

Vol. 1 Num. 4 2006



Essays

875TH ENGINEER BATTALION

A Holiday to remember

Support from home puts smiles on faces

- ◆ *Battalion troops get combat patch*
- ◆ *Home is where the heart is*
- ◆ *Flooded with good will*
- ◆ *A holiday letter from Maj. Gen. Chastain*



Essayons

Vol. 1; Num. 4, 2006

875th Engineer Battalion

Battalion Commander

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Command Sgt. Major

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On the cover: Patriotic ornaments brighten up a Christmas tree in the 875th Engineer Battalion's Personnel section. Christmas trees, letters from home, cards and decorations remind the Soldiers of the 875th that this is a special season, and that their families are thinking of them. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney.

Above: Spc. Alvin Lewis, Chaplain's assistant, shows his more elfish side while livening up the hallway at the battalion headquarters building at Camp Striker, Iraq. Despite being away from home during this holiday season, spirits remain high at the 875th. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney.

Please see special holiday message from Maj. Gen. Ronald Chastain, the adjutant general of Arkansas, on page 12.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



6 Proud to wear 411th Engineer Brigade Symbol

On December 7 & 8 members of the 875th Engineer Battalion were awarded the 411th patch for their right shoulder as a testament to the roll in the brigade's "plan, build and protect" mission



8 Home is where the heart is

This year the men and women of the 875th Engineer Battalion are celebrating the holidays in a far off land. But their hearts are always with their loved ones at home.



10 Deployed engineers flooded with good will

This year Soldiers of the Arkansas Army National Guard's 875th Engineer Battalion are spending the holidays far from home, but thanks to the U.S. Postal Service, home is only a package or letter away.

Questions, comments or submissions to the Essayons should be directed to Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney at christopher.durney@us.army.mil. All submissions will be cleared of OPSEC violations and edited to Associated Press standards. Photos, stories from home are welcome and encouraged. Please look for issues of the newsletter to be published about every three weeks.

DEPARTMENTS

Commander's Message:	4
From the Command Sgt. Major:	4
Company Corner:	5
Chaplain Message:	14



FROM THE TOP



Battalion Commander

Merry Christmas, Feliz Navedad, Happy Hanukkah, Holiday Greetings, I hope this newsletter finds everyone healthy, happy, and ready for the start of a new year. I realize that this Christmas will be a very different holiday for most of us. The soldiers of the battalion who are called to duty will be separated from our traditional families this year. However, we will be serving side by side with our squad, platoon, company and battalion families.

Our soldiers will always remember this December 25th. We will remember what we were doing, who we were missing, and how next year's celebration will be so much better. We will remember how, even though the dining facility did a tremendous job of making a holiday feast, the gravy isn't quite like Mom's, the pie just doesn't compare to Grandma's, and we miss Uncle Fred's stories. We will stand beside our brothers and sisters next to our nylon trees or an inflatable snowman singing Christmas carols and eating treats sent from home. We will conduct our missions according to our normal daily regiment and try our best to call home. We will look up in the sky around midnight on the 24th, searching for old Saint Nicholas. We will do the time conversation on our watches and wonder if he can make it with his reindeer half way around the world in eight-nine hours. We will email or call the kids back home telling them we saw St. Nick and he was heading their way. When we call home to get the run down of all the Christmas festivities we will be passed around on the phone to each member of the family in the house. We will repeat our story five, 10, maybe 15 times, but we don't mind, because it is great to hear everyone's voice.

And our families back home will be anxiously awaiting our return, pondering the joyous celebrations of Christmas 2007 when we will again be united. There will be an empty chair at the table. Our spouses, our parents will be repeatedly asked by distant relatives for an update on our status. There will be a tender moment after we hang up the phone, when there is a paused silence because everyone is thinking the same thing.

That simple thought will be whispered quietly and

held deep in our hearts. We will wish that everyone finds peace in the world and that all our soldiers return home safely very soon. In this season of miracles and joy may all your wishes come true. God bless the 875th Engineer Battalion, its family and friends.

Essayons – Ready and Willing!

Lt. Col. Patricia M. Anslow



Command Sergeant Major

We are working on three months now and all continues to be well. We thank all of you for your prayers and support. It is an opportunity to say Happy Holidays from the all the 875th Engineer Battalion. We continue to work toward improvement of the mission and the safety of our soldiers. I am so very proud of our soldiers who continue to perform their missions daily at the highest level.

Even though our soldiers will be away from their families and friends they understand the mission and the necessity for us being on guard the safety of our nation. We hope that you the community, families and neighbor continue to keep us in your prayers and thoughts. Thanks for all the care packages, telephone cards and letters both from far and near.

I do not know what the upcoming year will bring but I know without a shadow of doubt that my soldiers will be ready for the challenge. We continue to have great leadership from the Battalion, companies, platoons and squads.

So again thanks for all that you do for it does not go unnoticed or unappreciated. I leave these words to all that shall read this May God smile on each of you daily and may your days be sunny.

Our Motto is and shall always be READY AND WILLING!!!! HOOAH

Command Sgt. Maj. Billy Ward

131st Engineer Co.

It is hard to believe that it's within two weeks of Christmas. Everyone is doing well. There has been no shortage of work for the soldiers, but there have been opportunities for them to relax a little. The World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) was at Camp Victory to sign autographs and also to have some matches. Even though we are far away, many soldiers have been trying to make the Christmas spirit live on. There are an abundance of trees that are decorated, wreaths and lights that are hanging on doors, and even a sign that posts the number of shopping days left. Our mess hall has even gone all out with decorations.

The local Civil Military Aid Clinic (CMAC) visits are going very well. This is a great opportunity for soldiers to help the local public get what they need to make life better, and to see a side of Iraq that they do not get to see from inside a vehicle. If anyone would like to help to support our CMAC, the things that they need are soaps, lotions, medical supplies, clothes, shoes and even toys for the children. I also would like to congratulate Mrs. Jennifer and Spc. James Blagg on the birth of their baby boy.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone for the support that we have seen with all of the care packages, cards, and letters that have been sent. We also have received many letters from school children, which has been especially heartwarming. Thank You.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,

Capt. Jacob Roy



See Charlie Co. Page 15

Alpha Co.

As many of you know, the military is filled with customs, courtesies, and symbolism. Last week members of Alpha Company were presented the right shoulder sleeve insignia better known as the combat patch. This patch is very symbolic. It identifies soldiers that have been in combat and is something the soldier will wear on their uniforms for the rest of their military career. The men of Alpha Company are very proud of their combat patch and their service to our great nation.

Christmas and New Years is just around the corner. Everyone has been receiving packages, cards and other items from all over the United States. We have all received phone cards for the holidays so I would expect a phone call from your loved one during the holiday season. Thank you for the continued prayers and support we receive on a daily basis.

Happy Holidays & Essayons!!!

Capt. David Moore

HHC

Merry Christmas from Iraq! The temperature is dropping, and it's beginning to feel like Christmas! In the distance of our friends and families, we are bonding strongly with each other. I think it is harder on you back home in our absence! I know that many bonds amongst families have occurred that would never have happened without this deployment, and I hope you all get together to discuss your troubles and heart aches, and are able to lean on each other!

For Thanksgiving, WOW!!!! We received a lot of care packages! I can't explain to you how important it is to receive something from home! Most of the mail goes through my office, so I get to see the smiles and the joy that your packages bring! To each and everyone that had a hand in stuffing packages, I Joshua Simmons, Commander of the Great HHC, want to say thank you! It was awesome! Not a moment was in vain! It made a difference! Thank YOU!

To all of our loved ones, I pray peace for you all!

Capt. Joshua Simmons

COMPANY
CORNERY

Arkansas Engineer battalion earns combat patch

Proud to wear 411th Engineer Brigade symbol

Soldiers of the Arkansas Army National Guard's 875th Engineer Battalion now proudly wear the patch of the 411th Engineer Brigade on their right shoulder, a testament to their roll in the brigade's "plan, build and protect" mission.

Members of the battalion's A and C companies were awarded their 411th combat patches in a ceremony at Logistic Support Area Anaconda Dec. 7, 2006. Battalion Soldiers with the 131st Engineer Company and Headquarters, Headquarters Company, stationed at Camp Striker, received their patches December 8.

The combat patch is formally known in Army regulation as the Former Wartime Service Shoulder Sleeve Insignia. The tradition of wearing a patch indicating that a Soldier served as a member of a combat unit began with the 81st Infantry Division in World War I. Gen. John J. Pershing authorized the shoulder sleeve insignia in 1918.

At LSA Anaconda, Brig. Gen. Michael Silva, commander of the 411th Engineer Brigade, placed combat patches on Lt. Col. Patricia Anslow, 875th commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Billy Ward. Anslow and Ward then passed the honor down to the battalion staff, and the company commanders, who placed patches on each of their Soldiers right shoulders.

Members of the 875th wear the familiar "hog" patch of the Arkansas Army National Guard's 87th Troop Command on their left shoulder.

The 875th was mobilized in March, and underwent pre-deployment training at Fort McCoy, Wis., before deploying to the Iraq theatre of operations in late September. The battalion's route clearance and route sanitation missions are a critical part of the "protect" portion of the 411th's "plan, build and protect" motto, ensuring military mobility and the free flow of Iraqi commerce in the Baghdad area.





Previous Page: Showing off their new combat patches are Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Heady, Pvt. 1st Class Shaunta Johnson and Spc. Dennis McGinnis. Above: Staff Sgt. Dustin Stinson is congratulated by Capt. Jacob Roy, commander of the 131st Engineer Company after receiving the patch of the 411th Engineer Brigade. Left: Command Sgt. Maj. Billy Ward, “seats” the patch of the 411th Engineer Brigade on to the shoulder of 1st Lt. Terri Scroggins. Below: The patches of the 411th and the 875th.



Home is where the heart is

This year the men and women of the 875th Engineer Battalion are celebrating the holiday season in a far off land.

Although nearly 8,000 miles separate them from their families in Arkansas, Vermont and Indiana, these Soldiers' hearts will be there during the calm and anticipation of Christmas eve, and the commotion of Christmas day. They will be there in spirit as each present is unwrapped by gleeful children and loving family.

They will ring in the new year in places with names like Striker and Anaconda, in cities named Baghdad and Balad. But their hearts will be in places like Jonesboro, Paragould, Colchester and Indianapolis.

For most, it will be just another day in a critical mission -- one more day, out of 365, to provide stability and mobility to a country struggling to find freedom amid ruin.

Although the mission goes on every day, the Soldiers take time to remind themselves of what they are fighting for. Letters and packages from home always brighten their day, and modern conveniences such as the internet provide a nearly constant connection with home.

But one only need to walk the corridors at A and C companies, or the headquarters building where the 131st and Headquarters, Headquarters Company call home, to know that the folks back in the United States haven't forgotten them. On nearly every wall is evidence of love, support and concern in the form of cards, letters, crayon-colored messages, poems and decorations.

Candy, home-made cookies and treats abound, and evidence of the season can even be seen on the faces of the dedicated Soldiers.

Every day of this deployment, and especially this holiday season, these Soldiers' hearts are with their loved ones. And even though so many miles separate them, home will always be where their hearts rest. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the 875th.

Photos and story by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney

HOLIDAY SPECIAL



Left: Spc. Ronda Riley shows her Christmas spirit in the halls of the headquarters building at Camp Striker. The season has even brought out her silly side (inset). Above: Decorations, plushies and ornaments are a familiar site on desks and work areas throughout the battalion. Even the Grinch looks like he's in the holiday mood. Below: Among the most prized and valued decorations are cards and letters from home. Each one brings smiles to the men and women of the 875th, who are celebrating the holidays in Iraq this year.



This year Soldiers of the Arkansas Army National Guard's 875th Engineer Battalion are spending the holidays far from home, but thanks to the U.S. Postal Service, home is only a package or letter away.

Seven days a week, each of the battalion's mail clerks pick up and distribute, literally, mounds of cards, letters and packages to over 500 Soldiers serving in Baghdad and Balad. With the holiday season has come a marked increase in the amount of good will sent from supporters all over the United States.

"It's such a joy to see the stacks of boxes translated into smiles and laughter," says battalion chaplain Capt. Mark Golaway. "I don't think those at home realize that their thoughtfulness is so meaningful."

According to Golaway, care packages from various organizations and groups have come through his office, and are being distributed to troops spending Christmas and New Year's Day away from loved ones. "We've received boxes from the Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, the VFW and Family Readiness Groups in Arkansas, Vermont and Indiana, just to name a few," said Golaway. "The amount of

support and care we're receiving is astounding."

The 875th is about three months into a year-long deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Jonesboro, Ark., - based unit was mobilized in March, 2006, and includes troops from the Vermont Army National Guard's 131st Engineer Company, and the Indiana Army National Guard's 1313th Engineer Company.

"The level of support we see from home is always high, but lately it has been amazing," says Lt. Col. Patricia Anslow, battalion commander. "We are so very grateful to our families in Arkansas, Vermont and Indiana, and to all of the patriots back home who are thinking about us this year."

Among the stacks of care packages are boxes containing over 500 Christmas stockings, one for each 875th Soldier. The northeast Arkansas chapter of Soldier's Angels sent the special stockings, and, according to Angel member Debbie Johnson, they were put together by Girl and Cub Scout troops, a local soccer association and members of the Jonesboro community.

"Being away from friends and family is always difficult for Soldiers, but being gone during this special time of year is even more so," says Golaway.

"The care packages are helping to fill a void in our lives, and are keeping us connected with home."



Deployed engineers flooded with good will

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney

What do you want for Christmas?



*Sgt. David P. McElhaney
Paragould Arkansas.
"I would like to be home
with my family."*



*Spc. Joshua Beasley
Paragould Arkansas
"I would like a home
cooked meal."*



*Spc. Michael J. Goldinger
Paragould Arkansas
"I would like wrestling
videos."*



Above: *Spc. Nathan Lewis helps unload the mail truck with Sgt. Eric Jaeger in front of the battalion headquarters at Camp Striker, Iraq. **Above right:** Staff Sgt. Wendy Forbes and members of the 875th Engineer Battalion help unload a mound of packages from friends and family. **Right:** Spc. Alvin Lewis shows his holiday spirit while helping to stack packages from supports back home.*



*Sgt. 1st Class
Dwayne Somers,
Danville, Vermont
“A nice mountain bike.”*



*Sgt. 1st Class Curtis Stark
Vergennes, Vermont
“My retirement paperwork.”*



*Capt. Amy Bell
Heber Springs, Arkansas
“I want everyone to have a
safe deployment.”*



*Lt. Col. Patricia Anslow
North Little Rock,
Arkansas
“A Red Rider BB Gun.”*



15 December 2006

Dear Soldiers and Airmen:

I want to take the opportunity to wish the best to our Arkansas Guardsmen who are deployed during this holiday season. Deployments are challenging enough on our troops and their families, but the holiday separation makes it that much more difficult. I ask that our Soldiers and Airmen find comfort in knowing that the vital role they play in the war on terrorism allows our families to continue to live in peace, and will hopefully one day help other regions of the world enjoy the same.

It takes an extreme sacrifice to serve in today's military. Over 1800 of our state's men and women are deployed across the world this holiday season, and our thoughts are with you and your loved ones at home during this difficult time. On behalf of all of us who have the opportunity to enjoy this holiday season at home in peace, I offer my sincerest gratitude for your dedicated service.

Our hearts are with you through the holidays and the arrival of 2007. It promises to be a great year as it will soon bring the reunion of you and your loved ones as you complete your respective deployments. Until that return, I ask that you remain focused on the mission at hand, and take care of yourselves and each other, until we get you home safely.

I thank each of you for doing your part in these important endeavors. God bless each one of you and God bless America!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald S. Chastain".

Ronald S. Chastain
Major General
The Adjutant General



*Staff Sgt. James Ewald
Paragould, Arkansas
"A picture of my grandkids
opening their presents."*



*Spc. DeAngelo Scales
Jonesboro, Arkansas
"A date with Halle Berry."*

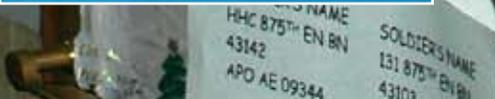
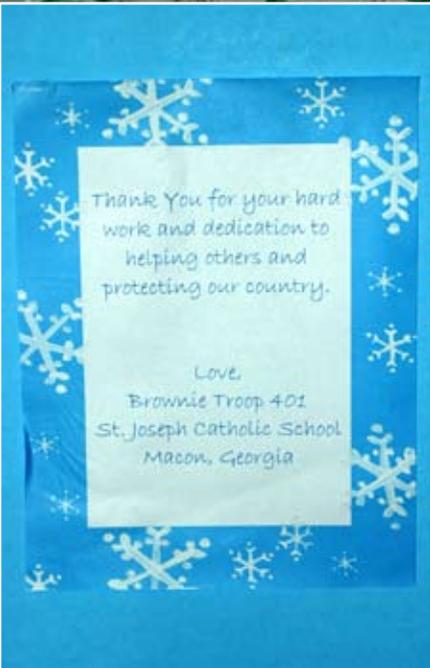


*Spc. Chris Anderson
Imboden, Arkansas
"A Yukon Denali."*



*Staff Sgt. James Duboise
Trumann, Arkansas
"To get through the holidays
with everyone safe."*

Happy Holidays from the 875th





For me as a Christian, it is a unique experience looking at Christmas from the other side of the world. In fact, we are located where some of the characters listed in the original Christmas story may have come from. The Wise Men who came to find the new king of Israel journeyed “from the East.” Archaeologists have discovered that the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and Persia, modern day Iraq and Iran, were peoples who worshipped the stars. The Wise Men were Satraps, or priests, of religions who worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, thus they followed a star to Bethlehem. The 875th is now living in a land those who found a babe in a manger may have traveled through over two thousand years ago.

However, Christians are not the only group who celebrate an event during this winter season. Almost every major religious group has a “holy day” or holiday in December with a variety of traditions and customs. Whether you celebrate Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanza, Eid Al-Adha, or another day, all traditions include a gift exchange. We love to give and receive gifts.

In each tradition, the reason we give gifts to each other is to commemorate the gifts given to us in the previous year by the Divine. As the year ends, and the seasons transition into death, the sap withdraws from the branches, leaves change color and fall, and the landscape becomes barren and cold. This removal of what we have enjoyed for the previous months makes us keenly aware of the gifts we have received everyday, but might not have noticed.

God blesses us daily with life. All that we need is provided to us by this incredible universe. But beyond those basic needs we are also richly blessed with family and friends. The gift of relationship is a gift which adds strength and meaning to our every moment. We choose to do things or to refrain from doing things based on our relationships with others. We are also blessed with intangible gifts. We know joy in the midst of trying, difficult times. We know peace in the midst of confusion and war. We know

love, despite knowing how difficult we sometimes are for others to love. All of these are gifts given by God. Thus, we can celebrate in the middle of this dark, cold season because our experience and our relationship with God have convinced us that there is always hope. Spring follows Winter. Joy follows sorrow. Peace endures strife. Love never fails.

May each of you find joy, peace, and love in your celebrations this year. Know that even though we are separated as families by many miles, we are with you at home in our hearts and minds as the gifts are exchanged and all of our hopes for the coming year are renewed. During this holiday season, take time to relish the gifts, and to recognize the love you have been given. Unwrap it all and bask in the glory of the Divine.

Blessings,

Chaplain (Capt.) Mark Golaway





Company Corner from page 5

HO! HO! HO! GREAT DAY TO BE IN CHARLIE COMPANY!!

Just want to wish everyone a MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR!! Hope you see some of that white stuff. Looks like we will have a tan Christmas here, but we will make the best of it.

The gifts and packages that you all have been sending have brightened up us all. It is amazing the amount of mail that comes to us everyday. The support that you send us has been a wonderful blessing to us all. I want to thank each of you for your support.

The one thing that you always hear is that it is Christmas no matter where you are. I can truly believe that now. The Christmas spirit is in the air! No, it is not truly Christmas without you, however we will make the best of it.

Everyone here is working hard and doing a great job! We continue to stay alert and the spirits of everyone remain high. It is a blessing to have your loved one with me to work with. Without a doubt they are the best!! You can stand tall and be proud of your loved one. As well as, we stand tall when we talk about the support of our families and community back home. There is NO OTHER unit that has the support that we do and everyone makes it clear that you are the BEST. We all miss you and hope you have a wonderful holiday season.

Have a Charlie of a CHRISTMAS,

Capt. Timothy P. Norman



Don't always believe the "grapevine"

**A friendly reminder
from your battalion
Public Affairs Specialist**

By Staff Sgt. Chris A. Durney

“Don't believe everything you hear” is an old axiom that takes on important relevance during a deployment. This simple phrase tells us that the “grapevine” is not the best place to get accurate information about loved ones serving overseas. But then again, one can't help tuning in when the vine begins to shake with something involving our deployed husband, wife, son or daughter.

For the most part, this usually benign form of communication passes on unsubstantiated rumors, or information gleaned from deployed sources. The problem comes when the rumor becomes fact, and it involves our worst fears.

Recently, it was reported through the grapevine that there had been a death, or deaths, of 875th Soldiers serving in Iraq. The horrible rumor circulated all of the way up to the 87th Troop Command -- the Arkansas Army National Guard brigade to which the 875th is normally attached. To put not too fine of a point on it, the information was absolutely false, and potentially harmful. This prompts a review of just how the process works.

First and foremost, it's important to understand that official information comes only through official channels. This is especially true when you're talking about the casualty notification process. In the event of a death or injury, family members are contacted and informed through an officially appointed Casualty Assistance Officer, and no one else.

Under the Defense Authorization Act of 2003,

there is a mandated 24 hour period between the notification of next of kin and the release of information to the public. Even then, only the Department of Defense is the official release authority of casualty information, which means that until the DoD puts it out, it's not necessarily true.

There have been instances of scam artists calling military families on the phone to “notify” them of a death. They usually ask for personal information as part of the “verification” process. Don't get hooked with this phishing scam! Hang up and call your Family Readiness Group. Remember, the military will *never* call you to verify information, or ask you over the phone or internet for personal information such as a Social Security number, banking data or credit card numbers. The Army and the National Guard take seriously the protection of your privacy.

As a public affairs professional in the Arkansas National Guard, I have stood next to grieving family members, and have seen the notification process in action. The Army takes great pains to be sensitive and caring, and to help the family through this difficult time. Under no circumstances would any Army personnel simply call on the phone, email notification or knowingly release information to the media before informing the family.

So what's the bottom line? Unless an officially appointed service member, in uniform, knocks on your door, don't believe what you hear through the grapevine. If you have questions, call the battalion rear detachment at (870) 910-7015.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF WAR



Spc. Robert Towne and Staff Sgt. Chris Weaver

Alpha Company, 4th Platoon

Meeting the challenges of war are Spc. Robert Towne and Staff Sgt. Chris Weaver of 4th Platoon, A Company, 875th Engineer Battalion. Towne, 26, is from Woodstock, Vt., and Weaver, also 26, is from Burlington, Vt. The photo was taken by Spc. Brian Cowen, and provided by Ms. Jennifer Towne. A Company is headquartered at LSA Anaconda near Balad, Iraq.