

The Monthly Magazine of the Texas Military Forces

February 2009

# The DISPATCH



**Fallen Heroes Remembered After Blackhawk Crash**  
**"Agribusiness" Soldiers Say Goodbye A Second Time**  
**2008 Outstanding Airmen of the Year Awards**  
**State Guard Soldiers Assist in delivery of Oral Rabies Vaccine**

# The DISPATCH



## 4 2008 Outstanding Airmen of the Year Awards

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## 6 State Guard Helps Vaccinate Wildlife Against Rabies

For nearly three weeks during January five Laredo-based Texas State Guard members air-delivered nearly two million rabies vaccines to wildlife in the name of public safety.

## 10 Fallen Texas Soldier Remembered After Crash

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## 11 ROTC Cadets Pay Respects to Fallen Aggie

It was a dreary overcast day as friends and family members laid to rest 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Zachary Ryan "Zac" Cook. Lieutenant Cook was killed in a Blackhawk helicopter crash at Texas A&M University.

## 14 36th Infantry Division Band Gains Elite Status

In December the division band became the second Army Division Band and fourth Army National Guard Band to ever receive the coveted Colonel George S. Howard Citation of Musical Excellence, a prestigious international award for Military Concert Bands.



**Cover-** 1st Lt. Andrew Barnes, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1/112 Cavalry Regiment guards the crash site of a Texas National Guard Blackhawk helicopter at Texas A&M University in Bryan/College Station, Texas. (Photo by Sgt. Jennifer D. Atkinson, Texas Military Forces Public Affairs.)

# THE BULLETIN BOARD

## *Soldiers Required to Take Self-Assessment*

U.S. Army officials announced that all Soldiers have until March 15, 2009 to complete a brief, one-time self-assessment of their foreign language skills. The survey is mandatory for active and reserve component Soldiers. A portion of the survey allows Soldiers who speak only English to submit that information. Soldiers can access the self-assessment survey on the Army's Human Resources Command website. (<https://perscomnd04.army.mil/langsurv.nsf/langsurvcentopen?openform>) For more information, contact the U.S. Army Human Resources Command in Alexandria, Va. at (703) 695-7697 or DSN (312) 225-7697.

## *Get College Credit for Military Experience in 2009*

The American Council on Education (ACE) was created in 1942 to recognize the educational value of military training and experience. Since that time ACE has continuously evaluated military schools, correspondence courses and occupations to determine the amount and level of academic credit each should be awarded. Applying your military experience credits could save you as much as \$600 and 5 months on a typical 3-credit college course. The first step to claiming the credits you have earned is to request a transcript from your military service. Each service will provide unofficial personal copies and send schools an official copy of your transcript at no charge. For more information visit: <http://education.military.com/timesaving-programs/college-credit-for-military-experience?ESRC=mr.nl>

## *Disney Offers Affordable Vacations for Troops*

"Disney's Armed Forces Salute" offers active and retired military personnel, including active members of the Coast Guard and activated members of the National Guard or Reserve, complimentary, multiday admission into Disney's U.S. theme parks and special ticket offers for family members and friends. At the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida, from Jan. 4 to Dec. 23 each active or retired member of the U.S. military may obtain one free five-day "Disney's Armed Forces Salute" ticket. Shades of Green, a hotel at the resort, is open exclusively to servicemembers, retirees, defense civilians, and their families. For more information, visit your installation's ITT/ITR office or [http://www.mickeynews.com/News/DisplayPressRelease.asp\\_Q\\_id\\_E\\_169Free](http://www.mickeynews.com/News/DisplayPressRelease.asp_Q_id_E_169Free)

## *VA to Provide Extra Funds for Rural Vets*

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will provide \$21.7 million to its regional health care systems to improve services specifically designed for veterans in rural areas. The extra funding will be used to increase the number of mobile clinics, establish new outpatient clinics, expand fee-based care, explore collaborations with federal and community partners, accelerate the use of telemedicine deployment, and fund innovative pilot programs. VA's Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) with less than 3 percent of their patients in rural areas will receive \$250,000. Those with population of rural veterans between 3 percent and 6 percent will receive \$1 million each. And VISNs with more than 6 percent of their veterans population in rural areas will receive \$1.5 million.

## *VA Assists Financially Burdened Veterans*

For veterans struggling financially due to a job loss or decreased income, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering an assortment of programs. Veterans whose previous income was ruled too high for VA health care may be able to enter the VA system based upon a hardship if their current year's income is projected to fall below federal income thresholds. Qualifying veterans may be eligible for enrollment and receive health care at no cost. Veterans who recently returned from a combat zone are also eligible for no-cost VA care. For more information, contact the enrollment coordinator at any VA medical center, VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387) or visit <http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/>

## *TRICARE Guidelines for Travelling*

To ensure that your TRICARE service is available if you plan to travel. Prior to your departure, verify that your information and your family's information is up to date in the [Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System \(DEERS\)](#). Pack your uniformed services ID card and TRICARE Prime/TRICARE Prime Remote enrollment card, which you may need to present if you need medical care or prescriptions refilled. Call the number (1-877-874-2273) on the back of your enrollment card to find out what to do prior to seeking care or if you are hospitalized. Schedule any routine care with your Primary Care Manager (PCM) before you travel. Urgent care must be coordinated in advance with your PCM.

# The DISPATCH

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# And the Winners Are...OAY 2009 Awards Announced

Story and photos by Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada

Camp Mabry, Austin, Texas (27 Jan, 2009) – The yearly selection of Outstanding Airman of the Year took place here on 11 Jan, 2009 in a family and friend-packed auditorium.

After the arrival of the official party, posting of the Colors by the Apollo Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol and a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem by Tech. Sgt. Wiggins from the 149<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Sr. Master Sgt. Nancy Herren opened the ceremony with the words: “Each of the Airmen, Non-Commissioned Officers, Senior Non-Commissioned Officers, First Sergeants and Honor Guard represented here today have exhibited the highest level of professionalism and leadership in their respective organizations. We are here today to recognize their achievements and contributions to the Texas Air National Guard.”

Before the winners were introduced, the OAY program was explained as selecting the best of the best competing in the categories: Airman of the Year, Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, First Sergeant of the Year and Honor Guard Member of the Year to represent the state of Texas during the National competition. Individually the competitors would be presented with the Texas Medal of Merit and the winners would receive the Texas Outstanding Service Medal, a state flag flown over the Texas capitol, and a recognition plaque from the Senior Enlisted Advisory Council.

But what everybody, not in the least the very nervous nominees, had been waiting

for was Sr. Master Sgt. Talavera from the State Senior Enlisted Advisory Council to name the winners, and they were:

Representing the **147<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Wing** and winner of the most outstanding Airman of the Year: **Senior Airman Jeremy D. Liversidge**.

Representing the **254<sup>th</sup> Combat Communications Group** and winner of the most outstanding Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year: **Staff Sgt. David E. Driver**.

Representing the **209<sup>th</sup> Weather Flight**, and winner of the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year: **Master Sgt. David J. Loyd**.

Representing the **136<sup>th</sup> Mission Support Group** and winner of the Most Outstanding First Sergeant of the Year: **Master Sgt. Anthony Jimenez**.

And finally, representing the **149<sup>th</sup> Mission Support Flight** and winner of the Honor Guard Member of the Year: **Staff Sgt. Angela M. Zuniga**.

Both The Adjutant General, Lt. Gen. (TX) Charles G. Rodriguez and Maj. Gen. Allen R. Dehnert, Assistant Adjutant General Air, addressed the group and acknowledged that today’s Guardsman and woman are expected to perform not only in their respective Air Force Specialty Codes and in support of the Global War on Terrorism, but also in Texas communities during times of need. He used the examples of recent hurricanes to demonstrate that more and more Texas Air National Guard personnel have been asked to step up and respond to provide comfort, food and shelter or assist during the recovery phase after a hurricane or flood.

General Dehnert spoke predominantly to family members and friends and asked the nominees to take a look at them and thank them for their support. He said: “Without them you would not be able to do what you do.”

Finalizing the ceremony, Senior Master Sgt. Herren said: “We congratulate

all of the nominees on their outstanding achievements and wish them the best in their future. It is most important to note that all nominees here today are winners, and we should congratulate each of them for their outstanding accomplishments, and a job well done!”

In attendance during the ceremony were: The Adjutant General, Lt. Gen. (TX) Charles G. Rodriguez, The Assistant Adjutant General for Air and Commander of the Texas Air National Guard, Maj. Gen. Allen R. Dehnert, Deputy Commander of the Texas Air National Guard, Brig. Gen. Donald D. Harvel, The Chief of Staff, HQ Texas Air National Guard, Col. Russell Malesky, The State Command Sgt. Maj. Juan Morales, The Texas Air National Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. Sam Davis, and Wing Commanders Col. Lanny McNeely, 147<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Wing, Col. John Nichols, 149<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Combat Communications Group Commander Col. Will Allen, Security Forces Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Carl Alvarez, Engine Installation Squadron, Lt. Col. Mark Eubanks, and 209<sup>th</sup> Weather Flight Commander, Capt. Paul Bushow.

Additionally the command chiefs from the 136<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, Chief Master Sgt. Johnny Jones, 147<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Wing, Chief Master Sgt. Priscilla Leger, and Chief Master Sgt. Ed Hobbs, were there to congratulate the Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

**Left- Master Sgt. Anthony Jimenez, Staff Sgt. Angela M. Zuniga, Staff Sgt. David E. Driver.**

**Bottom Left- Brig. Gen. Donald Harvel, Staff Sgt. Angela M. Zuniga Center- Brig. Gen. Donald Harvel, Staff Sgt. David E. Driver**

**Right- 1st Sgt., Master Sgt. Anthony Jimenez, Maj. Gen. Allen R. Dehnert. Not present during the ceremony were: SrA Jeremy Liversidge and MSgt David Loyd.**



# Arrowhead Soldier Plays Soccer With Iraqis

**Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick  
56th IBCT PAO, 36th Inf. Div., MND-B**

BAGHDAD – Spc. Toni Deason, serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team 36th Inf. Div., Multi-National Division - Baghdad, is a soccer player who just happens to also be a Soldier. Specialist Deason, from Houston, Texas, has played soccer most of her life.

Starting out when she was five, Sergeant Deason played soccer throughout her adolescence. At Coppell High School, she played for four years as a keeper, her team improving each of her four years with the squad. After high school, she went on to play and start for four years at McNeese State in Lake Charles, La. where she excelled, ranking as the number two overall performing keeper in the nation her junior season. The 2005 college graduate found herself looking toward the military when she joined the Texas National Guard in April 2007. On Jan. 16, she got a chance to show off her athletic prowess with some Iraqis. However, the former college soccer star wasn't alone.

"They were really quick; really good players," Specialist Deason explained.

Playing in a game with Soldiers of Headquarters Support Company, Division Special Troops Battalion, 10th Mtn. Div., she was able to mingle with some local players as they formed teams consisting of both Soldiers and Iraqi citizens.

"It was just a great experience to play with kids from a different culture and to just have some fun and interact with the people of the village," Specialist Deason explained.

Specialist Deason is a Human Resources Specialist and works in the brigade personnel section. She is responsible for the quality assurance on all awards that are submitted and subsequently printed. It is a job that generally keeps her in the office at least eight hours a day.

"It was great to be able to play and get out of the office. It took a lot of stress off of my shoulders. I probably won't be in a bad mood for the rest of the month," Specialist Deason said excitedly.



**Above- Spc. Toni Deason, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Inf. Div., Multi-National Division – Baghdad, advances the ball down field as a defender approaches her during a soccer game on Jan 16. Spc. Deason, a former college soccer star, was playing soccer with Iraqi citizens in Airport Village.**

**Above right- Spc. Toni Deason kicks the ball towards the goal during a warm-up exercise for a soccer game on Jan. 16.**

**Right- Spc. Toni Deason, puts on her cleats in preparation for a soccer game on Jan. 16.**



# Texas State Guard Members Help Vaccinate Wildlife

Story and photos by Master Sgt. Brenda Benner  
Texas Military Forces Public Affairs

JUNCTION, Texas – For nearly three weeks during January, five Laredo-based Texas State Guard members air-delivered nearly two million bite-sized morsels to gray foxes and coyotes in the name of public safety. Their volunteer mission involved low altitude flights over 35 counties in the West-Central Texas region as they supported the fight against rabies.

Each winter the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) conducts its Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP) in South and West-Central Texas for rabies control in rural areas. Vaccine baits are strategically dropped from small airplanes piloted by civilian aviators. Since 1995 the success of the program has drastically reduced the number of rabies cases in gray fox and coyote populations.

In recent years, the Texas State Guard (TXSG) has taken on the ORVP support mission previously performed by Texas Army National Guard (TXARNG) Soldiers.

Members from Laredo's 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment, volunteered for the West-Central Texas portion of the ORVP mission.

First Sgt. Alfredo E. Rendon and his 20 year-old son, Luis, helped their fellow



team members load three 18-wheeler trailers worth of vaccine baits onto the conveyor belt for the flights. They started before sunrise, preparing the baits for a series of flights by three specially-equipped airplanes.

Sergeant Rendon, a 22-year infantry veteran of the TXARNG, joined the TXSG 17 years after his retirement. With four of his sons in the same Laredo unit, serving the community is a family mission.

"This is my second year helping with the rabies control," said Sergeant Rendon. "We keep the baits rolling by immediately restocking the planes when they are finished refueling."

First time ORVP volunteer Pvt. Jesus Villanueva admitted it's the many hours of flying at merely 500 to 700 feet altitude that has him hooked on the mission. He said he considers himself fortunate to scan areas of rural Texas that few people will ever see. Besides that, there is a bonus.

"The little plane feels like a roller coaster," Private Villanueva said. "This is a fun mission."

According to DSHS Wildlife Disease Biologist Dr. Guy M. Moore, the return of ORVP experienced volunteers is a positive factor that reduces training time and ensures the vaccines are delivered approximately 91 baits per square mile.

"This year we have 10 State Guard members, including another team of five who have shifted from Del Rio to Pecos," said Dr. Moore. "They provide a really good service by keeping the continuity going as the baiting moves from region to region."

"They help us vaccinate our target species and build a barrier against the disease," Dr. Moore explained. "Domestic dogs can acquire rabies from foxes and coyotes from bites and scratches."

Dr. Moore stated the ORVP's efforts have shown great success in all treated areas with little reoccurrence of rabies in the past few years.

Second year ORVP veteran, Staff Sgt. Juan Garcia said he enjoys the rabies vaccine mission because it's something very different from his other assignments.

While performing duties as the navi-

gator, Sergeant Garcia controls the dispensing machine's vaccine bait drop rate by watching the delivery on a video screen. He intermittently stops the machine when flying over water sources, plowed fields or roads when vehicles are present.

"I help the pilot as another set of eyes," said Sergeant Garcia. "I watch out for water towers and flocks of birds and also make sure we aren't flying too fast and that we stay on our GPS coordinates."

Dr. Moore stressed that the TXSG volunteers, along with DSHS and Texas Wildlife Services personnel are a good fit and form an effective mission-oriented family.

"We've generated camaraderie as we work together for a common goal," said Dr. Moore. "Everyone from the different agencies pitches in ... it's all about teamwork."

Once the ORVP mission is complete, the TXSG members will shift their focus to community support events such as the upcoming 112th Washington's Birthday Celebration events and the Laredo International Fair and Exposition.



**Left- Texas State Guard member Spc. Luis Manzo, of Laredo, loads rabies vaccine baits onto airplanes at the Junction airport while supporting the Texas Department of State Health Services' anti-rabies program.**

**Above- Texas State Guard volunteers Pfc. Luis Rendon, left, and his father, First Sgt. Alfredo E. Rendon, load rabies vaccine baits while supporting the Texas Department of State Health Services' anti-rabies program.**

# 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, San Pietro commemorate battle

Story and photos by Maj. Eric N. Atkisson

36th Infantry Division Public Affairs

**SAN PIETRO INFINE**, Italy- For the people of San Pietro Infine, Italy, the memory of the Second World War is never far from their thoughts... or their homes. Indeed, in this quiet pastoral town of Italy's Campagna region, the memory of war looms above them quite literally, in a cluster of gray, vine-covered ruins on the southern slope of Monte Sammucro.

They are all that is left of the original San Pietro Infine, a once-sleepy village that was reduced to rubble during two terrible months in the winter of 1943 after the Germans occupied it and the Allies drove them out with a relentless onslaught of artillery, armor and infantry attacks.

The town's residents hid in caves without food, water or medicine, waiting for the savage storm to pass, and emerged to find their homes destroyed and 140 of their loved ones or neighbors among the dead. Captured on film by John Huston, the Battle of San Pietro came to symbolize the terrible tragedy of the war, and the ruins of the old town were later designated a national monument.

To honor the memory of the battle's victims—civilians and soldiers alike—and to inaugurate a new museum at the base



of the ruins, San Pietro hosted a 65th anniversary wreath-laying ceremony on Dec. 21, 2008.

Maj. Gen. Jose S. Mayorga, commander of the 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard, and a color guard of seven other Texas Guardsmen joined their Italian counterparts for the occasion in the courtyard of old San Pietro. The 36th Division led the Allied effort in 1943 to secure San Pietro and Monte Sammucro and suffered more than 1400 casualties during the battle.

"There is, and there always will be, a little piece of Texas in San Pietro, and a piece of San Pietro in Texas, for as long as future generations remember the Second World War and the Battle of San Pietro," said General Mayorga, who followed Mayor Fabio Vecchiarino on stage for speeches marking the occasion.

Mayor Vecchiarino expressed his hope that San Pietro, with the aid of its new museum, would continue to serve as a "monument against the madness of war."

The museum, whose interior resembles a dark cave of the kind that sheltered the town's residents during the battle, focuses on the harrowing experiences of the town's survivors and the soldiers who fought there. It includes personal relics as well as educational, multimedia presentations about the conflict from the perspectives of those who lived through it.

"It's very important that all of this information be preserved," says Michele di Lonardo, a local historian and tourist guide who speaks Italian, English, French and German. "Especially for the younger generations. They do not always consider how important these events were or how fortunate they are." Mr. Di Lonardo echoes the sentiment expressed by the mayor and others that San Pietro will serve as a place where people from all places and all walks of life can reflect on the importance of peace in our increasingly global world.

A delegation of Texas National Guardsmen is expected to return to Italy this summer for similar commemorative ceremonies in the nearby towns of Cassino and Sant' Angelo, both of which were also destroyed in the catastrophic battles of the Liri Valley, 65 years ago.



**Above- Maj. Gen. Jose S. Mayorga, commander of the Texas National Guard's 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, salutes during a wreath-laying ceremony at San Pietro Infine, Italy, commemorating the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic battle that claimed the lives of more than 140 of the town's original citizens and resulted in more than 1400 casualties from the 36<sup>th</sup> Division. Standing to General Mayorga's right is the town's mayor, Fabio Vecchiarino.**

**Above right- An Italian color guard stands at parade rest during the wreath-laying ceremony in the courtyard of old San Pietro, Dec. 21, 2008.**



## WILDFIRE Awareness: Preparedness and Evacuations

### Governor's Department of Emergency Management

AUSTIN – Wildland fires pose a threat throughout Texas, especially when dry weather conditions combine with high winds and extreme temperatures. Whether you live near open grassland, in a suburban area on the edge of town or in a forested area, fire can threaten your home. When weather conditions make wildland fires more likely, take the following precautions:

- Keep fire fighting tools handy, such as: ladder long enough to reach the roof, shovel, rake and buckets.
- Place connected garden hoses on all sides of the house for emergency use.
- Know all emergency exits from your house.
- Learn all routes leading out of your neighborhood.

As fires actually approach, take the following actions:

- Park your car facing the direction of escape.
- Shut off gas at the meter. Only a qualified professional can

safely turn the gas back on.

- Turn off propane tanks.
- Place combustible patio furniture inside.
- Seal vents with pre-cut plywood or commercial seals.
- Wet down or remove shrubs within 15 feet of your residence.
- Place lawn sprinklers on roof and near above-ground fuel tanks. Wet down the roof.
- Close windows, vents, doors, blinds and non combustible window coverings. Remove flammable drapes and curtains.
- Close interior doors and windows to prevent drafts.

**If advised to evacuate, do so immediately. Choose a route away from the fire hazard and be alert to changes in the speed and direction of fire and smoke.**

For more information on fire danger and advisories, see the Texas Forest Service Web site at: <http://texasforestservicetamu.edu>

## Ready At A Moment's Notice: Family Emergency Supplies

Following a disaster, officials and relief workers will provide assistance, but they will not be able to reach everyone immediately. To sustain your family before help arrives, prepare a disaster supplies kit.

It is best to keep your emergency supplies, except your credit cards, cash, and documents, in portable containers (such as plastic tubs) in case you need to evacuate. If you do this, you can be ready to leave much more quickly.

Your kit should include the following items:

- Bottled water (three-day supply of four quarts per person per day)

- Food (three-day supply of non-perishable foods such as canned meats, fruits and vegetables)

- Can opener, pocket knife, eating utensils, cups, plates and bowls

- First-aid kit and at least a 30 day supply of prescription medicines

- Battery-operated radio and extra batteries

- Flashlight and extra batteries

- Tools, tape, plastic sheeting, signal flares and matches

- Fire extinguisher

- Sanitation products such as toilet paper,

- paper towels, soap, detergent, bleach and disinfectant

- Clothing and bedding for each family member.

- Special items for babies, the elderly, disabled persons or others with special needs

- Cash or traveler's checks

- Important documents (kept in waterproof containers) such as insurance policies, deeds, titles, stocks, birth certificates, passports, wills, immunization records, etc.

- If you have a pet, include pet food, a carrier or cage, and, where appropriate, a leash in your supplies.

For more information and tips, visit

<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/publicinformation.htm>

# Arrowhead Soldiers Sharpen Reflexive Fire Skills



*Top left- A 5.56 millimeter casing is ejected from the weapon of Maj. John Barbour, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Inf. Div., as he looks downrange through his scope while squeezing the trigger on his M4 carbine at Arizola Range on Camp Slayer in Baghdad.*

*Below- Master Sgt. Donald Unsell, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Inf. Div., fires two rounds from his M4 carbine at a target during the movement to contact phase of reflexive fire training.*



*Bottom left- Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Inf. Div., fires his weapon down range. Kendrick was participating in the stationary phase of reflexive fire training on January 2nd at Arizola range on Camp Slayer in Baghdad. During this phase a Soldier stands in one spot with their weapon at the low ready position and awaits the command of 'Ready, Up'. When this command is given, it lets the Soldier know to raise his weapon towards the target; fire two well aimed rounds, and then return the weapon to the low ready position.*

*Bottom right- Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Inf. Div., listen as they receive instruction during reflexive fire training on January 2nd at Arizola Range on Camp Slayer in Baghdad. Reflexive fire teaches Soldiers to keep weapons at the low ready and to raise their weapons when targets present themselves; firing two well aimed shots and then returning to the low ready.*

*(U.S. Army Photos by Capt John Hutka, 56th IBCT PAO, 36th ID)*

# Texas National Guard Soldier Laid to Rest

**Story and photos by Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada  
Texas Military Forces Public Affairs**

CAMP MABRY, Austin, Texas—(26 Jan, 2009) Staff Sgt. Charles Clayton Mitts, 42, assigned to C Co., 1/108th Avn. Reg., born in a military hospital in San Antonio on 27 April, 1966, passed away Jan 14, 2009, from injuries sustained in a crash, and was laid to rest at Houston National Cemetery, 23 Jan, 2009.

The Texas Army National Guard UH-60 helicopter that carried Sergeant Mitts and four others crashed at Duncan Field, Texas A&M University on Monday 12 Jan 2009, after completing a routine training mission with ROTC students from Texas A&M.

Sergeant Mitts was and shall forever more be a Texas Army National Guard Soldier, but in his civilian life he was a beloved husband and father, police, SWAT and undercover vice officer and Federal Air Marshal.

Many of his former co-workers and superiors attended the funeral to say goodbye to a hero. Included among the mourners was 1Lt. Ellis Wayne Taylor, the UH-60 pilot, who despite being in a body cast and in a wheel chair, traveled to Houston to honor his fallen friend. In a touching moment, Mrs. Mitts em-

braced him prior to the ceremony.

The lone bagpipe, the Liberty Bells, Honor Guard and ceremonial 21-gun-salute all befitted the man who showed great valor in battle overseas and who proudly served his community. One of the speakers said: "I hope you won't be offended when I say that I never let him go because he will be eternally known as a police officer of the Parker Height police department. When he served at the department he was recognized many times over for acts of human kindness and bravery. A residential neighborhood was affected by a swollen creek in 1997 and he rescued people from flood waters at great peril to himself. Charlie Mitts was on the scene. Whether he worked for the Texas National Guard, the Federal Marshal Service or as a police officer, Charlie was not only a true hero; he was a good and honorable man."

Sergeant Mitts' commander in Iraq said: "Charlie was not afraid to speak his mind, but he did it with compassion and he did it with tact. Over the course of my conversations with him we talked about politics, we talked about the Guard, our God and our families but we ended every conversation with 'strength and courage.' My highest honor is to be his friend. For Charlie, one last time: 'Strength and Courage Charlie.'"

The Adjutant General Texas, Lt. Gen. Charles G. Rodriguez, said: "Staff Sergeant Charles Mitts was and is a great Soldier," and one by one he presented Mrs. Kristi Mitts with her husband's decorations. The flag that had draped the coffin was folded by the honor guard and presented to Mrs. Mitts and the children each received a flag after it was gently touched to Sergeant Mitts' casket.

The ceremony concluded with a fly-over tribute by his friends and fellow aviators. May Charlie rest in peace. He will be missed and never forgotten.



**Left- In silent tribute stand his boots and weapon.**

**Above- The flag is carefully folded and presented to Mrs. Kristi Mitts**

# Family and Friends Say Goodbye To Soldier; Aggie

Story by 2nd Lt. Adam Musil  
36th Infantry Division Public Affairs

LUFKIN, Texas—It was a dreary overcast day here as friends and family members laid to rest 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Zachary Ryan “Zac” Cook.

Lieutenant Cook died from injuries sustained during a helicopter crash at the Texas A&M campus last week. Lt. Cook was a recent graduate of Texas A&M University and a member of the Corps of Cadets. At the time of his passing he was assigned to the Reserve Officer Training Corps Cadre at Texas A&M University. By all accounts, Zac was a strong,

courageous, dedicated young man with a burning desire to help people.

“Zac had always wanted to graduate from Texas A&M, join the army and fly helicopters,” Zac’s longtime friend Hall Henderson said during a tribute to his friend. “And that sonnuva gun died doing all three...I know Zac is smiling down on us now.”

Raised in East Texas, Zac grew up playing sports and hunting with his friends and family. Those close to him described Zac as a strong silent type who was not afraid to help people in trouble. Some went as far as to describe Zac as a

young John Wayne.

Zac was a man who believed in his country and what it stood for. He believed in ceremony and the stories of courageous soldiers who came before him. While no one will ever know the type of soldier Zac would have been, the people of this small Texas town will always remember their fallen hero. And for man like Zac, that will probably be enough.

Zac is survived by his father and mother, David and Becky Cook; brother, Second Lieutenant David Cook Jr.; grandparents, Lloyd and Nelda Cook; and a number of aunt,

uncles, cousins and many friends.



**2nd Lt. Ryan “Zac” Cook**

## After The Crash- ROTC Cadets Remember Fallen

By Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada  
Texas Military Forces Public Affairs

BRYAN-COLLEGE STATION, Texas- Jan 14, 2009 -- Media trucks, emergency and military vehicles still lined the perimeter roads around Duncan Field at Texas A&M University following the crash of a Texas Army National Guard UH-60 at approximately 3 p.m. Monday, killing two and injuring five.

One of the Soldiers killed was 2nd Lt. Zachary R. Cook, a recent graduate from TAMU. While waiting for his class date to officer’s school, he assisted the TAMU faculty with this year’s cadets enrolled in Winter Exercise training.



**ROTC cadets stand at the side of Duncan Field to remember 2nd Lt. Ryan “Zac” Cook after the Blackhawk crash on January 14.**

The Winter Exercise course is offered every year and has been supported by the Texas Military Forces as long as the current faculty can remember. The course is popular with the students and each year before the official semester starts, many of the ROTC students enroll for the intense Soldier training at Camp Swift in Bastrop, Texas.

Lieutenant Cook had been one of these students. Colonel Jake Betty, ROTC Commander, said: “Zac was one of those self assured individuals that when he entered a room, everybody knew Zac was there. He had this young John Wayne swagger.”

Four Texas Army National Guard Soldiers were transported to local hospitals with various degrees of injuries. Sadly Staff Sgt. Charles Clayton Mitts, one of the four transported to the hospital, would succumb to his injuries on 14 January.

One local journalist who happened to be on site recording the events for his newspaper, said: “It was amazing how fast people rushed up to the aircraft after the crash. The thing was still kicking up dust but nobody seemed to pay attention to that. Everybody wanted to help. It was remarkable to see.”

Everybody who sees the wreckage agrees that it is a miracle that anybody

emerged from the aircraft alive. Wreckage is strewn across the entire Duncan Field, a field that is sacred for many of the students and faculty at Texas A&M.

ROTC Soldiers arrived at the field at different times during the day to pay their respects. Some knelt to pray; others just stood and reflected.

Many of Zac’s friends agree, that he was doing what he wanted to do most, which is to fly and to a very small degree that is a comfort to his family.

The three surviving Texas Army National Guard Soldiers are receiving excellent medical care and their real family members and many of their Guard family members are praying for a full recovery.

Everybody at the Texas Military Forces agrees that our first priority is to these Soldiers and their families.

All of the Soldiers, including Sergeant Mitts, have served valiantly overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom; some more than once.

This exercise to prepare young ROTC students for military life was equally important to each and everyone of the individuals aboard the UH-60 and undoubtedly if one were to ask one of these brave Soldiers, they would say that they would do it again.

# Agribusiness Team Soldiers Prepare For 2nd Deployment

**Story and photos by Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada**  
**Texas Military Forces Public Affairs**

**Lost Pines Resort, Bastrop, Texas** – (Jan 6, 2009) – Family, friends and invited guests were present here Monday to say goodbye to sixty-six Texas Army National Guard Soldiers deploying to Afghanistan for a war being waged on a very different front with very different weapons.

Agricultural and business skills do not immediately come to mind when one thinks of a deployment in support of the Global War on Terrorism, but the Soldiers of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Long Range Surveillance Agri-Business Team were selected for exactly those skills and will deploy within days to teach and assist Afghan farmers.

In May, 2008 Texas National Guard Soldiers under the command of Lt. Col. Stan Poe joined Missouri National Guard Soldiers for the first time with the express purpose of bringing expertise in hydrology, dairy and chicken farming, soil conservation, pest management and agricultural business practices.

On this, the second tour, the Texas Soldiers are again following sixty-four Missouri National Guard Soldiers and Airmen who deployed on *their* second rotation in November.

The Missouri Commander, Lt. Col. David Boyle, said: “They [the Soldiers and Airmen] bring a wide array of outside expertise to the situation.” He was speaking to the fact that each of his Soldiers and Airmen was selected based on their “soft” or civilian skills in agriculture. Colonel Boyle emphasized that agriculture in Afghanistan is very different than in Missouri and said: “We’ve got to find Afghan solutions to Afghan problems.” That is also the mission of this select group of Texas Guardsmen and women who the Texas Farm Bureau dubbed *Soldiers of the Soil*.

During his keynote speech, The Texas Adjutant General, Lt. Gen. (TX) Charles G. Rodriguez, said: You may have heard in conversations with your Soldier that this team is deploying to an area where agriculture and animal husbandry are very primitive.” He continued: “This is the second time Texas is preparing for a deployment

of this kind based upon an idea originated by Lt. Gen.

Clyde Vaughn, Director of the Army National Guard. General Vaughn developed a novel alternative to improve the lives of Afghans and outlined his ideas on a cocktail napkin one day saying, ‘We should do something different. We cannot expect to get better results by doing the same old thing.’” Working with Senator Kit Bond of Missouri, General Vaughn and several state Adjutants General with their state governors formed agri-business development teams that have deployed from the Missouri, Kansas and Texas National Guard.

The Kansas Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Tod Bunting, said: “Most people know the National Guard as defenders of freedom, but we’re also builders,” a sentiment echoed by General Rodriguez when he said: “The expertise you see here today is something very special. Afghanistan cannot get back on its feet until it can feed its people. Soldiers and leadership, our thoughts and prayers are with you each day of your deployment. Col. Dan Harris: Take command of your troops and God Bless.”

Chaplain Scott Crosley, who also delivered the invocation, spoke to the audience and said: “I would like to acknowledge the people who make military service possible for their loved ones, the unsung heroes and heroines of every deployment – The families.”

To underscore that point and with the aid of a program called the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, families were treated to a stay at the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort where they received vital information on different programs designed to help the spouse during the Soldier’s absence. More importantly, the entire family was treated to this wonderfully secluded resort where they could sit and enjoy each other’s company in front of a roaring fire or hike the beautiful Texas trails.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program is divided into phases dealing with the Soldier’s pre-deployment activities, deployment phase and reintegration process. Strong family bonds, Youth Pro-

grams, Red Cross, Military One-Source, ID cards, legal matters, transition assistance and financial planning are just some of the issues discussed and explained. Gone are the days when families are viewed as non-Army-issued nuisances. Today’s Soldier deploys in the knowledge that there is a strong support system for his or her family before, during, and after deployment.

When it was all said and done and the ceremony came to an end, there was only one thing left to do. Some of the youngest audience members who had been dutifully shushed throughout the ceremony and who had become increasingly antsy finally saw their chance to escape and made a run for it.

Two of Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class David Hunter’s youngsters made a beeline for the men and women in formation and ran through the ranks to find dad. When it became utterly impossible to ignore their antics, Sergeant Hunter finally gave up trying to maintain his military bearing and discreetly placed his arm around his daughter’s shoulder. The children created a ripple effect of laughter throughout the room, and compelled others in the audience to jump up and reunite with their *Soldier of the Soil* and that is exactly how it should be – United families forming a strong bond.



**From left to right: Lt. Gen. Charles G. Rodriguez, The Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jose Mayorga, Commander 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Brig. Gen. James Brown, Dep. Commander 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Lt. Col. Douglas O'Connell, Lt. Col. Brian Stevens, and Chaplain Stephen Vaughn, acknowledge and applaud family members for their continued support of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Agri-business Development Team.**

# Training to Retain the Force, Maintain Soldier Strength

**Story by Sgt. Melissa Shaw**

**72<sup>nd</sup> BSTB**

Camp Mabry, Austin, Tx (January 9, 2009) – Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis L. Threatt, Texas Retention Force (TRF), addressed close to fifty Retention Non-commissioned Officers (NCO's), also known as Battalion Career Counselors (BCC's), from 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (ID) attending the training held here this week.

The three days of briefings, exercises and informal discussions was peer-led with several of the senior leaders giving the classes using their best practices as examples.

While many of the individuals attending the training have held the position for less than a year, everyone understands what their mission encompasses. In front of each of them had been placed the Texas State Retention Standard Operating Procedures (TSR SOP), available to use as reference material, which very clearly spells out what the role of the BCC is in the Texas Army National Guard (TXARNG).

Line one of Chapter one reads:

“Maintaining Soldier strength is the number one priority of the Texas Army National Guard (TXARNG).”

To accomplish this monumental task, the BCC's receive refresher training each quarter on more than 20 programs, including; Alternatives to Separation, Education Benefits, AWOL Recovery, Student Loan Repayment regulations and Family Support Programs.

“Each of the subjects discussed and the training received during this conference is essential to enabling the BCC's to retain the Soldiers of today's TXARNG,” said Maj. Reginald Jackson. “Just as a healthy corporation balances new recruits and experienced workers to produce a quality product, TXARNG relies on its Retention Forces to keep quality, experienced soldiers in the National Guard.”

Each class was chosen for specific reasons, either a change had occurred to the benefits or the Soldiers themselves expressed a need to have more understanding of the topic. BCC's are required to be Subject Matter Experts (SME's), in all things regarding benefits. Often they are faced with questions where the answers change frequently, like retention bonuses or education payout, making this training essential.

As a Retention NCO for almost a decade, Sergeant 1st Class Sonny R. Velasco, head of 36th ID Retention Force is considered by many to be the ultimate SME on Retention topics. During the training, 1st Sgt. Velasco was most often seen prowling the room, looking for individuals with questions and opportunities to assist with the answers. His black eyes would quickly spot a puzzled look or a half raised hand and he would swoop down on the confused individual post-haste.

First Sgt. Velasco had personally hired each and every person in the room and is quick to explain to them how he views their successes and failures as his own. “I have made it a personal challenge to help them succeed as much as possible,” 1st Sgt. Velasco said during one of the frequent breaks.

First Sgt. Velasco and Sergeant. Maj. Threatt also addressed the issue that few of the Retention products that are used everyday on the job are created perfectly. Suggestions on how to improve this program or that online process were requested at the end of every block of instruction. Occasionally this was met with silence, but the soldiers with suggestions or questions were not afraid to speak up.

Sergeant 1st Class William A. Pyles, BCC for 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 144 Infantry Battalion, responded first. Sergeant Pyles brought forward a request for Incentive changes to be put out more regularly. He then suggested that an improved handoff program needs to be created for Recruiters taking new Soldiers returning from Advanced Individual Training, AIT, to their regular unit.

Sometimes there was already a better product available that the BCC's were as yet unaware. For example, Sergeant 1st Class Sloan D. Baker, Brigade Career Counselor for 136<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Battalion, requested an updated SOP and Sergeant Maj. Threatt immediately pulled up Texas Knowledge Online on the projector screens and demonstrated how to use the Recruiting and Retention, R&R, website to find the most current iterations of all R&R documents.

In addition to all the information being put out the, BCC's were indoctrinated with Sergeant Maj. Threatt's signature phrase “If you don't have it here,” he explained by pointing to his heart, “you won't have it here,” he concluded by pointing to a name-by-name listing of the Soldier's in 36 ID.”

That attitude was carried over to guest speakers Major General Jose S. Mayorga– Commander of the 36th Infantry Division, and Major General John T. Furlow, Assistant Adjutant General-Army for Texas and Commander, 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.

The somber tone used by General Mayorga stressed the importance of his message on how each and every one of the BCC's should take personal responsibility for motivating, informing and improving the lives of their Soldiers.

“We can't do our job effectively and efficiently if we are constantly training new Soldiers,” said General Mayorga, “Spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to train individuals only to let them go is not financially or morally responsible, it is not logical. I will fight the battles for you and for them at the highest levels, but Tri-care health care, bonuses and benefits are useless if there are no Soldiers to give them to.”

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# Raising the Bar, 36 ID Band Gains Elite Status

Story by 2nd Lt. Adam Musil

## 36th Infantry Division Public Affairs

AUSTIN, Texas--With all military units comes a great degree of ceremony and fuss. Soldiers are judged by the crispness of their uniforms, how they snap to attention, their preened scalps and their ability to sound-off in unison. Yet, for all the pomp and circumstance that goes into a typical military event, the ultimate test of a Soldier is his or her ability to perform their job under pressure. Which begs the question, what about those units whose main job is pomp and circumstance? Are they to be judged on the merits of their accomplishments or on their ability to soldier during a crisis? The Soldiers of the 36 Infantry Division Band are finding out the answer is both.

When then Officer Candidate Jeff Lightsey buried his face into the dirt during a routine Officer Candidate School smoke session, he believed his years of service in the 36 Infantry Division Band were over. Mr. Lightsey had served in the band as an enlisted soldier, but after some frustrating years, he decided it was time for a change. He wanted a career that provided new challenges, and the chance to lead and manage a large contingent of soldiers. The career of a military officer did that. Then during OCS something happened that would change his career course—the 36 ID band unit commander position was vacated and unfilled. Immediately, he left OCS and signed up for the Warrant Officer Program. After his training was completed he returned to the band, this time as its leader.

Chief Warrant Officer Lightsey believed Texas to be a great band state and a goldmine for musicians. In his eyes, there was no reason that the division band could not be one of the best of its kind.

“When I took over the band my first priority was to push visibility, rebuild morale and raise expectations,” Mr. Lightsey said.

Mr. Lightsey was successful in completing many of his goals by raising his recruiting standards. Under new leadership the band was given permission to recruit over strength to ensure they had slots for the best musicians they could find. Also, any Soldier unwilling to commit to the new band standards was asked to reevaluate their desire to stay in the band. And as Soldiers retired, Mr. Lightsey made it a point to fill that slot with someone better. In doing this, he fostered a positive environment with Soldiers all ready and willing to do their jobs.

“From a musical standpoint, the band challenges musicians in a way that civilian bands do not,” he said when asked how he is able to recruit so many talented musicians. “This is not a high school or college band. When we compete we are competing against some of the best bands in the world.”

Unlike most units who train a Soldier after recruitment, to join the band one must first audition. All new band recruits are already skilled musicians, but many of them have had little to no military training. The job of turning these musicians into soldiers falls upon a motivated group of non-commissioned officers led by First Sergeant Eddie Daffern, percussionist.

Sergeant Daffern spent most of his military career as a Marine Reservist. The Vietnam veteran left the Marine Corps after 23 years as an E-7 only to reenlist in the Texas Army National Guard years later after a visit to the Texas Military Forces Museum. Since being promoted to First Sergeant., Daffern has ensured all band Soldiers are not only practicing their instruments but conducting Soldiers common task training as well.

“As a Marine, pride and mission accomplishment are drilled from day one and I do my best to instill that in my Soldiers,” Sergeant Daffern said. “I always tell my Soldiers, that just because we are a band, we can still hold our head up high as any Soldier in any other unit, but you have to talk the talk.”

The band spends a large amount of their time on the road performing. This provides little time for soldier common task training, but Sergeant Daffern maintains that the band makes an extra effort to get its Soldiers trained. This training paid off last fall when the band was activated to provide Hurricane relief during Hurricane Ike.

“We take great pride in what we do,” said Sergeant Gary Brock, tuba section leader. “During hurricane Ike I think we surprised some people. The Lieutenant who we fell under for the mission said we were the most disciplined and professional unit he had ever seen.” Mr. Lightsey on the other hand was not surprised by his unit’s performance. “We have very specific time-lines for band movements that require a lot of planning and discipline. We also have a lot of combat veterans from various services in the band. For us, hurricane duty was easy.”

As of today, nothing seems to be difficult for the band. In December the division band was only the second Army Division Band and fourth Army National Guard Band to ever receive the coveted Colonel George S. Howard Citation of Musical Excellence, a prestigious international award for Military Concert Bands.

To win the award the band did not only have to compete against other division bands, but also special bands. A special band is an organization attached to the office of the President and is comparable to the London Symphony.

These bands are made up of active duty soldiers that have been hand picked from the best music schools across the



country. Unlike division bands, special bands are not required to conduct the Soldier tasks of a troop unit.

“The award means a great deal,” Sergeant Daffern stated. “It is an accomplishment of a goal that validates the policies we have put into place and is a benchmark for our organization.”

In just a short time, the 36 Infantry Division Band has become one of the elite in the country. Mr. Lightsey believes there is still more to achieve, “We will continue working to become the premier National Guard band in the United States, representing the State of Texas, the Texas Army National Guard, and the 36 Infantry Division on the national and international level.”

Currently, the band shows no

signs of slowing down. It continues to recruit top talent and has already received enough requests to fill a yearly drill calendar.

It is uncertain whether or not the band will ever live up to the lofty standards set by its focused leader, but what is certain is their determination to try—and anyone who doesn’t believe that, is not listening to the music.



**Members of the 36th Infantry Division Band entertain visitors during the 2008 American Heroes Celebration at Camp Mabry. (Photos by Sgt. Jennifer D. Atkinson, Texas Military Forces Public Affairs.)**



## General times two

**Story by Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada  
Texas Military Forces Public Affairs**

On 10 January, not one Colonel was promoted, but two. Brig. Gen. James K. “Red” Brown and Brig. Gen. David N. Blackorby, took the stage after being pinned by Lt. Gen. Charles G. Rodriguez, The Adjutant General Texas.

The two men come from very different backgrounds and very different career paths, but have three things in common. Both thanked the men and women who had ever worked for or with them and acknowledged that without the many Soldiers, Airmen, First sergeants and Sergeant Majors they would not have been able to achieve their goals; both thanked God and both thanked their strong and beautiful wives for their unwavering support.

In General Brown’s case, there was not a dry eye in the house when his daughter, Lt. Crystal Brown, read the Oath of office.

General Blackorby joked that speaking after General Brown was not fair because he [General Brown] was so eloquent and that simply saying “Ditto” would have said it all, but then he became serious and offered an equally heartfelt speech thanking many in the audience by name.

After the ceremony concluded, a long line of well-wishers formed to congratulate the men personally.



*Above: Lt. Gen. (Ret) Don O. Daniel, former commander 49th Armor Division, reads the Oath of Office to Brig. Gen. David Blackorby. General Blackorby’s wife Laura and Lt. Gen. Charles G. Rodriguez watch in the background.*



*Left: 2nd Lt. Crystal Brown, a Medical Officer at Fort Hood and General Brown’s daughter, reads the Oath of Office to Brig. Gen. James K. “Red” Brown, with a voice trembling with emotion and pride. Mrs. Jane Brown looks on in the background.*

# “GI Bill for the 21st Century”: What does it mean for you?

## Special report from Military.com

Many post 9/11 veterans and servicemembers will soon see a new package of education benefits. This new Post 9/11 GI Bill, or so-called GI Bill for the 21st Century, boasts the most comprehensive education benefits package since the original GI Bill was signed into law in 1944.

The new bill goes well beyond helping to pay for tuition; many veterans who served after Sept. 11, 2001, will get full tuition and fees, a new monthly housing stipend, and a \$1,000 a year stipend for books and supplies. The new bill also gives Reserve and Guard members who have been activated for more than 90 days since 9/11 access to the same GI Bill benefits.

### **Benefits Start Date**

This new GI Bill is set to go into effect on August 1, 2009. However, as with any new legislation, it could take some time for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to begin paying benefits. Benefits will not be paid for any training or education programs completed before July 31, 2009.

### **Eligibility for the New GI Bill**

If you have served a total of at least 90 consecutive days on active duty in the Armed Forces since Sept. 11, 2001, you're eligible. However, the amount of benefits you receive under this program are determined by the actual amount of accumulated post 9/11 service you have.

### **Eligibility Details From VA:**

At a minimum, you must have served at least 30 days of continuous active duty service after September 10, 2001 and be discharged due to a service-connected disability, or served an aggregate of 90 days of active duty service after September 10, 2001, and be honorably discharged from Armed Forces; or be released from Armed Forces with service characterized as honorable and placed on the retired list, temporary disability retired list, or transferred to the Fleet Reserve or the Fleet Marine Corps Reserve; or be released from the Armed Forces with service characterized as honorable for further service in a reserve component; or be discharged or released from Armed Forces for:

EPTS (Existed Prior to Service), HDSP (Hardship) or CIWD (Condition Interfered with Duty); or continue to be on active duty.

To be eligible for the full benefit, you must have three years of active duty service after 9/11 or have been discharged due to a service-connected disability.

If you are an officer who graduated from a service academy or received ROTC scholarships, you also qualify for the new GI Bill benefits. However, your ROTC/Service Academy associated obligated active-duty service time does not count toward the three years necessary to qualify for the full benefits.

*Note: You didn't have to opt-in for the Montgomery GI Bill to be eligible for this program.*

### **New GI Bill Payment Rates**

The Post 9/11 GI Bill will provide up to 100% of your tuition. In addition, the program provides a monthly housing stipend a stipend of up to \$1,000 a year for books and supplies. If you attend

less than full-time will receive a portion of the payment based on the number of units of study.

The amount of tuition and stipends paid under the Post 9/11 GI Bill will vary depending on your state of residence, number of units taken, and amount of post Sept. 11, 2001 active-duty service. Here is a quick reference showing the percentage of total combined benefit eligibility based on the following periods of post 9/11 service: **100%** - 36 or more total months, **100%** - 30 or more consecutive days with Disability related Discharge, **90%** - 30 total months, **80%** - 24 total months, **70%** - 18 total months, **60%** - 12 total months, **50%** - six total months, **40%** - 90 or more days.

### **Tuition Rates**

Under the new GI Bill you will be provided tuition up to the highest established charges for full-time undergraduate students charged by the public institution of higher education in the State in which you are enrolled.

One of the added features of this tuition payment plan is that the tuition will be paid directly to the school, relieving you of the responsibility. This is similar to the process used for military tuition assistance.

Based on 2008 in-state tuition rates, the anticipated annual tuition payment rate for 2009 will be just over \$6,000. The low being Wyoming at \$3,500 a year and Michigan which is the highest payment in-state tuition rate at \$13,000.

### **Monthly Housing Stipend**

If you are enrolled in a traditional college program as a half-time to full-time student, you will be paid a monthly housing stipend equal to the monthly Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for an E-5 with dependents. The average housing stipend will be approximately \$1,100 a month. However, if you attend distance learning programs such as correspondence courses and online you will not qualify for this stipend.

### **Book and Supply Stipend**

You will receive a lump sum payment the first month of each quarter, semester, or term. The payment will help cover the cost of books, supplies, equipment, and other educational fees for that academic term. The payment amount will be equal to either a quarter or half of the annual \$1,000 cap for that academic year, depending on how the academic year is divided – quarter or semester terms.

### **Benefits Expiration Date**

Unlike the Montgomery GI Bill, the new GI Bill will allow you to use this benefit for up to 15 years after your last discharge or separation from active duty.

### **Licensing and Certification Payments**

This new GI Bill will provide up to \$2,000 to cover the cost of one licensing or certification test. This benefit is not charged against your 36 month entitlement.

### **Tutorial Assistance**

Like the Montgomery GI Bill, the new GI Bill will provide up to a maximum of \$1,200 for tutorial assistance. The program will pay up to \$100 per month, for a maximum of 12

months. This benefit is not charged against your 36 month entitlement.

**Benefit Transferability**

According to a recent Stars and Stripes article, servicemembers who have served at least 10 years on active duty will be able to transfer their benefit to a spouse or dependent child. Spouses of servicemember who have served at least six years and agrees to another four-year contract can receive the money even sooner. The transferred benefit will cover the cost of tuition only.

Benefits may be divided as long as they don't exceed 36 months of college classes. For example, a retired soldier can use half of the benefits to pay for a two-year degree program, then transfer the remaining half to a spouse or child.

College-age children of long-serving servicemembers could get a free college education starting fall 2009, provided they attend a state-backed school.

Transferability is limited to those currently serving in the military and will likely be used as a retention tool.

**Affects on Existing GI Bill Benefits**

If you are already enrolled in the Montgomery GI Bill and also meet the criteria for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, you have the option to transfer your remaining MGIB benefits to the new program.

For many veterans this will be a good option. However, due to the tuition limits set by this new GI Bill, many veterans who are pursuing a post-graduate degree may find the MGIB better suits their needs. This is also true for those students pursuing an online degree, as this new benefit will not pay the housing stipend to students enrolled in distance learning programs.

**Further Eligibility Details:**

You qualify for 100% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 36 months on active duty in the Armed Forces. This includes service on active duty for entry level and skill training.

You qualify for 100% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 30 continuous days on active duty in the Armed Forces; and after completion of service were discharged or released from active duty in the Armed Forces for a service-connected disability.

You qualify for 90% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 30 months, but less than 36 months, on active duty in the Armed Forces. (including service on active duty in entry level and skill training).

You qualify for 80% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 24 months, but less than 30 months, on active duty in the Armed Forces. (including service on active duty in entry level and skill training).

You qualify for 70% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 18 months, but less than 24 months, on active duty in the Armed Forces (excluding service on active duty in entry level and skill training).

You qualify for 60% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 12 months, but less than 18 months, on active duty in the Armed Forces (excluding service on active duty in entry level and skill training).

You qualify for 50% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 6 months, but less than 12 months, on active duty in the Armed Forces (excluding service on active duty in entry level and skill training).

You qualify for 40% of the benefit if you have a total of at least 90 days, but less than 6 months, on active duty in the Armed Forces (excluding service on active duty in entry level and skill training).

	<b>Montgomery GI Bill Chapter 30</b>	<b>Post 9/11 GI Bill Proposed - Chapter 33</b>
<b>Payment Rate for Full-Time Student</b>	Annually set - nationwide - monthly payment rate. Set to increase to <b>\$1321</b> for 2008-2009. Paid to the student each month.	A payment indexed to full in-state tuition for public schools. A lump sum paid directly to the school each term. The national average for in-state tuition in 2008 is \$6,185.
<b>Duration of Program</b>	36 Month entitlement.	36 Month entitlement.
<b>Additional expense payments</b>	No additional payments for expenses.	Living Expenses - stipend based on local BAH for E-5 with dependents – paid monthly avg. amount app. \$1,000 a month.  Books and Fees - Up to \$1,000 a year.
<b>Eligibility Requirements</b>	Those who entered service the military after June 30, 1985.	Active-duty service since Sept. 11, 2001.
<b>VEAP-era Eligibility</b>	No - Except those who elected to convert in the past.	Yes – those who meet the eligibility criteria above.
<b>Benefit Expiration</b>	10 Years after separation or discharge.	15 years from your last period of active duty of at least 90 days.
<b>Transfer benefits to families</b>	Limited - Currently Limited to Army for Critical MOS only.	Yes - but this is limited to those in the military. The details are still being worked out.
<b>Enrollment fee</b>	Yes - <b>\$1,200*</b>	<b>None</b>

# News Briefs



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## Guard Closing in on 100% Drug Testing

The National Guard is moving toward the Defense Department goal of administering drug tests to 100 percent of its end strength. The Guard now tests about 70 percent of non-deployed units.

While that is an increase over three years ago, when the Guard was testing 50 percent of its soldiers and 40 percent of its airmen, it is still far below the Army, which tests 200 percent of its membership, and the Air Force, which tests 100 percent of its Airmen.

"We want to test everyone, every year, in addition to random testing to keep testing fair," said Army Col. Ronald Ship-

pee, director of the DoD Drug Testing and Program Policy. "It's a challenge to test the National Guard because they only drill two days a month and there's a lot to pack into a drill weekend. Deployments also affect testing, although, once on active duty, Guard members are tested frequently."

Shippee receives a quarterly report on positive drug tests from six laboratories that test DoD personnel. Those reports identify enlisted men ages 18 to 25 as the highest at-risk population.

The Guard's Substance Abuse Prevention Program is just one component of its larger counterdrug program, which

supports community-based organizations and law enforcement agencies in their fight against illicit drug use.

In early 2007, the Guard initiated its Prevention, Treatment and Outreach Program, which is now in use in 35 states. The Guard's counterdrug experts said they hope to help Guard members in their communities who are at risk for or are combating substance abuse and mental issues. They target the reintegration of those who return from deployments and transition back as traditional Guard members.



## 'Wounded Warrior Diaries' Website Launched

Defense Department officials created the "Wounded Warrior Diaries," a multimedia Web tribute in which American service members wounded in combat share stories of their service, including their hard-won battles on the road to recovery and the ups and downs of life in the wake of injury. The Wounded Warrior Diaries website features videos of servicemembers sharing their stories in their own words. The videos are accompanied by a written account of their experiences. The site kicked off with four diaries, and a new diary will be added each month. Visit [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2008/0908\\_wwd/index.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/2008/0908_wwd/index.html) to view the diaries.

Also included on the site are links other services such as WarriorCare.mil (<http://www.warriorcare.mil/>), with resources ranging from specific programs to sources of information. All play a role in ensuring Soldiers get the assistance to which they are entitled. WarriorCare.mil serves as a portal to these various resources. Whether currently active-duty military, veteran, a family member or a concerned neighbor, the links on this site will provide answers to questions or ideas for where to turn next.

# Guard Families Eligible for Child Care Subsidy

National Guard families are eligible for a child care subsidy during a family member's deployment. The National Guard Bureau is reminding its members of the subsidy that went into effect about five years ago.

Mike Conner, chief of program services for the bureau's Family Program Office, said the Guard program grew out of one designed for active component members. "There was an increased need for child care on the (military) installation," he said. "When the (wartime) deployments occurred, the day care centers on the installations were already at the peak. This made it even higher and the stress just increased."

This prompted a change to the program to allow active component families to receive a stipend to use off-post child care providers. Guard and Reserve members were later made eligible

as long as they were on Title 10 status.

"If you are deployed in Title 10 status and your spouse is either working or in school fulltime, you are eligible for a child care subsidy," Conner said. Recently, those on Title 32 active orders were added to the eligibility list.

The subsidy program is coordinated through the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which approves applications and determines the amount paid as part of the subsidy, which varies based on a number of factors, not including rank.

So far, more than 1,100 Guard members have taken advantage of the program. For more information, visit the Guard's Family Program Web site at [www.guardfamily.org](http://www.guardfamily.org) or call 1-888-642-2799.

# The VA Wants You - To Join Its Workforce

The Department of Veterans Affairs is contacting severely injured veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan about coming to work at the VA. The VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service has already been in touch with 2,300 such veterans, of whom 600 have expressed interest in employment at the department.

The current workforce at VA is 30 percent veterans, the second highest rate among cabinet departments after the Defense Department. Nearly 8 percent of VA employees are service-connected disabled veterans.

But VA Secretary Dr. James B. Peake wants to increase that percentage.

"I am proud of this effort," he said in a press release from the VA. "VA knows the true quality of our men and women, and we should be a leader in employing them."

The coordination service was established one year ago to recruit veterans to the VA workforce, especially those seriously injured in the current wars. It has nine regional coordinators working with local facility human resources offices across the country not only to reach out to potential job candidates, but to ensure that

local managers know about special authorities available to hire veterans.

For example, qualified disabled veterans rated as having a 30 percent or more service-connected disability can be hired noncompetitively.

"Our team is spreading the message that VA is hiring, and we want to hire disabled veterans," said Dennis O. May, director of VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service.

VA coordinators participate in military career fairs and transition briefings and partner with veterans organizations.

## *This Month in Military History: February*

**February 23, 1836** - The siege of the Alamo begins in San Antonio, Texas.

Following the outbreak of the Texas Revolution in October 1835, Mexican General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, marched north with an army to suppress the rebellion. His first goal was to reoccupy San Antonio de Bexar which had been captured from Mexican forces in December. To defend the town, the Texans had fortified the Alamo mission and initially garrisoned it with around 100 men. As the Mexicans approached, the Alamo was reinforced as volunteers such as frontiersmen Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie arrived with groups of volunteers. Commanded by Lt. Col. William Travis, the defenders of the Alamo prepared to receive Santa Anna's attack. Encircling the mission, Santa Anna began a traditional siege with Mexican forces slowly moving closer to the walls. Though Travis sent out several riders to other Texan forces, none were strong enough to defeat Santa Anna's army. On March 6, Santa Anna ordered the Alamo to be stormed. Overwhelming the outnumbered defenders, the Mexicans slaughtered the garrison in brutal hand-to-hand combat. The heroic stand made by the defenders of the Alamo inspired the Texans for the remainder of the war and the yell "Remember the Alamo" was heard during the victory at San Jacinto that April.

Photograph Source: Public Domain

Excerpt: <http://militaryhistory.about.com/b/2008/02/23/texas-revolution-battle-of-the-alamo-beings.htm>

By Kennedy Hickman, About.com Guide to Military History



*Two of Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class David Hunter's youngsters make a beeline for the men and women in formation and run through the ranks to find Dad. The children created a ripple effect of laughter throughout the room. (Photo by Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada, Texas Military Forces Public Affairs.)*

