

# The DISPATCH



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**Cover-** The 36th Inf. Div. honor guard proudly presents the colors amid the backdrop of the ruins of the original site of San Pietro Infine. (Photo by Master Sgt. Brenda Benner, 36th Inf. Div. Public Affairs)

# 2010: Looking to the New Year



2009 was an outstanding year for the Texas Military Forces. I want to sincerely thank every member of the team for your selfless service and continued commitment to excellence as we move into 2010. Your contributions in defense of this great State and Nation are first-class. As your Adjutant General, I'm extraordinarily proud of our Service Members, civilian employees and family members. You are indeed the very best our Nation has to offer.

2010 promises to be challenging and busy. Mobilizations, deployments, re-deployments and reintegration initiatives in support of the Nation's Overseas Contingency Operations will continue to be a priority. Soldiers and Airmen must keep themselves physically, mentally and spiritually strong in preparation for deployments. Family Readiness Programs and Volunteer support have been traditional

strengths of our agency. We will rely heavily on them again in 2010 as we collectively work to assist members and families when their spouses are deployed and to expedite access to services and resources to aid re-integration into home and jobs upon their re-deployment.

We will provide responsive DSCA support to Texas citizens and predictions for 2010 are that we will be confronted with challenging storm seasons in the spring, summer and into the fall. Our disaster plans, training and rehearsals must be continuously updated and exercised and we must remain poised to respond. Support to our local community training exercises is essential so leaders at all levels can incorporate those events into long-range scheduling and planning. Internally, we will continue to refine our Strategic Planning processes and reorganize and transform as necessary to better support our many customers. That said, the current budget landscape, both State and federal, promises to be challenging for 2010. We need every TXMF member to be a good steward of the resources available.

We have a number of key events on our plate for 2010. Both 36<sup>th</sup> ID Headquarters and the 176<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade will deploy this FY. Personnel assigned to mobilize must ensure they meet the administrative and physical requirements necessary for deployment, and that their families are active participants in unit Family Support Groups. It is inevitable that TXMF forces will be called to respond to wildfires, floods, hurricanes and other yet-to-be-defined situations that threaten the lives and/or property of Texans. Rehearsals and personnel/equipment preparedness are critical to DSCA success. Our Strategic Plans Working Group is currently developing our 2011-2015 Strategic Plan. I need your thoughts and opinions on our new Vision, Mission, Goals, & Values Statements.

Several Major events are coming up – Mark your calendars.

TXMF Joint Conference/NGAT 2010 is scheduled for 26-28 March 2010 at Austin's Radisson Hotel & Suites.

American Heroes Weekend is scheduled for drill weekend, 17-18 April.

Operation Lone Star is tentatively scheduled for late July/early August.

132d annual NGAUS conference, 21-23 August. TXMF will be in support with a large contingent of personnel and equipment.

Please keep SAFETY a number one concern in all that we do. I look forward to a challenging, exciting and rewarding 2010 as together we take the Texas Military Forces to the next level of excellence. TEXAS STRONG!!

## The DISPATCH

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# In love and war: marriage on the front lines

By *Lindsay Wise*  
Copyright 2009 *Houston Chronicle*

BAGHDAD — You won't find Iraq listed as a Top 10 honeymoon destination in the glossy pages of any bridal magazine, but there's nowhere else newlyweds Miguel and Amanda Perez would rather be right now.

"I like to think about it like it's the military sending us on a vacation," joked Miguel, a 24-year-old sergeant from Houston. "Sand and palm trees everywhere — a nine-month honeymoon."

The Perezes are one of six married couples who deployed to Iraq with the 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, a Texas Army National Guard unit headquartered in Houston. About 3,000 soldiers from the brigade are stationed across the country, assigned to missions such as Green Zone security, detainee operations, force protection and convoys.

Both Perezes served in Iraq before. Miguel deployed from 2006-07. Amanda deployed from 2008-09.

"We know what the military expects of us, and we know that the military has to come first," said Amanda, a 23-year-old specialist from Beaumont.

With an increasing number of women serving on the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan — about 10 percent of the 72nd's soldiers are female — married life has become a reality of military deployments.

Amanda and Miguel met in the Guard and married at a courthouse on Oct. 2, during a break in training. Since then, they've lived in group tents or barracks separated by gender, only seeing each other for a few hours each day.

See *MARRIAGE*, next page



## Strong Bonds Marriage Seminars— Weekend Retreat for Soldier, Spouse

Strong Bonds Seminars are a FREE weekend retreat for Texas Military Forces Single Soldiers, Married Couples and Families to focus on their relationships. For the Marriage Enrichment seminars, the Chaplain covers topics such as expectations, communications, reunion and friendship. He provides tools for the couple to use in the future. For the Singles Soldier seminar, the Chaplain helps soldiers establish relationship goals and gain essential skills in mate-choosing patterns. The Family Wellness seminar is for the entire Family to come to an off-post retreat and gain skills to help sustain healthy interactions, relevant teaching and training. They will also have time for relaxation, recreation, fellowship and fun.

Attendance for Service Members will be in lieu of drill. All Service Members will receive a performance certificate upon completion of the seminar. The spouse or lowest ranking Service Member will be put on Invitational Travel Orders and will need to complete a Travel Voucher (DD 1351-2). The Family Wellness Retreat, provides on-site daycare for children ages 0-8. Daycare is not provided on-site for the Marriage Enrichment or the Single Soldier Retreat. We are currently working on having childcare costs reimbursed to the attending service members.

### **WHEN & WHERE:**

There are two Strong Bonds Seminars in January.

January 15-17 at the Overton Hotel in Lubbock and Jan. 29-31 at the Omni Downtown in Austin.

To register for a Strong Bonds Seminar, complete the appropriate form fill out the form for the seminar that you wish to attend and return it to the Strong Bonds Coordinator.

Registration Forms are located at: <https://www.tx.ngb.army.mil/sites/J1/Family%20Readiness/Strong%20Bonds/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

Send form to:

Fax 512-782-6953

E-mail: [equilla.coleman@ng.army.mil](mailto:equilla.coleman@ng.army.mil) for more information.

**MARRIAGE, cont. from previous page**

Their first home together is a 130-square-foot room in a containerized housing unit, or CHU, at Camp Prosperity in Baghdad's Green Zone.

"Free of rent," Amanda pointed out.

The Perezes pushed the standard-issue twin beds together and hung a Texas flag in the doorway for some extra privacy. Miguel bought Amanda a full-length mirror so she wouldn't have to do her makeup sitting on the floor. He plans to use the wood shop at Camp Prosperity to build a table for their new flat-screen TV.

The Perezes have to walk outside to use shared latrines and showers. They eat at the chow hall and send their uniforms to a contractor-run laundry service — amenities that cut down on the potential for fights over whose turn it is to wash the dishes or fold the clothes. But there are plenty of other stresses.

As soon as they started dating, Amanda and Miguel had to ask the military's blessing. They went through counseling with the brigade's chaplain and got briefings from the chain of command.

"They said we had to keep it professional when it came to work and if there's any problems they're going to separate us," Amanda said.

"We can't show affection in front of everybody because we're in uniform, so we really have to watch what we say to

each other, and we can't touch each other," Miguel said.

So close, yet so far

The rule against public affection — no holding hands, no terms of endearment — is the hardest part about deploying with your spouse, said Spc. Andrew Prater, 22, of Temple. He serves in the same company as his wife, Spc. Crystal Prater, 24, of Corpus Christi, at Camp Cropper in Baghdad.

"All these guys are away from their wives, and they can't touch," Andrew said. "Imagine being 2 feet away from her and not being able to touch."

This is Andrew's second tour, and his wife's first. They met in February at a weekend drill for the Guard. Another soldier was talking to Crystal about his fiancée, and Andrew interrupted. "He said, 'Get rid of her, she's gonna cheat on you,'" Crystal recalled. "And I said, 'Wow, you're just a box full of sunshine.'"

Andrew is blunt: "I have trust issues," he said. "Seven or eight guys in my unit last time got divorced when we all got back home."

But when Andrew met Crystal, everything changed. She shared his goofy sense of humor and understood the demands of military service.

They had a courthouse wedding in July.

"Our plan when we get home is to go to school and start saving for a house," Andrew said.

On Valentine's Day, Capt. Jennifer Zavaglia, 28, and her husband, Capt.

Matthew Zavaglia, 29, of Leander, will mark their sixth wedding anniversary in Iraq.

The couple likely will not be able to celebrate together, however. Jennifer is stationed at Camp Prosperity in the Green Zone, while Matthew is at Camp Cropper, near the airport.

The situation is nothing new for the Zavaglias, who met in the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. This is Matthew's third combat tour since their wedding in 2004.

"Probably half of our marriage has been apart," Jennifer said.

She volunteered for this tour so she could get on the same deployment schedule as her husband.

"We never went into it with the expectation that we would be together in the same place," she said. "It just makes it easier because you don't know year to year who's going to get called up. This way we would deploy together, have our R & R together, and go home together."

**Opposite page- October' is tattooed in Arabic on the arms of Spc. Amanda Perez, 23, and husband Sgt. Miguel Perez, 24, to commemorate the month they were married. The couple is deployed together with the Texas National Guard's 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team at Camp Prosperity in Baghdad. (Photo by Mayra Beltran, Houston Chronicle.)**

## 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.

"Afterdeployment.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.

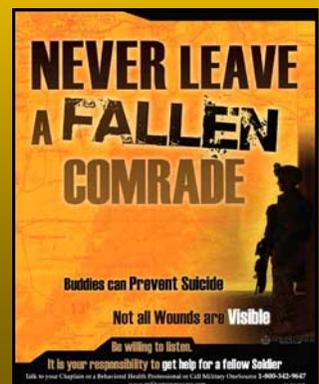
Authorized by legislation, the site is a pilot project to help service members deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other behavioral health conditions.

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.



# Commander does not say goodbye, leaves Taskforce in great shape

**Story and photo by Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada**

**Texas Military Forces Public Affairs**

Camp Mabry, Austin, Texas (Nov. 11, 2009) – During a change of command here Friday, Col. Tony L. West, relinquished command of the Texas Military Forces Joint Counterdrug Task Force to Col. Randall E. Davis, the incoming commander.

The change of command ceremony is a tradition which formally symbolizes the transfer of command from one individual to another. The ceremony was performed in front of family, friends, Jefferson County Sheriff's Department officials and Camp Mabry military personnel. The Taskforce guidon moved from Col. West to Brig. Gen. Joyce Stevens' waiting hands who in turn handed it to Col. Davis in a symbolic gesture and time-honored tradition signifying that the new commander will always accompany the colors into battle. Traditionally during time of trouble the Soldier or Airman would always look for the colors and rally around the flagpole. This may no longer be true during modern warfare but the tradition remains.

Colonel West was accompanied by his wife Rachel, and Colonel Davis' daughter Claire was in the audience. They both received yellow roses, a long-time tradition of showing appreciation for their "out-of-uniform" service to their country. Mrs. West also received a key charm symbolizing the "key to success" during Mrs. West's Family Readiness Group leadership.

Brig. Gen. Joyce Stevens, Commander lauded, among others, the Drug Demand Reduction Program, the Texas Challenge Academy and Operation Crackdown.

"The accomplishments of the entire 215-member Counterdrug Taskforce although relatively small in numbers make a big impact, she said, and continued: "I will not take much of your time but it is important that I highlight some statistics, not only to highlight Colonel West accomplishments, but those of the entire Counterdrug team. In 2009 the Taskforce celebrated it's 20-year anniversary, the same year that the Special Operations Detachment conducted 21 missions, trained over 250 law enforcement officers, seized \$ 2 million dollars in cash, nearly 11,000 lbs of narcotics and helped in the apprehension of two murder suspects. They have helped disrupt numerous drug trafficking incidents along the Texas border. In the first quarter of this year alone, 6,000 lbs of Marihuana were seized. Our RC26 crew and plane are back from participation in OEF and OIF and flew during Hurricane Ike. Their damage assessment provided invaluable information to Texas leadership."

She then changed gears and spoke about the Texas Challenge Academy and its many successes even under extreme conditions when the entire student body had to evacuate three times for impending storms. "In 2009," she said, "160 cadets graduated and received their GED or High School diploma. That is 160 kids who probably would have never graduated had they not been able to go through the Challenge Program."

General Stevens also praised the Drug Demand Reduction Program, a small team that year after year admonishes kids to stay away from drugs and finish school during more than 200

presentations. Last but certainly not least she lauded the accomplishments of the crackdown team that demolished 124 structures known to harbor drug traffickers in four communities just this year. She said: "In total this team has been responsible for the destruction of 1,077 structures during 34 missions in 24 communities. You can see the impact that these folks have on our communities.

Since its inception the Counterdrug Taskforce conducted 303 missions with 118 law enforcement agencies. The value of drugs removed off the streets is \$1 billion dollars, \$ 52 million in cash seized with more than 8,116 arrests made and 1,648 weapons seized and taken out of the hands of bad people, to include the confiscation of 1,883 vehicles. I am so impressed with that. They deserve a round of applause.

"And, by the way," she continued, "Don't just take my words for it." The program evaluation done by an inspection team from the National Guard Bureau last week thought so too and gave them a 100 percent on 10 of the 12 areas they looked at and gave them a commendable rating. That is amazing! One person obviously cannot accomplish all those things and he had a great team behind him but, she said: "Colonel West you made a significant impact in the last several years. Texas is safer, America is safer and we appreciate what you did – Thank you very much!"

She concluded by addressing Colonel Davis when she said: "Randy, you have big shoes to fill but we know you are

**See CHANGE, next page**



**Col. Tony L. West hands the guidon to Brig. Gen. Joyce Stevens during the change of command ceremony for Texas Military Forces Counterdrug Task Force.**

## **CHANGE, cont. from previous page**

ready for the challenge and we look forward to good things from you. We welcome you!”

When it was time to say the traditional goodbyes by the outgoing commander, Colonel West had a slightly different spin. After thanking family and friends, Mr. Brent Weaver and Chief Hobbs from Jefferson County Law Enforcement, he thanked Colonel Malesky, the Texas Air National Guard Director of Staff, for allowing him the opportunity to have the best job in the world.

“But,” he said: “Now it is time to pass it on to another great officer, Colonel Randy Davis. Randy served in the Counterdrug Task Force with Russ Malesky and they put in a lot of processes and procedures that made us the premier program in the United States.

“We have a great team that did great work and we have been recognized as such but General Stevens already gave you all those statistics. We are looking

into adding a second Challenge program.

“What some of you may not know is that the Challenge Program now offers High School diplomas, one of the few States to do so. On the 19th of this month we are graduating another 91 students and off that number 29 have earned high school diplomas already. Those are kids who did not have hope and now do.

“During Hurricane Ike that whole summer was really difficult. They [the Academy] were hurricane evacuated three times during a five-and-a-half month class. During a period of three weeks we picked up the whole program, hired a new staff and moved it 500 miles to the middle of the desert in Sheffield, Texas. That graduation was an extremely proud moment for us.”

Other programs Colonel West is really proud of are the \*1033 and 1122 Federal Surplus Programs that allows equipment once used by the Texas Military Forces to be loaned or sold to law enforcement. “We were inspected last September and found to be one of the top three

programs in the United States,” he said.

“To my Counterdrug Family I say thank you for your tremendous support to Rachel and me. In closing, I never say goodbye to those I care for. I got that from my grandfather. He would always sense when it was time for us to leave and we could never find him. He disappeared and when I asked him one time why he was never around to say goodbye, he said that he did not want to say goodbye to the people he cared for. So, I will not deviate from that tradition, but simply say: ‘thank you!’”

After this non-goodbye speech by the outgoing commander, Colonel Davis, spoke directly to his daughter and thanked her for the many years she had been supporting him. He said: “I am not married because I am basically married to the Texas Army National Guard, but my daughter has been my rock and support and I thank her for that. I know I have huge shoes to fill, but my predecessor has left this taskforce in excellent shape and I look forward to the task.”

## **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 equipped 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.

The logo for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is presented in a vertical rectangular frame. At the top, the word "NATIONAL" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a bright green horizontal bar. Below this, the words "SUICIDE" and "PREVENTION" are stacked vertically in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The letter "I" in "SUICIDE" is replaced by a green silhouette of a telephone handset. At the bottom of the logo, the word "LIFELINE" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on another bright green horizontal bar. Below "LIFELINE", the numbers "8 2 5 5" are displayed in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the very bottom, the phone number "1-800-273-TALK" is written in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters, and the website address "www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it.

# WWII heroes of 36<sup>th</sup> ID honored in Italy

Story and photo by Master Sgt. Brenda Benner

36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. Public Affairs

SAN PIETRO INFINE, Italy – Every December, thousands of miles away from the Texas home base of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the Italian community of San Pietro Infine honors the incredibly brave “T-Patchers” who fought to the death to save them from the onslaught of German forces.

An audience of Italian citizens, including a few old enough to personally remember the horrors of WWII, gathered at the historic town’s hilltop site to show their respect for the fallen heroes who initially arrived during the winter of 1943.

On a sunny December 13th winter day, U.S. and Italian military representatives, the mayor of San Pietro Infine, representatives from Italian veteran’s groups and WWII era re-enactors watched as two wreaths were carried up the hill and placed in front of two stone monuments. One wreath was presented in the memory of Italian military members and one for the U.S. Soldiers who fought beside them.

Joining in the solemn ceremony was a select group of Soldiers from the T-Patch division who provided the honor guard and carried the wreath. They proudly presented the U.S. and the 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. flag for all to see.

Col. Samuel L. Henry, commander of 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. Rear, said he felt honored to represent the revered division during the wreath laying ceremony. During his speech, he said WWII’s Italian campaign was a defining moment for the hard-fighting men of the division.



“It not only proved our toughness, but also laid the foundation for future generations of 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Soldiers,” Colonel Henry said proudly. “Liberating Italy from fascist tyranny was a hard fought campaign and some of the worst fighting the American infantrymen ever faced. Thousands of Americans and Italians paid the ultimate sacrifice. We learned freedom is worth fighting for, dying for and standing for – and the advance of freedom leads to peace.”

During his portion of the ceremony, San Pietro Infine Mayor Fabio Vecchiarino said the citizens of the Monte Cassino and San Pietro area are forever grateful for the sacrifice given by the T-Patchers and allied forces.

The visiting 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. honor guard toured the San Pietro museum, walked through the remains of the village and explored one of the numerous tunnels that residents lived in for two months while trying to survive the occupation of the Nazis.

Following the ceremony everyone gathered for lunch during which time 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. Command Sgt. Maj. Wilson Early presented the mayor with a few historical items to add to the San Pietro Museum’s collection. Items included an original T-Patch from the WWII era, “money” coupons the Soldiers used at the traveling military store and a helmet.

“Our Texas Military Forces Museum donated these items for the San Pietro Museum,” said Sgt. Maj. Early. “We also brought a brief story book, a pamphlet about the division that was published back then.”

Sgt. Maj. Early stated that the division’s annual participation in the wreath laying ceremonies is helpful for building a camaraderie between the U.S. and Italian military as well as with local civilian leaders.

Later that day, the visiting Soldiers caravanned for a staff ride to the nearby San Angelo area to see where two ill-fated attempts to cross the swollen Rapido River claimed the lives of many 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. Soldiers. Michele Di Lonardo, a local tour guide and WWII history expert, said the river basin area was covered by German firepower from the hills above.

“Trying to cross it here and during such time was a mistake ... 1,700 men lost their lives,” Mr. Di Lonardo said as he stood

See ITALY, next page



**ITALY, cont. from previous page**

on the river bank. “The Germans were ready for them and they had little chance to survive.”

Staff rides through historic battle sites can solidify one’s understanding of events in a way that movies and books can not.

During his many years in the Army, Colonel Henry said he has encountered a few Soldiers who enjoy understanding the history and the lineage of their respective units. He said it’s important to think about what transpired back in 1943 and the amazing effort it took to get from the shores south of Salerno all the way to Rome.

“Those Soldiers from the flatlands of Texas and Oklahoma were not used to this type of elevation,” stated Colonel Henry. “It was a difficult fight.”

The honor guard’s U.S flag bearer, Sgt. Donald Denson, who helps coordinate net fielding of new equipment, has been a military history buff since childhood. He said it is unfortunate that the Italian campaign of WWII is so overshadowed by the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

“To see where they came ashore and the area they fought through to get to San Pietro is incredible,” Sergeant Denson said with noticeable reverence. “It’s beyond my imagination that I’m here in person to see what I have read and watched movies about. The T-Patchers and units assigned with them were the first to hit continental Europe and liberate a major city ... Rome. They did great things in Europe.”

Another honor guard member, Sgt. Gerald Riley, an information assurance officer for the division, said he knew very little 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. history before participating in two San Pietro missions during 2009. Like most T-Patch division Soldiers, he said he didn’t realize there was an annual December ceremony half-way across the world honoring those who gave their lives for Italy.

Sergeant Riley said he agrees with Sergeant Denson’s hope for more history-conscious Soldiers who wear the revered 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. patch.

“We should appreciate what the Soldiers before us sacrificed that allows us our freedom today,” said Sergeant Riley. “I’ve meet a couple of war heroes here. They really had it rough with the terrain and the winter conditions.”

Sgt. Maj. Early said the yearly visits to the battle sites are great opportunities for his troops.

“It is important to teach younger Soldiers about 36<sup>th</sup> ID history by bringing them here so they don’t have to learn only from books,” he explained.

Sergeant Denson suggested all T-Patch Soldiers should have a basic knowledge of their division’s incredible history. The heroes of the past can still have an effect on the Soldiers of today.

“I think they would wear their patches with more pride,” Sergeant Denson explained. “I do. I’m authorized to wear four different combat patches and the T-Patch is the only one I choose to wear.”



**Opposite page, bottom-** 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. honor guard member Spc. Jose Albuerne learns about life in the tunnels as he views the San Pietro Infine Museum’s exhibits.

**This page, top-** Maria Pianesi, 80, proudly shows a photo of her then 12-year-old twin brother, Alberto, with an American Soldier during WWII. Alberto was killed by the Germans months after the photo was taken.

**This page, bottom-** Fabio Vecchiarino, the mayor of San Pietro Infine, proudly shows off his division coin presented to him by Col. Samuel L. Henry, commander of 36<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. Rear.

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



# DESTINATION: BAGHDAD

After training in West Texas and flying to the Persian Gulf, the citizen-soldiers make one last stop before their Iraq missions begin

*Editor's note: This is part of a yearlong series of stories documenting the historic overseas deployment of the Texas Army National Guard's 72nd Brigade, based in Houston.*

**By Lindsay Wise**  
**Houston Chronicle**

PERSIAN GULF- Spc. Migdalia Cabrera clutched a teddy bear in her right hand and an M-4 rifle in her left. In a few hours, the 20-year-old Texas Army National Guard soldier from Houston and the chocolate brown teddy bear named Jonathan would be boarding a plane to Baghdad to start a nine-month mission in Iraq.

It was Cabrera's first deployment and she was a little nervous. Over the past few weeks, 3,000 Texas troops from the 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Houston have passed through a Persian Gulf air base on their way to Iraq. From Baghdad International Airport they would be ferried to bases all over the country.

The brigade's missions will include Green Zone security, detainee operations, force protection and the transportation of people and equipment from the remaining American bases.

On Saturday night, Cabrera's platoon had been told to

wait inside Tent No. 3 until it was time to board a plane. Nobody knew when they'd get the order to move out.

Some soldiers slipped outside to smoke or to buy one last Big Mac at the McDonald's on base. Others watched movies or played games on laptops balanced atop rucksacks. A few napped, crammed into metal chairs or nestled between duffel bags and rifles.

Next to Cabrera, her friend Spc. Savanna Garcia, 23, of Lubbock, clutched her own teddy bear to her flak vest to protect it from Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Preston, 36, of Houston. Every few minutes the sergeant made a playful swipe at the stuffed toy. He warned Garcia that the bear would never make it to Iraq.

"You better get that bear a parachute," he teased her.

Spc. Vincent Carter, 22, of Kingwood, leaned back against a tent post and watched Preston's antics with a weary grin. Everybody seemed a little punch-drunk, caught in a feedback loop of anxious anticipation, mind-numbing boredom and back again.

**See BAGHDAD, next page**

## **BAGHDAD, cont. from previous page**

### **Strumming sad songs**

At the front of the tent, Spc. David Lee, 29, of Katy, sat cross-legged on the sandy concrete floor and strummed an acoustic guitar.

Other soldiers tossed loose bills and change into the open guitar case as they walked back and forth through the tent flap.

“I’ll be your crying shoulder,” Lee crooned. “I’ll be love’s suicide ...”

“Can you play something happier?” Carter asked.

“Happy?” Lee scoffed. “I don’t know any happy songs.”

Lee had smuggled the guitar across the Atlantic on a charter plane to the Persian Gulf air base. He wasn’t sure if he’d be able to get it on the flight to Baghdad. Friends from his platoon had tried to help him stuff it into a duffel bag, but it was too big. They even contemplated hiding it in a crate full of weapons.

“If it doesn’t go to Iraq, I’m not going,” he said.

Lee bought the guitar, named Oscar Schmidt, for \$200 when he was 15.

“Some people bring teddy bears,” he said. “I have my guitar. That’s always been the one thing that’s balanced me out. It kills time. It makes me smile.”

Lee left home on his daughter Hannah Lynn’s third birthday in October. Now, after months of training, he was mere hours from Iraq.

“I don’t really know what to feel,” Lee said. “I’ve never been there. There’s some anxiety. There’s some excitement. There’s some fear that I don’t really want to talk about. But every day that goes by, I get one day closer to my daughter.”

### **‘You learn to be patient’**

Sgt. Alberto Segarra, 39, is all too familiar with the tortuous limbo in terminals and tents, on buses and tarmacs during a major troop movement. Soldiers have a phrase for it: “Hurry up and wait.”

“You learn to be patient,” Segarra said. “If not, you’ll just be miserable.”

On Sunday morning, Segarra sat outside the tents on a wooden box of ammunition, his chin propped on his fists and

his eyes closed, waiting for his flight to be announced over loudspeakers.

“This is going to be my third tour to Iraq, so I’m just trying to get my mind set,” he said. Segarra joined the National Guard a decade ago. At the time, he never imagined doing three combat tours.

In civilian life, Segarra is a police officer at Audie L. Murphy Veterans Hospital in San Antonio. He’s married, with three daughters between the ages of 7 and 17.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, he figures he’s been away from home for a total of about 5½ years on overseas and in-state missions. “And that’s probably a low estimate,” Segarra said.

Late Sunday night, a C-130 Hercules idled on a dark runway, the 72nd’s last flight of the day to Baghdad. Charlie Company of the 72nd Brigade Support Troops Battalion marched up the ramp and sat on four rows of benches.

The soldiers whipped out cell phones and digital cameras and snapped pictures. When the cargo door closed, 1st Lt. Maria Mengrone, 32, stood up from her seat at the back of the 35-year-old aircraft.

“You are about to step on the soil of a country where thousands of your

brothers and sisters have died, where thousands of soldiers have died,” Mengrone said. “No more training. This is real. The explosions are real.”

### **No trip to Disneyland**

The lieutenant told the soldiers to look at those seated to either side. “Promise them you will not be complacent,” Mengrone said, “because that could get you killed.”

The engines droned. For a moment, no one said anything.

“We’re not going to Disneyland after Iraq, ma’am?” someone asked.

The planeload of soldiers erupted in giddy laughter.

“Nope, sorry,” the lieutenant said. “We’re going to Iraq.”



**Opposite page-** Sgt. Alberto Segarra waits Monday to begin his third Iraq tour. “I am just trying to get my mind set,” he says.

**Above-** Spc. Savanna Garcia, 23, of Lubbock, is bringing along a teddy bear named Christian — a gift from a fellow soldier — to help her get through the deployment in Iraq. (Photos by Mayra Beltran, Houston Chronicle)

# Soldiers begin to assemble fuel farm at Adder



**Pfc. Gregory Vasquez, a petroleum specialist with the 305th Quartermaster Company out of Fort Campbell, Ky., ensures sandbags are placed around the fuel liners, on a berm that is part of a new fuel farm under construction at Contingency Operating Location Adder, Iraq. The fuel farm will supply fuel to southern Iraq during the responsible drawdown of forces. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Tad Browning)**

**13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) Public Affairs** “They said three days.

CONTINGENCY OPERATING LOCATION ADDER, Tallil, Iraq – Soldiers with the 36th Sustainment Brigade and the 305th Quartermaster Company prepared and installed fuel bags and liners as part of fuel farm operations Nov. 28 at Contingency Operating Location Adder, Iraq, to consolidate fueling operations in Multi National Division – South.

Capt. Smiley Garcia, the officer in charge of petroleum operations for the 36th Sust. Bde., 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), said it was the first of three phases.

“This is the first phase of our fuel depot here at (COL) Adder,” said Captain Garcia. “With current operations, the fuel hub for MND-S is at Camp Cedar ... This operation will consolidate Cedar and Adder, with Adder becoming the fuel hub for MND-S. Eventually, the Cedar Hub is going to discontinue and Adder will be the hub for MND-S.”

Operation Throwdown had roughly 80 Soldiers installing the liners, positioning sandbags and installing the fuel bags that make up the fuel farm. The operation was completed ahead of schedule due to the teamwork on the ground.

Sgt. Dale Fuller, Jr., a fuel specialist with the Texas National Guard’s 36th Sust. Bde., said he was surprised at the team’s efficiency.

“It all happened so fast,” said Sergeant Fuller, an Austin, Texas, native.

I was looking at a week from prior experience. Everything came together perfectly.”

The 732nd Naval Petroleum Detachment and KBR, Inc. contractors worked together for the project, said Captain Garcia.

“It’s important to maintain those partnerships between ourselves and partner units, and also our civilian contractors at KBR and our intra-service components,” Captain Garcia said. “As long as we keep that team intact, everything will run efficiently.”

Consolidating the fuel farm should help the drawdown of Soldiers and equipment from Iraq, Sergeant Fuller said.

“Recentralizing, cutting down on bases, revamping it all will make this fuel farm more efficient,” he said. “Taking everything that was wrong with Cedar ... taking all of the flaws out of it is going to speed up operations ... Everything will be centralized here. It will give more time for maintenance, more time for convoy (operations).”

Pfc. Gregory Vasquez-Ortiz, a petroleum specialist with the 305th Quartermaster Company out of Fort Campbell, Ky., did quality control on the placement of the sandbags and said the operation will help logistics considerably.

“All of the fuel that is going to be moving through (southern) Iraq; everything is going to be on one base,” said Private Vasquez.

## Cavalry Change of Command

Lt. Col. Tom Hooker, left, the incoming commander of C Company, 3rd Squadron, 124th Cavalry, passes the regimental colors to 3rd Squadron’s Command Sgt. Maj. William Simpson during an informal Dec. 17 ceremony aboard a C-130. (Photo by Master Sgt. Brenda Benner, 36th Inf. Div. Public Affairs)





## New Iraqi Army base opens in Maysan province

### 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) Public Affairs

IRAQI ARMY CAMP AL MEMONA, Iraq – A ribbon cutting ceremony Dec. 9 marked the celebration of the official opening of Iraqi Army Camp Al Memona, Iraq.

Iraqi Army Brig. Gen. Amer Abd Al-Wahid Al-Bayat, the base commander at Al Memona, gave his thanks to Coalition forces and the Iraqi Ministry of Defence at the ceremony.

“I would like to thank the ... (Coalition forces) and also the Iraqi Ministry of Defence for their support and assistance, and their effort in the construction of the new buildings and the support of the Iraqi Army,” said General Al-Bayat, through an interpreter.

Col. Sean A. Ryan, commander of the 36th Sustainment Brigade, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) out of Temple, Texas, attended the ribbon cutting and said he plans to send logistics trainings and advisory teams to help with the logistics and maintenance at Al Memona.

“Those teams will come in and help them set up their systems and order parts, and make sure that they translate all the manuals, and (know) how to issue tools – just the procedures for conducting maintenance and sustaining that maintenance,” he said.

Colonel Ryan, a Cedar Park, Texas, native, said Al Memona was designed as a logistical hub to support the Maysan area.

Air Force Lt. Col. Steven Ramsay, the senior adviser with the Tallil Logistics Military Advisory Team and a Fitzgerald, Ga., native, said Al Memona took roughly 14 months and more than \$35 million to complete.

Colonel Ramsay said the new base has dry and cold storage abilities, as well as production sights for a few necessities, including ice and a bakery capable of producing more than 600 flatbreads a day.

“From the standpoint of warehousing, ice, bread and

fuel, they are going to be sort of a hub for a lot of supplies that support various 10th (Iraqi Army) Division units in the Maysan area,” he said.

Iraqi Police Force Staff Maj. Gen. Sa’ad, the Maysan provincial chief of police, said the base exhibits the success of the partnership between Coalition forces and Iraqi Security Forces, and will provide better security for the Maysan province.

“It is another sign of success between ISF and CF,” he said. “This location will include elements from IPs, IAs and CF to help ensure stability and prosperity in the province.”



**Air Force Lt. Col. Steven Ramsay, the senior adviser with the Tallil Logistics Military Advisory Team and a Fitzgerald, Ga., native, presents Iraqi Army Brig. Gen. Amer Abd Al-Wahid Al-Bayat, the base commander at Iraqi Army Camp Al Memona, Iraq, with a gift during the base’s ribbon cutting ceremony Dec. 9. (U.S. Army photo by: Pfc. Lisa A. Cope)**

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## Christmas in a war zone: Thoughts turn toward home

By *Lindsay Wise*  
*Houston Chronicle*

**BAGHDAD** — Annika Chambers didn't even realize it was Christmas Eve.

"I've been writing the 23rd all day," the 24-year old Army National Guard sergeant from Houston said. "OK, it's Christmas Eve. Oh my goodness! OK, Christmas."

A few days ago, Chambers and thousands of Texas troops arrived in Iraq to start a nine month mission with the 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team based in Houston. Most of the soldiers here at Camp Prosperity have barely had enough time to unpack their belongings or to find the gym, mailroom and chow hall — and inevitably get lost in the bombed-out former palace that will serve as the brigade's headquarters in Baghdad's Green Zone.

"My time, it just all runs together here," Chambers said. "I talked to my mom this morning, and I didn't even wish her Merry Christmas. I'll have to call her back."

Chambers said she'll probably go to chapel with other soldiers and sing a few carols. Back home in Houston, she would be gathering with her extended family on the north side to celebrate the holiday.

"I'm the oldest child and grandchild and great-grandchild, so they're just kind of used to me being there to help and stuff," Chambers said. "It's really weird not being there."

The dining facility plans to serve soldiers a special Christmas meal today, but the one thing Chambers really wants

won't be on the menu.

"My granny makes the best sweet potato pie," she said. "Oh, that's the best."

Bombings killed at least 27 people across Iraq on Thursday, but no hint of violence touched Camp Prosperity, apart from the distant wail of sirens.

Master Sgt. John E. Wilson, 44, of Killeen, and Sgt. Ruben Romero, 27, of Houston, spent the morning shopping for a gift exchange organized by a major from the 72nd. Romero was struggling to find something under the spending limit of \$10 at an Iraqi-run kiosk that sells key chains and T-shirts near the post-exchange store.

"There's no Best Buy nearby," he said. "I'm looking for something useful, something practical."

Wilson settled on an ID badge holder with American and Iraqi flags on it. This is his fourth deployment, and his second to Iraq.

"It's just another day," he said. "I'm just happy for all the people back home."

"Another beautiful day in paradise," Romero said, nodding at the sun-drenched palm trees overhead. "I mean, seriously, it could be a lot worse. This is a combat zone, and we could be in the desert somewhere. I know some of the soldiers didn't expect this."

In civilian life, Romero works as a drilling supervisor for an oil company. He's married with two sons, ages 7 and 2. This is his first deployment.

See *CHRISTMAS*, next page

**CHRISTMAS, cont. from previous page**

"It's a big stress on my wife and my kids, definitely," Romero said. "It's the first Christmas we won't be together in years."

He calls his sons via his computer every day at 4 a.m., Iraq time, so he can talk to them before they go to bed in Houston, and again at 4 p.m., before they head to school. The boys are too young to understand, Romero said, and they keep asking him when he's coming home.

"My sons talk in their sleep, so I know they're having dreams about me," he

said. "My wife tells me about it. It's hard."

Lt. Col. John Laing, the brigade's chaplain, pounced on soldiers waiting in line for dinner Thursday night.

"Are you here to go caroling?" he asked.

"To what?" laughed one sergeant major. "There's not enough alcohol for me to go caroling, but I'll stand here and help you reel people in."

Laing, 40, of Friendswood, is a professor at the Harvard School at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Houston. He counsels about 20 soldiers a

week, mostly to help them cope with strained marriages and depression during deployment.

He was determined to make unique holiday memories for his Texas troops.

"Most of us are so busy settling in, we're not even aware," Laing said.

"That's what makes it so hard for me this year to try to remind people that this is a holy day."

Laing's persistence paid off.

Within a half hour, Chambers and a dozen other soldiers had joined Laing in song outside the chow hall. They weren't all in key. Sometimes they forgot the words. Few people stopped to listen. But the carolers had found the Christmas spirit. One soldier even danced a little jig to *Jingle Bells*.

"C'mon," Laing urged, waving his arms. "*Joy to the World*, on three: three, two, one ..."

Spc. Garrett Elliott usually attends midnight Mass with his family in Houston. On Thursday, the Houston Community College student attended a candlelit Christmas Eve service with about 60 other soldiers and civilian contractors in Baghdad's Green Zone.

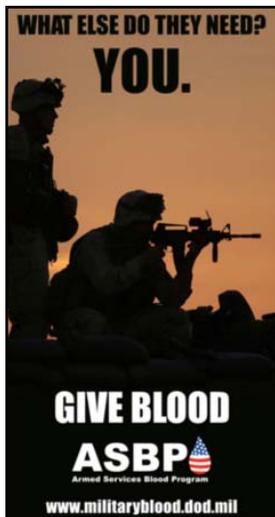
"It's different, but it was still very touching," Elliott said afterward. "I at least got the feeling of Christmas. It actually feels like Christmas. You really didn't feel it before, but you do now."

This is the first Christmas the 23-year-old guardsman has spent away from home. "It's a very unusual feeling, being on the other side of the world, when normally it's a time to be with your family, but in a way, I'm glad to be here," Elliott said.



**Opposite page-** Spc. Garrett Elliott, 23, of Houston, left, holds back tears while singing *Silent Night* during a service in the Palace Chapel at Camp Prosperity on Christmas Eve in Baghdad. "It's my first Christmas away from my family," he said.

**Above-** Troops with the Texas National Guard's 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team sing Christmas carols outside the dining facility at Camp Prosperity on Christmas Eve in Baghdad. "Most of us are so busy settling in, we're not even aware," said Lt. Col. John Laing, the brigade's chaplain.



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# National Guard contributed in Battle of the Bulge

*Compiled from NGB historical records*

ARLINGTON, Va. (Dec. 16, 2009) – Four National Guard infantry divisions were involved in repelling a German counterattack on the western front in what became known as the “Battle of the Bulge” in mid-December of 1944.

Earlier this week, the 65th anniversary of the month-long battle was commemorated in the city of Bastogne, Belgium, which in World War II was under siege by the German army.

When the Germans struck on Dec. 16, 1944, VIII Corps was stretched more than 80 miles from Belgium across the Ardennes Forest in Luxembourg. The 28th Infantry Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard was among the first units attacked along “Skyline Drive.”

The division was deployed in a general north-south direction and spread out along 24 miles. More than three German divisions, including the elite Panzer Lehr, struck the overextended 28th ID. They resisted stubbornly but had to give up ground. The 110th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Division fought for three days despite being completely encircled. Their stiff resistance bought time for other Allied units to move into the sector to block the enemy assault and the occupation of Bastogne.

The 30th Infantry Division, made up of Guard units from North and South Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, provided part of the northern shoulder of the bulge, with their sector covering the Malmedy area. They moved into position the day after the attack began. The 30th fought first to contain the German penetration and later attacked to erase the bulge.

Soon after the start of the German Ardennes offensive, the 26th Infantry Division of the Massachusetts National Guard, which was part of Gen. George Patton's Third Army, was di-

verted from its eastward advance toward the German border near Metz, France. It was one of the spearhead elements of Patton's historic winter march north to relieve the 101st Airborne Division surrounded in Bastogne.

The 26th formed part of the southern shoulder protecting the flank of the 4th Armored Division in its attack towards the encircled 101st. The 26th moved into the line on Dec. 22, 1944.

On Christmas Day, the 26th Division attacked the Germans in the village of Eschdorf near the Sure River in Luxembourg despite heavy snow and sub-freezing temperatures. They needed to link up with the 80th Infantry Division to secure the area, so a bridgehead across the Sure River could be constructed to allow Patton's armored formations to cross over and relieve the besieged town of Bastogne.

After a sharp firefight, which included tanks from both sides, Eschdorf was cleared of its last German defenders and the 26th moved to the river to secure the area allowing combat engineers to quickly construct a floatbridge, which was used by the 3rd Armored Division.

The forward elements of the 3rd Division reached the outskirts of Bastogne on Dec. 26, effectively lifting the siege. The 26th was joined by the 35th Infantry Division, made up of Guard units from Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska, in widening the corridor to Bastogne. They would stay in close combat with German forces until the enemy was finally pushed back to its starting positions, marking the end of the campaign on Jan. 25, 1945.

It was the largest land battle involving American forces in history. More than a million Allied troops fought in the battle across the Ardennes, including about 500,000 Americans and more than 55,000 British troops. More than 19,000 were killed in action.



**Above left- U.S. troops of the 28th Infantry Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard, who had been regrouped into security platoons for defense of Bastogne, Belgium, march down a street on Dec. 20, 1944. Some of these Soldiers lost their weapons during the German advance in this area. (Signal Corps Photo #ETO-HQ-44-30380 by Tec 5 Wesley B. Carolan)**

**Above right– Soldiers dig in before the Battle of the Bulge, near Bastogne, Belgium. (National Guard Photo)**

# Camp Mabry holiday luncheon celebrates the season

Story and photo by Spc. Maria Moy  
Texas Military Forces Public Affairs

Camp Mabry, Austin, Texas (Dec. 18., 2009) – The first thing Soldiers, Airmen, civilian employees and family members saw when they walked into the drill hall in building eight Friday was the big Christmas tree in the center of the room and the many Christmas-themed booths lining the walls.

Every department that was at the event was able to enter into the contest for Best Booth design and Best Homemade Food. Booths had different themes, such as, Candyland, Snowman, Texas State, Military, National Guard, Charlie Brown, The Kissing Booth, The Grinch and many more.

Every booth was hand-crafted by Texas Military Forces personnel with creative design displays representing that little magic in the air. It was astonishing to see the variety of the different types of cookies, cakes, tamales, sausages, tortillas, miniature Coca Cola drink bottles, New York pizza, beans, fondue, cheesecake and much more. Some booths were creative in its design and dressed up according to what they served, like the Charlie Brown booth serving Charlie Brown cookies. There was a long line for the spin the big-wheel game, which offered T-shirts, hats, and many more prizes.

One of the employees said, "Last couple years the lunch was formal, it was nice, but now it has creative booths and I finally get to see faces I have been working with throughout the years over the phone. It is also nice that we can walk around instead of sit at certain locations and eat at the same table with your department section." One Transition Assistance Advisor, Jacinda Johnson said, "It is more involved, more festive." Another civilian employee, Sabrina Matthews from Medical Records said, "This year is just so much more colorful, everybody gets something as a prize, it is fun and it is all about the holidays." Tonya



*The winners of the "best booth" contest. At the Camp Mabry holiday luncheon.*

Kelly another civilian employee said, "The Retirees come in to mingle and see everybody, it rocks!"

"The set up with the booths makes it easier to socialize," said Air National Guard member Master Sgt. Theresa Guyer.

Capt. Earl Stots said, "There were more Army and Air Guard soldiers involved this year. I am impressed with the amount of effort and creativity showcased during this seasonal social. The forum is personable, creates a relaxed friendly environment, and it allows one to move about the crowd and greet friends. Also, there is a variety of food to choose from prepared by familiar faces."

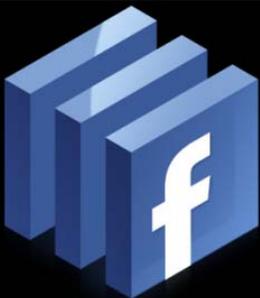
Sgt. Maj. Elwood Imken (Ret) said, "This is one of the best events in recent years. I would like to see a chili cook-off added to this event next year." Throughout the event, "The Grinch that Stole Christmas" brought to life by the IG department kept trying to steal everyone's food and drinks. The Grinch walked around with a small sign

that said "Naughty", putting bunny ears in photos being taken.

The final winner for the Best Booth design contest was "Santa Sweets" from the G2 Department. The design was a big gingerbread house with candy canes dangling from the house. Personnel in the booth were dressed in a red long sleeve tops with a logo that said, "WANNA PIECE OF ME!?" The final winner for the Best Homemade Food contest was Texas Medical Command Group. Their booth was "Santa's Readiness Processing." They offered mulled cider (in specimen cups), candy as happy pills (in small cups), chili (in emesis trays) and berry and fruit cobbler with ice cream.

The winners received a glass plaque given by Adjutant General of Texas, Maj. Gen. Jose S. Mayorga.

Overall, the Camp Mabry Holiday Lunch Program from all appearances was a great success and turnout was wonderful.



Look for the Texas National Guard on facebook at  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Austin/Texas-Army-National-Guard/171437136571?ref=mf>

# News Briefs

## Shinseki Says VA's Home Loan Program a "Continued Success"

### Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON – Despite problems in the nation's housing market, mortgage loans backed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had a lower foreclosure rate than any other type of home loan in the industry, as of the end of the last fiscal year.

"The dedication of VA's loan professionals, the support of our partners in the mortgage industry and most importantly, the hard work and sacrifice of our Veterans have made this possible," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "VA is making good on its promise to help Veterans buy homes, and Veterans are achieving their dreams."

Currently, about 1.3 million active home loans were obtained using VA's Home Loan Guaranty Program. The program makes home ownership more affordable for Veterans, active-duty members, and some surviving spouses by protecting lenders from loss if the borrower fails to repay the loan.

More than 90 percent of VA-guaranteed loans are made without a downpayment. Despite this, VA has the lowest serious delin-

quency rate in the industry, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association. Furthermore, VA's percentage of loans in foreclosure is the lowest of all measured loan types—lower even than prime loans, which require high credit scores and a 20 percent downpayment by the borrower.

Much of the program's strength stems from the efforts of VA employees and loan servicers nationwide, whose primary mission is to help Veterans stay in their homes, avoid foreclosure and protect their credit lines from the consequences of a foreclosure, Shinseki said.

Depending on the situation, VA's loan specialists can intervene on a Veteran's behalf to help pursue home-retention options such as repayment plans, loan modifications and forbearance. Additionally, under certain circumstances, VA can refund a loan, which involves purchasing the loan from the mortgage company and modifying the terms so the Veteran can afford the new mortgage payment.

## Secretary Shinseki Releases Hospital Report Card

### Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON – For the second consecutive year, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has released a "hospital report card" as part of VA's effort to provide the public with a transparent accounting of the quality and safety of its care.

"This report demonstrates VA's determination to be open and accountable," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "As a health care organization, transparency of information is essential to providing quality care for our Veterans."

In addition, for the first time, data from both the 2008 and 2009 reports will be available to the public in machine-readable format on Data.gov. To empower Veterans and the public at large to track quality, safety and access to Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities, VA's hospital report cards include raw data on care provided in outpatient and hospital settings, quality of care within given patient populations, and patient satisfaction and outcomes.

VA issued its first facility-level report on quality and safety in May 2008.

As part of the Obama Administration's commitment to open government and accountability, VA highlights its rigorous quality programs and actions taken to address the issues VA identified from the last report.

The report gives the health care system high marks, with VA facilities often outscoring private-sector health plans in standards commonly accepted by the health care industry.

"Patient-centric care is our mission," said Shinseki. "As Secretary, I am committed to continuing to meet and surpass our high standards of care each and every day."

In addition to allowing VA to demonstrate the quality and safety of its care, the report card provides opportunities to enhance health services.

Some of the marked improvements that VA showed in 2009 include:

-Smoking cessation counseling provided to 89 percent of Veteran patients, a 6 percent improvement from 2008; and

-Among all ages at risk, 94 percent of Veterans received a pneumonia immunization,

a 4 percent improvement.

The report notes there is more to be done for women Veterans. To address this priority and provide women Veterans with the highest quality care VA has implemented several initiatives, such as placement of women advocates in every outpatient clinic and medical center, and creating a "mini-residency" program on women's health for primary care physicians.

The report also found minority Veterans are generally less satisfied with inpatient and outpatient care than other Veterans. In addition to targeting outreach efforts to these Veterans, a minority Veteran program coordinator has been placed in every medical center.

"VA's hospital report card will become a valuable resource of information for Veterans, stakeholders and the department," said Shinseki. "It will allow VA's health care system to be forward looking and focused on advancement."

# This Month in Military History: January

## 1863- Battle of Galveston, Confederates recapture the city.

As part of the Union blockade of the Texas coast, Commander William B. Renshaw led his squadron of eight ships into Galveston harbor to demand surrender of the most important Texas port on October 4, 1862. Brig. Gen. Paul O. Hébert, commanding the Confederate District of Texas, had removed most of the heavy artillery from Galveston Island, which he believed to be indefensible. The Fort Point garrison fired on the federal ships, which responded by dismounting the Confederate cannon with return shots. Col. Joseph J. Cook, in command on the island, arranged a four-day truce while he evacuated his men to the mainland. The Union ships held the harbor, but 264 men of the Forty-second Massachusetts Infantry, led by Col. I. S. Burrell, did not arrive until December 25 to occupy Kuhn's Wharf and patrol the town.

When Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder replaced Hébert in the fall of 1862, the new district commander began to organize for the recapture of Galveston. For a naval attack he placed artillery and dismounted cavalry from Sibley's brigade, led by Col. Thomas Green, aboard two river steamers, the *Bayou City* and the *Neptune*, commanded by Capt. Leon Smith. Magruder gathered infantry and cavalry, led by Brig. Gen. William R. Scurry, and supported by twenty light and heavy cannons, to cross the railroad bridge onto the island to capture the federal forces ashore. To meet the attack Renshaw had six ships that mounted twenty-nine pieces of heavy artillery.

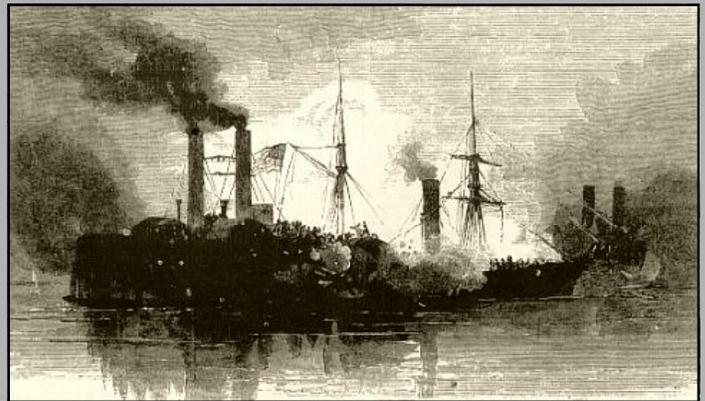
The Confederates entered Galveston on New Year's night, January 1, 1863, and opened fire before dawn. Cook failed to seize the wharf because of the short ladders provided for his men. Naval guns helped drive back the assault. Then the Confederate "cottonclads" struck from the rear of the Union squadron. The *Harriet Lane* sank the *Neptune* when it tried to ram the Union ship, but men from the *Bayou City* boarded and seized the federal vessel despite the explosion of their own heavy cannon. Renshaw's flagship, the *Westfield*, ran aground, and the commander died trying to blow up his ship rather than surrender it. The other Union ships sailed out to sea, ignoring Confederate surrender demands, which could be enforced only

upon the abandoned federal infantry in town.

Magruder had retaken Galveston with a loss of twenty-six killed and 117 wounded. Union losses included the captured infantry and the *Harriet Lane*, about 150 casualties on the naval ships, as well as the destruction of the *Westfield*. The port remained under Confederate control for the rest of the war.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Alwyn Barr, "Texas Coastal Defense, 1861-1865," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 65 (July 1961). Charles C. Cumberland, "The Confederate Loss and Recapture of Galveston, 1862-1863," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 51 (October 1947). Robert Morris Franklin, *Battle of Galveston, January 1, 1863: A Speech . . . 1911* (Galveston: San Luis, 1975). *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies* (Washington: Department of the Navy, 1894-1927). *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.

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The civilian steamboat *Bayou City* (l.), fitted out as a "cottonclad," rams the Union gunboat *Harriet Lane* during the Battle of Galveston, January 1, 1863. *Bayou City* is shown in this period illustration as having two stacks, or "chimneys;" in fact contemporary sketches and written accounts confirm that she actually had only one.



**BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHN C.L. SCRIBNER  
TEXAS MILITARY FORCES MUSEUM**

**BUILDING 6, CAMP MABRY,  
AUSTIN, TEXAS**

**HOURS OF OPERATION:**

**WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY—10:00AM TO 4:00 PM**

**MONDAY AND TUESDAY - CLOSED**



*Happy New Year from your Public Affairs Office!  
May you all have a healthy and happy 2010 and  
we look forward to telling Texas Military Forces  
story!*

*Col. William Meehan*

*Capt. Randall Stillinger*

*Chief Master Sgt. Gonda Moncada*

*Sgt. Jennifer D. Atkinson*

*Sgt. Malcolm McClendon*

*Staff Sgt. Eric Wilson*

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