

The Straight Arrow

Serving North Dakota's Army National Guard Community



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Joint Force Headquarters North Dakota National Guard

Spring 2005

Update on Battery F Air Defense Artillery's deployment to Iraq

Story and photo by Capt. Shannon J. Horton,
Battery F 188th Air Defense Artillery

FOB Warrior, Iraq – Fox Battery of the 188th Air Defense Artillery is in the eighth month of its mobilization and deployment. The Soldiers of Fox Battery started training and preparing for their overseas mission back in early March 2004 after receiving a late February deployment notice. Upon completion of four months of training at home station, (and preparing their personal lives and families for the deployment) Fox Battery deployed to Fort Bliss, Texas, on July 2, 2004. There, we joined our higher headquarters, the 116th Brigade Combat Team (BCT), an Idaho-based National Guard Brigade. Fox Battery is one of several units from nine different states that make up the 116BCT.

Fox Battery Soldiers spent just over three months at Fort Bliss honing their technical and tactical skills and learning enemy techniques, tactics and procedures (TTPs). After completing the Fort Bliss training, Fox Battery moved on to Fort Polk, La. and the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). There, the battery executed all of its training in a major event commonly called a Mission Rehearsal Exercise or MRE.



Fox Battery is training the Iraqi Army in fundamental areas that include weapons training, Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOU), driving skills and leadership skills. When fully trained, the Iraqi Army will be better able to assume the mission the Coalition Forces now perform.

The JRTC situational training events prepared the North Dakota Soldiers for what they could expect on any given day in Iraq. After successfully completing the MRE, and following a visit from North Dakota Gov. John Hoeven and the state's National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Michael Haugen in late November, Fox Battery departed for overseas. On Dec. 4, 2004, after a four-day layover in Germany, Fox Battery arrived in Kuwait. Soon, Fox Battery Soldiers learned what their mission would be and where they would spend their time in Iraq.

Fox Battery Soldiers were eager to begin their mission. The battery is well suited for its primary mission: training Iraqi Army Battalions. Hand-picked by Brig. Gen. Alan Gayhart, the 116th BCT Commander, 70 percent of Fox Battery Soldiers have either graduated from college or were college students when called for their deployment. Furthermore, it didn't hurt that many of the battery Soldiers are either military course instructors at the Regional Training Institute at Camp Grafton, N.D., or have taught many classes in

See Battery F, page 6



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Aune, 1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Alyda Blazek hugs her dad 1st Lt. Donavon Blazek after his return from Iraq on Feb. 16. The 141st spent a year in Iraq working as "Trailblazers," clearing the roads from IED's (Improvised Explosive Devices) for Operation Iraqi Freedom II. The 141st is a North Dakota Army National Guard unit headquartered in Valley City.

141st returns to U.S.

By Sgt. 1st Class Mike Jennens,
Joint Force Headquarters

It was the moment everyone was waiting on for more than a year; the homecoming of more than 470 North Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers of the 141st Engineer Combat Battalion.

The Colorado Jet Center welcomed the first wave of Soldiers on Feb. 8. More Soldiers followed in different groups, on different days. One group numbered 300 Soldiers, one numbered 30. Regardless of the size of the group or the day they arrived, they were home. The relief and joy of that day and those that followed is beyond description.

Once on the ground, the Soldiers checked in so records showed they were back in the U.S. From there, they went to their billets and dropped off their bags. TB tests were next. If time allowed, they started the paperwork-side of the demob process, otherwise they waited until the following day. Within the next few days they would sign and review countless papers and forms, go through medical screening, relax, enjoy choices of food some hadn't seen in quite some time. Some just wanted to sleep without the sound of

mortars, generators or small arms fire in the background.

The overwhelming feeling from the troops was that it is great to be home. The choices and freedoms as citizens of the United States are like none offered anywhere else in the world; the Soldiers of the 141st are going to cherish and enjoy them like never before.

Sgt. 1st Class Dallas Shipley, Company C Operations Sergeant, put it this way, "Being home with family and seeing the support from the Guard is overwhelming and much appreciated. And knowing all the work the family support group did for us is also much appreciated."

There were, and will continue to be, changes. War and combat does that to people. Lest we forget, four Soldiers from the 141st paid the ultimate price; Spc. Phil Brown, Spc. James Holmes, Staff Sgt. Lance Koenig and Spc. Cody Wentz. These fallen Soldiers of the North Dakota Army National Guard, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion will never be forgotten.

Soldiers of the 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, it's great to have you back.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Fighter Wing

Sgt. Shane Sager, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, kisses his son as he arrives at Hector International Airport, Fargo, on Feb. 16.

Some just wanted to sleep without the sound of

near Combat Battalion, it's great to have you back.

Soldier Talk



What do you think about the new re-enlistment bonus?



Spc. Chris Klein

Alpha Battery 1st Battalion 188th
Air Defense Artillery



Sgt. Chris Clarke

Alpha Battery 1st Battalion 188th
Air Defense Artillery



Spc. Seth Vinchattle

Alpha Battery 1st Battalion 188th
Air Defense Artillery



Spc. Janel Schwab

68th Troop Command



Sgt. Jeff Camp

Alpha Battery 1st Battalion 188th
Air Defense Artillery

"It's a good deal for people who want to extend their time in the Army. The most important thing, with or without the money, is how you feel about serving your country."

"Personally, I'm taking advantage of the re-enlistment portion. It definitely gives a good benefit."

"It is nice it isn't split into installments and that it's all up front. If my ETS (end of time in service) wasn't in 2009, I'd take that bonus right now to re-enlist."

"It is a great incentive and opportunity for younger people. One improvement would be to offer it to full-time technicians."

"It's a great deal and good incentive to join back up. I just re-upped for three more years."

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Show me the money

By Staff Sgt. Billie Jo Lorius,
1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

A new bonus could put cash in the pockets of many Soldiers. The cash is in the form of substantial increases in enlistment and reenlistment bonuses. Some of the bonuses will be increased from \$5,000 to \$15,000.

The increased bonuses for this fiscal year are meant for new Guard Soldiers, for people who join the Army National Guard after serving on active duty, and for Guard Soldiers who agree to reenlist for three or six years. Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers make up nearly 40 percent of the 148,000 troops in Iraq, and 42,000 Guard Soldiers are serving in Iraq and Kuwait, officials reported. Another 8,200 are serving in Afghanistan. Approximately 100,000 Guard Soldiers have been on active duty at home or abroad at any given time since terrorists attacked this country on Sept. 11, 2001.

The increased bonuses are an effort to improve the Army Guard's recruiting and retention efforts during the global war on terrorism

and build the Army Guard back up to its authorized strength of 350,000 troops. The bonus increases for fiscal year 2005 include:

— An increase in reenlistment and extension

bonuses for enlisted people from \$5,000 to \$15,000.

— An increase from \$5,000 to \$15,000 for prior service enlisted people who enlist in the Army Guard for six years. That includes former active duty members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard who have fulfilled their military service obligation.

— An increase in enlistment bonuses from \$8,000 to \$10,000 for people without prior service who sign up for one of the Army Guard's "top 10" military occupational specialties, such as engineers, medics and food specialists.

— A \$6,000 bonus for newly commissioned officers and warrant officers and for officers who have served on active duty.

— A \$2,000 bonus for enlisted Guard Soldiers who agree to be retrained for a military occupational specialty to meet the needs of

Recruit referral bonus incentive

How does \$200 sound? Very little work involved, just a referral. The North Dakota National Guard has over 250 vacancies on the Army side and 25 on the Air side. Your help is needed in filling these vacancies! If you refer someone who joins the Guard between March 15 and June 15 of this year, you'll get a check for \$200 dollars. A second referral that joins is another \$400. A third is \$600. That's \$1200 just for telling someone about the Guard.

Members of the National Guard are the best recruiting tool. Please help keep the National Guard up to strength. Introduce a friend or family member to the National Guard and not only will you make a few extra dollars, but you'll strengthen the Guard and our national security. It's our Guard. We can make it strong.



the Army Guard provided the Soldiers are not receiving any other incentives.

Guard Soldiers will receive a lump sum for reenlisting. New Guard Soldiers joining the military for the first time and those with prior service will be given a 50-50 payment schedule. Those who join the Army Guard's enlisted ranks who still have a military service obligation following their active duty tours will be eligible for a \$50 bonus for each remaining month of their obligation.

They can then receive a \$15,000 bonus if they reenlist in the Guard.

The eligibility for receiving reenlistment bonuses has been extended by two years. Guard Soldiers previously could not receive a bonus after 14 years of service. They are now eligible for up to 16 years.

The Army Guard will also offer Montgomery G.I. Bill Kickers of between \$200 and \$350 per month to non-prior service people who are enrolled in colleges or vocational schools provided they are already receiving GI Bill benefits.

The National Guard Bureau chief also said the Guard will change its recruiting message to more accurately reflect the fact that many Citizen-Soldiers are now pulling tours of duty overseas for at least a year.

"We are correcting, frankly, some of our recruiting themes and slogans to reflect the reality of today," Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum told The Washington Post. "We're not talking about one weekend a month and two weeks a year and college tuition. We're talking about service to the nation."

Trekking all the way to Germany for training

By Sgt. 1st Class Marvin Baker,
1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Approximately 90 Soldiers from Company A, 164th Engineer Battalion, Minot, departed Feb. 19 for a three-week annual training mission to southeastern Germany.

The unit will be involved in a training exercise to support the Army's 2nd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 1st Armor Division as that unit prepares for future deployments.

The North Dakota group carried out its annual training at the Combat Maneuver Training Center at Hohenfels, Germany, which is near Munich and Innsbruck, Austria.

Maj. Davina French, Bismarck, was preparing the Soldiers for their trip Friday night. Minot was the second time within a week that French has helped ready Soldiers for an overseas mission. Earlier in the week French was in

"This type of training is very important in today's fight against the global war on terrorism."

**Capt. Brent Naslund,
164th Battalion,
officer in charge**

French, who was commander of the 957th Multi-Role Bridge Company in Iraq and later helped the Iraqis restore their power grid, talked about some of the prohibited materials that European customs doesn't allow. She often used humor to help get the point across and keep the Guard personnel interested.

"We're trying to make it easier on the troops," French said. "It's a great process. Anytime you

Fargo preparing members of the 142nd Engineer Battalion for its annual training to the Philippines.

French, who was commander of the 957th Multi-Role Bridge Company in Iraq and later helped the Iraqis



Photo by Sgt. Elliott Larman, 164th Engineer Battalion

Company A, 164th Engineer Battalion, Minot, conducts dismounted land navigation at the Charlie South training area in CMTC Hohenfels, Germany.

can send a Soldier to a foreign country on annual training, that's retention."

Company A will be directly involved in the training exercise, playing the role of opposing forces for the 2nd BCT and providing a strong sense of reality.

Opposing forces, commonly referred to as OPFOR by the Army, is an exercise in which one side acts as an adversary against another team in an effort to exploit weaknesses or vulnerabilities, which can later be analyzed by the command element.

Company A Soldiers will pose as enemy forces, civilians on the battlefield or civilian construction workers. In some cases members of the Minot unit, which includes Soldiers from Carrington and Hazen, will pose as terrorist groups.

"This type of training is very important in today's fight against the global war on terrorism," said Capt. Brent Naslund, full-time officer in charge of the 164th Battalion. "The 164th will bring more engineers to the OPFOR fight and provide the commander of the 2nd BCT

the realistic assets to replicate terrorist forces that the U.S. Army encounters."

According to Sgt. First Class Mark Vickerman, who is the operations sergeant in the Headquarters platoon, the training will be similar to what many North Dakota Soldiers have witnessed at Fort Irwin, Calif. The difference at Hohenfels, however, is that training there tends to be more realistic.

Vickerman said the Army has built small cities near the Hohenfels base for urban warfare training and they hire the local German population to bring realism into the training that isn't found anywhere else in the Army.

"We will replicate the current world situation," Vickerman said.

He suggested the approximately three weeks will be demanding on the Soldiers, but he is pleased to be going to Germany.

"I have been in Europe before," he said. "Twenty-four years has taken me around the world, and then I'm retiring at the end of March."

Vickerman said he has traveled with the National Guard to Honduras, Italy, England, Norway, three times to South Korea and now Germany.

Technically, this is Pfc. Daryn Hoover's first overseas mission. He went to Canadian Forces Base Shiloh with the 164th Battalion in June 2002, which was his only time out of the country with the National Guard.

"This is the first time I'll be going across the pond," Hoover said. "And the nice thing is, I'm German, so I'm excited."

Hoover said he originally turned the offer down because he is in college, but a week later decided he couldn't pass up the opportunity.

Hoover will be one of three medics on the mission that will include National Guard Soldiers from Texas and Georgia.

"My instructors in the MSU Business Department have been very supportive," he said.

Eagle Flight 'Leadership' successful in attracting potential Guard officers

Story and photo by Lt. Col. Peter W. Conlin,
Joint Force Headquarters

"You are the future leaders of the North Dakota National Guard, and our success depends upon you," said Brig. Gen. Jerald Engelman, Deputy Adjutant General, as he addressed forty-two North Dakota National Guard Soldiers attending the first-ever Eagle Flight Leadership held Feb. 11-12 at Camp Grafton, North Dakota. "We are in need of officers and I commend all of you for coming forward to explore leadership opportunities in the North Dakota National Guard."

The Eagle Flight Leadership was developed and conducted by the Recruiting and Retention Battalion and the 2nd General Studies Battalion, 164 Regiment (RTI). The purpose of the weekend was to seek Soldiers eligible for commission programs and provide them an opportunity to learn about becoming an officer or warrant officer. Soldiers were selected to attend based on their educational qualifications as well as recommendations by their leadership.

The EF Leadership is in response to the shortage of junior officers and warrant officers in our state. There are numerous lieutenant positions and warrant officer positions unfilled. This means that company commanders are left with few if any lieutenants and platoon sergeants must fill the void. However, this provides an excellent opportunity for Soldiers willing to take the challenge to accept a leadership position in the North

Dakota National Guard.

Participants attended a social Friday evening to meet the North Dakota National Guard Leadership, and received a welcome brief from Engelman. On Saturday, Col. Dennis Jacobson, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army, addressed the group discussing the future of the North Dakota National Guard and why it was important to fill our leadership positions now. "The North Dakota National Guard is changing, and we need leaders that are willing to take the challenge and move us into the future," said Jacobson. Command Sgt. Maj. Orville Wang also spoke to the group, providing the NCO perspective on the importance of supporting the officer programs. "It is in the best interest of the NCO corps to send our best to a commissioning program," said Wang.

Eagle Flight attendees were also briefed on the various different commission programs, such as Officer Candidate School (both traditional and fast-track), Reserve Officer Training Corps, and Warrant Officer School. In addition, Chief Warrant Officer Gerard Schwan presented the updated educational assistance program, which has increased its incentives for attending college. The afternoon was spent on round-robin, team-building activities. The attendees were broken into teams of six and challenged to perform activities such as building card towers and building the best paper airplane. All the activities are designed to help the group interact with each other and demonstrate leadership and team cooperation skills.



Prospective officer candidates attempt to solve the "knotty problem," an exercise in leadership and communication skills.

As a result of the Eagle Flight weekend, nine Soldiers expressed interest in OCS, traditional course; 17 expressed interest in OCS, Fast-track; and 16 in the warrant officer program. Lt. Col. Dave Skalicky, Recruiting and Retention Battalion Commander was pleased with the attendance. "This was a very successful weekend," stated Skalicky. "Our turn-out exceeded expectations and we have a lot of willing and eager prospective officer candidates."

If you or anyone you know is interested in becoming an officer or warrant officer, you can contact Maj. Joel Bickford, Officer Strength Manager, at 701-739-2818.

Increased deployments bring dental changes

By Maj. Brad B. Bekkedahl, DDS, and Lt. Col. Marvin A. Zerr, DDS, PhD, N.D. Army Medical Department

Mobilization of Army National Guard Soldiers has identified a readiness issue that affects all North Dakota Guard members. We are now an integral part of the war on terror, with long-term combat deployments around the globe. These mobilizations have brought to the forefront the importance of oral health care. Dental concerns have been hampering unit and personal mobilizations causing delays in unit and personnel activations. Dental emphasis has changed and the North Dakota National Guard has had to adjust as well.

New guidance by National Guard Bureau (NGB) requires a complete dental evaluation on all Army National Guard Soldiers annually. The directed assessment consists of a full oral examination to include bitewing and panograph radiographs, an oral cancer screening, health history and record updates, with interpretations and recommendations for treatment. New annual requirements for enhanced examinations for our 3000 soldiers posed a significant task for two dentists.

In the analysis of this issue, Lt. Col. Marvin Zerr and Maj. Brad Bekkedahl developed an examination reporting process that allowed the Soldiers to be examined by their civilian dentist and have the results reported to the State Medical Detachment and documented. With the endorsement of Col. (P) Dennis Jacobsen, Assistant Adjutant General Army, Col. Charles Wagner, Chief of Staff, and Col. Robert Nyre, Medical Detachment Commander, a Record of Civilian Dental Examination (CDE) was developed.

With a civilian dental option, all Soldiers now have two avenues to complete this yearly requirement. The Soldier may be examined by their dentist or be examined by the two NDARNG dentists. Any soldier that wants to take advantage of private dental care to fulfill their annual dental re-

quirements for the NDARNG needs to contact their full-time administrator requesting a dental packet prior to the dental examination. The necessary information required will be documented by the dental office and mailed to the State Medical Detachment in a pre-addressed, stamped envelope.

For Soldiers not pursuing private dental care, a dental examination room has been set up in Bismarck's Bohn Armory and equipped with the necessary equipment to complete the examination process. There will be limited opportunity for Soldiers in outlying areas to have an examination completed without traveling to Bismarck. A portable bitewing radiograph machine was purchased in 2004 that allows the dentists to take the examination process "on the road" in order to complete this annual requirement.

The benefit of this cooperative effort benefits the Soldier. The Soldier will be able to accomplish two tasks at one dental visit if seen by their dental practitioner. They will fulfill an ARNG requirement plus complete a recommended dental examination for their own personal health. If any necessary treatment is noted by their dentist, it should be completed. In regards to the military dental exam process, if any dental disease is noted by the military dentist, the soldier will have to seek civilian dental care and have the dental problem evaluated and treated. Therefore, completing a civilian dental examination may be less time consuming and more flexible.

A final thought and suggestion by our two state dentists is the recommended use of the TRICARE DENTAL PROGRAM. It is a good and reasonable dental insurance program for all members. Please contact your unit administrators for more information.

The dental mission has changed, it has become more aggressive and time consuming for all. Oral healthcare and prevention of dental problems has become a major focus for mobilizations and for the well-being of the Soldier. Remember, it is the Soldiers responsibility to remain fit for duty.

State Partnership Program

Maj. Gen. Mike Haugen, Adjutant General of North Dakota, discusses possible military-to-military State Partnership events with Lt. Gen. S.K. Obeng, Chief of Defense Staff, Ghana Armed Forces. The State Partnership Program is designed to develop relationships between the National Guard and the partnered country's military. North Dakota is currently partnered with Ghana. (Editor's note: Look for the full story on North Dakota's State Partnership Program in the next issue of the Straight Arrow.)



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Rob Keller, Joint Force Headquarters



Sgt. 1st Class Dallas Shipley, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, hugs his wife Sgt. 1st Class...



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Aune, 1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
Staff Sgt. Daryl Theurer, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, holds his grandson, Dawson, while talking to loved ones on February 16, 2005. Theurer just returned from Iraq with his unit.

(Right) Spc. A... Magnuson, a... the 141st Eng... Combat Batta... flashes a brig... as she returns... after a year... deployment to...



Jasmyn Smith... Engineer Co... his return fro...

Welcome home 141st



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Aune, 1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment
1st Class Melissa Shipley following his return from Iraq.

Angela
medic in
engineer
battalion,
light smile
s home
long
to Iraq.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Aune,
1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Aune,
1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

h, the daughter of Spc. Jeremy Smith, 141st
Combat Battalion, holds a sign for her dad for
om Iraq on Feb. 16.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Fighter Wing
Spc. Reed Zieman, 141st Engineer Combat
Battalion, greets his sister Nikole Page and his
nieces Lexus and Tessa Page upon his return home
from Iraq.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Fighter Wing
Spc. Amy Egbert, 141st Engineer Combat
Battalion, gets a big hug as she arrives at Hector
International Airport, Fargo.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp, 119th Fighter Wing
Spc. Adam Gehlhar, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, is greeted by
Gov. John Hoeven as he steps out of the gate at Hector
International Airport, Fargo, on Feb. 16. Gehlhar is the first 141st
Engineer Combat Battalion troop off of the charter plane back to
North Dakota after a one year deployment to Iraq.

(Right) Immigrants from
Iraq, Meriam and
Abdulla Farok thank
Spc. Corey Wegner,
141st Engineer Combat
Battalion, for his
service in Iraq. Abdulla
suffered injuries from
chemical attacks during
Saddam Hussein's rule,
as well as the loss of his
father and his daughter
in the same attacks.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. David H. Lipp,
119th Fighter Wing

Avenger missiles give upgrade to ADA arsenal

By Sgt. Justin Vinje,
1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

North Dakota's Air Defense Artillery (ADA) units received a major upgrade to their arsenals.

Thirty-six Avenger missile systems, each holding up to eight Stinger missiles, arrived in North Dakota in the first part of February, according to Master Sgt. Kurt Espelien, ADA battalion operations sergeant.

"Twelve Avengers are going to each line battery—Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie," Espelien said. Air defense Soldiers are typically MOS-qualified as 14M, and a two-week training course is necessary before they are qualified to use the new Avengers and reclassify as 14S, said Espelien.

The Avengers, delivered from Fort Stewart, Geo., are a real upgrade to air defense capabilities, said Espelien. Instead of a single, shoulder-fired missile, eight Stinger missiles are mounted in an Avenger system. This can be mounted on the back of a HMMWV and fired on the move.



Photo by Sgt. Christopher Kaufmann, U.S. Army

Sgt. Aubrey Caplinger, left, and Spc. Gabriel Vega maintain security atop an Avenger air defense system during a Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team event in Ghazni, Afghanistan.

"They can be remoted, too," Espelien said, referring to the option allowing Avengers to be fired from a distance. This greatly improves the safety of Soldiers operating the equipment, because when an Avenger is ready to fire, it becomes visible to the enemy's radar, and remote firing capability keeps Soldiers far enough away to be out of immediate threat.

Air defense soldiers won't be abandoning their previous, shoulder-firing methodology, though, Espelien said. The Avengers come with plastic grip-stocks, so that Soldiers can load individual missiles for over-the-shoulder use.

The Avengers also allow Soldiers to enhance perimeter security, with .50-caliber machine guns and night vision capabilities. "In Iraq, Avengers are sometimes even used for convoy security," Espelien said.

The upgrade hasn't caused many changes in the structure of the ADA units, Espelien said, but getting Soldiers trained up on them is a high priority now.

Battery F: Making N.D. proud

From Page 1

their years with the military. The mission, then, is a natural for the North Dakota contingent.

On Dec. 10, 2004, I learned I had been selected to be the Elections Officer. On Dec. 11, I boarded an aircraft and flew north. The next day I began working with my counterpart from 2nd Brigade 25th Infantry Division out of Hawaii, the unit we ultimately replaced. Fox Battery departed Kuwait on Dec. 13 and convoyed to our Forward Operating Base (FOB) Warrior arriving Dec. 17.

When we arrived in Iraq, we were directed to our new homes. We are living in Container Housing Units (CHUs). Each CHU is about 8 x 20 feet and has electricity, heating and air conditioning. The bathrooms and showers are in separate containers near our housing. The CHUs house one to three Soldiers based on

rank. Some days it can get cramped, but no one is complaining. It's a lot better than a tent. There is a lot to do, so most of the time in the CHU is spent sleeping.

The food is pretty good. In fact, I think it's better than what we ate in the states during our training. We have a main line, which is like home-cooked meals and a short order line, consisting of fast foods like burgers, pizza, hotdogs and tacos. Meals are supplemented by a salad bar and sandwich bar. Considering where we are, one doesn't hear many complaints.

Fox Battery is training the Iraqi Army in the fundamental areas to succeed as an effective domestic security force. These areas include weapons training, Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT), driving skills, leadership skills and those tactics and techniques that work in this region. When fully trained, the

Iraqi Army will be better able to assume the mission the Coalition Forces now perform.

We frequently get asked if we've seen any hostile action. All I can say is we are in a combat zone in Iraq. Every day we wake up prepared to do whatever it takes to get our mission accomplished. We're also asked if we're able to interact with Iraqi civilians. There are opportunities to interact with Iraqis; officials and ordinary citizens.

The Iraqis I have worked around are 100 percent for a free and democratic Iraq. They know sacrifices must be made to ensure freedom for future generations. They're smart people. They know all about U.S. history. Security was the greatest concern as the election approached.

Solid planning produced great results. There were no major incidents and we had 85 percent voter turn out in Fox Battery's AO. This was over 1.2 million voters. On Election Day, Iraqis danced in the streets and citizens proudly showed their ink-stained finger signifying they

had voted in Iraq's first free election.

Iraqis voted for a 275-seat National Assembly. This assembly will design a permanent government and write Iraq's Constitution. The next election is not scheduled until Oct. 15, 2005. Iraqis will vote to either accept or reject the constitution. If ratified, a final general election will happen on Dec. 15, 2005. These are milestones that we look forward to here as Soldiers.

Personally, I know that each one of us is proud of what we are doing. We will all have some interesting and unique stories to tell. For now, we are focusing on our mission. We take it one day at a time. And at the end of the day, we each give thanks in our own way, knowing that each day the government of Iraq and its security forces get stronger and better and that we have had a hand in that process.

North Dakota can be proud that its Soldiers have answered the call and are doing a great job.

Top Soldiers recognized during Soldier of the Year

By Pfc. Chris Erickson,
1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

A Grand Forks Soldier and an Elgin Soldier, won Soldier of the Year and NCO of the Year in the North Dakota Army National Guard's annual competition. During the competition, soldiers demonstrate their military knowledge and correct wear of the uniform before a board of senior NCOs, who then determine the smartest and sharpest Soldier. It is considered an honor to be nominated as a unit's candidate.



File photo
Spc. Matthew Voeller

The winners this year were Spc. Matthew Voeller as Soldier of the Year, and Sgt. 1st Class Delbert Weishaar as NCO of the Year. Voeller is a member of the 1-188th Air Defense Artillery. Weishaar is a member of the 164th Engineer Combat Battalion.

"It (going to the board) can be nerve-wracking, but the more boards you go to, the less stressful it gets," said Sgt. Philip Weiser, a member of the 1-188th ADA and last year's Soldier of the Year winner.

Soldiers who rank from private to specialist, E1-E4, compete for Soldier of the Year, and Soldiers who rank sergeant or higher (E5 and above) compete for NCO of the year.

The state winners will now advance to the Fifth Army Northwest competition in Gowen Field, Idaho, May 14-18.

The runners-up were Spc. Sarah Bergman, 142nd Engineer Combat Battalion, of Fargo, for Soldier of the Year, and Staff Sgt. Steven Groth, 34th Engineer Brigade, of Hawley, Minn., for NCO of the Year.

The other candidates for Soldier of the Year were Spc. Eric Jenson, 1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, of Fargo; Spc. Stephanie Reich, 1-112th Aviation, of Grand Forks; Spc. Adam Gehlhar, 141st Engineer Combat Battalion, of Fargo; Spc. Vanessa Imdieke, 957th Multi Role Brigade Company, of Bismarck; and Spc. Kristi Simmons, 136th Quartermaster Battalion, of Grand Forks. Candidates for NCO of the Year were: Staff Sgt. Brian Zins, 1-112th Aviation, of Bismarck; Sgt. Michael Cantlon, 1-188th Air Defense Artillery, of Bismarck; Sgt. Brad Geist, 142nd Engineer Combat Battalion, of Fargo; and Sgt. Jonathan Gourneau, 136th Quartermaster Battalion, of Saint John.

Change at the top

By Master Sgt. Tim Erhardt,
Joint Force Headquarters

The State Command Sergeant Major wears a beret to work like all Soldiers. But the duties of this job require the wearing of many "hats." Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Cripe assumed this position with its many roles Feb. 13 during a ceremony in Bismarck. Cripe replaces State Command Sgt. Maj. Lyle Brend who held the position since April 2000.

Cripe entered military service June 6, 1978, and was on active duty for four years serving a three-year tour in West Berlin. He has been a member of the National Guard for 21 years serving in numerous capacities from team leader to Command Sergeant Major of 68th Troop Command, Bismarck. Among his numerous awards are several Army Commendation and Army Achievement medals as well as two Meritorious Service Awards.

"The most challenging job I've had so far was being the Command Sergeant Major for the 1-112th Command Aviation Battalion," said Cripe. "The battalion reorganized three times over a five-year period, which placed a great stress factor on the Soldiers and leadership over the unknowns."

From Dickinson, Cripe has been a full-time employee of the National Guard since 1984. He and his wife Vaune have two children.

"When I entered the service, I was not sure what I wanted to do with my life at that point, so I enlisted in the U.S. Army to see if that is what I wanted to do with my life," said Cripe. "I stayed in because I enjoyed the military and felt an obligation to serve my country. Also I've enjoyed having an impact on Soldiers' lives."

The State Command Sergeant Major is the top enlisted Soldier in the North Dakota Army National Guard. Included in that job description is ensuring the achievement and maintenance of the readiness of the Army National Guard, to include enlisted morale, welfare, discipline, performance, training, awards and recognition. Additionally, the position is involved in recruiting, equal opportunity, promotions, and assignment and reassignment of Soldiers.

Serving full-time for three to four years, the State Command Sergeant Major is an essential member of the Adjutant General's staff, contributing advice and information on issues affecting enlisted Soldiers. To keep informed, the State Command Sergeant Major serves on a myriad of councils and committees. This Soldier is a member of the Joint Executive Council, Family Advi-

sory Council, State Safety Council, Army National Guard Fitness Committee, Installation Menu Board, and several other organizations that are concerned with the welfare and performance of Soldiers.

"I believe the greatest advantage to being in the North Dakota Army National Guard is the opportunity to train, mentor, develop and instill leadership traits with the enlisted ranks," said Cripe, "and to provide them with guidance in the management of their careers. It is also great to be part of such an outstanding group of professionals in all aspects of military life."

Cripe said that he has been blessed with some excellent mentors himself. "Brigadier General (retired) Harvey Haakenson, Colonels (retired) Terry Robinson, Greg Wilz, Colonels Jon Hanson, Dale Adams, Lieutenant Colonel Lanny Runck, Major (retired) Gary Wilz, Command Sergeants Major Lyle Brend, David Chicos, and John Grasl are to name a few that challenged me to the maximum," said Cripe. "I would have to say the single most important individual behind the scenes that was instrumental in my drive for excellence is my wife Vaune," said Cripe.

Cripe advises Soldiers to have trust, faith, and confidence in the leadership and the decisions that are made. "In most cases people are eager to criticize the decisions made, but in most cases they do not have all the background information that leadership does that assists us in our decision making process," said Cripe. He said that leadership makes decisions based on the entire formation of the North Dakota Army National Guard. "Give 100 percent everyday you put on the uniform and base your decisions on the Soldiers that you are responsible for," urges Cripe, "and keep your personal agendas out of your decisions and every Soldier can reach the top."

As he begins his new job, Cripe would like to see continued success in the Enlisted Promotion Management System, saying "strength maintenance needs to remain the number one priority, and all soldiers need to become engaged in it."



File photo
State Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Cripe

JAG Notes



National legislation and new issues impacting the military

By Capt. Brandi Sasse Russell,
Joint Force Headquarters

National legislation on military issues may have a greater impact on military members than current North Dakota military legislative proposals. The following bills and proposals represent current legislation and issues of importance to both National Guard and Reserve members at the national level.

*H.R. 558 and S. 337-The Guard and Reserve Readiness Act of 2005

This legislation would make an individual eligible for retired pay for military service at an earlier age. A member would be allowed to subtract one year from the retirement age of 60 for every two years of service completed after they have reached twenty years of service. For example, a member could retire at age 57 with 26 years of service. Minimum age requirements are between 53 and 60 and minimum years of service requirements are between 20 and 34. To be eligible, the member must have performed the last 6 years in an authorized category of military service and the member is not entitled to any other retirement pay from the armed forces.

This bill would also authorize a guard or reserve member without other health care coverage to enroll for self and family coverage under the TRICARE program as standard coverage.

*H.R. 97- Service members Anti-Predatory Lending Protection Act

This legislation prohibits a creditor from imposing an annual percentage rate greater than 36 percent with respect to extended consumer credit. The act sets forth terms for consumer credit extended to a service member or their dependant, including terms of interest with respect to the extension of such credit. The act would prohibit a creditor from automatically renewing, repaying, refinancing, or consolidating any consumer credit with the proceeds of other credit extended to a service member by the same creditor.

*H.R. 269- Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act of 2005

This legislation would authorize senior enlisted personnel to enroll in the Montgomery GI Bill program upon meeting certain requirements. The bill requires an individual's basic pay to be reduced, over an 18-month period until the total deduction is \$2700, which is the amount required to enroll in the Veterans Education Assistance Program.

*S. 2100 and H.R. 4188- Increase Reserve GI Bill Rates

This proposal addresses the disparity between the monthly rates of Active Duty and Reserve Montgomery GI Bill benefits. This bill would increase the Reserve Component's Montgomery GI Bill benefit, currently at 29

percent of the Active Duty rate, to bring the benefit back to the original 47 percent of the Active Duty rate.

*H.R. 968- Paid-Up SBP (Survivor Benefit Plan)

Under this legislation, the effective date for paid-up coverage under the Survivor Benefit Plan would change from 2008 to 2005 for retirees who reach age 70 and have paid SBP premiums for 30 years.

*S. 2486 - Veterans Improvement Act of 2004

This law would improve and update several VA education and housing programs. Significant changes to the VA home loan program would include an increase in the maximum loan amount to \$359,650, expanding eligibility for housing grants and waiving the VA funding fee, and reinstatement of the adjustable mortgage rate.

*Health Care Fee For 2.4 Million Veterans

Republican majorities of both the House and Senate have voted to impose a \$230 enrollment fee on 2.4 million veterans eligible for VA health care in order to decrease health care costs. Veterans affected are in priority categories 7 and 8, meaning they are neither poor nor suffering from service-connected disabilities.

*3.1 Percent Military Pay Raise

This proposal would increase basic pay for military members by 3.1 percent and 2.3 percent for Federal Civilian employees as part of the President's 2006 defense budget. For example, the 3.1 percent increase would raise basic pay for members in the lowest enlisted grade from \$12,000 in 2005 to \$15,000 next year, and for second Lt. or ensign from \$23,000 to \$28,000.

*Budget Proposal To Raise Prescription Prices For Veterans

This budget proposal would increase health care charges to veterans to include increasing co-payments from \$7 to \$15 for a month's supply of prescription drugs and charging a \$250

annual fee to use government health care. The proposal targets those veterans without service related disabilities and those that have higher incomes.

*H.R. 1779- Guardsman and Reservists Financial Relief Act

This legislation would allow military reservists or national guardsman called to active duty for at least 179 days or for an indefinite period, to make penalty free withdrawals from retirement plans.

*Request for Special Compensation for Purple Heart Recipients

Under this request, the Combat Military Medically Retired Veteran's Fairness Act of 2004 would authorize the payment of special compensation to military members retired due to disability with less than 20 years of active service who were awarded the Purple Heart.

*\$15,000 National Guard Bonus

In an effort to increase military strength, the Army National Guard requested congressional authority to offer \$15,000 bonuses to active duty Soldiers willing to join the Guard. Certain stipulations and requirements apply in order to receive the bonus.

*Death Pay Increase

This proposal provides an extra \$250,000 in government payments to families of U.S. troops killed in a war zone. The plan would allow for retroactive payments to surviving relatives of Soldiers since October 2001. The tax-free death gratuity now at \$12,420, would increase to \$100,000, and the government would also pay \$150,000 in life insurance for members.

Further information and up-to-date bill status regarding the above legislative proposals and issues can be found at www.military.com. Make sure you contact your legislator if you support or oppose any of the bills or proposals.

News that affects you

Chaplain's Corner



Bittersweet blessings

By Chaplain (MAJ) David L. Johnson,
68th Troop Command

It was foggy that morning in Colorado Springs but the plane still landed. The bay doors opened on the side of the plane and the crew of baggage handlers started hoisting all those duffels onto the truck. At the same time, a line of people took their places on the other side of the plane at the bottom of the stairs. And everyone was anxiously waiting for the doors to open.

It was "awesome" to see and be a part of. SOLDIERS HAD LANDED! WE WERE EXCITED! AFTER OVER A YEAR AWAY... THEY WERE FINALLY HOME!

But as you know, while we celebrate with these soldiers, others from our state are still well into their deployment. *We celebrate with those who have returned...yet we don't forget the service that has been done and continues to be done by our military men and women.* It is truly a "bittersweet" time.

With this in mind, please read the following scripture from God's Word. It is from the book of Luke, chapter 18, verse 1. It says, "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should **ALWAYS PRAY** and

never become discouraged." (Today's English Version)

Easier said than done right? We pray...yet we can...and we do get discouraged at times. But our promise is this and that is that our Lord does hear us when we pray and he does help. He may not answer or help in the way or the time that we think it should be. But our Lord is faithful...HE will see us through our struggles, our joys and all those in-between times.

So...our Lord encourages us to pray and I encourage you to do the same for our leaders, our world and all those in need. And as you pray, don't forget to...

Pray for...our military serving overseas and their families here at home in the struggles they face.

Pray for...the wounded as they recover from injuries sustained overseas.

Pray for...families whose loved ones have died in the war, that God's love and strength would sustain them each day.

Pray for...returned and returning military members and their families as they "transition" back into each others lives.

God be with you...as you pray for these and all needs.

Medical exercise



Photo by Pvt. Nantena Beller, 1-129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Practical training - Pvt. A.J. Barnum of the 814th Medical Detachment holds Pvt. Benjamin McConnell's head steady during training exercises. Sgt. Travis Hackey holds the spinal immobilization board steady while Sgt. Carl Altenburg rolls the practice victim onto it. The unit is training for the practical use of new equipment.

The Straight Arrow

Serving North Dakota's Army National Guard Community



What's inside

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Safety corner

By Capt. Kurt Fleck,
 Joint Force Headquarters

As our Soldiers return from deployments around the world, we can't show enough appreciation for what they have accomplished and endured during their course of deployment. For this reason, I would like to share some thoughts about "Operation Guardian Angel" (OGA) for all military families, employers, local community members and private business owners. OGA is a national campaign that encourages families, friends, neighborhoods and communities to remind service members to practice safety when they return home. These troops have been in a war zone for 12 months or longer and returning home will be a major adjustment. Driving, social interaction and everyday life will be much different. Some may have a tendency to overindulge. Others may experience difficulty in relationships. These factors place them at high risk for accidents and injuries. The objective of the program is to help protect service members from injury or accident, let them know that we are proud of them and that we care. To learn more, log onto <http://safety.army.mil>. For more information, contact the state safety office at 333-3013 or 333-3012.

A salute to service



Photo by Staff Sgt. Gary O. Bailey

Spc. Zacher and Spc. Habverson of the 141st Engineer Combat Battalion take a moment from their out-processing in Fort Carson, Colo., to admire the signs welcoming them home from Iraq. Families of the Soldiers made the posters with the Bismarck 141st Family Support Group.