldiers and their families with a system of advocacy and follow-up.

<http://www.armyds3.org>

The **Guard Family Team Building** website provides online training and access to valuable contact information, documents, and links to assist in meeting the challenges of Guard life.

<http://www.gftb.org>

The **Guard Family Action Plan** website provides information on actions to improve Family Programs, benefits, and entitlements for the National Guard Community.

<http://www.gfap.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.ang.af.mil.

Drills Test Response to Major Emergencies

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

August 15, 2005

By Amanda Bohman

Elaborate drills to test the state's ability to respond to terrorist attacks and natural disasters are planned in 21 communities from Barrow to Ketchikan throughout the week. Officials are keeping the particulars of the scenarios secret, but said people acting as bad guys and as casualties are involved.

The state routinely conducts emergency response drills, but the coming week's exercises are more complex, more numerous and involve more people and locations than ever before, said Jamie Littrell, spokesman for the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

Nearly 5,000 people from various government agencies are expected to participate in the training, paid for with about \$5 million in federal grant money, Littrell said.

The main Fairbanks drill will be held Tuesday at 2 a.m. at the Fairbanks International Airport and concerns three simulated events, a release of hazardous materials, a terrorist incident and a mass casualty episode, according to Barry Jennings, emergency operations manager for the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

Anyone near the airport during those early morning hours should expect to see a beehive of activity, said Shannon McCarthy, spokeswoman for the exercise. McCarthy works for the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

"They're going to see ambulances and fire trucks and police cars--a lot of them," McCarthy said. "And maybe a hazardous materials team or two with some gear on."

Expect to see a surge of activity at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital as well, McCarthy said. "By the time it gets to Fairbanks Memorial, there will be far fewer responding vehicles so it probably won't be as noticeable," she said.

Exercises are also planned at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Flint Hills Resources Alaska refinery, separate statements and officials said.

UAF's drill is planned for Thursday, and whether it will be terrorist related or a natural disaster has not been released. The campus enlisted the help of the **National Guard** 101st Civil Support Team from Idaho for the drill, a statement said.

"We'd like the drill to appear as real as possible to allow staff to look for areas where improvements can be made," said UAF Fire Chief Edie Curry in the statement. "Plans are in place, but they need to be dusted off, reviewed and walked through so that responses become second nature." Efforts to determine when Flint Hills' exercise takes place and what it will be were unsuccessful. A drill is also planned at the Alaska-Canada border.

The overall endeavor has the long, convoluted title of Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2005 Homeland Defense/Homeland Security for Civil Authority, or Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2005 for short.

The exercises are meant to bring together various local, state and federal agencies, including the Alaska State Troopers, Alaska **National Guard**, Alaska State Defense Force, FBI, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard and the American Red Cross of Alaska, said a statement from the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

At the Fairbanks International Airport drill, involved agencies include Alaska Airlines; Eielson Air Force Base; the Midnight Sun Council, Boy Scouts of America; FBI; troopers; Fairbanks police; Bassett Army Community Hospital; the Fairbanks North Star Borough; the Transportation Security Administration and the UAF police department, McCarthy said.

US National Guard Training Provides Soldiers with the Skills They Need to Survive

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Voice of America

10 August 2005

By Deborah Block

Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Casualties from roadside bomb attacks in Iraq continue to increase, as insurgents deploy devices that leave even armored vehicles vulnerable. To learn how to better protect themselves, thousands of troops with the United States National Guard are being trained at Camp Shelby in the southern state of Mississippi. The National Guard, a military reserve force located in each U.S. state, is training in an environment that simulates villages in Iraq.

This man is playing the part of an Iraqi sniper, pretending to shoot at National Guard troops who are learning how to protect themselves while on a convoy. As they travel down a road at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, canisters burst with smoke representing mock roadside bombs.

For many of these soldiers, it's all new. Lieutenant Anderson, a National Guard platoon leader from Wisconsin says, "Once the booms start happening, and bullets start flying, the confusion sets in. So this is one of those things that needs to be constantly rehearsed."

Army Captain Kevin O'Connell, who trained police in Iraq, knows the danger of roadside bombs first-hand. He's showing these troops how to avoid the bombs, also known as improvised explosive devices or IEDs. "Now if you stopped anywhere, and you didn't plan on stopping there, something made you stop, whether it's an IED, a truck in the road, anything. That's because that's where the bad guys want you to stop."

Remote triggering devices such as cell phones and radios are being used to detonate IEDs. In Iraq, they can explode several bombs almost simultaneously. National

Guardsmen Wayne Winstead says the telltale wires connected to the roadside bombs are well hidden, in garbage, straw, or even animal carcasses. "Things that are not obvious anymore are the wires hanging off the road, or antennas and things like that."

Most of the men and women in the National Guard are part-time, and range in age from 17 to 60. They hold a variety of jobs or are students. The National Guard provides help with natural disasters and other emergencies in the U.S., but also serves as a military backup during war.

Currently, the National Guard and other military reserve units make up about 40 percent of the forces in Iraq. At Camp Shelby, National Guard soldiers spend up to six months learning the skills they need to survive.

Army Major Art Sharpe is a public affairs officer at the 70-kilometer square camp. He says of the training, "We try to create as close as possible, to replicate, the conditions they're likely to face as they go down range." This also includes searching for insurgents in Iraqi villages, and protecting themselves from snipers hidden in fields. The soldiers also learn how to maintain checkpoints, and handle hostile villagers, which in one training exercise ends with smoke, representing tear gas, which is used to disperse the crowd.

Major Sharpe, who is 47 and a judge in civilian life, spent six months in Iraq, training people for the new Iraqi army. He says this training is meant to make soldiers think before they act. "For example, there were times when I could have shot someone myself in Iraq. And if I had been a nervous 18-year-old, I probably would have shot the individual. As it were, I paused, I waited, I gave the guy the benefit of the doubt. I analyzed the situation as it developed and I chose not to shoot the person. And it turned out to be the right decision."

Twenty-year-old Guardsman William Johnson, a jazz musician, is being deployed to Iraq in the next few weeks and thinks the training will help him, "We learned a lot today. This is very valuable training that we need to do, and I'm glad we made a lot of mistakes." Like other soldiers, he says he'd rather make them now, than in life-and-death situations in Iraq.

BENEFITS

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Trust Fund Set Up for Soldier's Children

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

August 10, 2005

By Rosalind Bentley

A trust fund has been established for the children of Charles Warren, the Georgia **National Guard** soldier killed last week in Iraq.

Two of Warren's nine siblings made the announcement on Tuesday during a press conference at the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center in Lawrenceville.

"We're just sort of overwhelmed with the outpouring of support," said Rachel Elliott, Warren's older sister.

Warren, a sergeant first class with the Guard's 48th Brigade, was killed when a car bomb exploded at a checkpoint. He was 36. Before he was sent to Iraq, he, his wife, Carol, and their son, Jackson, lived in Duluth. Jackson is 22 months old. Warren's 6-week old daughter, Madeline, was born while he was in Iraq. She was christened on Saturday.

Money contributed to the new trust fund will help pay for the children's college education, Elliott said.

Standing in front of the imposing stone tablets that form the justice center's Fallen Heroes' Memorial, Elliott and her brother, Alexander Warren, talked about Charles. They said he had been proud to be a Georgian, and even more proud to be a soldier.

Speaking for his brother, Alexander Warren said he was certain his brother would want to encourage the troops still serving in Iraq.

"He supports you now in his death as does our entire family," Alexander Warren said. "He wants you to come home safe and sound."

Charles Warren became a member of the Georgia **National Guard** immediately after moving to Gwinnett about six years ago. He had been working as a pediatric nurse at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta before his deployment.

Elliott said Charles Warren's name had already been added to one of the war memorial crosses in Duluth. His name will be etched into one of the tablets at the Fallen Heroes' Memorial, county officials said, though a date has not been set for its addition.

"He would be thrilled that they're going to add his name," said Elliott.

A private funeral service will be held on Saturday, the same day that would have been his sixth wedding anniversary, Alexander Warren said.

TRIBUTE TO OUR FALLEN HEROES

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Georgia's Guard: THE 48TH: IN IRAQ: A Familiar Sadness

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

August 9, 2005

MONI BASU -- Camp Striker, Iraq --- At a memorial ceremony just five days ago, Lt. Col. Mark Davis stood with other 48th Brigade Combat Team officers and listened to the battalion commander of an infantry regiment offer eulogies for four fallen soldiers.

Even then, Davis knew it soon would be his turn. He had just learned of the deaths of

three of his own.

Davis, a banker from Statesboro, had pondered the heavy price of war, the life-changing scars cruelly etched forever in the hearts and minds of Georgia's citizen soldiers. It fell to him Monday evening to soothe their sadness.

In the gloaming, as sand swirled through the Iraqi capital in the midst of a violent storm, Davis stood solemnly by himself. He saluted and hugged trios of soldiers as they stepped off the Camp Striker stage, where they fell to their knees in front of the upended rifles, helmets, boots and dog tags symbolizing the lost soldiers. It was their last goodbye to their comrades-in-arms, their friends, their brothers.

The names of the dead pierced the air, ringing out over the microphone and in the first sergeant's roll call they could not answer.

Sgt. 1st Class Charles Warren of Duluth, Spc. Jerry Ganey of Folkston and Spc. Mathew Gibbs of Ambrose, all of Charlie Company, 648th Engineer Battalion, were killed after a suicide car bomber attacked a traffic control point on nearby Route Aeros Aug. 3. Davis said his soldiers made "valuable contributions" to the 648th and had died valiantly doing their duty.

"We struggle with feelings of shock, anger and sadness," he said. "We are all heartbroken."

* Part of a yearlong series that will follow the lives of the citizen soldiers of Georgia's **National Guard** and their families back home.

GENERAL

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Husband, Wife Pilots Serve Together

By Spc. Jerome Bishop

1st COSCOM Public Affairs

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq (8/15/2005) — The separation during deployments can become a dangerous obstacle very quickly when it comes to marriage, but for two UH-60 Blackhawk pilots on Logistics Support Area Anaconda, deployment to Iraq has kept them together.

“It feels completely wonderful to be deployed together,” said 1st Lt. Rebecca DeForest, a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot from B Company, 1st Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment, who deployed Jan. 9 with the South Carolina National Guard.

“We can share all of our experiences first hand and we can relate to our jobs and struggles and our accomplishments.”

However, the couple almost missed the opportunity to stay together overseas, but reacting quickly to their situation allowed the DeForests to deploy almost at the same time.

“Last year I was in the 82nd Aviation Brigade,” said 1st Lt. Patrick DeForest, a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot from D Company, 1st Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment who deployed to LSA Anaconda on Dec. 18, 2004. “Her unit got alerted for deployment in May 2004 and then activated in September. In September, I asked my supervisor if there was a possibility that I could switch over to the 1-159th.

“First they said ‘We’ll look into it’,” he said. “Then there was a one-for-one switch but the 82nd didn’t want to because the other Soldier didn’t have the experience they needed.”

“He swapped out with a female lieutenant in the 159th because her husband was in the 82nd,” Rebecca DeForest said.

“It ended up being that another married couple got assigned with the 82nd and that way two married couples could be assigned in their spouse’s command.”

“So she went over to the 82nd and I went over to the 159th,” Patrick DeForest added.

Either way Patrick DeForest would be spending time in the Middle East; the only difference between being deployed with the 82nd in Afghanistan or the 159th in Iraq is the length of separation from his wife.

“The way it was scheduled was I was supposed to go to Operation Enduring Freedom in May,” Patrick DeForest said. “Had I stayed at my previous assignment, we would be facing a 20 month separation.”

“It’d probably be better if we weren’t deployed to two different areas because communication would become a lot more difficult,” Rebecca DeForest said. “I’m sure we will (be separated) at some point.”

Although the couple has been fortunate in the fact that they can be with each other every day even while deployed, neither of them forgets that other Soldiers aren’t so lucky.

“It’s difficult to relate to their experience since we haven’t been separated,” Patrick DeForest said. “I always try to put myself in their shoes.”

“I communicate with both of my Soldiers and their spouses to understand what they’re both going through,” Rebecca DeForest said.

The DeForests are aware that their situation could take a turn for the worse if it isn’t handled correctly. Being in separate units often helps in keeping their personal and professional lives separate.

“Our jobs are pretty separate which I think is a good thing,” Rebecca DeForest said. “I’d say my spare time is divided between Patrick and my Soldiers.”

“We spend enough time apart because we wouldn’t want to be put in an unprofessional position,” said Patrick DeForest.

Since the DeForests don’t have any children yet, they have one less worry than other dual-military families.

“We’re lucky we don’t have kids at this point in our marriage,” Rebecca DeForest said. “I know dual-military spouses who have had to leave their kids with other family members. We don’t have any kids but we have a dog that we left behind.”

The couple is in agreement that their situation is more than good at the moment, but their plans differ for when their tours in Iraq come to an end.

"I'm looking to extend until May," Patrick DeForest said. "I want to enjoy the mission here and I want to help the incoming unit with their mission here."

"I want to go back to my civilian job," said Rebecca Deforest. "I work in investments for a financial institution."

Having the support of a spouse is a big help for married Soldiers serving in the Global War on Terror, and although the DeForests don't need a 1,000-minute phone card and an open seat at the calling center, they still have friends and family waiting at home for their safe and healthy return.

(Editors note: Spc. Jerome Bishop is a member of the 1st Corps Support Command Public Affairs Office deployed to Iraq in support of units at LSA Anaconda.)

Selling the Guard; Military Officials Hope That Inviting Bosses to Watch Their Employees Who Are Serving in The National Guard Train for Fighting in War Will Increase Employers' Support for the Guard and Part-Time Soldiering

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The Baltimore Sun

August 14, 2005

By Matthew Dolan

FORT BRAGG, N.C. - At a dusty encampment filled with canvas tents and loblolly pines, Linda Schmidt finally spotted her elusive employee.

Michael Kristian, a 38-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Maryland Army **National Guard**, had temporarily left his job as security director for the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services in Woodlawn for combat training here. His next stop could be Iraq.

Schmidt couldn't have been more supportive as she trailed Kristian under a hot Carolina sun, through ear-shattering rifle ranges and into mock assaults on enemy-held towns.

Still, at the end of the day, she seemed a little worn, never finding out what she really wanted to know - when she could expect Kristian to return to his job in Woodlawn.

"He's not really gone, so it's not like I can replace him," Schmidt said during the military-sponsored tour. "We need him pretty badly."

What employers like Schmidt think about the **National Guard** is increasingly critical as the military struggles mightily to attract new recruits and keep their employers happy.

Schmidt's drop-in visit this summer is part a **National Guard** effort to lobby anxious employers by letting them watch how their employee-turned-soldiers train to fight. It's called a "boss lift," and the concept isn't new.

But the Maryland Guard has given it a fresh look, with a shortened, one-day tour customized to match local employers with their employee Guard members. Supporters say the approach is spreading across the country and could become an essential tool for reassuring business leaders that the Guard service can be a good thing for their employees.

The Army **National Guard** has fallen short of its recruiting goals every month since November, even though recent re-enlistment rates have hit an all-time high. In Maryland, the trend is similar.

"We recognize the stresses we put on employers," said Brig. Gen. Edward A. Leacock, assistant adjutant general for the Maryland Army **National Guard**. "We're trying to be better about how much heads-up we give them about upcoming deployments."

Eventually, a flood of troops will be returning from Iraq and the Guard also hopes to help employers manage that deluge and reintegrate the soldiers into their civilian jobs.

For years, the military invited employers of members of the **National Guard** and Reserves to camp out for several days at a military base, as a sort of fact-finding mission and patriotic booster shot.

Officials wanted to dispel the notion that the employees are "playing hooky" in the woods during training, which traditionally included one weekend a month and two weeks a year.

Employer outings, however, formerly demanded a significant time commitment, usually three days or more at a base halfway across the country. Organized nationally instead of locally, boss lifts rarely provided employers the chance to see their own workers. Instead, they saw whoever happened to be training that day.

Though the tours drew hundreds during the 1980s, employer interest dwindled in recent years, despite the fact that almost a half-million reservists have been mobilized into federal service since Sept. 11, 2001.

Until recently, the **National Guard** Bureau didn't track who its employers were, a point that critics have said illustrated its inability to manage massive call-ups well. Maryland's boss lifts could help reverse the trend, officials say.

The abbreviated, nine-hour trip to Fort Bragg this summer was sponsored by the state's Committee of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. It drew 72 employers, almost three times the number that attended a similar, three-day trip to Fort Knox, Ky., in April.

Half of those who went to Fort Bragg said in surveys that they saw their own workers in uniform, firing assault rifles on a training range or learning how to storm an insurgent's house.

Dazzled employers put down their camera phones and gamely donned heavy battle armor to feel its 40-pound-plus weight. It was all to get a sense of what their own employees were going through.

They didn't eat Meals Ready to Eat, known as MREs, but they served as townspeople when the soldiers surprised them with an ambush in a neighborhood erected like a Hollywood movie set on the base.

Wearing an Army helmet that swallowed her head, Stella M. Miller, president of Stella

May Contracting in Edgewood, said she found the experience thrilling.

"It's tough to run a small business and worry about people leaving," said Miller, whose company started with three people in 1995 and has grown to 65 employees, largely depending on military and other government construction projects. "But isn't what they do tough, too?"

The Guard service is creating fewer problems for employers these days. The number of Guard and Reserve being called to active duty has fallen to its lowest levels in almost four years. But pressure on employers may grow later if the conflict in Iraq continues long enough to require more troop call-ups to replace returning Guard.

Formerly, employers might have been notified 60 to 90 days before a deployment that an employee would be taking a leave, Leacock said. Now, that notice might be given as much as six months before a guardsman ships out.

Employers said that repeated activations have been frustrating. Many part-time soldiers were called to duty immediately after Sept. 11. And some Guard companies in Maryland have been called up three times in less than four years.

Not surprisingly, the number of disputes between Guard members and employers over the possible loss of a job or conditions of return have grown.

Before Sept. 11, the Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve committee in Maryland, a Department of Defense program that uses volunteer ombudsmen to negotiate issues, handled about 100 complaints a year. Last year, the committee processed more than 300 complaints.

The program using volunteer ombudsmen to negotiate issues resolves more than 90 percent of its cases within a few days and without legal action, officials said. A database search showed no federal employment lawsuits filed by members of the Guard and Reserve in Maryland since Sept. 11.

In Maryland, the number of informal disputes may be dropping. So far this year, the state's 20 volunteer ombudsmen have only processed 79 complaints by employees or employers.

"I've heard very little in terms of complaints," said Elaine Borakove, whose husband is in charge of Bravo Company of the Maryland Army **National Guard's** 1st Battalion, 115th Infantry Regiment stationed outside Baghdad. "As far as I know, employers have been very supportive. We've already had some organization pay the difference in pay [employees] lose when they're deployed."

Despite the heavy lobbying campaign, a new nationwide survey commissioned by the Guard found most employers have little familiarity with the laws designed to protect the jobs of Guard members while on active duty.

But the survey found that employers continue to support repeated call-ups of their employees and are willing to deal with trying to find people to fill in.

"I am hearing less in the way of problems than I would have anticipated," said David R. Segal, director of the Center for Research on Military Organization at the University of Maryland, College Park. "My sense is that there are strains on family relations, and they

take primacy."

The latest stop on Maryland's campaign to win over employers started early one morning this summer when more than 70 gathered at Warfield Air **National Guard** Base at Martin State Airport in Middle River.

"Lunch is what we in the military call a meal of opportunity," Maryland **National Guard** Sgt. Maj. Franklin J. Wright warned the employers. But they appeared in high spirits as they boarded a C-130 military cargo plane for what many called the experience of a lifetime.

An hour and a half later, they arrived at Pope Air Force Base at Fort Bragg. On the Army base known as the home of paratroopers and special forces, employers saw an increasingly common type of training used for combat in Iraq. For the 3rd Brigade, 29th Infantry Division of the Maryland Army **National Guard**, the exercises were routine training, but military leaders said the soldiers could easily be deployed to a war zone in the near future.

Schmidt, the government manager in Woodlawn, said her security director had been called to active duty twice since Sept. 11. Kristian told her he wasn't sure when he would be able to shed his uniform again.

For others, the day was a chance to see military operations up close and thank their own employees for service.

Keri Zuras, who owns the River Hill Mobil gas station in Clarksville, presented the Guard with a \$1,500 check to support troops in the field. Luckily, he said, he's able to offer jobs to Guard members as they come and go, even for a few weeks of employment.

"It's just amazing what they do," he said, gazing down from a balcony as four soldiers cleared a room of pop-up cutouts of insurgents. "I'm only trying to do my part, too."

Employers Put Out the Welcome Mat for Wounded Veterans

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*Soldiers Valued for Sacrifice, Skills
Learned in Military*

USA Today

August 11, 2005

By Stephanie Armour

Shrapnel seared the left side of Tracy Reep's face. The rocket-propelled grenade that spewed shrapnel did its damage quickly, ripping two fingers from his left hand and severely wounding his shoulder, hand and elbow.

The Nov. 11, 2003, ambush on a road in Iraq left Reep blind in his left eye and ended his tour as a Texas Army **National Guard** member. It also meant that, eight months after returning home to Dallas, Reep had to learn how to do his job as a restaurant

management recruiter with his altered physical condition.

"I only have eight fingers and see out of one eye, and that affects the speed in which I process work," says Reep, 36, a father of two boys, 12 and 10. "But at the end of the day, you're drawing a paycheck that supports your family, and that's a huge part of the healing."

More than 14,000 service members have been wounded in action in the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. Major medical advances in the ability to treat injured soldiers on the battlefield mean more are surviving than in previous wars, but it also means men and women are coming home with life-altering injuries such as amputated limbs, blindness, paralyzed legs, serious burns and severe emotional trauma.

But far from being shunned, today's service members are finding themselves actively recruited by employers. Cisco Systems is attending job fairs at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington for wounded military members because of their technology skills. Northrop Grumman is reaching out to seriously disabled service members with a job fair at Walter Reed and offering information on how to complete a resume or handle a job interview.

"We're committed to helping those heroes who went off to war and paid a sacrifice for our country," says Sandra Evers-Manly, with Northrop. "We believe this is an important population."

There are no statistics on the unemployment rate of service members seriously injured in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nine percent of all veterans had a disability sustained while they were in the service.

A sudden life change

For some, a life-altering injury is also a career-altering experience.

Before going to Iraq in April of 2003 with the Army **National Guard**, Robert "B.J." Jackson, a father of two girls, worked doing home improvement, on roofing, siding and windows. Iraq seemed far removed from the lush cornfields of his native Des Moines.

In Iraq, he saw mud huts in the middle of the desert, days with temperatures of 130, and children so eager to see U.S. troops that they crowded the streets to shake his hand, making a 1-mile drive take two hours.

On Aug. 7, his day off, he and four other soldiers went to downtown Baghdad to shop in the busy, congested city where lambs hung in the windows of butcher shops and trash smoldered in the streets. He stopped to buy his oldest daughter a Barbie doll, then jumped in this vehicle. When the Humvee pulled out, he hit a land mine. At the same time, a rocket-propelled grenade was launched at his truck.

The truck flew six feet in the air, pinning Jackson's legs under the dash. For more than four hours, others in his group were in a firefight while struggling to free him. The next thing Jackson remembers is waking at Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio. His wife told him that both his legs were gone.

His first thought: I'm still alive. Today, after recovery and a set of prosthetic legs, Jackson feels he can do almost anything. "But I haven't tried to get up on a roof again,"

he jokes.

Instead, Jackson, 24, is national spokesman for the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes (www.saluteheroes.org), which provides recently disabled veterans with job counseling, housing and spousal support. "This will help service members, and it helps me deal with my injuries."

Interest from companies such as Home Depot, Oracle and others is in contrast to the Vietnam era, when disabled veterans found many employers wary of hiring because of mounting opposition to the war, says W. Roy Grizzard Jr., assistant secretary of Labor for the Office of Disability Employment Policy.

"We learned in Vietnam, when a lot of military personnel came back, they slipped through the proverbial cracks," Grizzard says. Today, he says, "American businesses realize (disabled veterans) are a good source of employees."

Some disabled veterans say they're hopeful about the interest shown by private employers. Peter Lohman, 26, graduated from West Point and served as a scout platoon leader in Iraq until he was shot on Dec. 19, 2004, while on routine patrol. The bullet shattered a bone in his arm and left him disabled; today, he hopes to find a job in national security, and has had six interviews with private-sector employers.

"My leadership experience is very attractive," says Lohman, of Arlington, Va.

Others have started businesses. Jerry Ezell, of Haskell, Okla., was in a convoy when his truck ran over an explosive. He was left with a concussion and crushed bones in his back, causing him to lose most function in his right leg. The father of three children (two girls, ages 11 and 10, and a boy, 6) has opened a metal fabrication business, SFS Fabrication, and is hoping to train other disabled veterans.

"I'm 32, I've got three young kids, and I didn't want them to see their daddy sitting around the house all day," Ezell says.

A different era

The Americans with Disabilities Act, which was signed into law in 1990, also didn't exist in the post-Vietnam era. The law prohibits discrimination based on disability.

Veterans in general are an attractive talent pool because they often have technology and leadership skills, and might have a federal security clearance, allowing them to take jobs for companies that work with classified or restricted information.

But there are challenges. Spouses might have to leave jobs to care for or be close to a service member during recovery, leaving both partners unemployed. Recovery and rehabilitation from a serious war injury can take months or years. Employers might be willing to hire now, but injured veterans might not be physically or emotionally ready to begin work. By law, employers are generally required to offer jobs back to members of the Guard or Reserve who are injured in service and to make any necessary accommodations.

Disabled service members can also go back to school or try to forge new careers in a sometimes-bewildering civilian world.

Matthew Braiotta, 24, spent 10 months in Iraq with the Army, doing scouting patrols,

weathering sweltering temperatures of 120 degrees inside his tank and living amid a seemingly endless terrain of sand. While on a patrol to the Baghdad International Airport, he was riding in a Humvee that was showered with shrapnel from a roadside bomb.

Braiotta remembers looking out and feeling suddenly as if he'd been punched. Shrapnel flew into his eye, severed his ear and tore up his legs. His eyes burned shut, and his goggles melted like candle wax to his skin. Everywhere, he felt heat. He kept telling anyone who would listen that his legs were on fire.

Learning new skills

He was evacuated to Germany and later, to Walter Reed. Today, he can't feel much of his right foot due to nerve damage and undergoes physical therapy. His eyes are now fine. At first, he felt unsure of what to do without the military.

He says he felt that "I'm useless to the world, because all I know how to do is shoot a rifle and run around in the woods. That's not very marketable."

But through a Veterans Affairs program that hires disabled vets for information technology jobs, he is now working full time as a budget analyst and hoping to attend Georgetown University and perhaps to study law. He struggles to figure out how his military experience fits into the working and everyday world. Instead of giving orders, he says, he has to figure out how to persuade co-workers or others to do a job.

"I'd like to get into politics someday," says Braiotta, of Washington, D.C. "But transitioning out of the military has been a nightmare. People look at you like you're just a college kid. No one has any idea the stuff I've done and seen. I've fought for your freedom."

DAV Pledges Support to National Guard, Families

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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 it's 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."

End

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