



The Mountain View

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An issue dedicated to soldiers' stories

Soldier descends from the fence on Sept. 11



Photo by Sgt. Rodney Foliente

Sgt. Bradley Rokicki is a paralegal specialist with 2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div. Rokicki signed up for the Army on Sept. 11 as a direct result of the terrorist attacks that occurred that day.

SGT. RODNEY FOLIENTE
2ND BCT, 4TH INF. DIV.



CAMP ECHO – Deciding to serve one’s country can be difficult. Most people weigh their options carefully and often sit on the fence for a while before making the decision.

For Sgt. Bradley Rokicki, currently

deployed to Iraq with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, ‘Warhorse Brigade,’ the events of Sept. 11 compelled him to descend from the fence and into the Army.

“It was Sept. 11, 2001. There was no significance at the time yet, but I decided to skip my second period class, business law, to cruise around Wal-Mart,” he said. “As I was pulling into

the parking lot, I heard over the radio that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center.”

He said the announcer was speculating that it was not an accident. Even without the facts, the thought of an attack on his country was enough to ignite his patriotism.

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Warhorse University brings education, opportunity to Soldiers

2ND COMBINED ARMS BN., 8TH INF REGT

CAMP ECHO, Iraq – Since its inception in January, the Camp Echo Education Center, also called ‘Warhorse University,’ has helped develop and mentor deployed Soldiers in their career progression.

“It’s a perfect opportunity to help Soldiers work towards their futures,” said Col. Butch Kievenaar, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division ‘Warhorse Brigade’ commander. “The Soldiers of the Warhorse Brigade work extremely hard maintaining their equipment, focusing on the commander’s intent and supporting the mission. I want the Soldiers of Warhorse to understand that continued education is an extremely important part of our Army’s way of life.”

One recent achievement for Warhorse University was the administration of a General Technical Score Improvement Course to Soldiers who wished to qualify for other military occupational specialties.

Sgt. Maj. Dale Veneklasen, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of 2nd Combined Arms Battalion, 8th Infantry

Regiment, assisted in administering the Armed Forces Classification pre-test, which is used to identify strengths and weaknesses of the Soldiers and build a baseline for training.

“It was a privilege supporting the outstanding Soldiers who volunteered to better themselves for their futures and the opportunities this great Army has for them,” said Veneklasen, an Estelline, S.D. resident. “Developing stronger Soldiers to become tomorrow’s solid leaders is the goal of all leaders in the Warhorse organization.”

The training focused on arithmetic reasoning, word knowledge and paragraph comprehension. Fifty-six Soldiers attended the 60-hour and participated in voluntary study halls. The GT scores of these Soldiers improved by an average of 12 points as a result of this training.

“I raised my score 20 points from 100 to 120,” said Sgt. Kai Waters, supply NCO with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Combined Arms Bn., 8th Inf. Regt., who took her test on March 17. “The course helped me to get to a point I needed to be at in my personal and professional development. By increasing my GT score, it opened up more doors of opportunity for me, both in the Army and for when I get out.”

The Chicago native said she plans to take the Alternate Flight Aptitude Selection Test next. She hopes to qualify for selection as a warrant officer helicopter pilot, something she has wanted to be for a while.

In addition to the GT Score Improvement Course, Warhorse Soldiers also enrolled in and completed 480 semester hours of undergraduate courses, 114 hours of graduate-level courses and enrolled and completed over 1,000 credits of correspondence courses. Iraqi volunteers also taught three basic Arabic language classes to 24 Soldiers and leaders, while an additional eight Soldiers also took a basic French language class. Other military education classes such as the Combat Lifesaver Course were also offered.

“We’ve processed over 100 Soldiers for tuition assistance,” said Sgt. 1st Class Nevada Smith, retention NCO for STB. “We give Soldiers the opportunity to do something constructive with their downtime. The education opportunities are an authentic way to show that we take care of our Soldiers.”

With the Brigade’s upcoming move to Basra, the intent is to establish a similar facility there, focusing on maintaining the same educational opportunities that are available on Camp Echo.



Photo by Command Sgt. Maj. Wade Myers

Sgt. Maj. Dale Veneklasen, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of operations for 2nd Combined Arms Bn., 8th Inf. Regt., 2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., teaches Warhorse Soldiers during a GT Score Improvement Course at the Education Center on Camp Echo recently.

THE Mountain View

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SOLDIER

From page 1

"The recruiting station was in the same strip mall as Wal-Mart, so I stopped the car and went into the recruiting station," the Wilmington, Ohio native continued. "It was a little hectic in there."

"When I got in there, the second plane had hit. Once everything settled down and all the recruiters were done huddling around the TV, I told them I wanted to join the Army and asked them if I could leave today," he added. "(A recruiter) looked at me funny and answered, 'No. you've got to graduate from high school first.'"

Rokicki said once he filled out some initial paperwork, the recruiter tried to give him some pamphlets on military service to take home. Rokicki, however, wasn't interested in those and filled out the rest of the enlistment paperwork that day.

Two days later, he went to his local Military Entrance Processing Station where he took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, a physical examination and his initial oath of enlistment.

"Two months after I graduated high school, I was in basic training at Fort Jackson, (S.C.)," said Rokicki.

He gave up his dreams of playing baseball and wrestling in college to begin his new career in the Army. Rokicki was always athletic and played sports avidly in high school, which resulted in many sports injuries, including partial color blindness. With those physical limitations, he was unable to select his desired military occupational specialty.

"My Grampappy was a Ranger at Normandy. I wanted to join the Army as a combat (Soldier), but wasn't allowed to because of my injuries and my minimal color vision," explained Rokicki.

"Since I was skipping business law (on Sept. 11), I decided to go with being a paralegal so I could make up for the class I skipped, which turns out to be a little bit longer than one hour," he said humorously.

Shortly after completing basic combat training and advanced individual training, Rokicki deployed to Iraq in 2003 with the 3rd Infantry Division.

"We were the tip of the spear for the push into Baghdad. I was a paralegal, but also part of a quick reactionary team," said Rokicki. "We would go on various missions and a lot of the times we would go ahead of the convoy to secure certain places and clear buildings and villages, making sure the area was safe for the convoys to pass through."

He deployed again to Iraq with 3rd Inf. Div. three months after coming home, working with an elections team assessing the security of approximately 14,000 polling sites for Iraq's first provincial elections. He also served in a personal security detachment.

Rokicki has been a noncommissioned officer since 2003, when he made corporal. He said the drill sergeants in basic training really impressed him with their discipline and competency and he wanted to become like them and earn his stripes.

"From the day I started in the Army, I wanted to be an NCO. Being a noncommissioned officer is important to me because I get to have an effect on my Soldiers every day. I try to make sure they have everything they need before I even start thinking of myself."

He is in Iraq once more, this time working strictly as a paralegal for the Warhorse Brigade's 2nd Combined Arms

Battalion. He said this deployment is harder than his first two were.

"Being deployed is (more) difficult now, since I do have kids," said Rokicki, who finds some solace in knowing 2-year-old Reznor and 8-month-old Wyatt recognize him when they see him on webcam. "My wife, Lindsay, and I have been married four years. She's strong enough but it's hard for two young boys to be without their father."

Even with the sacrifice of being away from his family, he has no regrets about joining the Army, he said. If anything, the Army has taught him how to be responsible for his family and care for them.

"It's definitely helped me to grow as a person and as a husband and father. Being an NCO has taught me that it's more important to take care of those around you before you take care of yourself," said Rokicki. His wife is also supportive of his decision to stay in the Army.

"The military is the greatest job security you can have," said Rokicki. "You're always going to get paid on time, you get great benefits for you and your family. If you want to stay in longer, you reenlist and get a bonus. You can't get all that anywhere else. Even if the economy was flourishing right now, I'd still be in the Army. It's the only place I want to be."

"I enjoy being part of something that is bigger than me. Just being able to fight for my country is an honor and volunteering for it is kind of a private pride," said Rokicki. "It's an honor to see the American flag and know you're a part of it. The best part of the Army is being able to lead Soldiers, the structure and just the pride itself in serving the greatest country on Earth."



Photo by Sgt. Rodney Foliente

Sgt. Bradly Rokicki, a paralegal specialist with 2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., laughs with a couple of Iraqi citizens at Camp Echo recently. The Wilmington, Ohio native is on his third deployment to Iraq.

Headline Round-up

World News:

President Obama plans to take his message of partnership to Latin America and the Caribbean this week, but he will face a group of leaders far less forgiving than their European counterparts were about the United States' central role in the global financial crisis. Over the past five years, the region has posted the fastest economic growth rates in the world, lifting millions of Latin Americans out of poverty. Now, those gains are threatened by a downturn. At the fifth Summit of the Americas, hosted by Trinidad and Tobago, Obama will encounter several Latin American leaders who have criticized the economic mix of free trade, privatization and public-debt reduction known as "the Washington consensus." Although Obama will signal the same change in tone and approach from the Bush administration that he delivered to Europe, his audience will be different in its politics and personality.

U.S. News:

WASHINGTON - A new report providing the most detailed portrait to date of the illegal immigrant population found that it is mostly made up of young families that are having children at a much faster rate than previously known. The study, released April 14 by the nonpartisan, Washington-based Pew Hispanic Center, also found that a disproportionate share of such children live in poverty and lack health insurance. Because any child born in the United States has a right to citizenship, the growing presence of these children is likely to complicate the debate over immigration policies aimed at their parents. The findings, which analyzed census data, also suggest that the impact of the unprecedented increase in illegal immigration over the past three decades will continue to be felt for years to come, even as the size of the illegal immigrant population appears to have leveled off since 2006 at about 10.4 million adults and 1.5 million foreign-born children. By contrast, the number of children born in the United States to illegal immigrants rose from 2.7 million in 2003 to 4 million in 2008.

Odd News:

PIQUA, Ohio - An Ohio woman is serving 60 days in jail because police said she ordered adult magazines in a neighbor's name during a feud. Police said the 47-year-old woman told authorities she wanted payback after being charged with a misdemeanor because of a complaint made by the other woman. The neighbor told police she was billed hundreds of dollars for magazines such as Playboy and Hustler. The woman pleaded no contest to felonious tampering with records and has been in jail since her March 16 conviction. Her husband said he can't believe she was sent to jail over the dispute. Her lawyers have asked a judge to suspend the rest of the sentence, noting it was her first felony conviction.

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For the answer to today's puzzle, go to:



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The Norris Roundhouse
Outer space exists because it's afraid to be on the same planet with Chuck Norris.

