



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Weekly News for National Guard Families

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Websites:

National Guard Family Program Online
Communities for families and youth:

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

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

TRICARE website for information on health benefits

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

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

<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/esgr/index.jsp>

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/index.cfm>

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>

Military Spouse.org

MilSpouse.org provides information on employment, education and relocation, with thousands of links to employment-related information and other resources for military spouses and families.

<http://www.milspouse.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.

U.S. Plans Military Retraining For Terrorism War

Reuters

October 12, 2004

By David Morgan

Washington (Reuters) - The Bush administration, beset by violence in Iraq and growing strains on the armed forces, plans to sharply increase the number of soldiers with non-combat skills as it pursues its war on terrorism, officials and analysts say.

Under a seven-year re-balancing program which will gather pace after the November 2 election, the Pentagon said on Tuesday it intends to create 100,000 military police, civil affairs, intelligence and other positions needed for stabilizing war-torn countries.

The initiative represents an about-turn in the approach of President George W. Bush, who before the September 11 attacks on the United States adamantly opposed using the U.S. military for "nation-building", insisting its main function was warfare.

General Richard Cody, Army vice chief of staff, said at a recent defense briefing on Capitol Hill that the re-balancing of the structure toward non-combat roles was "the biggest change that we've done in 50 years."

Analysts estimate that the program will double the all-volunteer Army's pool of soldiers who can be called on for non-combat duties overseas but it would not enlarge the active duty force of 1.2 million troops.

Instead, the Pentagon intends to fill the new slots by retraining thousands of Army Reserve, **National Guard** and active-duty soldiers now assigned to traditional combat duties such as artillery, air defense, armor and ordnance.

An Army official said the long-term objective was to bolster the military's ability to fight the war on terrorism, which is guided by the Bush doctrine of intervention and regime-change in states seen as threatening the United States.

But the immediate goal is to relieve non-combat specialists already on duty overseas, especially **National Guardsmen** and Reservists hard-hit by repeat mobilizations and extended tours. The intensive use of those forces has prompted debate over a possible draft and the need for a larger force.

"After 9/11 hit, we obviously went into a new mode with the war on terror and our engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq," said the Army official, who asked not to be identified.

"The threats are asymmetrical, and we don't know where the next one will come from -- but we'll have to respond. This will help units deploy more rapidly for duties ranging from peacekeeping to combat to nation-building."

Planning for the long-term re-balancing of Army combat and non-combat duties began early in 2003 and accelerated that summer as the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq gave way to

looting and a subsequent widespread insurgency.

At the same time the Pentagon scrapped plans to close its only institute devoted to peacekeeping and instead expanded its role in advising the Army on stabilization strategy.

WINNING THE PEACE

"We have unrivalled conventional capabilities, but we did not have very much to win the peace," said Lawrence Korb, who served as assistant secretary of defense under the Reagan administration.

"Now, if you do another regime change, you'll have the capability to maintain order," Korb told Reuters.

Bush, accused by his Democratic presidential challenger John Kerry of creating "a back-door draft" by extending individual service in Iraq, routinely cites the transformation of the U.S. military in his stump speeches.

"We're working to minimize the number of extensions and repeat mobilizations by moving forces out of low-demand specialties, such as heavy artillery, and increasing the number of available troops with skills that are in high-demand," Bush said in a September 14 speech to the **National Guard** Association.

But the Army said it has trained fewer than 5,000 **National Guard** artillery specialists as military police under a provisional reorganization in anticipation of the long-term re-balancing program.

The Army's structure was never intended to tackle extended nation-building missions such as Iraq and Afghanistan, analysts said.

"This is a race between re-balancing the force on the one hand and the exhaustion of existing capabilities on the other," said Hans Binnendijk, a National defense University professor.

Analysts believe the re-balancing program will entail Navy and Air Force personnel as well as Army troops. And they expect the largest burden to fall on Reserve and **National Guard** forces who could make up 70,000 of the 100,000 new positions.

The program is being phased in. About 30,000 specialists will be trained in civil affairs, psychological operations, chemical and biological detection and special operations and as intelligence and military police from 2004 to 2009.

Of those, the Army said about 20,000 will be **National Guard** or Reserve.

Another 10,000 slots for military police, transportation specialists and quartermaster duties would be created from 2005 to 2008. Training for the remaining slots would occur over the course of the program, the Army said.

National Guard Recruiters Hope Increase In Federal Benefits Will Lure More Potential Soldiers

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News Review.info

October 12, 2004

By Chelsea Duncan

With federal Army **National Guard** benefits increasing in Oregon, local recruiters are hoping their efforts will see more success in the face of increased skepticism from potential soldiers.

The added benefits -- put in place by the U.S. Department of Defense at the beginning of October -- include a bigger signing bonus and full college tuition.

"More people will join because the benefits have increased," said Sgt. Nick Marshall, a career counselor for the Roseburg Guard unit. He added that the increases are also intended to show appreciation for current guardsmen and keep up with the cost of rising tuition.

Among the new benefits are 100 percent tuition assistance each school year, up from 75 percent, a \$20,000 student loan repayment program up from \$10,000 and an increased signing bonus up to \$8,000.

Oregon Army **National Guard** spokeswoman Kay Fristad said statewide, Guard recruitment numbers were down 10 to 15 percent for the past fiscal year.

"We have had a problem keeping the numbers up," she said. Even with the recent federal increases, the state has one of the least attractive benefit packages in the country, she added.

Sgt. 1st Class Brian Wheaton, another career counselor at the Roseburg Armory, said he was unable to fulfill his personal recruitment goal for the past year although he met the minimum state requirement. Local recruitment was down by about 6 to 10 percent from the previous year.

"It's a lot lower," he said.

He said the media's negative portrayal of Iraq, the possibility of more than a yearlong deployment and increasing violence in the area is causing many to have second thoughts about joining.

"The Iraq thing's scaring people away," he said.

With fewer people dropping in at the armory each month to seek out information on their own, Marshall and Wheaton have had to step up the pace.

"You had to pick up the telephone and kind of motivate someone to talk to you," Marshall said, adding that it has also meant more frequent trips to local high schools and Umpqua Community College.

While recruiting, Marshall said he comes across many misconceptions about the possibility of deployment to Iraq such as the belief that everyone shipped overseas won't make it home alive.

"People are scared of the unknown, I guess," he said. He added that it's probably just as likely to get in a fatal car accident in the states than to die in Iraq.

Pvt. Alan Boles of Oakland, who enlisted for six years of service this summer, agrees. The 19-year-old said he likes to look on the "bright side" of potentially going to Iraq, which could mean more money and experience.

"They're fighting for something good over there and I want to be a part of it," he said.

While they hope to see interest pick up again, Marshall and Wheaton say the decrease in recruitment hasn't been entirely negative.

"The ones who do join," Wheaton said, "really want to serve their country."

He said the local Guard has taken extra steps to provide support for new guardsmen such as hiring Marshall as a second full-time career counselor this summer.

"The Guard's always changing, trying to make things better," he said.

Nationally, the Guard has beefed up its training program for new recruits entering and returning from basic training, a system modeled in part on the Roseburg unit's two-year program, Marshall said.

The Recruit Sustainment Program provides better preparation for basic training and once-a-month service in areas such as rank structure, chain of command and self-discipline. Marshall also tries to make sure recruits are thinking about school.

"My goal is to get them to go to college," he said.

Boles said the main reason he joined the Guard was to go to school, but he was realistic about potential deployment when he signed up.

"I wanted the experience of being in the military," he said.

With the federal tuition assistance program offering 100 percent tuition coverage, Boles said he feels even more encouraged to attend college.

"There would be no excuse not to go," he said.

Duty - Guard Makes State Proud

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The Charleston Gazette

October 18, 2004

DESPITE the dangers and uncertainty, West Virginians continue to join the Army **National Guard**. West Virginia was one of only four states to meet its recruiting goal for the year while maintaining full strength.

West Virginia's Army **National Guard** units are so reliable at recruiting and keeping members and being ready for emergencies that the state was chosen for the formation of four new units, said Maj. Bill Crane:

The 151st Military Police unit of 30 soldiers. The 154th Military Police unit of 89

soldiers. The 620th Chemical unit of 14 soldiers. The 753rd Explosives Ordnance Disposal Company, also with 14 soldiers.

The state's Guard will expand from 33 to 37 units, Crane said. The state recruited about 600 people during the year that ended Sept. 30, roughly the same as in previous years. The state has more than 3,800 Guard members now and with other additions will reach 4,100.

In addition to joining missions in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, Guard members also respond to natural disasters at home. They recently patrolled flooded areas in the Ohio River and helped with cleanup.

There is an underside to this news. We know that some young people are desperate for a way to support themselves and their families. In a more diverse and healthier economy, the lure of military service would not be so strong. Young soldiers gamble that they will survive the dangers and return home stronger, smarter and more skilled, or that they will be able to pursue a military career. But that does not explain all of the motivation of new recruits.

Generation after generation of West Virginians have volunteered for military service. The Guard's success is a sign of the enduring loyalty and sense of service of Mountain State residents.

DEPLOYMENT

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Departure Ceremonies Planned for Three National Guard Units

NBC.Com

17 October, 2004

About 250 soldiers in three Alabama Army **National Guard** units are preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan for new duty assignments.

Guard spokesman Sgt. Martin Dyson said departure ceremonies are planned Saturday and Sunday.

Two separate ceremonies will be held Saturday for 140 members of the 440th Chemical Company at armories in Vincent and Clanton. The Vincent ceremony is scheduled for 9 a.m. at the Vincent **National Guard** armory and the Clanton ceremony is planned for 11 a.m. at Fort Ivan F. Smith armory.

A send-off for 60 personnel from the 278th Chemical Battalion is scheduled for 8 a.m. Sunday at the Oneonta **National Guard** armory where state adjutant general Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen will address the troops.

A third ceremony will be held Sunday at 2 p.m. when 50 soldiers from the 1993rd Personnel Service Detachment will be recognized at Fort Rufus W. Shepherd armory in Hope Hull near Dannelly Field.

163rd Guard Soldiers Coming Home on Leave Before Iraq
Deployment

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The Bozeman Daily Chronicle

17 October, 2004

By [Gail Schontzler](#)

Soldiers in the Montana **National Guard's** 1-163rd Infantry Battalion will be coming home soon for a few weeks of leave before being sent to Iraq, friends and family members say.

Doris Zinger, a real estate agent from Three Forks, said her 23-year-old son, Spc. John Stites, will be one of the first. He'll be flying home on Oct. 24.

The Guard members' leaves are being staggered, and some won't arrive home until early November. They are taking commercial flights.

Nearly 700 members of the Belgrade-based 1-163rd were called up to active duty in July, in the largest mobilization of Montana troops since World War II. They began their training at Fort Bliss, Texas.

Zinger said her son has told her that all the Guard soldiers seem to have a "very upbeat attitude."

She said she's looking forward to her son's three weeks at home, and family members are planning to visit him.

In mid-November, her son will return to Louisiana, where the battalion has been training at Fort Polk. Some time after that, he expects to be sent to Iraq.

Zinger said she's not looking forward to her son leaving again, but added, "We just ask that God will keep him safe and bring them all home safely."

"I think everybody's worried about them going, but everybody can be awfully proud of them, too."

In the past, her son has worked with her husband's heating and air conditioning business and also served in the Army for three years.

Noel Cooper of Belgrade said farewell to both her husband, Bill, a full-time Guardsman, and their son Bill when both men were called up with the 163rd in July.

About a month later, her son tore a ligament during a training exercise. He has been home since, undergoing physical therapy.

"I'm missing my husband tremendously," Noel Cooper said. "It's definitely hard having him away. We're definitely proud and behind him all the way."

She's enjoying having her son's family stay with her, especially her granddaughter.

"She's keeping my mind occupied happily," Noel Cooper said. "I don't know what I'd do

without her."

Meanwhile, the Bridger alternative high school program of Bozeman High School is preparing to charter a bus to meet social studies teacher Richard Galli at the airport when he flies home later this month.

"We're going to take the whole school," said Dave Swingle, assistant principal.

Maj. Scott Smith, Montana **National Guard** public affairs officer in Helena, said the battalion's training includes the latest lessons learned from soldiers already serving in Iraq.

Smith said he hasn't heard any hard and fast dates about when the 163rd will be sent to Iraq. The current guideline is that Guard members should expect one year of "boots on the ground" in Iraq from the time they arrive, he said.

From the time they were called up last July until the end of their deployment should be about 18 months.

National Guard Says 600 Members Are Being Sent to Iraq

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Associated Press

Boston Globe

15 October, 2004

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) The Vermont Army **National Guard** announced Friday that 600 members of the 86th Brigade are being deployed to Iraq.

That's slightly half of the soldiers who were expected to be mobilized for active duty.

About 1,300 soldiers of the 86th Brigade, a tank unit that draws soldiers from armories across the state, have been on alert for a possible mobilization since June. That alert order was extended in August.

Currently there are about 200 Vermont Army **National Guard** soldiers in Iraq. The soldiers are performing security duties.

Three Vermont **National Guard** members have been killed in action in Iraq. A fourth died of a heart attack in Kuwait before his unit was sent into Iraq.

Oregon Guard Soldiers Mobilize for Iraq Duty

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Bend.com news sources

October 14, 2004

About 60 soldiers from the Oregon Army **National Guard** will mobilize for duty in Iraq on Friday at the Andersen Readiness Center in Salem.

The soldiers will join the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry as replacements for casualties or for soldiers who have completed 24 months of active duty service in the last five years.

Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski and Congresswoman Darlene Hooley will speak at the mobilization ceremony.

The deploying soldiers will report to Fort Bliss, Texas by Oct. 17 for a few weeks of training before deploying to Iraq. When they arrive, the unit will integrate them into operations and provide additional training as needed.

The soldiers will remain in Iraq with the 2nd BN, 162nd IN and return with the unit upon its scheduled rotation out of Iraq. The 2nd BN, 162nd IN is expected to return to Oregon in April of 2005.

There are nearly 700 soldiers from the 2nd BN, 162nd IN serving in Baghdad, Iraq. Fifteen more soldiers from Detachment 2, L Company 151st Aviation Battalion are serving in Balad, Iraq approximately 50 miles north of Baghdad.

There are fifteen of Oregon's citizen soldiers are also serving in Afghanistan as an embedded training team in support of the Afghan National Army. More than forty Guard members are on duty at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; they are watching over detainees captured in the Global War on Terror.

There are currently 399 soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry and 150 soldiers from F Troop, 82nd Cavalry at the Joint Readiness Training Center on Fort Polk, La. They are in the final stages of training prior to a deployment to Iraq.

There are currently 100 soldiers from F Troop, 82nd Cavalry in training at Fort Bliss for a late fall deployment to Iraq.

Oregon has provided citizen-soldiers to Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and homeland defense missions under Operation Noble Eagle while maintaining peak readiness for response to crises in the state. Oregon's citizen-soldiers are ready to serve both state and federal missions as required, being true to their motto "When we are needed, we are there."

**Arizona Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 180th
Field Artillery Called to Federal Active Duty**

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Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs

Oct 14, 2004

More Than 180 Guardsmen from Phoenix and Tucson-based Unit to Depart Saturday

(PHOENIX) The following statement regarding the Arizona Army **National Guard** has

been authorized for release by Governor Janet Napolitano and Major General David P. Rataczak, the Adjutant General of the Arizona **National Guard**:

“We have been informed that the President of the United States has exercised his authority pursuant to section 12302 of Title 10 of the United States Code and ordered selected members of the Arizona Army **National Guard**’s 2nd Battalion, 180th Field Artillery to federal active duty for a period of up to 545 days in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

The order to federal active duty involves more than 180 soldiers from the Phoenix/Tucson-based Artillery Battalion. The unit is scheduled to depart their Chandler Armory (2100 S. Cooper Rd.) in two increments Saturday morning, Oct. 16th beginning at 3:30 a.m. for their mobilization station training at Ft Dix, New Jersey. They will train there for a period of time until the unit is certified and the unit will then depart for their designated theater of operations. Prudent planning and continuous assessment of the security situation gives the combatant commander the force structure and flexibility required to meet mission accomplishments.

Although trained as Artillerymen, Detachment 2 from the 2nd Battalion will be conducting a security force mission. The battalion has been training in Military Police procedures, Infantry tactics, and support and stability operations. They will also receive theater specific training dealing with Arabic culture, urban operations and convoy techniques.

The deployment of Detachment 2, 2nd Battalion, 180th Field Artillery marks the 26th Arizona Army **National Guard** unit to be deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Noble Eagle.

The activation of this unit is part of the ongoing nationwide mobilization of Army and Air **National Guard** units ordered by President Bush in support of the global war on terror over the past 36 months.

The Arizona **National Guard**’s motto is “Always Ready...Always There.” As of today, more than 2,750 Arizona Army **National Guard** and Air **National Guard** soldiers and airmen have answered the call and been ordered to federal active duty in support of Operation’s Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom since September, 2001.

Additionally, the men and women of the Arizona **National Guard** continue to support our state and homeland by supporting local emergency responders for State emergencies and providing security for critical infrastructures when called.

Since Sept 11th 2001, the Arizona **National Guard** has been “Always Ready...Always There” when called to both state active duty and federal active duty to provide security and protection in the State of Arizona. The Arizona **National Guard** has been deployed to provide security at Hoover Dam, additional security to 10 airports throughout Arizona while the transition to the TSA took place, support to expedite inspections of commerce at commercial ports of entry at border stations in Southern Arizona, support to the Immigration and Naturalization Service as well as to the U.S. Customs Service and have been deployed numerous times to Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station to augment existing security.

National Guard Unit Heads Out for 2 Years

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Metro West Daily News

October 15, 2004

By Laura Crimaldi / News Staff Writer

NEWTON -- Growing up in Puerto Rico, Spc. Luis Alvarez, 19, of Framingham idolized his grandfather Manuel Rosario, a private first class in the Army who served in the Vietnam War.

Alvarez's mother, Luz Rosario, will tell you her first-born son latched onto the stories her father told the boy from the time he was 7 until the family left Puerto Rico two years later.

Rosario figures that's how Alvarez, a 2003 Framingham High School graduate, ended up enlisting in the **National Guard**. On Sunday, he ships out to Fort McCoy, Wis., for training before heading overseas with the 747th Finance Detachment.

"My dad is very proud of being in the Army," Luz Rosario said. "He's always telling these types of stories. He (Alvarez) gets fascinated and this is the result," she said yesterday before a mobilization ceremony for the unit at the West Newton Armory.

The 21-member unit, which is part of the West Newton-based 726th Finance Battalion, will train in Wisconsin for six weeks before embarking on a 700-day deployment to the Middle East in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While **National Guard** officials would not comment on the unit's destination, the unit specializes in financial operations and commercial vending for soldiers who are deployed.

"He's excited. He's proud of me," Alvarez said of his grandfather. "I saw him. I saw his uniform. I saw all that he accomplished and I hoped I'd be like him."

Alvarez was studying business at Massachusetts Bay Community College in Framingham and working for TJX Cos. Inc. as a merchandise processor before his unit was activated in February. For the last eight months, he has been guarding Fort Devens in Ayer as part of Operation Noble Eagle.

Aside from his mother, Alvarez has to say goodbye to his two brothers, Oscar, 16, and Antonio, 14, sister, Yadira, 17, and his girlfriend, Melissa Garcia, 18.

"I am (nervous), but you know what? He's in God's hands and that's going to help him and bring him back....I'm not going to fall apart. I am very proud of my son -- very, very proud of him," Rosario said.

Edward Flynn, secretary of the Executive Office of Public Safety; state Reps. Kay Khan, D-Newton, and Peter Koutoujian, D-Waltham; state Sen. Cynthia Stone Creem, D-Newton, and Newton Mayor David Cohen joined **National Guard** personnel in

extending their best wishes to the unit and their families.

"I'm proud of you. We all love you and we want you to take that with you as you go forward to serve us," Cohen told the unit.

Spc. Andrew Bell, 22, of Framingham leaves knowing he has three semesters left before he can graduate from Framingham State College.

But because of online classes available at the college, Bell may not have to put his studies on hold during his deployment.

"I'm excited about that," said Bell, a 2000 graduate of Marian High School in Framingham.

Bell's parents, Bill and Elaine, friend Matt Owens, grandmother Minnie McCann of Newton, and aunts and uncles Jack and Martha Winchenbaugh and Margaret and Terry Donnelly of Waltham were on hand to for the ceremony.

As for the next 700 days, Bell said he is not a bit nervous.

"We're going to be prepared. We have a job to do and we'll do it," he said.

BENEFITS

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Fletcher Allen to Extend Benefits to Workers on Duty in National Guard

Vermont's largest healthcare provider is going to ensure that employees called to active duty in the **National Guard** or Reserve don't lose money from their salaries.

Fletcher Allen Healthcare in Burlington will make up the difference between an employees' regular pay and their military pay.

The agreement also provides health insurance benefits for employee dependents who are not eligible for military health insurance benefits.

Fletcher Allen's offer is effective from October 1 of this year until December 31, 2005.

There are about a half dozen Fletcher Allen employees currently on active duty, said spokesman Collin Parker.

Earlier, the state of Vermont decided to make up the difference in salaries for up to a year of military service.

Governor James Douglas called on all state employers to extend the benefits.

"We are very pleased to answer the governor's call and provide these benefits for our employees in the Guard and Reserve," said Fletcher Allen President Melinda Estes, MD. "It's a way for us to honor their sacrifice and to help make sure they get the financial stability they deserve."

Currently there are several hundred Vermont **National Guard** members on active duty. Another 1,300 Guard members have been told it's likely they will be called up within the

next 2 months.

HOMEFRONT: DEALING WITH DEPLOYMENT

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On The Home Front: Bringing Up Baby; While Daddy's Away At War

The Columbian (Vancouver, Washington)

October 9, 2004

By Dean Baker

Melissa O'Neil tells friends not to feel sorry that she's raising her 2-month-old daughter alone while her husband, Patrick, soldiers in Baghdad with the Washington **National Guard**.

"I hate it. I hate the pity," said O'Neil, 25, as she holds nine-pound Averyaella Marie in their east Vancouver house. "Especially when I was pregnant, and they heard Patrick was in Iraq, people felt sorry for me. I didn't want that.

"It's hard because I miss him so much," she said, packing a tiny plastic Christmas tree and gifts for her soldier: chocolates, family photos, newspapers, candles and a video game. She's sending the gifts now to make sure they reach Iraq by the holidays.

"I'm having to go through life without him," said the 1997 Evergreen High School graduate.

She stroked her baby and brushed back her own long, red hair.

"It's hard because I'm scared. If anything happened to him I don't know what I'd do. And there's nothing I can do. And he's not going to see Avery again until she's six months old."

Yet, there's no reason to cry for her, she said. She knew Patrick, 29, was a soldier when she married him a year ago. He's been in the **National Guard** for 10 years. So it was no surprise when he was shipped to Iraq eight months ago.

"I've pulled my life together," she said. "I have so much here for Patrick to come home to. Patrick's doing more than I could ever do, but I'm here, too. I want people to be proud of me, not feel sorry for me."

Patrick often sends e-mails and phones Melissa. He even e-mailed home photos of himself in combat gear. But, they seldom talk about his mission in Iraq.

"He doesn't want to worry me," she said.

Patrick didn't answer e-mail from The Columbian. But his buddy, Sgt. Curtis Hyland, 30, of Vancouver, serves beside O'Neil in Baghdad. Hyland wrote in an e-mail to The Columbian that they've seen plenty of action.

Hyland's wife, Brandi, 26, gets together with Melissa frequently in a Family Readiness Group that meets every Tuesday night at Vancouver Barracks. The group links Washington **National Guard** parents, spouses and children. Many have attended over the months, but generally only half a dozen or so show up to support each other on any given Tuesday.

In Baghdad, Hyland and O'Neil serve in the 1st Battalion, 161st Infantry Regiment of the Washington **National Guard's** 81st Armor Brigade attached to the Army's 1st Cavalry Division. They collect intelligence, Hyland wrote.

"Five or six times a week, we drive into our area and ask questions. Interaction with the Iraqi populace is both interesting and dangerous. We've been involved in hostile encounters with insurgents in our area. Most of our time is spent helping the Iraqi people rebuild their infrastructure."

Relaxation comes in watching movies, listening to music, playing poker, talking and writing to family, Hyland wrote. "At times there is the looming threat of mortars, rockets and car bombs."

Hyland questions the reasons behind the war. He wrote, "But I do not question the fact that the Iraqi people will be stronger, freer people for our efforts."

He added that most Americans get from TV "a tainted look at Iraq as a whole. Granted, there is violence and death. But there is also hope. The new Iraqi government, with cooperation from the coalition forces, are refurbishing and rebuilding schools, paving roads, teaching democracy, restoring power and staying steadfast on the path of a free election in January."

Nearly misses the birth

Patrick was granted a leave for the baby's birth, but barely made it home in time on Aug. 12 for her arrival.

"I went into labor at midnight the night before he got here," Melissa said. "I knew he was on his way home. I didn't know where he was, but I knew he should be here soon." She went to her doctors and asked for drugs to make the contractions stop. They worked.

"I just slept and slept and slept and tried to stay calm so the contractions wouldn't start up again."

The next day, Patrick called from a layover in Texas and asked her to pick him up at Portland International Airport. Her friend Amy Stalkup drove her to the airport.

"I had to wait in the car, and I was talking to Avery the whole way: 'Please wait, please wait!' "

When she saw Patrick getting off the plane, she said, "I was screaming. I was crying. I was so happy to see him. I just felt so wonderful. Everything was OK. Everybody was staring at us."

They sped directly to Southwest Washington Medical Center, where she delivered a few hours later.

Firefighters Warm Up To Soldier's Campaign

Washington Times
October 18, 2004
By Judith Person

When Army Sgt. Ben Jost sent an e-mail from Afghanistan asking his family and friends to send coats for the war-torn country's orphans, his firefighting "brothers" in Dale City, Va., went all out to answer his call.

The Prince William County Fire and Rescue Department and the Dale City Volunteer Fire Department started a coat drive two weeks ago and, with the community's help, have collected dozens of boxes of coats, gloves, hats and scarves for Afghan children, as well school supplies, including reams of paper, pencils and pens.

David Buchanan, equipment manager for the Dale City department, estimates that it has collected nearly 200 boxes of winter clothes and school supplies.

"This has snowballed into something more than we expected, but it is a good thing," Mr. Buchanan said. "Now we are wondering how to get a whole tractor-trailer full out to Afghanistan."

The collection started after Sgt. Jost, 31, a county firefighter, told his parents in an e-mail that he wanted to start a coat drive for children living in some of the villages he patrols in Afghanistan.

Because he didn't have the means to do it, the Front Royal, Va., resident asked his parents for help. "The kids have nothing here," he wrote in the Aug. 24 e-mail.

His parents shared the e-mail with his younger sister, Tammy Jost, 25, who immediately took it to the Dale City fire department, where she has volunteered for three years.

There, firefighters didn't hesitate to spread the word in the community, which responded in droves.

Miss Jost said she hopes the military will pitch in to transport the donations to Afghanistan. Otherwise, she said, she will go to her local post office and mail each box individually. "There is no stopping this now," she said.

Mr. Buchanan said the department is looking for ways to deliver the donations overseas. "If anyone has a bright idea of how to get a truckload of stuff to Afghanistan, please throw it our way," he said.

Miss Jost said she can't wait for her brother to find out how his firefighting family has responded to his request. "He knows we are collecting things. He does not know to what extent this is going on," she said. "He is going to be overwhelmed with joy."

Sgt. Jost has been a county firefighter for about two years and a volunteer firefighter with the Dale City Volunteer Fire Department for 11 years.

He is serving in the Bravo Company, 5th Platoon, 116th Infantry of the Army **National Guard**. A husband and father of three, Sgt. Jost began his two-year tour in Afghanistan in July.

Serving with Sgt. Jost in his same unit is firefighter Troy White, of the Dale City Volunteer Fire Department. The two men are offering humanitarian support to Afghanistan.

Sgt. Jost wrote the e-mail to thank his family for sending a care package to him. "If given the choice," he wrote, "I would rather the care package go to [the children] instead of me."

The firefighters who work with Sgt. Jost and Mr. White say the request for humanitarian supplies is typical for both soldiers.

"I know Ben well," Mr. Buchanan said. "The amazing thing about him is how selfless he is. This is exactly the thing he would do."

Anyone interested in donating coats or school supplies can drop them off at four stations in Woodbridge: Station 10 on Birchdale Avenue, Station 13 on Hillendale Drive, Station 18 on Dale Boulevard and Station 20 on Prince William Parkway.

Mr. Buchanan said his department will continue to accept donations after the Nov. 1 deadline and will get them overseas.

National Guard Troops Thanked For Hurricane Duty

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Tampa Tribune
Oct 15, 2004

PLANT CITY - One child drew a truck and a soldier. Another wrote ``Hip hip hurray. You're our hero. Thank you so much for helping our community."

One sent a poem.

``Roses are red. Violets are blue. Thank you for your help. We love you!"

The thank-you cards, sent from children of First Christian Church of Wauchula, are on

display at the Florida **National Guard** Armory on Airport Road.

It is the church attended by Capt. Bill Mitchell, who was among about 200 soldiers who gave aid and comfort to victims of four hurricanes that struck Florida in the past two months. The Guard members are part of the 3rd Battalion 116th Field Artillery, based in Plant City.

“That's the best part of hurricane duty, the kids,” said Mitchell, who is headquarters service battery commander.

The battalion, which is composed of five units, was deployed to some of the hardest-hit places in the state: Arcadia, Wauchula, St. Lucie County and Pensacola. The troops handed out water, ice and food to victims and stood guard outside businesses to deter looters. In places such as Indiantown in Martin County, bilingual soldiers eased the fears of migrant families who were reluctant to seek help.

End

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