

The DISPATCH

The monthly magazine of the Texas Military Forces

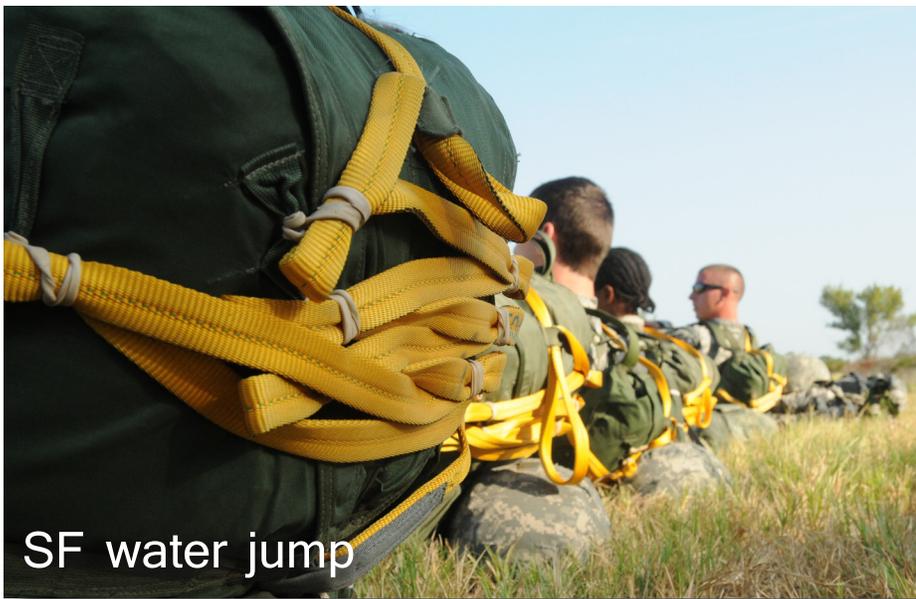
September 2011



THINK...THINK...BOOM!

SF WATER OPERATIONS

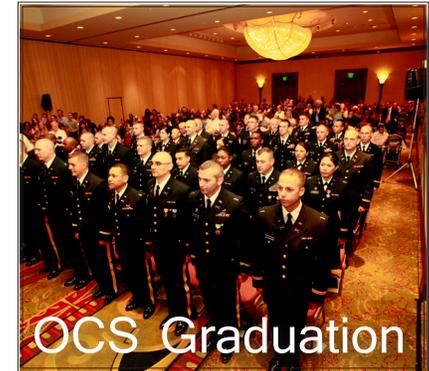
Looking for the next
pay grade?



SF water jump



Refreshing skills



OCS Graduation

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Train for disaster



Wild blue yonder

Cover- The joint efforts of several units led to the successful completion of a water jump in Corpus Christi, Texas, Saturday, Aug. 20, 2011. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Melissa Bright, 100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

The Bulletin Board

The DISPATCH

Vol. 6, No. 9 September 2011

'eArmyU' Moving to 'GoArmyEd'

The eArmyU Program will culminate on March 31, 2012. Schools will continue to offer their own programs through GoArmyEd. Tuition Assistance will also continue. To find out more about Army education programs, visit a local education center, or visit www.GoArmyEd.com to access a list of all Army education centers and points of contact.

Blood Donors Needed

The Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) is constantly seeking blood and platelet donors. An individual can donate platelets every two weeks, up to 24 times a year, but when giving regular red blood, a person must wait eight weeks before donating again. The amount of time the platelet donation process takes depends on the donor's height, weight, blood and platelet count. For more information, visit the Armed Services Blood Program website at <http://www.militaryblood.dod.mil/>.

New VA Paralympics Website

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched the Paralympic Program website at <http://www.va.gov/adaptivesports/> in an effort to motivate and support disabled veterans to participate in adaptive sports. Vets and their families can use the website to locate local sports programs and link up with clinics. Learn more at VA's Vantage Point blog at <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/?p=4265>.

New Shot at Med Retirement for Some Vets

The DoD Physical Disability Board of Review (PDBR) is re-evaluating Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) and Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) disability ratings for some Veterans medically separated between September 11, 2001, and December 31, 2009, to ensure a correct disability retirement determination was made. Veterans who received a combined disability rating of 20 percent or less and were not found eligible for retirement can apply to have their MEB/PEB disability rating reviewed for fairness, consistency, and accuracy. Former reserve members with greater than 20 years of total federal military service but fewer than 20 years of active duty, who meet the above criteria, are also eligible to apply. Learn more about the PDBR and how to apply at http://www.health.mil/About_MHS/Organizations/MHS_Offices_and_Programs/PDBR.aspx. Questions on the PDBR can be sent to PDBRPA@afncr.af.mil.

TRICARE Seeks Feedback

Do you use TRICARE or the Military Health System? Do you still get your maintenance medications from a retail pharmacy? If so, TRICARE wants to hear from you. TRICARE has created an online questionnaire that allows users to provide direct feedback about how they get their prescriptions filled, as well how they feel about considerable savings on their prescriptions. The questionnaire can be found at <https://tricare.inquisiteasp.com/cgi-bin/qwebcorporate.dll?idx=D9GAC7>.

VA Outlines GI Bill Changes

The third round of 2011 changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill will take effect Oct. 1. Programs not leading to college degrees, including programs offered at schools that do not grant degrees, will now be eligible for GI Bill funding. Flight programs, correspondence training, on-the-job and apprenticeship training also are covered by the GI Bill. For more information, visit the VA's Post-9/11 GI-Bill webpage at http://gibill.va.gov/benefits/post_911_gibill/Post911_changes.html.



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Homeland responders refresh skills to serve community

Story and photo by Spc. Praxedis Pineda
100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CAMP SWIFT, Texas - Within minutes of receiving their alert, the trained and proficient first responders arrived on scene at the high school gymnasium to combat the chemical spill incident. Donning their safety equipment and working expertly in concert, they orchestrated a clean containment of the affected area. The incident, which involved a massive fuel tanker colliding with the building, presented an immediate and severe threat to both public and environmental safety.

This threat, however, remained only a simulated disaster to test the assets and training of state first responders.

The Soldiers and Airmen of Joint Task Force 71, a Texas Army National Guard brigade headquartered in Austin, Texas, responded as part of a capstone collective exercise July 28, 2011, during their annual training at Camp Swift.

Annual training enables the National Guard members to maintain soldiering skills, enabling them to meet the standard set by the brigade motto: "Always Ready-Always There."

"The more training we have, the more efficient we can be," said Spc. Philip Garza, 236th Military Police Company.

The highlight of this year's exercise was the new Homeland Respond Force mission training in preparation for certification this fall. The HRF enables JTF-71 to be one of the first responders in a FEMA Region VI crisis.



Soldiers with the 436th Chemical Company set up a decontamination station during their annual training at Camp Swift.

"We don't have a wartime mission," said the JTF-71 Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Horn. "New Orleans and Oklahoma City, those are the places where we really shine."

Local emergency responders were also on hand during the exercise, as they would be in a real situation.

"State emergency response agencies like the fire department and the police department can get overwhelmed," said 1st Lt. Joseph W. Meller, operations officer for the 836th Engineer Company. "We support and augment the local responders as force multipliers."

Leading up to the collective event, the brigade conducted basic soldier training with as well as job-specific exercises. Combat readiness training included weapons qualification and establishing an area of operations.

"We are still Soldiers," said Horn as a reminder that basic soldier skills cannot be forgotten.

The 836th, headquartered in Kingsville, conducted demolition training for familiarization and confidence building. In support of the HRF exercise, engineers used their problem solving skills and played a key role as the extraction team. They spent part of their time rappelling off a 54-foot tower in case a rope rescue is necessary during an incident.

"We are always ready. We are always there," said Meller.

After being extracted from the exercise disaster area, casualties passed through CERFP Air Medical Element triage stage and the 436th Chemical Company decontamination lines. The CERFP is the CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-Yield Explosive) Enhanced Response Force Package, capable of processing up to 100 casualties through the decontamination stage each hour.

During a domestic disaster, order must be upheld. Responsibility to diffuse civil disturbances lies with the 236th Military Police Company, as they partner with civilian law enforcement.

The 236th, headquartered in San Antonio, spent the majority of their time practicing traditional MP skill sets, such as riot control, convoy operations and patrols. During a civil disturbance exercise, MPs defended

See EXERCISE, page 17

Riggers practice parachute packing quality control

Story and photo by Sgt. Suzanne Carter
100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BASTROP, Texas - The UH-60 Black Hawk kicked up a cloud of dust as it rose into the sky with six Soldiers' boots dangling out the side of the aircraft. The bird carried the paratroopers about 500 feet above the dry, grassy field before they jumped out one by one. The jumpers took the leap, trusting the parachutes on their backs to deploy at the right moment, in the right configuration, to bring them safely back to Earth.

"There's nothing that you can compare it to," said Staff Sgt. Cabe Scotland, jump master with the 294th Quartermaster Company, 36th Sustainment Brigade. "You just forget everything, and you appreciate the view from up above."

The 294th QM Company parachute riggers conducted these jumps Aug. 15, at Camp Swift, Texas, during their two-week annual training.

The riggers' main job is to pack parachutes for airborne troops to jump from fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft.

The unit conducts these jumps with their riggers every quarter for them to build confidence in their skills as riggers and as a quality assurance to paratroopers who will use the parachutes packed by the 294th on future airborne missions.

"It's kind of a checks-and-balances type thing," said Sgt. Brian Treutler, parachute rigger and inspector with the 294th. "If I'm not willing to jump my own chute, why should any other Soldier jump my chute?"

Back at Camp Mabry, the riggers spent the days leading up to these test jumps packing the parachutes that they would use.

"There's a lot," Sgt. Erica Urrtia, squad leader with 294th, said about the steps involved in packing the parachutes. "Pretty much you have to know your equipment. Before you pack it, you have to check everything over, make sure everything's good to go."

Each Soldier checks for holes, rips and frays in the parachute canopy. Then they check the suspension lines for twists, turns and tangles. The suspen-



Soldiers with the 294th Quartermaster Company practice parachute jumps during annual training at Camp Swift, Texas, Aug. 15. The riggers participated in the training for confidence building and competence assurance in their packing skills. The unit provides parachute-packing support to airborne units across the state in the National Guard, Army Reserve and active Army units at Fort Hood.

sion lines connect the parachute to the paratrooper via kit bag and harness.

"We fold the parachute into a long fold," Urrtia continued. "Then we stick the whole entire chute into a small kit bag. After that, we stow the suspension lines, then close it up."

For this exercise, the riggers packed and used parachutes designed for pinpoint landings, as well as smaller, backup chutes in case the main one fails to deploy properly.

"We are jumping today with the MC1-1D," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Michael Beraldi, rigger shop chief. "These are life preservers. When you jump out of an airplane, rotary wing or high-performance aircraft, that's the only thing keeping you from falling straight down."

The MC1-1D parachute weighs in at 29 pounds when packed and ready. Made from low porosity nylon, the chute reduces descent rates of geared-up paratroopers up to 360 pounds. Modified spaces in the canopy panels facilitate direction and speed control.

"Those are modifications in the canopy and they have toggle lines up on the risers to where you can steer," Beral-

di said. "If it's a windy day, you see a lot of them rotate to where the modifications are behind them... If you're turned the other way, the modifications facing the wind, that means you're going to be running really fast with the wind."

Beraldi said the company packs primary and reserve parachutes for airborne units across the state, including an Army Reserve unit and active Army paratroopers at Fort Hood.

"And lately, we've been getting a lot more requests for airborne operations from outside the state and other agencies," he said. "The 294th Quartermaster Company in the state of Texas is a fantastic group of Soldiers, and they work hard to keep the airborne, airborne."

Beraldi said he appreciates the care his riggers put forth in their parachute packing because it ensures paratroopers' safety.

"For me, the best part of jumping is seeing every Soldier have that canopy open up and land safely," he said. "That is the best part for me being the shop chief. That means my Soldiers are doing a fantastic job at doing their job and producing a fantastic product."

Looking for that next pay grade?



The most important question that every young Soldier or NCO usually brings to his or her supervisor is “when and how do I get promoted?” To answer the first part of the question, there must be a valid vacancy within the Soldier’s unit when the Troop Promotion List (TPL) is published on 1 February of each year. For example, if a unit has three E-5 slots filled, but one of the slots is considered excess then if one of the E-5s gets promoted, retires, or otherwise moves out of that slot then the unit will not have a valid vacancy since it was over its allotment for that slot. E-4s are promoted based upon valid E-5 vacancies within their battalion. If a battalion does not have an E-5 vacancy then the Soldier has other options such as MOS reclass or transferring to another unit with a valid E-5 vacancy. If an E-4 is mobilized with a non-organic unit, then his or her organic unit **MUST** keep them on the TPL under their Unit Identification Code (UIC).



The second part of the question requires input from the Soldier, their unit, and battalion/brigade headquarters. All NCOs must ensure that they are eligible for promotion by checking the eligibility and non-eligibility roster on the Enlisted Promotion System (EPS) link on TKO. The non-eligibility roster will state the reason why the Soldier is not eligible for promotion. Soldiers can be switched to the eligibility roster if they provide proof that refutes the reason(s) they were not eligible. All Soldiers are required to sign the non-eligibility roster. If a Soldier has completed an NCOES (WLC, ALC, SLC, etc.) but the date(s) are not on record then the Soldier needs to have their SIDPERS updated.



Eligible E-4s and above must mark the correct city codes and accept or decline consideration for military education and promotion on their DA Form 4100. Eligible E-4s and E-5s must ensure that their 4100 admin points (i.e. weapons qualification, APFT score, civilian college credit,

etc.) are updated prior to signing the DA Form 4100. The DA Form 4100 can be updated with documents within a Soldier’s Interactive Personnel Electronic Records Management System (iPERMS), Standard Installation and Division Personnel Reporting System (SIDPERS), or having the points inputted on the 4100 link on the EPS link on TKO. The Soldier should reference the Quick Reference Guide, which is available at all units, to evaluate and calculate their points under EPS system. If a Soldier does not appear on the TPL then they may not have a board score in the EPS system. **NOTE:** Do not sign the DA Form 4100 until all corrections have been made. The last day to input admin points for E-4s and E-5s is 15 January.

Beginning the 2012 cycle, the National Guard Automated Board System (NGABS) will be used to determine board points for all E-5s and above. (E-6s and above will not require admin points.) The points will be derived from documents within the Soldier’s iPERMS to include documents such as NCOERs, DA Form 1059, Awards, DA Photo, etc. Also starting in the 2012 cycle, all Warrior Transition Unit (WTU) Soldiers will be eligible for promotion. WTU Soldiers will be promoted in place, and EPS will move the next available Soldier on the TPL for the gaining unit. E-8s, who are age 55 or older by the cutoff date of 31 December of each year, will not be eligible for E-9 due to the five year commitment required to complete the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA) and fulfill the three year service obligation after graduation.

For more information on this subject, go to the TKO homepage (www.tx.ngb.army.mil), click on “Enlisted Promotion System (EPS)” on the right side of the page. To contact the EPS section, call (512) 782-5211 or e-mail int-ngtxg1eps@ng.army.mil.

34 Officer Candidates receive commission

Story and photo by Spc. Andrew Oeffinger
100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AUSTIN, Texas - The Texas Army National Guard welcomed 34 officers to the rank of second lieutenant during a ceremony held Aug. 13, in downtown Austin. These young officers endured 18 months of arduous training at Camp Swift, Texas, to receive their commission as members of the 54th class to complete Officer Candidate School for the state of Texas.

When asked about his motivation to enroll in the OCS program and tackle the challenges it entailed, the newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Richard

Harvey, a member of the field artillery branch, explained, "my father and grandfather were both commissioned officers, and I wanted to carry on the tradition."

Harvey and his fellow class members conducted intense training including basic Army skills like land navigation and small unit leadership, forced road marches and multiple field training exercises lasting two weeks each.

These skills will be vital when these officers assume their first command assignment and become responsible for the well-being and

professional development of the Soldiers under their supervision.

Above all else, Col. Anthony Woods, regimental commander for the Texas Army National Guard OCS program, emphasized the welfare of the subordinate Soldiers, the families of those Soldiers and their own family life.

"Put yourself last, your family and service members first; and you will do very well," Woods remarked in his address to the graduates.

As his previously commissioned first lieutenant wife pinned on his rank, Officer Candidate Macharia Davis demonstrated the importance of family and joined her in the ranks of Army leaders.

As the members of Class 54 disperse among the ranks and start their career in the Army, the seeds to grow Class 55 have already been planted. In September 2011, the Texas National Guard will host a workshop at Camp Mabry in Austin to assist and recruit future candidates with the administrative portion of enrollment, as well as conduct an Army Physical Fitness Test. From there, qualified candidates will begin their journey down the 18 month long path to commission and become the next generation of leadership for the Texas Army National Guard. Further information on the OCS program can be found on the Texas National Guard website: www.txarng.com or call 512-782-5731.



Soldiers, family members and guests participate in a military commissioning ceremony in Austin, Texas, Aug. 13. The commissioning ceremony was for the Texas Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School Class 54 graduation.

DID YOU KNOW?

Beginning October 1st you can use your **POST-9/11 GI Bill** for **on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and non-college degree programs.**



9/11 responders tell their stories at media event

Story by Staff Sgt. Chris Powell
Defense Media Activity

8/25/2011 - WASHINGTON (AFNS) -- A Texas Air National Guard pilot who flew an escort mission for Air Force One on Sept. 11, 2001, was at the Pentagon to tell his story to the media Aug. 23.

Lt. Col. Rolando Aguilar, the RC-26 Metroliner program manager at the 147th Reconnaissance Wing in Houston, was one of several people who were available for interviews by reporters representing media outlets from all over the world.

"It's important that we don't forget," said the former F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot. "If you don't study history and don't know it, you're bound to repeat it. It's a good time to retell the story, know what happened and learn from it so we don't repeat the same mistakes that happened on that day."

On 9/11, Aguilar was on a 72-hour alert shift in Houston. He was taking an opportunity to sleep in when a crew chief knocked on his door.

"(He) said, 'Hey, come check this out. A plane just crashed into the World Trade Center,'" Aguilar said.

The colonel said it wasn't long before they were scrambled to prepare their F-16s for a possible mission.

"We sat in the airplane ... and were ready to go just in case," Aguilar said. "We (waited) for about 90 minutes, and then we got the green light to go. About 20 minutes later, we intercepted Air Force One in the Gulf of Mexico about 50 miles off the Louisiana coast."

It wasn't until the point he saw Air Force One that he fully felt the magnitude of the situation, he said.

"When I saw it, I thought, 'Wow, this is Air Force One. This is no kidding ... the real deal,'" Aguilar said.

From there, the colonel swept in front of Air Force One and ensured no potentially-threatening unidentified aircraft were nearby.

"Air Force One landed at Barksdale (Air Force Base, La.) to refuel and make some phone calls, but I stayed airborne to provide air

cover while the other plane that was with me also landed to refuel," he said. "At that point, my base launched two additional F-16s, and I was running out of fuel, so I had to land to refuel as Air Force One was taking off."

As the two F-16s arrived in addition to the one that had already escorted Air Force One, it was determined that Aguilar could refuel and head back to Houston, he said. While his role in the escort duty ended there, the experience has stayed with him to this day.

"I was humbled and proud of the responsibility that I was entrusted with at the time," he said. "Here I was, flying with live missiles next to Air Force One. (There are) not too many people who get that close or are trusted to do that."

"I played my part helping to protect the nation and combat the war on terror," Aguilar said.

The media day in which Aguilar participated was one of several that Air Force and National Guard officials have hosted since June.

"The National Guard was one of the first responders from the military, so we want to tell the National Guard story and showcase some of the response stories that we've had," said Lt. Col. Randy Salazar, from the National Guard Bureau Public Affairs. "Looking back 10, 15 and 30 years down the line, we want to make sure that story has been told, not only from a National Guard story, but a U.S. military story of how we responded that day."



Wild blue yonder-36th ID Soldier competes in the sky

Sotry by Pvt. Andrew C. Slovensky
362nd MPAD, USD-S Public Affairs

BASRAH, Iraq— Not everyone is a fan of flying. Probably fewer people are fans of falling toward the ground at 120 miles per hour from thousands of feet in the air. Lt. Col. George Conwill is one of those few.

Conwill, assessments chief for the 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard, doesn't just enjoy falling from planes; he's actually won some awards doing it. He is a competitive skydiver, and with a team of fellow atmospheric enthusiasts, conquers the sky.

Conwill, currently deployed with the 36th Inf. Div. headquarters to Iraq, started jumping out of planes in 1976 at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he was a member of the sport parachute club. He continued his parachuting hobby and military career through the Army's Airborne and Ranger schools.

"In my opinion, military jumping isn't fun at all," said Conwill, who made his last Army jump in 1980.

In 2004, his youngest daughter caught the bug, and did a tandem jump that inspired Conwill to revive his love for freefall.

After returning to skydiving through an accelerated-freefall program and a few jumps with an instructor, he started jumping for fun and competing in skydiving events in formations of teams from four to eight people.

"I like the competition aspect of skydiving," said Conwill.

Conwill said his teammates come from all walks of life and places like Brazil, Great Britain, New Zealand, Ireland, and Russia.

"It offers camaraderie," said Conwill. "It's people doing the same thing."

The teams learn over 40 different formations and spend weeks prior to competitions doing 200 to 300 practice jumps and mastering the right movements.

"We'll do reviews after jumps and we critique ourselves," said Conwill. "We're always trying to do it better."

When the day of the competition arrives, Conwill dons his black suit and silver helmet. Aboard the plane, he and his teammates grasp hands and align themselves standing in the first formation they will perform; then they jump.

While plummeting to the

ground, the team maneuvers into multiple shapes before breaking away to deploy their parachutes.

Every team has an extra person who jumps with them to record their daring feats. The resulting video is used to judge the performance of the competitors.

In spite of the adrenaline rush from diving out of an aircraft, Conwill said there is clarity, not panic, in his mind.

"You're thinking about your next move and what you're supposed to do," said Conwill. "You're not thinking about going 120 miles per hour headed toward the ground."

"The most important thing is to have fun," he added.

Conwill has jumped all over the U.S. and in Ecuador, won medals in national competitions, and has participated in attempts to break the record for the largest skydiving formation. All together, he has performed more than 2,100 jumps and plans to join the Texas Army National Guard skydiving demonstration team when he redeploys.

He counts laughing in the face of gravity as one of his favorite hobbies; a list that also includes scuba instructing and being a private pilot. He isn't showing signs of giving it up anytime soon.

"I'll do it until I can't anymore," said Conwill.

Below- Lt. Col. George Conwill (silver helmet), assessments chief for the 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard, exits a plane with his team in formation over Rosharon, Texas in 2007. (Photo courtesy Lt. Col. George Conwill)



SF practice water operations in Gulf of Mexico

*Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Melissa Bright
100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas - In the hour or two before dawn when the surf is calm and quiet, the beach in front of the USS Lexington Museum in Corpus Christi, Texas, came alive with service members from the Texas Military Forces, Saturday, Aug. 20, 2011.

More than three-dozen pairs of boots left deep prints crisscrossing the damp sand as the service members prepared for a water-hazard

familiarity exercise and parachute drop into the Gulf of Mexico later that morning.

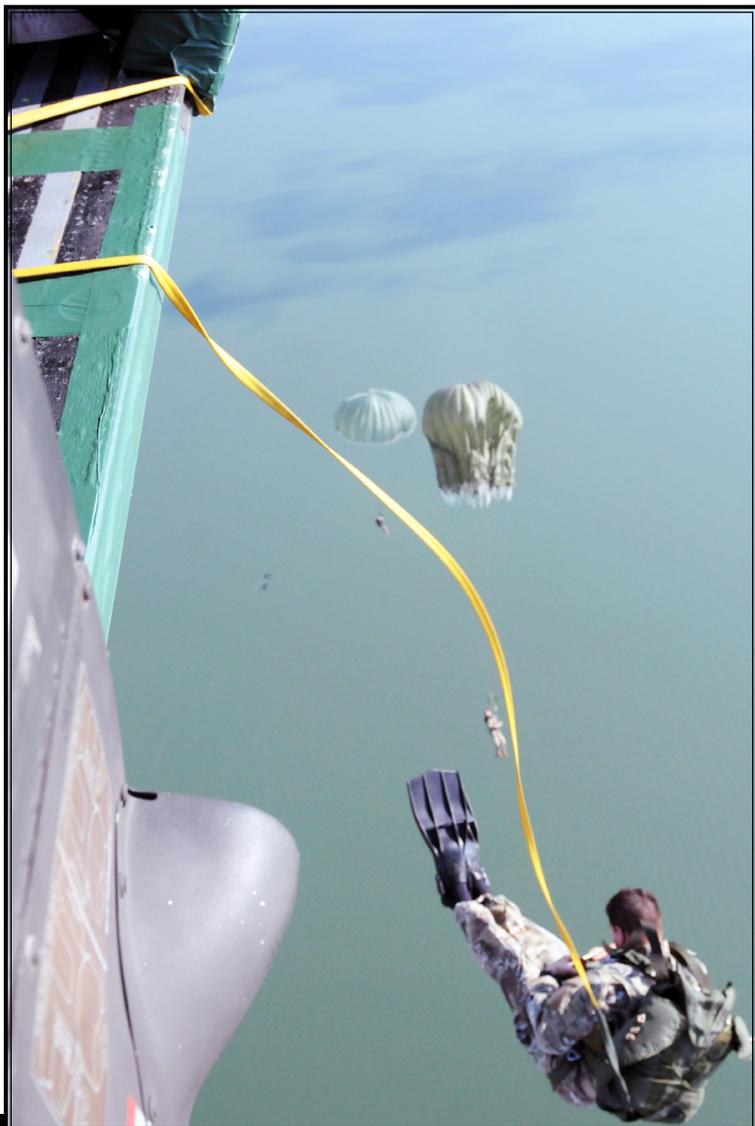
Army Capt. Daniel Edwards of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group, gathered the group of Army and Air National Guardsmen in the museum parking lot at the edge of the beach for a brief review of the basic plan for the jumpers.

"We are here to do a deliberate water jump," said Edwards, "The chopper should land on the flight deck around 0700 where we will be waiting with our gear. Our intent is to get this thing going as quickly and safely as possible so we have enough time for several iterations."

The sky slowly brightened as the majority of the group headed up the long ramp to the Lexington to set up their equipment staging area and wait for air support from the 108th Aviation Task Force in the form of a UH-60 Black Hawk.

The rest headed back to finish unloading, assembling and positioning several Zodiacs on the bit of sand closest to the museum entrance. Despite their deceptively fragile appearance, the small, black, inflatable boats were more than up to the challenge of navigating the waters of the bay.

"We are using the boats," said Army Staff Sgt. Shawn Dagley of the 672nd Engineer Dive Detachment, "to haul the jumpers and their parachute canopies safely out of the water and ferry them to the beach. We also have safety swim-



mers in each boat in case a jumper gets hurt and needs assistance.”

Army Maj. Max Krupp, commander of C Company, 1-19 SFG, said these training jumps are necessary, not just for the SF but also their support teams.

“Just like any other military training,” he said. “You need to practice working together to remain proficient.”

The challenge of bringing together all the pieces of the mission proved equal to making the jump itself. The teams initially assembled earlier in August only to have their air support diverted to Camp Swift to support wildfire mitigation teams working in the area.

“We were already here, ready to complete our training,” said Edwards. But, he continued, having overcoming challenges like this in real world missions is just something the SF is used to.

Personnel from the other units, like Sgt. Erica Urttia of the 294th QM Company, also



The joint efforts of the 19th Special Forces, the 627th Engineer Dive Detachment, the 294th Quartermaster Company and the 108th Aviation Task Force led to the successful completion of a water jump and hazard familiarity exercise in Corpus Christi, Texas, Saturday, Aug. 20, 2011.

took advantage of the opportunity to jump. “It was great,” she said, “But I definitely didn’t want to land in the middle of a bunch of jellyfish. Oh, but once you push off the edge, everything is just awesome.”

Behind her, the helicopter passed by again as four green parachutes bloomed into the deep blue of the sky, slowly drifting down to the boats waiting in the water below. It was a scene repeated more than a dozen times over the course of the morning.

“For some, it’s new. For others, it’s a refresher,” Edwards said. “Essentially, we are here to hone our airborne skills

and provide a training opportunity for our boating support, our divers and our riggers.”

“We are very fortunate that the climate here in Texas is pro-training,” said Krupp.

“We do some extremely adventurous and bottom line high-risk training and [TXMF leadership] has afforded us the latitude to train on the tasks that will allow us to be successful in our real world mission, and that includes today’s joint water jump. Special Forces definitely brings a lot to the table with our organic capability but it’s very hard to do anything without support from external units or our sister services.”

Humanitarian effort brings free healthcare to the Valley

Story by Luke Elliot
Texas State Guard

LAREDO, Texas - Some describe it as a humanitarian mission, others call it a disaster response exercise; however, the reality is that Operation Lone Star is both.

On Aug. 1, Operation Lone Star, a 13-year, annual tradition in southern Texas, began its second week of providing health care services to people living near Laredo and Hebbronville.

The Texas State Guard, Texas Army and Air National Guard, local municipalities, Texas Department of State Health Services, and many other agencies, organizations, companies and volunteers collaborated for Operation Lone Star. This exercise not only brings free medical care to those in need along the Texas border, it simultaneously offers a real-world, emergency response exercise that allows first-response agencies and organizations to prepare for potential disasters.

More than 400 military members, 200 state and county employees and a myriad of volunteers united for the exercise, which started July 25 and ends Aug. 5. OLS provided a variety of medical services to include immunizations, sports physicals, blood pressure screenings, vision exams, pharmaceutical service, medical referrals, ministry services and preventative health education.

Health care providers and volunteers assisted with more than 36,000 health services to about 5,950 people during the first week of the exercise, which was held in several valley cities to include Brownsville, San Juan, Mission and Rio Grande City.

"We are providing free healthcare to the surrounding communities, those that are in underprivileged areas and those that do not have access on a day-to-day basis to affordable healthcare," said Capt. Daniel Sem, a second-year, Operation Lone Star veteran serving as the Texas Army National Guard officer in charge at the Laredo Operation Lone Star site. "I came away last year, as I trust I will come away this year, feeling like we did a job well done out here. We got a mission, a purpose and a point and made an impact on the community."

One of Sem's Soldiers, Spc. LaRee Lennox, 162nd Area Support Medical Company, a Texas Army National Guard unit out of San Antonio, Texas, said that since a lot of people here could not afford healthcare or insurance, this event helped provide much needed annual checkups and immunizations.

"I think it's awesome that we're helping," said Lennox. "Everybody should have a chance to be healthy and get checked out, so I think it's a good thing."

While providing medical care is a major focus of the event, another purpose is to prepare disaster response agencies and organizations in case an emergency situation, such as a hurricane landfall, emerges.

"The training that we get in running a non-disaster exercise like this prepares us for working together in disaster situations," said Col. Robert Morecook, information officer, Medical Brigade, Texas State Guard. "We get to know each other's capabilities. We get to know each other's personalities. We get to see where the strengths and the weaknesses are in an organization and under a situation where not so much is at risk."

This real-world training exercise is an imminent part of emergency preparedness for the Texas Army National Guard and other agencies that could potentially respond to hurricanes and other disasters.

"The training value from this is invaluable because when we have an emergency situation, a hurricane, a fire, a flood, whatever could happen, it's better to learn it here in a controlled environment, non-emergency environment, where we can come together and work out all the different hiccups and kinks in the system," said Sem.

Morecook described the purpose of the exercise as Texans helping Texans to become better prepared for emergencies and to help those in need with essential medical services.

"It's a tabletop exercise with real patients," he added.



Texas State Guard Capt. Alec J. Ross, a registered nurse with the Texas State Guard Medical Bde. provides an immunization shot to an Operation Lone Star patient at the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo site.

Getting down and dirty with combatives

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Malcolm McClendon
Task Force Raptor (3-124) Public Affairs

Bastrop, Texas (Aug. 11 2011) – It was only 8 a.m. and the heat in the gym was unbearable. Bodies dripped sweat at the slightest of efforts. It was Army Combatives Training at Camp Swift.

Texas Army National Guardsmen from Task Force Raptor, 3-124 Cavalry, battled not only the heat, but also each other as they practiced hand-to-hand combat techniques.

“It was without a doubt hot, but it added value to the training, it pushed you to the limits physically while still having to concentrate on what was being taught.” said Staff Sgt Michael Barker, with the Headquar-

ters and Headquarters Troop. “Good fun stuff in miserable conditions, but that’s part of being in the Army” he added.

The training gives Soldiers the tools they need to survive should they have to physically engage the enemy. However, it’s not designed to teach anyone how to fatally injure his or her opponent.

“We don’t try to teach them how to beat somebody up, we’re teaching them to hold on till their buddy comes, and that’s how we are going to win the fight,” said Sgt 1st Class Christopher Max, Combat Support Training & Evaluation Battalion (CSTEBn) instructor, who will actually

be joining the unit on the deployment. “Training the guys I will be going with, is a good gauge of how the unit will be when we’re over there; and they did well.”

The Task Force’s deployment will take them to the Horn of Africa early next year to join a larger Combined Joint Task Force to promote partnerships with local countries’ governments in that region. While it is not Iraq or Afghanistan, the Soldiers must still remain alert and know their basic skills.

“On our mission, there might not be a point to actually [use lethal force], but we will still need to control them, so that’s why this training is important,” adds Max.

The training consists of dominant body positions, transitions from these, and submission techniques such as chokes and arm bars.

The Army Combatives Training is only one day in Pre-Mobilization Training (PMT) the unit participates in to get them ready for the deployment. And as the training continues, so does the battle with the summer heat.



Capt. Christ Sedtal battle Capt. Douglas Yates, HHT Co., Task Force Raptor (3-124), during Army Combatives training at Camp Swift.

Negative mental traps- think, think...BOOM!

By Maj. Steven Keihl
Texas Military Forces Resilience Team

Too often we lack the passion to pursue our dreams because we are convinced that we will fail. We find ourselves in hot water at work and unable to accomplish missions. We go through the heart wrenching pain of relationships crumbling right at our feet. And too often all of these difficulties are caused or intensified by our own brain!

That's right, we allow our brain to communicate information that is not accurate and even detrimental to our own growth and happiness and this wreaks havoc in our world. This chaos is caused by thinking traps.

So what exactly are thinking traps? They are overly rigid patterns in our thinking that impair growth. Thinking traps are quite common, in fact, most of us probably deal with them in our own lives. Unfortunately, these traps limit our vision, impair our productivity, and even create relational tensions. The first step in overcoming thinking traps is learning to identify them. Let me help. Here are the top five most common thinking traps in my opinion:

#1 - "Ready, Fire, Aim." Did you notice that those three words are out of logical sequence?

The first thinking trap is always assuming we are right and subsequently jumping to conclusions with little or no evidence. For example, a Soldier goes to his Chaplain distraught because he believes his spouse is cheating on him. When asked why he maintains such a belief, he states that she did not answer his call at lunch.

Sound like a bit of a stretch? Yes, it is. Just because his wife did not answer the phone does not mean she is having an affair. There could be a million reasons why she failed to answer the phone. If this is the ONLY reason to determine that his spouse is unfaithful, he is most definitely jumping to conclusions. The best way to deal with jumping to conclusions is simply

to slow down, open your mind, and seek real information and evidence.

#2 - "I am Psychic." This second thinking trap makes the faulty assumption that I actually know what another person is thinking.

I assume that I know exactly what is going on in their mind and heart. Additionally, I assume that other people should know exactly what is going on in my head and heart.

This thinking trap is common in close relationships as we develop the notion that because they care about us and have spent time with us, they must know what we think and feel. This thinking trap leads to a ton of misconceptions, miscommunication and even heated arguments.

I don't know about you, but I hate it when someone tells me what I am thinking and feeling! Why? Because they don't know!! In order to understand what someone else is thinking or feeling, there is only one real approach that works... TALK! Instead of making assumptions, ask questions and share information.

#3 - "I am." The third thinking trap is completely self focused. This person tends to believe that he or she is the center of the universe.

Therefore, when something good happens, they deserve all the credit. When something bad happens, they deserve all the blame. This thinking often inadvertently irritates others as their contributions to either the success or failure are discounted.

If you are having a difficult time in your relationship, it is rarely all your fault. When things are working out perfectly, it is likely that there are more factors to such bliss than just you. We have to consider the contributions and impact of other people, circumstances, etc. when examining the realities in our world. We are NOT the center of the universe!

#4 - "You are." The fourth thinking trap is the exact opposite of the third.

Some struggle with the notion

that they have absolutely no control over anything... they merely experience destiny. Unfortunately, when everything and everyone else is ultimately responsible for everything, this individual develops a victim mentality when things are not going their way or a false sense of security when they are. Breaking this thinking trap requires taking responsibility for the things we can control.

#5 - "Life Stinks." The final thinking trap to make my top five list is the continuous negative and pessimistic perspective on everything.

These people believe in Murphy's Law to the extreme... not only will everything that can go wrong happen, everything is doomed to failure at some point and there is nothing we can do to change it. Yuck!

This type of pessimism is not only a significant personal impairment, it impacts everyone around us who is exposed to the mound of negativity. When things are difficult and challenges arise, we need to learn to grab control of the things we can impact and take the positive steps we can take. Surrendering to the pessimistic perspective is a surefire manner to impede progress and upend relationships.

These are only my top five thinking traps. There are more. We have to remember that our thinking and our self talk impact our emotions and our attitudes, which eventually impact our behaviors or actions. When we take action based off faulty thinking, the end result is often less than ideal. We must learn to overcome these thinking traps and correct our flawed foundations in order to grow and move forward in our lives. The good news is that we CAN change our thinking patterns! We can learn to improve the accuracy of our self-talk! We can avoid thinking traps with practice! These skills are part of what it means to be resilient. Interested in more information? Give us a call... the TXMF Resilience Team would love to assist!

AFGHAN QUEST

Afghan Quest is written by a senior sergeant on his second tour in Afghanistan. He's been there and done that and volunteered to do it all over again.

[HTTP://AFGHANQUEST.COM/](http://afghanquest.com/)

Today, more than ever, Soldiers rely on technology to bring the fight to the front lines. That technology doesn't just include high-tech weapons, body armor or Blue Force Tracker. It also included web logs, "blogs," that allow a more immediate glimpse into military life and history than ever before. Often funny, sometimes painful and poignant, these snippets of opinion, daily life, and commentary on war, the military, and life in general allow more people to see what our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines are thinking, experiencing and fighting for.

A VIEW FROM THE FRONT LINE

BAND OF BLOGGERS



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Check us out on the Internet!!!

Running to Texas: Soldiers tally the miles between COB Basra, Iraq and Texas

*Story by Spc. Brittany H. Gardner
362nd MPAD, USD-S Public Affairs*

BASRAH, Iraq – Many Soldiers often think of home while they're deployed overseas, but not many think about running there. There are thousands of miles between Iraq and the U.S. and more than 7,000 miles from Contingency Operating Base Basra to Texas. Although it seems like an impossible feat, one group of 36th Infantry Division Soldiers decided to take on the challenge of running those 7,000 miles.

The idea to 'run to Texas' was originally thought of by Staff Sgt. Jason R. Perdue and was launched in January.

"We started this group run on Sundays," said Chief Warrant Officer Lisa Buckley, 36th Inf. Div. Special Troops Battalion property book officer, "you know, when it was a little bit cooler outside. And for a couple of Sundays we had a pretty good group. I brought up the idea that he presented and said, 'Hey, you know, it's seven thousand and some odd miles to Texas from here.'"

Chief Warrant Officer Christy Clements, 36th DSTB human resources technician, who helped plan and coordinate the races for COB Basra in 2011, expanded on these ideas.

"You hear about people running across the States," said Clements. "So we said, 'How far is it? How far do you think it is from here to Texas?' So they did the calculations, and of course it does go over water. It's about 7,663 miles."

Clements and a group of other 36th Inf. Div. Soldiers realized that there had to be guidelines for what did and did not count toward their mileage log, said Clements. Those rules included having a battle buddy present while running as part of COB standard operating procedure, and someone had to validate that each runner actually ran the amount of miles claimed. Also, biking counted toward the total mileage for those who couldn't run. Soldiers who ran had to do a minimum of three miles at a time.

"We came up with a minimum, so that those that were serious about doing this run would continue and be committed to it," said Clements.

Buckley has personally logged more than 1,000 miles since January, which is when the group began their long-distance running project. Buckley said she totals at least 30 miles weekly. Before she recently began training for a half iron man competition, she was totaling almost 60 miles each week.

"She's already crossed the thousand-mile marker," said Clements. "She's actually at 1,120."

Buckley attributes her passion for running to Lt. Col. Doug DeVries, 36th DSTB commander, who started her

on a running program when she was a specialist.

"It was sort of his way of mentoring me," said Buckley. "He sat me down and he asked me what my goals were. What were my life goals, my career goals, and my financial goals? He had me draw them out on a timeline. But one of my goals was that I wanted to max the PT test by the end of the year. So, he made me run with him at least four times a week. At the time I kind of hated it, but as I did it I got better and better at it and got more comfortable."

Buckley soon began setting goals to run small races. It eventually led her to run for the Texas Marathon Team and the All Guard team. Now, she is running toward Texas to help this group of Soldiers meet their goal. She said she now thanks DeVries for pushing her many years ago.

"Something that at the time seemed so insignificant brought me to where I'm at now," Buckley said.

With the help of Buckley and many other dedicated runners and bicyclists, Clements said they will soon wrap up their tallying and finally finish the run.

"We're only about 100 miles off right now," Clements said. "So we will meet that goal."

If the feeling of accomplishment isn't enough, DeVries and Command Sgt. Maj. Todd Richardson, 36th DSTB, offered one more incentive to the group of Texas runners if they reached their mileage goal.

"We're going to have it completed by 1 August," said Clements. "So, we're pretty excited about that. And of course, you know, Command Sergeant Major Richardson along with Lieutenant Colonel DeVries said if we actually completed and finished they would wear pink reflective belts."



BASRAH, Iraq –U.S. Division-South Soldiers participate in a 10k run on Contingency Operating Base Basra March 2011. The miles completed during the fun runs held at COB Basra counted toward the miles logged toward the Run to Texas. (Courtesy photo U.S. Army)

Texas' airborne unit jumps at Ft. Bliss

Story and photo by 2nd Lt. Nicholas Lutton
143rd Infantry (Airborne)

FORT BLISS, Texas— The 1st Battalion of the 143rd Infantry Regiment from Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas conducted an Airborne Operation on July 11, 2011 at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas as part of their annual training exercise.

Battalion Chaplain Cpt. Neal Hicks of Houston, Texas said it was a really good operation because everything ran fairly smoothly, including a nice ride in the C-17.



Troopers from the 143rd prepare for their jump into a dry lake bed at Fort Bliss on July 11, 2011 as part of their annual training exercise. Pictured in front, Lt. Col. Sean McGrath was the first paratrooper out of the plane as he led the way in conducting the airborne operation.

The 143rd jumped as part of their preparation for deployment to Afghanistan. With roots that date back to the Independence of the Republic of Texas, the 143rd will deploy for the first time since World War II and airborne operations are a normal part of their training.

“I was the fourth jumper on the first pass. I went out the door beautifully. I looked around and saw the mountains and the storm in the background. After that I just enjoyed the view,” said Hicks.

Hicks, who has approximately 84 jumps, said from the time they tell you 30 seconds to the jump, your mind is clear and all you’re thinking about is the jump.

“The coolest jump for me was the 65th Anniversary of Normandy Jump. The historical precedence just means a lot. If I had another cool jump to do, I guess it would be a water jump in the Florida Keys. Just any place with a drop zone would be fine by me,” said Hicks.

For Staff Sgt. James Balandran, 41, Battalion Medic from Austin, Texas, the 143rd is about camaraderie and heritage.

“I got back into an airborne battalion because I was missing jumping and being around paratroopers. It’s just like riding a bike,” said Balandran whose last jump was on September 1, 1993. Balandran said his father was in the 143rd as a Parachute Rigger from 1977 to 1996.

Chaplain Hicks believes in the camaraderie also.

“I think it is a fun unit with a lot of experience. It really runs very similar to an active duty unit. Plus the Soldiers here really want to be here. Not everyone wants to exit out of a high performance aircraft. It takes a special person.”

EXERCISE, con't from page 4

a building from a trash-throwing, rioting mob.

On the day of the collective HRF exercise, the cool early morning quickly reached temperatures exceeding 100 degrees. Even with the extreme heat, the units still did their part to complete the mission.

“We are Soldiers- we drive on and

do anything to complete the mission,” said Garza as he rested from the sun’s heat.

“The advantage of this training is that we all get to set up our lanes and everyone gets to do their job,” said Horn. “Soldiers and Airmen with the 436th, 836th and the SPEARR work very well together.”

The SPEARR is the joint medical component of the HRF, the Small

Portable Expeditionary Aeromedical Rapid Response.

Being one of only 10 outfits of its kind in the U.S., the HRF makes JTF-71 part of a unique set of assets in the National Guard.

“Our Soldiers and Airmen don’t have to do this, they get to do this,” said Horn, “and that’s what sets them apart from other Soldiers and Airmen.”

NEWS BRIEF

US Labor Department announces more than \$5.4 million in job training grants to benefit homeless veterans

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Labor today announced 23 grants totaling \$5,436,148 to provide homeless veterans with job training aimed at helping them succeed in civilian careers. The grants are being awarded by the department's Veterans' Employment and Training Service through the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program.

"Too many of our veterans face difficulty making the transition from military service to the civilian labor force, and too many battle homelessness as a result," said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis. "These grants will help more than 3,000 veterans in communities across the coun-

try access the resources they need to find good jobs and build bright futures for themselves and their families."

The grants were awarded on a competitive basis to state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies and nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and community organizations. These agencies are familiar with the areas and populations to be served and have demonstrated that they can administer effective programs.

Grantees serving 15 states will offer occupational, classroom and on-the-job training, as well as job search and placement assistance, including follow-up

services for homeless veterans. HVRP is the only federal program that focuses exclusively on employment of veterans who are homeless.

Grantees under the HVRP program coordinate their efforts with various local, state and federal social service providers. The grants announced today are the first of a possible four years of annual awards contingent upon satisfactory performance and congressional appropriations.

More information on the Department of Labor's unemployment and re-employment programs for veterans can be found at <http://www.dol.gov/vets>.

VA Encourages Veterans to Visit VA Website to Learn More

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is reaching out to inform Veterans of recent changes made by Congress to the Post 9/11 GI Bill that take effect in 2011. General Allison Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits, said "The Post 9/11 GI Bill is incredibly important because it reduces the financial burdens of higher education so that Veterans have an opportunity to achieve their education goals. VA believes it is important for Veterans to be aware of changes to the GI Bill this year and learn more about how these changes may affect them."

"It's hard to believe how far we have all come with the Post-9/11 GI Bill the past two years," stated General Hickey. "Today, more than 537,000 students have received over \$11.5 billion in GI Bill benefits to help them take charge of their future."

Upcoming changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill effective August 1, 2011 include paying the actual net cost of all public in-state tuition and fees, rather than basing payments upon the highest in-state tuition and fee rates for every state; capping private and foreign tuition at \$17,500 per academic year; and ending payments during certain school breaks, to preserve Veterans' entitlement for future academic semesters. Also, certain students attending private schools in select states can now continue to receive benefits at the same rate payable

during the previous academic year.

Beginning October 1, 2011, eligible individuals will be able to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill for programs such as non-college degrees, on-the-job training, and correspondence courses, and they will be eligible to receive a portion of the national monthly housing allowance rate when enrolled only in distance learning courses.

VA is implementing the latest round of changes to the Post 9/11 GI Bill and has already begun processing fall 2011 enrollment certifications. Outreach by VA has helped to increase participation by colleges and universities in the Yellow Ribbon program, which helps students avoid out-of-pocket costs that may exceed the benefit. Today, more than 2,600 schools are participating in the Yellow Ribbon program.

"VA is committed to ensuring Veterans have the information and tools they need to succeed," General Hickey concluded. Complete information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill is available at: www.gibill.va.gov. VA's education information phone number is: 1-888-GIBILL-1. For ongoing benefit information, Veterans and Servicemembers can log into the VA eBenefits website: www.eBenefits.va.gov. To ask a question in a secure e-mail, use the "Ask a Question" tab at: <https://www.gibill2.va.gov/cgi-bin/vba.cfg/php/enduser/ask.php>.

Texas Military History- September

The U.S. Army's longest World War II campaign began in Italy on September 9, 1943, when the Texas National Guard's 36th Infantry Division landed at Salerno, south of Naples. Operation AVALANCHE was the first Allied thrust onto the European continent.

The "Texas" Division, federalized in November 1940, shipped out two and a half years later for North Africa. The "T-Patchers" did not take part in the Sicily campaign of July-August 1943, but instead were selected as the American VI Corps' assault division for AVALANCHE.

On September 3rd, the British Eighth Army landed at Calabria on the toe of the Italian boot. Allied planners hoped that this would pull the Germans south, away from the main landing at Salerno. Over the objections of his naval task force commander, Fifth Army commander Lt. Gen. Mark Clark vetoed a pre-invasion bombardment in favor of a surprise landing.

Unfortunately for the Texans, the Germans saw them coming. Landing craft carrying the first waves of the 141st and 142nd Infantry were 300 yards from shore at about 3:15a.m. when German shells began falling. Landing craft took direct hits, spilling men into the sea; disabled boats created a logjam. Machine gun fire greeted the men who made it to the beach, but

in small groups the T-Patchers began fighting their way inland.

At 5:30 a.m., much-needed artillery landed, and the 151st Field Artillery and the 143rd Infantry's Cannon Company repulsed an armored attack. During the next two days German attention turned to the British sector, allowing the 36th to consolidate and move inland as reinforcements, including parts of Oklahoma's 45th Division, arrived. But Kesselring was gathering units for a counterattack, and by September 12th six panzer divisions faced the Allies, whose units were so decimated by the fierce fighting over the next two days that Clark began planning for evacuation.

But Allied air superiority, and superb naval gunnery, finally drove the Germans back. Salerno was secured -- but the battle up the mountainous Italian peninsula, where Germans held the high ground, had just begun for the 36th Infantry Division, the first U.S. division to land on the continent of Europe.

Source: National Guard Heritage Paintings.



Tip of the Avalanche by Keith Rocco. Salerno, Italy

TXARNG RECRUITING & RETENTION BN IS HOSTING THE

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**** UNITS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATING lodging for their respective Soldiers.**

WHY: TX has critical shortages in the Officer ranks. Units should help those Soldiers interested in the OCS begin the application process. Contact the OCS office for more information.

INTENT: To complete/evaluate (APFT) prescreened soldiers packets for the FY12 OCS course

MISSION: The purpose of the OCS Workshop is to review all applicant packets, make recommended changes, and ensure physical standards are met or exceeded IOT be accepted into the OCS course.

