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Cover- Sgt. Mathew Wallace , A Troop, 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, originally from Florence, Texas, gets a closer look at a suspicious object from an entry control point at Victory Base Complex in Iraq., May 14. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell

MND-B PAO)

THE BULLETIN BOARD

DoD Changes Identification Cards

The Department of Defense (DoD) began the process of removing Social Security numbers from issued identification (ID) cards in an effort to prevent identity theft. All ID card holders should wait until their cards are in need of renewal before replacing their cards with ones devoid of a Social Security number. The DoD instructed retirees with indefinite expiration dates on their cards to start replacing them in January 2010. Cardholders whose cards have expired June contact the nearest Real-time Automated Personnel Identification System site. If the cardholder does not know where their local RAPIDS site is located, they can visit the Rapids Site Locator at http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/owa/home to find a location nearby.

Applying ACE Credits

Your military service has likely earned you college credit. ACE recommended credits will be used to fulfill your free-elective requirements, but each college determines the number of credits they will accept, and how they will be applied toward your degree. 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. Each service branch has their own system for recording your military education and experience credits. Get a service breakdown at http://www.military.com/timesaving-programs/college-credit-for-military-experience?ESRC=mr.nl

Housing Assistance Program Expansion

Vice President Joe Biden announced the Defense Department's plan to expand its housing assistance program with $555 million devoted to Servicemembers forced to sell their homes at a loss due to the country's struggling housing market. The financial support comes from President Barack Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to supplement the department's Homeowner's Assistance Program, Biden said aboard the USS Ronald Reagan during a visit with sailors and their families at Naval Base Coronado in San Diego. Read more at http://www.military.com/news/article/housing-assistance-program-expansion.html

Army Training Goes Online

The Army Training Network (ATN) recently went online with the mission of becoming the one-stop shop and information source for Army training. The ATN website has the most current training doctrine available, Field Manual 7-0, Training for Full Spectrum Operations, published in December 2008. Online "Training Management How-To" and "Training Solutions" in ATN replace the hardcopy FM 7-1, Battle Focused Training. Visit the ATN portal at .https://atn.army.mil/ An Army Knowledge Online user name and password or Common Access Card is required to access the ATN website.

Military "Portable Lifestyle" Website

Operation Life Transformed (OLT) recently launched a new website enabling military spouses and caregivers to find accessible short-term training certifications, with immediate career accessibility in fields that accommodate their military lives. These careers will fit around permanent change of stations (PCS), deployments, medical schedules, disabilities, future rehabilitation and transitioning, and will create a portable lifestyle for the military family. For more information, visit the Operation Life Transformed (OLT) website at http://www.operationlifetransformed.org/

Military OneSource Expands Counseling

Military OneSource recently increased the number of nonmedical counseling sessions it will offer to Servicemembers. Eligible Servicemembers, including active-duty, Guard and Reserve members, and their families, may now receive 12 sessions per person, issue, and counselor within 120 days. The new 12-session limit applies to face-to-face, short-term solution- focused telephone consultations, and online consultations. For more information, visit the Military OneSource website at http://www.militaryonesource.com/home.aspx?aspxerrorpath=/skins/MOS/splash.aspx

The DISPATCH

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Articles and photography are welcome and may be submitted to JFTX-PAO, P.O. Box 5218, Austin TX 78763-5218, or by e-mail to paotx@tx.ngb.army.mil. Deadline for submissions is the **10th day of the month** for the issue of the following month.

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Texas Guardsman March for Fallen Comrades

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Daniel Griego

100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AUSTIN, Texas- Uniformed and unarmed, the group of Soldiers marched together through the humid Texas morning. Led by the American flag held high by a non-commissioned officer, the group strode over three miles of hills, rocks and streets. This band of dedicated Soldiers did not march for fitness or for training; they marched for the memories of their fallen comrades.

The third annual "March for Fallen Heroes," held March 21, 2009, recognizes the ultimate sacrifice of American heroes who have died in the Global War on Terror, with special emphasis on Soldiers who served in the Texas Army National Guard. Army Staff Sgt. David J. Mendiola, who organized and led the event, first got the idea from a fellow Guardsman.

"While flipping through the [GX Magazine], my attention was drawn to a picture of a Soldier carrying our nation's colors while walking down the road," said Sergeant Mendiola.

"The article was about a Tennessee Soldier by the name of 1st Sgt. James P. Williams, who marched nine miles in remembrance of the Soldiers that died in his unit due to the Global War on Terror. The article moved me in such a way that I immediately went to my first line supervisor and insisted that we do something like this as well."

More than three dozen Soldiers participated in the march, which began under the MOPAC overpass by the Town Lake track, reached to the 36th Infantry Division monument on the northwest side of the state capitol building, and ended with the return trip back.

"I lost eight buddies in the last tour," said Spc. James C. Gaspar, a Guardsman with the 36th Infantry Division. "I had to be here, it's important for the brothers I lost over there. Every step I take, it's just one more step to remembering them, keeping them alive."

Joining the troops on this early morning excursion was the new commander of the Texas Army National Guard, Brig. Gen. Joyce L. Stevens.

Above- Staff Sgt. David J. Mendiola marches along Austin streets during the March for the Fallen.

Below left- Members of the Texas Military Forces at the 36th Infantry Div. memorial on the state capitol grounds.

"It really means a lot to me to have Soldiers that want to support each other," said General Stevens. "We can come and just remember those who came before us and feel part of a good organization."

Sergeant Mendiola chose to hold the event in May, in conjunction with the Memorial Day weekend, to further recognize the sacrifices of past veterans.

"Whether it was during Pearl Harbor, World War I and II, Oklahoma City bombing, or Vietnam," Mendiola said, "we have lost an ample amount of Americans due to the Global War on Terror and this march is in their honor."

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Why should I call the Lifeline?

The **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** is a 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention service available to anyone in suicidal crisis. If you need help, please dial **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. You will be routed to the closest possible crisis center in your area. With more than 130 crisis centers across the country, our mission is to provide immediate assistance to anyone seeking mental health services. Call for yourself, or someone you care about. Your call is free and confidential. Para obtener asistencia en español durante las 24 horas, llame al **1-888-628-9454**.

From immediate suicidal crisis to information about mental health, crisis centers in our network are equiped to take a wide range of calls. Some of the reasons to call 1-800-273-TALK are listed below.

- Call to speak with someone who cares.
- Call if you feel you might be in danger of hurting yourself.
- Call to find referrals to mental health services in your area.
- Call to speak to a crisis worker about someone you're concerned about.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE™

1-800-273-TALK 8255

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Cav Women Warriors: Just One of the Guys

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell

Multi-National Division-Baghdad Public Affairs Office

BAGHDAD – Prior to their deployment to Iraq and on a hot, summer afternoon at Fort Stewart, Ga., Texas National Guard Soldiers from the 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat, 36th Infantry Division, donned heavy rucksacks, wore uncomfortable body armor and carried M-4 rifles for a grueling pre-mobilization road march.

"Most of the people fell out, but I finished it," said Spc. Janice Parisi, an intelligence analyst assigned to Apache Troop, 1st Sqdn., 124th Cav. Regt."Most of the people said they would have [fallen] out if a girl wasn't in it ahead of them."

Historically, cavalry units, much like infantry units, don't have many women Soldiers, but the women warriors of Apache Troop have proven themselves worthy.

"I came from a support unit and they told us we were going to the cav and I was a little unsure," admitted Spc. Heather Ketter, a light-wheeled vehicle mechanic from Wylie, Texas, also assigned to Apache Troop. "But it's been great so far!"

Ketter was raised by her brothers and that mentally prepared her for working with cavalry Soldiers and the demands of manning a guard tower at Victory Base Complex here.

"[My brothers and I] got to get in our fights and hang around with their friends," remarked the petite, blond-haired and smiling Ketter. "It helps a lot when you have to deal with the guys."

"My brother and step-brother taught me to be tough by beating me up all the time and picking on me and not letting me get away with stuff just 'cause I'm a girl," added Spc. Tiffany Frenchwood, a logistical specialist assigned to Apache Troop, as a vehicle pulls up to her checkpoint and an out-stretched arm hands her a yellow gardenia. After checking their IDs, Frenchwood smiles and waves them through the gate.

"I give people chances, but out here you can't be so nice because people will take that kindness for a weakness," said Frenchwood, from Texas City, Texas. "They [people entering VBC] think they can bring me flowers and be nice, but it's very serious out here and I got my battle buddies on VBC sleeping, so I gotta be tough…I can't let people in without a badge."

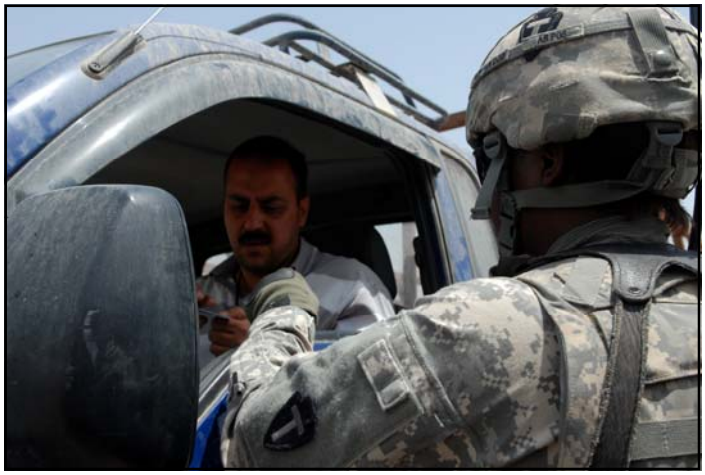
Though these Soldiers all have different military occupational specialties, they are all infantrymen first in this cavalry regiment and stand guard against insurgents trying to breech VBCs defenses.

"Out here, it's like gender doesn't matter anymore," explained a rosy-cheeked Parisi from Fort Wayne, Ind., from behind a .50 cal machine gun. "There's no air-conditioning and I have to wear body armor, but I feel like I have a purpose out here."

"We need to make sure the right people get on base," said Ketter. "[Local nationals] have jobs here and we need them, but we also have to make sure the wrong people don't get on."

Working daily for the past 10 months with the other cavalry Soldiers has been a positive experience for these Soldiers and they have earned each other's respect, added Ketter.

"I can't explain it," recollected Ketter as sweat dripped down from beneath her camouflaged Kevlar helmet. "But you can pretty much say I'm one of the guys."



Above left- Fort Wayne, Ind. native, Spc. Janice Parisi, an intelligence analyst assigned to Apache Troop, 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment, uses the microphone to give orders to vehicles entering her checkpoint at Victory Base Complex here, May 14. Parisi joined the military after the Twin Towers in New York were attacked. "Because of Sept. 11, there are kids that go to sleep without a mom and a dad," said Parisi.

Above right- Spc. Tiffany Frenchwood, a logistical specialist assigned to Apache Troop, 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment, hands back a local national's ID at a checkpoint at Victory Base Complex here, May 14. Frenchwood is one of a handful of women who are assigned to the Texas National Guard cavalry unit here. "We've been with these guys almost 10 months now and have gotten used to them," said Frenchwood.

Camp Mabry Welcomes New Chief of Joint Staff

By Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada

Texas Military Forces Public Affairs

CAMP Mabry, Austin, Texas (May 15, 2009) – She is equally comfortable among equestrian clients as she is discussing N1H1 with State Officials or participating in, and planning, Government Division of Emergency Division exercises, Dr. Connie Couch McNabb, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine has been appointed as the Director, Joint Staff, Joint Force Headquarters.

Colonel McNabb, the previous State Surgeon, has once again switched gears and has embarked on a new journey. She agreed to sit down with us to do an interview.

Q - ***Ma'am, most of us have worked with you and know you, but for our newest members, would you mind sharing a little of your background with our readers*****?**

A – I am a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. That may sounds like a strange qualification to end up in this job but in a way it is not so strange at all. Veterinarians focus on large scale production and herd health. We serve clients every day and experience how success gets down to management and leadership. Veterinarians assist clients who make a million decisions to keep a large operation of hundreds of individuals and millions of dollars of investment on track for years at a time. A client on one side of the road may be successful and another on the other side of the road may not be. I learned from a very early stage, that it is all about management: 1. how to set the tone 2. stay focused on where the organization is going and 3. communicate the overall direction. Only then can all these different decisions add up and lead to an organizational success.

Col. McNabb, center, is the new Director, Joint Staff for Texas Military

But to get back to your question, I hung up my Veterinary shingle in North Carolina in 1981. Working a "large animal practice" I served five counties in the mountains of North Carolina. But my goal was to work with quality horses because that is where my love was. I practiced veterinary medicine at Churchill Downs for seven years and juggled a large clientele. After 10 years of successful practice in this very physical and demanding field, I realized that I was ready for something different.

Q – ***Is that when you decided to join the military*****?**

A - Not in that sense, but one day I came home at my usual time – 10 at night, looked among my mail and noticed a postcard. It said: "Are you ready for a change?" and I said to myself: "yeah, I think I am," I checked the box and mailed it.

A couple of weeks later Tech Sgt. Steve Jordan called me and he said: "Here I am - Air Force Health Profession recruiter," and I said: "How in the world did you get my name," and he said: "You checked the box on the postcard."

I am not super religious but God has made His presence known more than once. I felt it was a door I should walk through. The first Gulf War was just starting up and I wanted to serve.

I became the Public Health Officer at Luke Air Force Base. My job was very much like being in practice. I provided the Wing Commander and Senior Leadership the preventive medicine information they needed to keep their pilots and ground personnel fit, healthy and ready to deploy at any time, anywhere in the world.

During my time at Luke I met some Guard guys and gals and I felt that maybe this was what I was looking for – I missed being a civilian but did not want to give up my military career. When a position in the Texas Racing Commission came up and people from around the country started sending me the application, I felt that it was another open door. "So I asked the Texas Air Guard, "if I go to Texas is there a place for me?" and the reply was: "Oh yeah there is a place for you; we need a public health officer at Ellington Field." A few years later I joined the 149th Fighter Wing Medical Group in San Antonio. Col. Spermo, gave me a lot of support, Col. Morrow gave the Group a National Spotlight and Col. John Nichols gave us the confidence and support to become Texas's lead deployable medical team for disasters.

Q – ***I seem to remember that Katrina and Rita happened while you were with the 149th Medical Group, and I know you and your people were tasked to provide medical help in New Orleans.***

A – Yes [Hurricanes] Katrina and Rita came along which got us national attention. Katrina was the big unknown. We were part of a large Texas Joint military organization, but we were nowhere near were we are today. Katrina taught us a lot of lessons. It was not only the pats on the back when we returned, but also the "what went wrong" discussion.

We responded with everything we had but we knew that Katrina, organizationally, was not very pretty. We knew that as one part of the larger Texas response we had to do better.

So the next several years we were passionate about working out the things that did not go well. I realized that I was a change agent now. We do not consist of blue people, or green people, but Texas Military Forces people. Culturally the Army Guard and the Air Guard are different, but the reality is that we are going to respond; we are going to take care of business, not only in Texas, but in the region.

I do not expect Army Guard to be painted blue, or the Air Guard to be painted green but now we know each other. We have established relationships, we have worked together. We are going to take care of each other and we are going to take care of other people in need. This will take all of us, including the State Guard, especially their medical folks.

Q – I know that you have only been in the position for a couple of weeks,

See DIRECTOR, next page.

and it might not be fair to ask you this, but what is your vision for the future?

A. What is my vision for this client? Right now, I have one big client, the TAG, Maj. Gen. Mayorga, and his client is the Governor. We have some other pretty important clients, called the legislature. We serve our country and Texas and there are many things that we are expected to do. We are honest brokers. We cannot be all things to all people.

But our commitment to the needs of Texans is not negotiable. We have good links to our strong DSCA partners who will also provide service. This position is not about me, it is about my client(s). That is where I am now - the last few years as the state surgeon here at Camp Mabry, and now in this position.

Q – You mentioned DSCA, and it seems that every year we get a bigger role. It almost seems like if there is something wrong in Texas, whatever that maybe, we are there to help. There is more reliance on us every year. The H1N1 flu virus seemed to explode into something much more devastating than what it fortunately turned out to be and the hurricane season is upon us. You have worked closely with Dr. Lakey Commissioner, Texas Department of State Health Services, and many others agencies at the Governor's Division of Emergency Management. Do you think from that perspective, it might have influenced the decision making for General Mayorga to place you in this position?

A – Maj. Gen. Mayorga's decision to give me this opportunity certainly was like all the decisions he makes, based upon careful consideration of many factors. I would like to think that my background in recent DSCA operations gave me a record of performance and qualifications to join his team. I am grateful for the confidence he has shown me.

The reason the Governor depends on Texas Military Forces during emergencies is because the Guard brings a sense of stability and order. Citizens of Texas know that when the Governor "calls out the Guard:" 'you will be taken care of.'. We bring professionalism, tremendous capability, not just water, and food. Our neighbors trust us. We are citizen soldiers. We live in these communities and we are helping our neighbors. We are accountable to the civilian authorities. We are not taking over, we are here to help and then when it is time for us to leave, we leave because we are citizen Soldiers.

Q – Something you said struck me, even though we could bring military members from around the country under Emergency Management Agreement Cooperation. We are the military leaders when things happen in our State. We know the local conditions and know where to get the local resources. In that sense we are truly citizen Soldiers and Airmen. Do you agree?

A – Exactly, that is one of the great strengths of the Guard. We are citizen –Soldiers in uniform. We come with the connections and the knowledge and the network. We've got people in the Guard who are elected officials, corporate executives or major business owners. We come with a wealth of talent that far exceeds our military skill sets.

When a small town mayor is having problems, we have (by virtue of being the Guard) the ability to understand what it is he is trying to accomplish. He or she just wants to get their community back to normal and we understand that. We are civilians who put on the uniform as long as we are needed, and it is time to be civilians again, we do that.

Q – Different topic: In terms of mental health what are we doing in the State of Texas for our Soldiers and Airmen coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan who maybe suffering from PTSD?

A – PTSD is a disease, but so is the less recognized Traumatic Brain Injury. It is not uncommon that it happens in the same person, but that certainly is not always the case. We are asking Americans to go into a very dangerous environment where they are subjected to mortar or IED attacks.

Our Soldiers and Airmen are performing admirably, but in the blink of an eye, a Soldier on patrol or a civil affairs guy working on a water treatment plant, may be exposed to something horrific. If you take a brain and shake it around in someone's skull, something happens. That soldier or airman may or may not realize it at the time because he was able to get up and function as well as anybody else.

Our folks are professionals, with a "suck it up and do the best they can" mentality. The medical effects may not clearly show for days, months or even longer. Everybody handles it differently, how people recover and deal with PTSD or TBI it is different for every individual. Not everybody develops PTSD or traumatic brain injury, but we are dedicated to be ready for those who do. It is important that we have a very robust commitment, military and civilian to get treatment for our Soldiers and Airmen.

Q – Please define treatment for me.

A - We, as a military organization, are adjusting to the new normal. Seeking help does not necessarily mean, 'you are sick,' and we have to redefine treatment. It if means that any organized discussion on working out problems is considered treatment, then we may run the risk that a Soldier or Airman does not seek "treatment ."

Does PTSD mean that I am irreparable, **of course not**. The healthiest thing a person can do is to seek the means that gets him or her back operating normally. Sometimes treatment means the chance to get much needed sleep and eat well, other times it means longer and more targeted treatment possibly including medication and counseling.

It is perfectly normal for a Soldier or Airman to share his or her thoughts with somebody who has been there. Command Sgt. Maj. Morales, Command Sgt. Maj. Broyles and Command Chief MSgt. Davis are working together to remove the stigma that the "help" threshold is too high, too hard, or too frightening.

Q – How can a friend or family member help?

A - Peer to peer is key. Nobody knows you better than the people who are next to you. It is no different than saying, "hey you have a fever, let me take you to the Doc." We would not wait until it turned into something more serious. Same thing applies here. We know when something is wrong. We do not expect family members, Soldiers and Airmen to become PHDs or psychiatrists, but we should be able to say "Something is wrong, can I help you?"

We may not know that an individual is showing signs of PTSD or TBI, but his or her buddy or family member may. He or she did a great job and six months later he gets fired from his job, his wife or her husband is leaving, and the car was

See DIRECTOR, next page.

DIRECTOR, Cont. repossessed – those are all signs we need to be cognizant of. We have huge resources, VA, Partners Across Texas, Mental Health, Family Resources. Kids in school may be the canary because the only colors they draw their mom or dad in is black while everybody else's mommy maybe colored in cheery tones.

Senior NCOs are the key to destigmatizing this issue. We should be able to walk somebody over to great partners such as the VA or Texas Vet Commission. These people have their antennas up, they are veterans – they get it.

Q -So it almost sounds like the first defense for people suffering from PTSD are the people close to them?

A – You don't have to be an expert. There is help but you have to know where that help is. The Command Sergeant Majors and the Chiefs through the Wings have to be involved in getting this information out. If you don't know anybody else, you need to know your local Vet Center, Mental Health team member or Texas Vet Commission representative. Giving somebody a booklet on PTSD is not the answer. Somebody with TBI may not get beyond the first sentence because they have brain damage.

Q – I believe it is everybody's responsibility to be cognizant of a returning Soldier or Airman. We receive phone calls from concerned moms and dads and we need to step out of our lanes. We have to seek help immediately.

A – We are the Guard. If you are deployed with somebody and they come to work and they cough up a lung you would immediately assist. This is the same thing. The threshold is not somebody sitting at their desk in tears. You need to pay attention to each other earlier. The resources are available.

Q – During the National Day of Prayer, the chaplain said the motto should be:* People first, mission always, *instead of* Mission first, people always. *To me, that makes so much sense. Do you agree?

A – Absolutely, and though I am no longer the joint surgeon, I cannot leave the medical piece behind. This is important business. We are in the business of protecting Texas, but we have to protect ourselves to be able to protect Texas. The number one mission is not doing one big giant group hug, it is doing what the President or the Governor asks. I've got to take care of my people so that they are ready to go. If I am going to ask/tell you to do everything, I am responsible for seeing to it that you are able, trained and fit.

Q – This is not your first stab at being involved in a joint organization, but what does joint mean to you?

A - I had the opportunity to take a reserve component professional military education course. It taught me what this purple thing is. It is Army, Marines, Navy and Air Force. You need to bring your service culture but you should expect the other service to bring theirs as well. In this joint business we have to understand what is best done by what component and step aside and let them do it. There are sprinters and distance runners. A distance horse is not at the front of the pack in half a mile race. We have to recognize our service competencies and exploit them for the best possible mission outcome.

Q – Ma'am thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us, and as a final note – Are you still happy with your decision to become a Citizen Soldier?

A – Absolutely. The militia was around long before there was a DoD. It is in our blood, it is in our families. My mother and father were in WWII, and I have a great – great –great relative who served in the Revolutionary War, Massachusetts field artillery. As a matter of fact they did not know that he was a **she** until she was injured. DoD and the United States Army came from us – the State Militias. We are still here.

afterdeployment.org Explores Behavioral Health Information

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – The U.S. Army, with oversight by TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), has created an interactive Web site that allows service members and their families to explore behavioral health information. The site launched Aug. 5, 2008 at **http://www.afterdeployment.org,** and development continues.

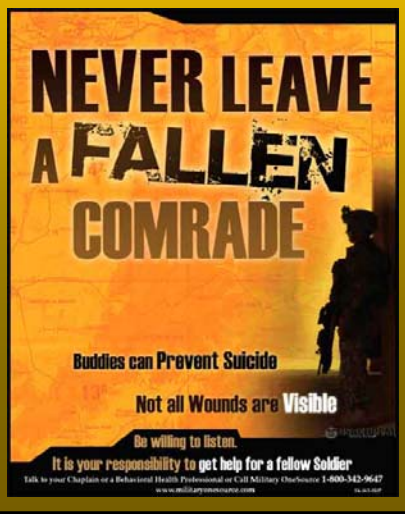
"After deployment.org serves as an interactive, self-help solution to assist with behavioral health needs following deployment," said Army Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, deputy director, TMA.

Authorized by legislation, the site is a pilot project to help service members deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other behavioral health conditions.

Visitors to afterdeployment.org will notice the user-friendly environment. By clicking on a video link play button, users can watch veterans, spouses and other family members tell real-life stories about how war changed their lives and how they dealt with the demands of readjusting after combat deployment.

In addition to these first-person accounts, a tool bar on the left side of the Web site links beneficiaries to educational topics that include: Getting Help, Check How You're Doing, Staying Healthy Where You Live, Stories from Home and Far Away, and Links, Books, Blogs & Pods. In each of these areas, additional links offer detailed information on chosen subjects.

A user-friendly environment is not all that matters to service members. Privacy is of paramount concern, and users don't have to register to access the site. Afterdeployment.org provides confidential education on sensitive issues such as stress and triggers, conflict at work, reconnecting with family and friends, moods, anger, sleep, substance abuse, stress management, kids and deployment, spiritual guidance, living with physical injuries and health and wellness.



TXMF SENIOR LEADERS RIDE FOR SAFETY

Story and photos by Spc. Mark Braden

100th Mobil Public Affairs Detachment

HUTTO, Texas- On his 21st birthday, Private Joe "Evel Knievel" Johnson, strode into the nearest Harley Davidson motorcycle dealership and declared to the salesman his life-long desire to own a "Harley ." The salesman eyed the Soldier up and down and questioned his clothing choice of sleeveless shirt, cutoffs and flip-flops, suggesting that he may want to wear something a bit more protective when departing the showroom with his new purchase. "Nah. I am the best rider on my block. I never crash!"

According to the Department of Motor Vehicles website, riders in the 20 to 29-year-old age group are the largest percentage of fatal crashes on the road today. With the largest population of motorcyclists in the country, Texas has many riders to protect.

Summer is here and gas prices are on the rise, so this is the time of year for cyclists to take measures to protect themselves, and others, on the road.

According to the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, there are over 780,000 licensed motorcyclists in the state. Whether you ride motorcycles or just share the road with them, all Texans can improve the safety of motorcycle riders.

Texas Army National Guard senior leadership perfected their skills in cornering, swerving, and braking during the Experienced Riders Course. The event, held on April 26, 2009 in the Hutto High School parking lot, included two classes for both basic and advanced riders.

"We have been trying to get safety pushed into the motorcycle arena for years now," said CSM Jimmy Broyles, Command Sergeant Major, Texas Army National Guard. "The problem we have had is that some of the younger Soldiers feel as if the older Soldiers that are riding have not been participating in the safety programs. So to start at the top, so to speak, we set it up so that all the senior officer and enlisted motorcycle riders in the state attended the Experienced Riders Course so that every Soldier would realize that safety is being pushed from the top down."

The basic class caters to new riders and the advanced class trains experienced riders, allowing new riders to not feel intimidated by experienced riders while the experienced riders don't have to wait for beginners to catch up. Either class can be completed in one weekend or over the course of a few evenings. Riders choose the Motorcycle Safety Course that's right for them.

"Most of us have been riding for 20 plus years," said Broyles. "We had all taken this course before but it is one of those things you need to retake every few years as a refresher. The course brought back some of the basic riding skills that experienced riders tend to overlook. We all really enjoyed the class."

"Advanced riders take the class because they want to learn," said Zac Lancaster, an instructor of the AMSC. "[They] also want the discount on their insurance, [which] can be fairly expensive throughout the year."

Last year, 29,141 Texans took either the basic or advanced course, reported the DMV website, setting an all-time record number of students taking advantage of the courses. The basic course may be used to waive the licensing road test, and both of the courses may qualify for ticket dismissal and insurance discounts.

The Texas National Guard reimburses state Guardsmen the $195.00 course fee upon completion of the Basic or Advanced Motorcycle Safety Course. Graduates bring their course completion card and a completed SF 1164 to the Safety office and the fee is directly deposited into their

account in about three weeks. Graduates also receive a free reflective vest. For more information about the free vest or fee reimbursement, contact Linda Bovee at the Camp Mabry Safety office at 512-782-5005 or email her at kinda.e.bovee@us.army.mil.

"Any Soldier that is going to ride a motorcycle on the public roadways in the state of Texas needs to have as much training and experience as they can," said Broyles. "The most dangerous thing we do as Texans is drive on the public roadways and riders exposed to the elements need to have as much safety consciousness as they can get. We want our Soldiers safe and anything we can do to increase their safety we are going to do."

Courses are held at numerous locations throughout Texas. To sign up for a Motorcycle Safety Course just log on to www.totalrider.com or call **512-282-1518** for further information.

Above- Command Sergeant Major Juan Morales, Senior Enlisted Advisor, JFHQ, demonstrates the head to toe "uniform" for optimal riding safety: DMV approved helmet, safety goggles, gloves, motorcycle riding jacket, regulation safety vest, long pants and work boots.

Below- The motorcycle riding senior leadership of the Texas Military Forces gathered together in Hutto to attend the Experienced Riders Course as part of a push for more motorcycle safety initiatives for Texas Soldiers.

Texas Soldier gets hospital-bed promotion, Purple Heart

By Air Force Master Sgt. Greg Rudl

National Guard Bureau

WASHINGTON (5/16/09) – Sometimes the only way to take it is lying down.

A National Guard Soldier staff sergeant received the Purple Heart Medal and a promotion today lying on his stomach in a hospital bed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center here.

Staff Sgt. Dennis Rayos Jr., C Battery, 3-133 Field Artillery Regiment, wounded May 4 in Iraq, was presented the Purple Heart Medal and promoted to sergeant first class by Maj. Gen. Peter Aylward, the director of the Joint Staff at the National Guard Bureau, and Texas Guard Lt. Col. Paul Hernandez, rear detachment commander, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division.

His father, Dennis Sr., his mom Yolanda and his son Zachary Dennis and other family stood by his bedside during the ceremony.

Rayos, 35, was wounded when his convoy bound for Balad was hit by an IED. He was treated at the Joint Base Balad hospital, moved to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany then flown back to the states, arriving at Walter Reed May 8.

The Pecos, Texas, native didn't want to be promoted yet, said his father Dennis Sr. His son had told him that he wanted more time and experience leading and mentoring junior Soldiers.

His father said Dennis – the oldest of his three boys – resisted taking pain medication for the severe injuries to his lower back. "My son never drank or smoked," he said. "He's always been a clean kid. I told him he needs to take the medication because that will help his wounds heal faster."

Rayos has 12 years of military service including four years with the active-duty Army and an 18-month tour in Egypt. He was working on a degree in computer technology and drives a forklift in the civilian world.

The family has been staying at a hotel, but is making arrangements to stay at the Mologne House here.

Now he might finally get that computer degree that he's always dreamed about, said his father, a diesel mechanic that works for the county.

Above- Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Rayos Jr. in his hospital bed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Left- Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Rayos Jr., his son Zachary Dennis, his father, Dennis Sr., Maj. Gen. Peter Aylward and his mother Yolanda after the ceremony . (Photos by Sgt. Ralph McCallum, National Guard Bureau Soldier and Family Liaison)

Rayos Sr., despite the seriousness of his son's condition, seemed upbeat and thankful for the attention his son was getting. He talked about having a cookout and inviting the people he's met since arriving in Washington.

Department of Labor- Transition Assistance Seminar; Resume Support and More

WHO: All Texas Military Forces, Reserve Components, Veterans and their Spouses

WHAT: TWO Department of Labor- Transition Assistance Seminars

WHEN: June 6-7, 2009. Saturday 9:00-3:00pm and Sunday 9:00-12:30pm

WHERE: Camp Mabry - 2200 W. 35th Street, Bldg 8, Room A123, Austin, TX 78703

WHEN: July 11-12, 2009. Saturday 9:00-3:00pm and Sunday 9:00-12:30pm

WHERE: 1775 California Crossing, Dallas, TX 75220

WHY: Resume support; know your benefits, career enhancing support, file VA claims.

The National Guard, Department of Labor, Texas Veterans Commission, and your Transition Assistance Advisors are working together to provide you a day and half Seminar free of charge. Attend in lieu of drill, IDT credit with Commander's approval. Spouses also invited to attend this FREE Seminar. POC: Please contact Harvey King at (512) 463-2815 or king.harvey@dol.gov or Jacinda Johnson at (512) 782-1201 or jacinda.johnson@ng.army.mil to reserve your spot.

Guardians of the gates: 56th IBCT Soldiers protect VBC

By Staff Sgt. Mark Burrell

Multi-National Division-Baghdad Public Affairs

VICTORY BASE COMPLEX, Iraq – Soldiers can work out, train, plan and analyze combat missions inside of Victory Base Complex without worrying about donning their heavy body armor and carrying loaded weapons. That's because they're protected day and night by the vigilant troops of the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team manning the entry control points throughout VBC.

"This job has the highest level of importance," said Cpl. John Wiley, a cavalry scout from Bruceville Eddy, Texas, assigned to A Troop "Apache," 1st Squadron, 124th Cavalry Regiment, 56th IBCT. "There are Soldiers [safely] asleep right now in their racks that work night shift because we're out here doing our job. It's very important that we do it correctly."

Each day under the beating Iraqi sun, the Soldiers check all personnel and vehicles entering their ECP, added Wiley.

"We check every single thing coming into our ECP," said Wiley. "I've been here long enough to know who's who and I know if there's a new driver or something and I'll take a little bit more interest."

The Texas National Guard Soldiers have been doing this job here for almost six months and are as detailed and proficient as they come, added sergeant of the guard, Sgt. Mathew Wallace, assigned to Apache Troop.

"We're looking for anything that doesn't look right on an ID card or a vehicle," added Wallace, a Florence, Texas native. Then the Apache Troop Soldiers take appropriate actions to handle the situation, he said.

"I know what's supposed to go through and what's not," explained Wiley. "We've always got 360 security, so we know what's going on at all times."

The guardians of VBC know that the smallest mistake or act of complacency can mean disaster for their battle buddies inside the wire, added Wiley.

Though these stalwart Soldiers all have many different military occupational specialties and come from different walks of life, they are performing a tough job with a high level of competence, explained Wallace, a combat medic.

"Being a medic is preventive medicine, and the best way to prevent injuries is out here protecting our guys," Wallace said.

Spc. Brandon Barefield (left background), a Waco, Texas native and combat medic, mans the turret gun as Sgt. Mathew Wallace (right foreground), the sergeant of the guard from Florence, Texas, also originally a combat medic, gets a closer look at a suspicious object from an entry control point here, May 14

"I'm just an infantryman until somebody gets hurt."

With the dependable and ever-ready Soldiers of the 56th IBCT manning the ECPs here, Soldiers inside VBC can continue to re-energize and prepare for upcoming combat missions in relative safety.

Interested in helping those who serve?

Find out more at http://www.uso.org/howtohelp/

Lieutenant Colonel commissions son into U.S. Air Force from Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Melanie Trollinger
145th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, TIKRIT, Iraq—Lt. Col. Rocky Smith, of Manvel, Texas, commissions his son, Alex Smith, as a U.S. Air Force second lieutenant via video teleconference from Iraq, May 15. Lt. Smith served as the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, 1st Air Wing commander for more than 200 cadets during his final year of college at Texas A&M University. Lt. Smith graduated and was commissioned the same day.

Lt. Col. Smith, who is deployed with 25th Special Troops Battalion, 25th Infantry Division located at COB Speicher, is a Texas Army National Guard member. Smith's appearance by VTC was organized as a surprise to his son. He said it took "a lot of work by a lot of different people on both ends to make the VTC happen."

"I was introduced as a special guest and my son didn't know what was happening. Once he figured out what was going on, he was excited," Colonel Smith said.

Colonel Smith, who is an AH-64 Apache pilot and a simulation engineer with NASA, said his son will go to Laughlin Air Force Base in November to begin flight training. Colonel Smith said his son hopes to eventually fly fighter jets.

Lt. Smith was nominated to the U.S. Air Force Academy but instead accepted a scholarship to Texas A&M. It was a difficult decision to make but after visiting both schools, said Lt. Col. Smith, the traditions and camaraderie of Texas A&M won his son over.

Lt. Colonel Rocky Smith reads the oath of commissioning to his son Lt. Alex Smith during a long-distance ceremony on May 15.

At Risk Youth Program Participate in Legislative Day

By 1st Lt. Yves Raoelina
Joint Texas Counterdrug Task Force

AUSTIN, Texas- On 17 March 2009, the Joint Counterdrug Task Force participated in the Legislative Day, hosted by the by the Texas Military Forces on Camp Mabry. A delegation of the Texas State Legislature, accompanied by the Texas Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jose Mayorga and senior leaders of the Texas National Guard walked through various exhibits showcasing special equipment used by Texas National Guardsmen.

The Texas Challe*NG*e Academy (TCA) was featured at the Drug Demand Reduction booth of the Joint Counterdrug Task Force. TCA is a volunteer program for 16 to 19- year- old teens who are at risk of dropping out, or who have already dropped out, of high school. The goal of the Academy is to "reclaim the potential of these young adults through education, training and volunteer service ."

Mr. Eliu Rojas, Texas Challe*NG*e Academy recruiter, and Master Sergeant Juan Casillas, Drug Demand Reduction Administrator, were on hand to brief the Texas legislators on the need to open a second facility in the state. Current cadets Tina Lara and Katie Baxley shared the challenges they face while being in the program and their success stories with all those in attendance.

Cadet Lara, 17, from Baytown, TX, came to TCA "thinking I was not going to amount to anything. I have learned since being here that I can't say I give up and know that I am becoming a leader ." She plans to go to college after she graduates while working part time.

Cadet Baxley, from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, stated in high school she used to be a straight-A student until she "got into an unhealthy lifestyle of hanging out with the wrong crowd, sneaking out at night and going to parties after telling my mom I was staying at a friend's house." One day she decided it was time to change and she heard about TCA. "After being in the program for twelve weeks, I can tell I have matured and actually know I can make it in life, and that the next eleven weeks I am here, I will be a great success." She is seriously considering attending West Point in the future.

Former Cadet Chris Hines is a Marine who was severely wounded in Iraq in November 2006 and who appeared as a guest on the Oprah Winfrey show following his return from the war. He told of the discipline and new outlook on life the youth program gave him and how it inspired him to join the Marines and serve his country. He is now working for a computer firm in Austin, TX.

Nick Maggio, 19 and a recent graduate of TCA, was also on hand to share his experiences. "I used to be heavily involved in hard drugs, did not listen to my parents and skipped school on a daily basis," the Austin native stated. At age 16, Chris heard about the program from his JROTC Colonel and later applied. He said that although it took him a while to realize that Challe*NG*e was a good program, it helped him realize that he needed to turn his life around. He is now attending college in the Austin area and wants to study endocrinology.

Col. Tony West, the Joint Counterdrug Task Force Commander, and Mr. Michael Weir, the Director of Texas Challe*NG*e Academy both participated in the day. The legislative delegation was very impressed to see first hand how the National Guard Youth Challe*NG*e Program saves lives by giving direction to our at-risk youth.

Eliu Rojas, TCA recruiter and Master Sgt. Juan Casillas present the TCA program to Texas state legislators at Camp Mabry.

Troubled Youth Meet Challe*NG*es Head On

By 1st Lt. Yves Raoelina
Joint Texas Counterdrug Task Force

SHEFFIELD, Texas- It's eight o'clock in the morning on Saturday, January 24, 2009, the arrival day for the first Texas Challe*NG*e Academy class at the Sheffield facility. The new cadets and their loved ones nervously flock to the registration tables in the Academy gymnasium. Dressed in grey sweat tops and pants, the cadets are from all over the state and eager to begin this new, redeeming phase of their lives.

The goal of the Texas Challe*NG*e Academy is to reclaim the potential of Texas high school dropouts through education, training, volunteer service and mentoring, all the while instilling in them a deep desire for success and to become productive citizens in the community. Once the last goodbyes are said and the remaining families and friends have departed the area, the reality of the new surroundings suddenly sinks in. Pre-Challenge has begun.

The cadets form lines while standing at parade rest as National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from the Texas Joint Counterdrug Task Force begin the process of transitioning the cadets to their new home. It is a flurry of activity that will last throughout the morning. The Texas National Guardsmen are members of the Task Force's Drug Demand Reduction team who have dedicated themselves to educating young Texans on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

In many ways, Pre-Challenge is a culture shock for the majority of the cadets. Few of them have seen the deserts of West Texas. Even fewer have experienced any kind of strict military environment and regimen, to include shared living quarters, scheduled physical activity and personal discipline.

Following a couple of welcome briefs and a quick meal, the cadets are assigned to a platoon and marched to their squad bays. Here they are introduced to basic military customs and courtesies, Academy terminology and taught how to make their bunks and care for their clothing. The following days are filled with drill and ceremony training; personal hygiene and common living area inspections; dining facility procedures and more briefings. A 5-mile road march and plenty of military-style physical training are included throughout the days.

The Youth Challe*NG*e Program incorporates a 22-week residential phase and a 12-month post-residential phase. During the residential phase, cadets learn the eight core components of the Challe*NG*e program ranging from physical fitness to service to the community. The post-residential phase incorporates constant monitoring as each student is matched with a mentor. The results speak for themselves: 70 percent of the students complete the course with a high school diploma or GED, 20 percent move on to a career in the military and over 30 percent continued their education.

The first few weeks at the Academy were not without growing pains, but they certainly gave these young Texans a new outlook on life and their future. Thanks to the hard work, dedication and caring attitude exhibited by the Texas Joint Counterdrug Task Force members and the Texas Challe*NG*e Academy staff; eighty-one motivated cadets graduated from Phase I of training on February 21, 2009.

Texas National Guard: A Community of Excellence

Maj. Gen. Grant Hayden presents Maj. Gen. Jose S. Mayorga, Adjutant General of Texas, Capt. Stephen Greathouse and Ms. Gail Bickling the Gold Second Place award for Texas Military Forces at the ACOE Award Ceremony in Arlington, Va., on May 4, 2009

Texas Military Forces were recognized as an Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) during the Annual Army National Guard 2009 ACOE Award Ceremony, Monday, May 4, 2009, in Arlington, Va.

Annually, J5 Organizational Development gathers information and data across the entire installation to self-assess the organization and report on the processes and results in a 50-page submission to ACOE.

The self-assessment is based on the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, comprised of six process categories and one results category: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Customer Focus, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management, Workforce Focus, Process Management, and Results.

Successful management of overall performance requires organization-specific synthesis, alignment, and integration. Synthesis means looking at your organization as a whole and builds on key business attributes, including your core competencies, strategic objectives, action plans, and work systems.

Alignment means using the key linkages among requirements given in the Baldrige Criteria Categories to ensure consistency of plans, processes, measures, and actions.

Integration builds on alignment, so that the individual components of your performance management system operate in a fully interconnected manner and deliver anticipated results.

State Surgeon Gives All to Country, State, and Troops

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Daniel Griego

100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Seventeenth century English churchman Robert South said, "if there be any truer measure of a man than by what he does, it must be by what he gives." Without question, these words patently apply to Col. John J. Garcia, State Army Surgeon for Texas, who has given his time, energy and of himself in the duty of his country throughout more than four decades of dedicated service.

Set to retire in June of 2010, Colonel Garcia will close out a career that will ultimately span 44 years, three branches of military service; active, reserve and guard components, three major conflicts and almost a dozen promotions. As an officer and a Servicemember, he stands among the most elite of veterans who have willingly devoted their lives to the service of their country.

In the spring of 1966, Colonel Garcia and his friends began selecting their paths following graduation from high school in San Antonio, Texas.

"The Vietnam War was going on," he said, "so we all went in different branches of the military. Some in the Army, some in the Marines. I went into the Navy. After my four years of active service, I went back to San Antonio and was in the Navy Reserves for six years. During that time, I started going to school at San Antonio College and I became a paramedic with the San Antonio Fire Department."

This early training in the medical field would serve as the foundation for a career as a military medic.

"I decided to cross over into the Air Force as a flight medic," said Colonel Garcia. "After seven years, I was an E-7 in the Air Force, I had finished my four year degree from UT San Antonio and got picked up for medical school."

Graduating with a degree in Biology and a minor in Chemistry, Colonel Garcia chose this period to enter his third branch of military service.

"I was at a crossroads. I had to resign from the Air Force and the Fire Department and I took up a scholarship in 1983 to go to medical school."

Colonel Garcia joined the Army Reserves as a 2nd Lt, concurrent with his medical school.

"I ended up going to the University of Texas at Galveston [for] my four years of medical school and when I graduated I was a captain. [After graduating] from medical school, [I] was sent to Eisenhower Medical Center at Fort Gordon to do my internship."

This training further reinforced his dedication to the Army and his medical practice, leading him to become a general medical officer in 1989.

"I got assigned to Fort Ord, California, with the 7th Infantry Division. A couple of months after I got there, we were sent to Panama for the invasion of Panama."

As his first real experience in military combat, the Panama conflict presented new challenges to the captain within the scope of this historic event.

"We landed at the civilian airport where General Noriega had his private jets. There was a lot of heavy fighting; we took a lot of wounded."

Following the surrender of Noriega, Garcia's true calling took shape in the jungles of Panama.

"I stayed longer to help set up some of the medical hospitals and clinics under the new minister of health. All of their supplies and equipment had been taken from them so it was very rewarding for us, as the American Army, to be able to help disperse monies and bring fresh supplies and set up these hospitals. [It] was probably one of the best things we did for that country after the invasion."

Less than a year later, Colonel Garcia found himself in a new type of battlefield.

"By August of 1990, we were getting ready to go to Iraq for the first Gulf War. It was interesting coming from jungle warfare to a totally new desert environment."

"My mission [in Desert Storm]," Colonel Garcia said, "was to travel 1500 meters from the battle and make arrangements to treat and collect wounded and get them on the Bradleys back to the rear. All the contingency plans we had for helicopters coming in to air evac our wounded Soldiers fell through because we overlooked the hand-held Stinger, a shoulder-mounted surface to air missile system."

"We couldn't bring the birds in, so we put our wounded soldiers on the 113s, which is like a Bradley, and evac them by ground 50 or 60 miles to the rear and get them air lifted from there. So from my command hatch, I could see the battle and I could see the injured that were coming to us."

These experiences, and others throughout his tours, instilled in Colonel Garcia a strong sense of not only responsibility, but also how best to combat future engagements. When asked what he took away from his deployments, he confidently answered, "training."

"I think the biggest thing from a medical officer's standpoint is that you have to train, all the time. You as the doctor or PA have to make sure that your medics are ready to treat these kinds of casualties. Everything you think of in emergency combat medicine, your medics have to be ready to do."

He and his medics were further tested in his third and most recent conflict, the Global War on Terror.

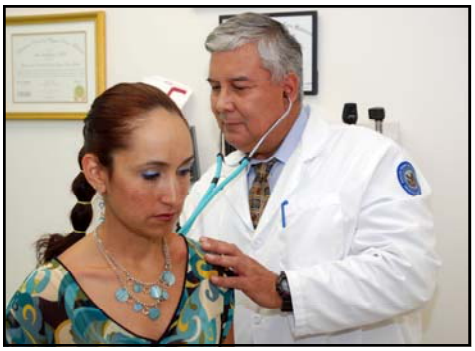
"The most positive thing that I found out of Iraq in 2005 is the level of soldiership. Their level of citizenship, commitment, their loyalty to America was unbelievable. No Soldier that I ever treated, no Soldier that I ever talked to, no Marine that I ever talked to, ever complained about being there."

Colonel Garcia found this reverent devotion to service in a Marine gunnery sergeant who required the amputation of an arm after being hit with an IED.

"The guy looks me dead in the face and says "Doc, do whatever you gotta do, just send me back to my guys." I'll never forget those words because they sum up the American Servicemember and their commitment to each other and their loyalty to this country."

Colonel Garcia joined the Texas Army National Guard in 2005 and became the state surgeon in 2007. As state surgeon, he has taken on more expansive and diverse roles in the medical field and consummated a long and distinguished career for the United States military.

"It was a challenge, but it's a challenge that I welcomed. I was more than willing to take this responsibility because the state surgeon is overall responsible for the Soldiers' health, to ensure that



Right- Col. John J. Garcia examines Marisa Alamilla at his office.

Getting Ready for the Worst: Mass Casualty Exercise in Iraq

By Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick

56th IBCT Public Affairs Office, 36th Inf. Div.

BAGHDAD – Incoming! Incoming! Incoming!

These words can strike fear into the hearts of those that hear them. However, it is important that they don't summon panic. The best way for Soldiers and members of the Victory Base Complex Force Protection force to mitigate any possible panic, is to train for the worst.

On Apr. 24, U.S. Soldiers, civilians and contractors held a base wide training event that simulated a coordinated attack; creating a mass casualty (MASCAL) event.

Above- Members of a rapid response team load a wounded Soldier onto a field line ambulance from a nearby troop medical clinic.

Left– Two firefighters from the Camp Victory Fire Department extinguish a simulated fire caused by vehicle borne improvised explosive device during a mass casualty training exercise .

A real life emergency created by such an attack would require coordination of effort across multiple agencies and commands on VBC. This training event, allowed all these organizations to come together and plan how they would react and handle this type of situation without panic.

"The VBC MASCAL II event involves over 20 organizations including all the Mayor Cell's, [troop medical clinics, contractors] and some other civilian agencies," explained Maj. Wesley Otken, assistant operations officer serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Multi-National Division—Baghdad. "The training value added is having all these organizations work together through a complex attack, making sure that we are able to respond; providing command and control, good communications amongst all these different elements, especially the coordination involved among the different [troop medical clinics] for the treatment of our wounded Soldiers."

The size of this event required more than a month of prior coordination that included several meetings bringing all the partner organizations together.

"We held four IPR's (In Progress Review's) and had a rehearsal over a six week period in preparation for the event," said Otken, a native of Plano, Texas.

Soldiers and crews working at entry control points benefited from the training by providing over-watch from guard towers and conducting internal patrols.

"It's not just an exercise to test the reactions of the crews on the [entry control points], it is also to test the coordination and reactions of the emergency service providers on VBC," said Maj. Ed Dextraze, a Houston, Texas native serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron 124th Cavalry Regiment, 56th IBCT.

The event included a vehicle borne improvised explosive device attack at an ECP, and two indirect fire impact areas. Several agencies responded to the VBIED attack including the Victory Fire Department, Military Police, a rapid response team, a quick reaction force, and a field line ambulance from the nearby troop medical clinic.

"The impressive thing is not that everyone reacted to the situation, but that they reacted quickly. Everyone that needed to be here was, and in a timely fashion," Dextraze remarked.

Relationships Matter! Reaching Out to Others

By Maj. Steve Keihl

Behavioral Health Team

I reviewed research this past week on the impact of relationships upon individual mental health. The results were less than staggering in my mind; individuals able to maintain significant and intimate relationships demonstrate good mental health while those who suffer through dysfunctional, unhappy or relationship splits often struggle with poor mental health… Relationships Matter!

For years, those in military mental health emphasize the importance of peer relationships and support networks. In fact, maintaining significant and healthy peer support relationships is critical in post-deployment reintegration and can strongly reduce the risk of combat related anxiety disorders such as PTSD… Relationships Matter!

There are additional studies supporting the notion that success or failure may have a direct impact upon critical behavioral issues such as addiction. Some suggest that the development and maintenance of healthy and meaningful relationships deter addictive behaviors, while the failure to obtain and maintain such relationships often serves as a catalyst leading to addictive behaviors… Relationships Matter!

I could go on and on listing study after study, citing research from across the globe, providing data and evidence, but it is unnecessary. The reality is that we all know that relationships matter. Every one of us can quickly think of someone who had a significant impact, positive or negative, upon our development, our life, our dreams, and our mental health. The reality is indisputable… Relationships Matter!

Now, in our warrior society we often refuse to acknowledge our need for other people. Instead, we too often try to tackle the world's problems on our own. Even worse, we fail to acknowledge our own issues, struggles, limitations, and pain. We stubbornly convince ourselves that we can get through life on our own and that we don't need anyone. This attitude of hyper self reliance often leads to isolation, loneliness, depression, unhappiness, and can even cause problems with our physical health. Get this, people who are engaged in intimate relationships actually live longer! Get the picture… Relationships Matter!

While there are no sure fire methods to create perfect relationships, there are some definitive keys that can help improve relationships you already have. In a recent article entitled "Making Relationships Work", Charleen Alderfer lists eight suggestions for reflection and growth. I choose to highlight three that I believe are especially relevant.

First – Live in the Present. Too many people spend far too much time focusing on the past. There is a Native American proverb that reminds us that we "never step in the same river twice." Even though the river may look the same, the water is constantly moving and therefore the proverb is correct. The same is true of relationships. They are dynamic, evolving, and ever-changing. We cannot live in the past. It is a bad move to constantly drudge up past failures and offenses. Forgiveness is necessary and living in the past baggage will only handcuff present efforts to improve. It is an equally bad idea to live in your past success. What works today may not be the same as what worked yesterday. Our focus with all of our relationships must be in the present.

Second – Focus on Giving. We live in a self-centered and often overly indulgent world. It is far too easy to obsess with our own needs, desires, likes and dislikes. Learning to focus on others could make a huge positive impact on your relationships. I have a peer that I refuse to go to lunch with. No matter how many people are along for the ride, he insists on his choice of restaurants. I know it sounds petty, but his self-centered focus irritates me and creates a roadblock in our relationship. We all need to learn to be more concerned with loving others and adhering to the old adage; it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Third – Share. Learn to talk and share your thoughts, feelings, ideas, and opinions. Avoiding difficult topics does not alleviate the conflict. The notion that those who know us already know what we think or feel is a cop out and completely ineffective. We need to learn to communicate. We need to learn to share. The more that remains unspoken, the greater the risk for lingering problems.

Relationships matter! They impact every aspect of our lives. We can't just assume that relationships are going to work naturally. They require attention, effort, and emphasis. Learn to invest in relationships at work and you will improve your career satisfaction as well as your team's productivity. Commit yourself to relationships in your personal world and you will find contentment and greater personal happiness. Share the load, share your life, reach out to others… Relationships Matter!

Arrowhead Soldiers: Cinco de Mayo in Iraq

BAGHDAD – Left- Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Sportsman, serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division, plays his guitar during the company barbecue celebrating Cinco de Mayo at Camp Victory. Sportsman, a resident of Arlington, Texas, is serving in his second tour to Iraq in support of the Global War on Terror.

Center- Staff Sgt. Jeremy Amis, serving with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division, acts as the official 'taste tester' for the company barbecue held in celebration of Cinco de Mayo at Camp Victory. Amis, a Texas State Trooper in Waco, Texas, is serving his first tour in Iraq.

Right- 1st Sgt. Ron Novio, senior enlisted leader for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division, cooks brisket and ribs on the grill for a company barbecue at Camp Victory on May 5. Novio, from the greater Houston area, is serving in his second tour to Iraq in support of the Global War on Terror.

(U.S. Army Photos by Staff Sgt. Jason Kendrick, PAO 56th IBCT, 36th ID)

Armed Service Blood Program Now on Facebook and Twitter

WASHINGTON, D.C., Apr. 17, 2009—The Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) invites you to join your military blood program on Facebook and Twitter! These sites help us reach our larger military family while offering more ways to stay in touch with current donors and volunteers.

• To become our fan on Facebook, please visit www.facebook.com and search for the Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP).

• To follow us on Twitter, please visit www.twitter.com/militaryblood.

"These methods of communication are one more way of making the point to our great troops and their family members that the ASBP is their program. We need their support wherever they may be, and reaching out to them via these channels will help us get our message across," says Perry Jefferies, ASBP Blood Donor Recruiter, Fort Hood, Texas.

Registration is required before users can navigate through Facebook and Twitter ,but only takes a few moments. The service is free and makes it easy to stay up on the latest program news, ask questions about donating blood or find out about upcoming blood drives.

Erin Hawkins, ASBP Blood Donor Recruiter, Fort Gordon, GA. adds: "Facebook and Twitter are great tools to keep the topic of military blood donations on people's minds in an engaging and relevant way."

Join us as we use technology to keep you informed and discover one more way the military takes care of its own! For all other information pertaining to the ASBP and to schedule your next donation appointment, please visit our Web site, www.militaryblood.dod.mil.

Donation centers in Texas are located at Ft. Bliss, Ft. Hood, Lackland Air Force Base and Ft. Sam Houston.

TWITTER "TEXASGUARD" FOR INFORMATION AND UPDATES FROM RECRUITING AND RETENTION COMMAND!

News Briefs

Texas State Guard; Helping Out in a Hot Spot

Story by Sgt. George Garriott

Texas State Guard Public Affairs

Texas States Guardsmen from the 4th Civil Affairs Regiment, Texas State Guard (TXSG) located in Denton, Decatur and Fort Worth had an eventful Easter holiday weekend due to the devastation caused by a recent string of wild fires in Montague, Jacksboro and Cook counties, where over 100 homes were destroyed.

Members of the TXSG deployed at the request of its Commander in Chief, the Governor of Texas, to team up with the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Texas Baptist Men and the Texas Animal Health Commission, to name few of the 19 organizations in Montague County, offering assistance at the Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster Assistance Center (VOADAC).

Many families across the counties were still in shock, trying to sort out how to begin cleanup and rebuilding of their homes. The flames were undiscriminating; others were less fortunate having lost everything they had to the wind swept flames.

The sight of the TXSG men and women being there; rendering assistance and aid in time of need was emotional for many. Frazzled, lost or in need of assistance, they came from various areas, what some have described as a "different planet, scorched and devastated, total despair."

All of Texas can not help but to stand tall and be proud of these citizen – Soldiers who sacrificed their personal time with their families at Easter to answer the call for help from fellow Texans in times of need. The true meaning of "Texans serving Texas."

The TXSG is the oldest of three branches of the Military Forces of the State of Texas, reporting to the Governor of Texas and the Adjutant General. The other two Branches are the Army and Air Guard.

TXSG has units throughout the State of Texas, providing Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) by maintaining a highly trained, mission-ready, military force, providing services to state and local authorities in times of State Emergencies and Homeland Security throughout Texas.

(Maj. J. Michael Spraggins contributed to this story.)

Department of Defense Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts

The Department of Defense's expanded Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) program is now offering up to $6,000 to military spouses who are interested in pursuing degree programs, licenses or credentials leading to careers in high growth, high demand portable career fields.

MyCAA financial assistance pays for expenses such as post-secondary education and training, tuition, licensing, and credentialing fees. This includes degree programs (e.g. associates, bachelors, masters, doctoral and post doctoral), continuing education classes (including those offered through professional associations at conferences), Bar, CPA and other similar exams, state certifications for teachers, medical professionals and similar licensed professionals, and services required to become employed in portable career fields (e.g. finger printing, security checks, drug tests, etc.)

MyCAA does not pay for computers, school application fees, graduation fees, student activity cards, child care, parking, transportation, medical services or testing fees. NOTE: If the cost of a course includes books, supplies or other necessary equipment, MyCAA will cover that cost. Schools use MyCAA's AI Portal to bill DoD electronically.

Who Is Eligible? Spouses of active duty members and activated members of the National Guard and Reserve Components.

The period of eligibility for spouses of Guard and Reserve members is from the date of the Alert or Warning Order for Military Recall or Mobilization, through activation and deployment until 180 days following De-Mobilization.

Military spouses who are military members themselves are not eligible. Military members have education benefits provided through the Military Voluntary Education Tuition Assistance (TA) Program.

Eligible spouses who are ready to explore portable careers options and develop a career goal and plan should establish a MyCAA Account by visiting the MyCAA website ~ https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa. This is an easy, self-help process. Once spouse profile information is provided, DoD will verify MyCAA eligibility through DEERS. The spouse will be notified of his/her eligibility status through the MyCAA messaging system.

Who Can Help Spouses Move Through the MyCAA Program? Spouses are encouraged to work with their School Academic Advisor or call a Military OneSource Career/Education Consultant at 1-800-342-9647 if they need help in: establishing a MyCAA Account and signing the MyCAA Statement of Understanding (SOU), choosing a portable career and establishing a career goal, developing a career plan (selecting courses, exams, other needed services), looking up school(s) of choice in the MyCAA AI Portal, requesting that a new school be added if the school of choice is not already listed, and requesting up to $6,000 of financial assistance to pay for courses of study or related licensing and credentialing services provided by other agencies (e.g. Bar or CPA exams, state certification exams for teachers and nurses, finger printing, drug testing, security checks, etc.)

For spouses who experience technical difficulties using the MyCAA website or have forgotten their password, please contact MyCAA@InvernessTechnologies.com.

This Month in Military History: June

A Blue Star Service Banner displayed in the window of a home is an American tradition. The banner lets others know that someone in the home is proudly serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. As Americans do their best to support Operation Iraqi Freedom and the ongoing war on terror, the Blue Star Service Banner tradition reminds us all that war touches every neighborhood in our land.

The American Legion also has available a Blue Star Banner Corporate Flag for government and corporate America to show support for employees called to active duty with their Reserve or National Guard units. It should be noted that this is different from the 1926 War Mothers Flag hoisted every Veterans Day at 11 minutes after 11 o'clock, and which flies until sundown beneath the U.S. Flag to honor the millions of Americans killed in action during World War I and World War II.

Blue Star Service Banners Fact Sheet:

- The Blue Star Service Banner was designed, and patented in 1917 by World War I Army Capt. Robert L. Queisser of the 5th Ohio Infantry who had two sons serving on the front line. It quickly became the unofficial symbol of a child in the service.

- On Sept. 24, 1917, an Ohio congressman read the following into the Congressional Record: “The mayor of Cleveland, the Chamber of Commerce and the governor of Ohio have adopted this service flag. The world should know of those who give so much for liberty. The dearest thing in all the world to a father and mother - their children."

- During World War II, the Department of War issued specifications on the manufacture of the flag, as well as guidelines indicating when and by whom the Service flag could be flown, or the Service Lapel button could be worn. The Department of Defense updated the guidelines on December 1, 1967 with DoD Directive 1348.1, which implemented an Act of Congress authorizing a service flag and a service lapel button (U.S.C. 179-182).

- The Blue Star Service Banner typically displayed in windows is an 8.5 by 14-inch white field with a blue star(s) sewn onto a red banner. The size may vary but should be in proportion to the size of the U.S. Flag.

- Today Blue Star Service Banners are displayed by families who have a loved one serving in the armed forces, including the National Guard and Reserves of all military departments (https://www-perscom.army.mil/tagd/tioh/FAQ/ServiceFlagFactSheet.htm). The banner displayed in the front window of a home shows a family's pride in their loved one serving in the military and reminds others that preserving America's freedom demands much.

- The blue star represents one family member serving in the armed forces. A banner can have up to five stars, signifying that five members of that family are currently in military uniform on active duty.

- If the individual symbolized is killed or dies while serving, the star representing that individual will have superimposed on it a gold star of smaller size so that the blue forms a border. On flags displaying multiple stars, including gold stars, when the flags are suspended as against a wall, the gold star(s) will be to the right of, or above the blue star(s), a place of honor nearest the staff.

- Blue Star Mothers and Gold Star Mothers organizations were established during World War I and remain active today. Blue Star Service Banners, while widely used across America during World Wars I and II, were not embraced during the Korean or Vietnam wars with nearly the same enthusiasm.

- The American Legion is providing banners to families in communities across the nation.

- The American Legion also has a special Blue Star Banner Corporate Flag for government and corporate America to show their support for employees called to active duty in the war against terrorism. For more information, contact The American Legion Public Relations Office at (317) 630-1253.

A Texas National Guard Soldier carries the American flag during the March for the Fallen in Austin. (Photo by Staff Sgt Daniel A. Griego, 100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)