Happy New Year! Another busy month behind us. We said goodbye to the 4th and 8th Engineer Battalions, the 10th Survey and Design Team, the 15th Explosive Hazards Team, the 49th Mine Dog Detachment many of our Air Force augmentees, and several members of our own brigade headquarters. It was sad to see them go, but great to know they were all home by Christmas. Job well done!

Like most units currently serving in Afghanistan, our task force is undergoing significant change. Our route clearance units will transition to other commands while we shift our focus to training the Afghan National Engineer Brigade and synchronizing theater-wide basing requirements. To better support those two missions, we will move from Bagram to Kabul and closely integrate with our higher headquarters.

They say that when you deploy, you should “expect the unexpected” - that has certainly proven true for us in our first three and a half months. Despite the challenges, our crew has handled the uncertainty and changes with the utmost professionalism and enthusiasm. I am exceptionally proud of everyone and look forward to our continued success in 2014!

I hope that everyone had a wonderful holiday! Special thanks to our families, friends and the 130th Engineer Battalion (Provisional) for your unrelenting support. SAPPERS IN!!

— COL Diana Holland

Brigade undergoes major changes in mission set

By 1st Lt. Laura B. Beebe
JTF Sapper Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — December proved to be an uncertain and dynamic month for the Theater Engineer Brigade.

Joint Task Force Sapper is transferring some of their current responsibilities as they gain others. The direct responsibility for the combat patrols and route clearance for example, will transfer completely to the regional commands in which the units operate. The brigade does however assume the responsibility of synchronizing all deconstruction efforts across the country of Afghanistan.

This is no easy task as many units prepare to leave theater after 12 years in country. This mission offers little certainty as it is unclear what the theater will look like.

To better accommodate this new responsibility, the brigade headquarters is in the process of moving to Northern Kabul where they will be co-located with higher headquarters, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.

(Continued on page 3)
Command Sergeant Major’s Corner

Aloha to our Ohana from Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan!

Happy New Year! We sincerely hope your holiday season was one to be remembered and thankful for. As you may know anything can change at a moment’s notice in Afghanistan as we continue our partnership with the Afghan Army; therefore some of our Soldiers were able to redeploy earlier than expected and make it home by the holidays. We are grateful for those of you that welcomed them back on such a short notice! Hopefully we didn’t disrupt too many plans, lives, or cause your Families any hardships.

Please continue to remain flexible as we continue to keep you informed to the best of our ability. Our Soldiers that returned home early did an outstanding job. And although it was difficult for the command team to decide which Soldiers to send home, we are always grateful for the opportunity to send Soldiers home.

Now that the New Year has begun it’s time to make or break those New Year’s resolutions and start the year off right. Valentine’s Day is right around the corner and before you know it, it will be Spring!

We are proud of each and every Soldier and family member of our great Task Force, especially during these times of change and uncertainty.

Those still deployed with the Brigade headquarters are currently in the process of relocating to North Kabul to be co-located with the U.S. Forces-Afghanistan headquarters. Our new address will be: USFOR-A / NKC “Name” 130th EN BDE / TF Sapper APO AE 09354-9998 Thank you for supporting your Soldier! Happy New Year and Mahalo! (“Thank you!”)

Sappers In, CSM John Etter

Engineer assets leave theater with detachment re-deployments

By U.S. Army 1st Lt. Laura B. Beebe
JTF Sapper Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – The Theater Engineer Brigade has been home to many different engineer assets since its establishment. Throughout the month of December, many of the specialty engineer assets were taken out of Afghanistan when the detachments with those particular missions redeployed from theater and were not replaced.

Early December saw the exit of the Survey and Design detachment and the Explosive Hazards Team from theater when the 10th and 15th Eng. Detachments cased their colors on Bagram Airfield.

Whatever remaining need for these abilities will now rest on the shoulders of those left in various staff positions within the Brigade.

The 49th Mine Dog Detachment also cased their colors this past month as they became the last mine dog unit in Afghanistan. The combat battalions have a small number of dog handlers within their formation to give them the ability to operate independently; however, they now must solely rely on those internal assets for all missions ahead of them.

These re-deployments come at a time when the U.S. is curtailing many troops serving in Af-

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Public Affairs Officer: 1LT Laura Beth Beebe laura.b.beebe@swa.army.mil

Facebook.com/TheaterEngineerBrigade
Email: laura.b.beebe@swa.army.mil

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JTF Sapper ready for new chapter in TEB history

(Continued from page 1)

Afghanistan (USFOR-A).

This creates a major move of personnel and equipment that must also be planned for and executed while assuming these new roles.

The brigade focus will shift to concentrate more on training the Afghan National Army’s National Engineer Brigade, general engineering construction and deconstruction, as well as synchronizing with III Corps engineer efforts and mission command.

The direct capabilities retained by the brigade will be all construction engineering units, a bridging company, Naval Mobile Construction Battalion as the Engineer Brigade Advise and Assist Team. The ability to centrally command and control all construction and deconstruction efforts across the country will increase the capability to plan for long term and contingency operations.

Increase the capability to plan for long term and contingency operations.

Keeping Roads Safe: One company’s responsibility in the West

By 1st Lt. Laura B. Beebe
JTF Sapper Public Affairs

SHINDAND, Afghanistan — The sun hasn’t come up yet to wake up the world, but engineers with the 576th Engineer Company are already moving around, conducting final checks on vehicles, prepping their gear and conducting rehearsals and back-briefs.

The sounds of military vehicles rumble in the open lot as Soldiers of 1st Platoon, 576th Eng. Co. are getting ready to again leave the gate of the Shindand military base. Over the sounds of the trucks, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant gather everyone together to go over their mission one last time and end by joining hands and saying a prayer over the mission ahead.

This mission is a daily routine for the Soldiers huddled together on the brisk morning. Combat engineers throughout Afghanistan are tasked to clear routes of all improvised explosive devices (IED), allowing other units the freedom of maneuver in the area.

The difference for the 576th Eng. Co. is the area they cover to ensure this maneuver capability. The “Spartans” are the only combat engineer company operating in Regional Command-West, which covers all of Western Afghanistan.

The imminent threat of IEDs on routes makes the patrol a critical task for continued movement of military units across the area, along Highway 1.

Prior to leaving the base, the platoon stops to test fire their crew served weapons and check all communication equipment. Then they slowly creep along on their way to their destination.

Throughout the mission, all Soldiers in the vehicles remain vigilant of their surroundings. They will pick up on any known enemy patterns, identifying indicators, and hazardous areas. Once they suspect a threat, they will interrogate the site to confirm or deny any emplacement. Combat engineers continue to conduct route clearance operations on all major routes throughout Afghanistan.

As the platoon nears the end of it’s mission, they are greeted by more life as the rest of the country wakes up and goes about their day.

No matter the hours, distance, or time spent on the road, the Soldiers of 576th Eng. Co. know that as long as troops need them cleared, they will execute their mission to clear those routes.

Soldiers work together in the early hours of the morning to prepare their vehicles prior to a mission.
ANA Engineer potential grows with new NEB footprint

By U.S. Army 1st Lt. Carly Schoenhof
Joint Task Force Sapper

CAMP GHAZI, Afghanistan – The layers of surging hot and cold air swirling from the propellers of a UH-60 could take your breath away; the first sign of excitement for a meeting with the Chief of the Afghan National Army (ANA) Engineers, Maj. Gen. Muslem.

Members from the Joint Task Force Sapper ANA Engineer Development Cell traveled last week to Camp Ghazi to discuss construction of a permanent home for the new National Engineer Brigade (NEB). The addition of the NEB to the ANA engineer force introduces specialty engineering tasks such as bridging and well drilling to the ANA. The construction of a permanent base serves as another step forward in the development of these new and advanced engineering capabilities.

JTF Sapper Soldiers and ANA key engineers arrived early to walk through the one of the buildings and take a general survey of the building’s condition as well as to inspect wiring, generators, and plumbing. The group quickly generated a list of projects to complete to create a proper home for the ANA engineers. After completing this hasty review of conditions, the group found itself in Muslem’s office.

This initial meeting focused on prioritization of the construction effort and laid a foundation for the development of a long term master plan for the base. In a finely decorated office, Canadian, French, Afghan and American leaders huddled around cups of chai tea and a construction map; this sight was indicative of the times deployed forces are currently in. Lt. Col. David Hurley, JTF Sapper Deputy Commander, expressed, “this is truly a multi-national effort.” The meeting proved successful as the Engineer Brigade Advise and Assist Team (EBAAT) identified a location for bridge training, a motor pool, a permanent bridge park, and a site for well-drilling equipment.

“Today we continued to see the growth of a strong and independent Afghan Corps of Engineers,” stated Capt. Chad Livingston, JTF Sapper ANA Engineer Development Cell OIC. “I am proud to play a role in supporting the construction of a proper home for such an important organization.” It was a repeated message during the discussions Dec. 10, that the ANA were eager to provide for themselves, that they had to take charge of this mission now. Hurley articulated by saying, “the Afghan engineers continue to make strides in the development of their engineering skills. They paved Afghan roads, made progress in the fight against IEDs and today have started to tackle the advanced engineer skill sets of well-drilling and military bridging.” Sustaining these advisory roles is a critical task as the ANSF takes responsibility as they are still developing on all levels. With a side of tea at these vital discussions with the Afghan Engineers, JTF Sapper will maintain these efforts and continue relationships as the ANA gains confidence and capability.
Seabees Reap Refreshing and Cost Efficient Results

By U.S. Navy BU2 Shalaketha Brown
Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 28

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN - During a time when being cost effective is important, Seabees with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 28 offer a money saving solution while deployed to Afghanistan.

Although other military units have tried different methods, the Seabees slogan “can do” rang true for them recently. A joint effort between NMCB 28 and their predecessors, NMCB 15, resulted in one of Afghanistan’s deepest water wells to date on the coalition military side of the Kabul International Airport.

This well is projected to support all water needs on the KAIA military base and is estimated to save NATO forces millions of dollars in the coming years.

The mission, first tasked to NMCB 15, was given the impromptu label of “impossible;” however, the Seabees don’t like using that word in their vocabulary. NMCB 15 worked diligently on the initial plans and broke ground for the construction. NMCB 28 followed behind and assumed responsibility of the project, making minor adjustments as they went until the project was completed.

The well, approximately 1280 feet in depth, is one of the deepest wells in Afghanistan. It has the capability to produce 61,000 gallons of water per day, at 42 gallons of water per minute. With temperatures in Afghanistan reaching incredible heights during the summer, the 55 degree potable water produced by the well will offer a refreshing solution.

The well has been constructed to house two delivery methods, or ports. One port has the capability to fill a 20,000 gallon water bladder that can then be transported by various vehicles. The second port is an upward spout designed to fill water trucks.

These ports are in a portable water pump house constructed by NMCB 28 Seabees. One of the concrete pads placed by the Seabees was created as a solution to environmental protection plans being implemented in the area.

The Seabees have shown through their determination and the intensive labor put into the project, they “can do” what others have said will not work.

Bayonet Soldiers stay on the move in Afghanistan

By U.S. Army 1st Lt. Alexandra Lostetter
FSC Executive Officer, TF Bayonet

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN – Soldiers of the 65th Engineer Battalion, stationed out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, did not wait long to make their mark in the Regional Command-South and Southwest, Afghanistan.

After being in country for less than two months, eight Soldiers have challenged themselves against other Soldiers, Airmen and Marines in a competitive race. At Camp Leatherneck, in Southwest Afghanistan, two Soldiers from the battalion, 1st Lt. Wade Robertson and 1st Lt. Alexandra Lostetter, completed a demanding 26.2 mile course for the deployed Marine Corps Marathon. Further east on Kandahar Airfield, six Soldiers, 1st Lt. Kyle Hanratty, 1st Lt. Andrew Hicks, 1st Lt. John Spies, 1st Lt. Shane Wright, Capt. Robert Davis and Capt. Christina Somnuk, completed the Army Five and Ten Miler races.

To these eight soldiers, the competition is more than just running to stay in shape or to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test. The stresses of being deployed can take a toll on Soldiers, which can come from fear in two directions according to Dr. Thomas Guthiel, a board-certified forensic psychiatrist and Navy veteran: one “from the military side as one awaits and enters a combat situation,” and the second he adds is “on a personal level, worries about family, kids and everyday life while deployed can add to the pressures faced by those in the military.”

These soldier-athletes demonstrate one avenue using these races as a way to release the stress of seven day work week. According to the Mayo Clinic, exercise has a direct stress-busting effect. When you run, your body releases a large amount of neurotransmitters called endorphins. These endorphins are a natural drug and painkiller.

Initially, endorphins are released so that your legs and muscles don’t hurt as much when you run. However, for those suffering from stress and anxiety, these endorphins can drastically improve your mood, making your mind and body feel genuinely good, as though nothing at all is wrong.

This effect is very real and is sometimes known as the “runner’s high.” As they began to regularly shed their daily tensions through movement and physical activity, these soldiers found that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism, can help them remain calm and clear in their everyday work.

“Running races here is a release for those who run them,” Davis, acknowledged after finishing the Army Ten Miler. “We are pretty wound up during the workweek and a good run really lets you relax and take on the rest of the day no problem. It also helps improve your mood and take your mind off of missing home and everyone back there. It is something that we really look forward to doing once or twice a month when the races come up. Preparing for the races also helps my mental attitude.”
EBAAT Trains Critical ANA NEB Engineers

By U.S. Navy SWC Barry Wood
Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 28

CAMP PHOENIX, Afghanistan — December 7th is historic day in our nation’s military history, when the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor in 1941. For those service members stationed in Hawaii, like the 14th Construction Management Team (CMT), it is all more real with Pearl Harbor in view most days.

Now, with the 14th CMT forward deployed to Afghanistan, Dec. 7, again became an important day for them. Dec. 7 marked the start of the Afghan National Engineer Brigade (NEB) training mission. The 14th CMT, from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii and Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Two Eight (NMCB 28), from Barksdale AFB, Louisiana, together create Task Force EBAAT (Engineering Brigade Advise and Assist Team).

To take advantage of every moment and use as much of it as training time, TF EBAAT took the training to the ANA Combined Fielding Center (CFC) and began construction training in conjunction with the shoot, move and communicate training the ANA soldiers were receiving at the time.

Seabees began teaching a two week basic carpentry, plumbing, and electrical. Going back to their own experiences with initial military training, they developed training platforms for each of the skills allowing for maximum interaction from the Afghan National Army (ANA) Soldiers, while remaining expeditionary in nature. The positive results have been getting notice from many stakeholders.

Lt. Col. Richard Collins, EBAAT Officer in Charge, described the early days, “After several months of planning and preparation, the basic vertical construction training provided to the SEK at the CFC marks the start of the NEB development mission for the Theater Engineer Brigade. I don’t know who was more excited about the training - the Afghan Soldiers who were receiving the training or the Seabees who were providing it.”

According to Master Sgt. Victor Jackson, “I’ve never seen anything like it, the level of enthusiasm, and the willingness to learn.”

Jackson, who is currently on his seventh combat deployment in support of Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, gained experience in training foreign forces during one of his previous deployments in Iraq.

The goals of this initial training were not only to begin the fundamental skills of construction, but also to develop the necessary instructional skills for Seabees doing a mission unlike any other in their history.

Petty Officer 3rd Class Jonathan Murray, a vertical construction advisor, said “The ANA have really embraced the training well beyond my expectations and just soak it up like a sponge.

They know this training will bring a better life to Afghanistan, and for me, that’s what I came here to do.”

Seabees are scheduled to continue training the National Engineering Brigade through fall 2014.

“I’ve never seen anything like it, the level of enthusiasm, and the willingness to learn”
Engineers continue efforts to enable base closures and transfers in Afghanistan

Story courtesy of Aiken Standard

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Platoons from the 124 Engineer Company, attached to the 489th Engineer Battalion and the 82nd Sustainment Brigade-U.S. Central Command Materiel Recovery Element, have been participating in multiple projects in and around Kandahar Air Field which helps with the complete closure of forward operating bases, combat outposts and camps throughout Afghanistan.

The projects include deconstruction efforts that return many bases to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as U.S. forces prepare to eventually redeploy from Afghanistan.

During one such recent project, the company’s first platoon teamed with engineers from the 1223rd Engineering Company, also attached to the 82nd Sustainment Brigade-U.S. Central Command Materiel Recovery Element, to deconstruct earth-filled barriers, move concrete T-wall barriers into caches, remove trash burn pits and close a test fire pit at outpost Luke throughout late November and early December. The deconstruction project was the platoon’s first mission that required them to live and operate in an austere environment with limited amenities, and the Soldiers said it was a worthwhile experience.

“This project was a great experience for me, being that this was one of our first projects on my first deployment,” said Augusta native Spc. Leonard Kitchens, a heavy equipment operator for 124th Engineering Company. “It was interesting to work with local nationals and to learn more about the way they live and how the U.S. is benefiting them.”

During another major project, the 2nd Platoon, 124th Engineering Company worked with soldiers and airmen from the Australian military and troops from the 1223rd Engineering Company to deconstruct and transfer Multi-National Base Tarin Kowt over the course of nearly six weeks, ending in mid-December.

One of the main focuses of the 3rd Platoon, 124th Engineering Company has been multiple projects around Kandahar Airfield. These projects included using cranes, excavators, loaders, tractor trailers, dump trucks and other heavy machinery to move storage containers to different areas, tear down buildings, and take down tents.

The 3rd Platoon troops also ensured unused materials were sorted so that they could be re-used in theater or returned to the U.S. military inventory. Many of the projects were completed with the help of the other companies in the 489th Engineering Battalion to include the 1223rd Engineering Company and the 760th Engineering Company.

“The through our efforts of deconstructing, we are investing in the Afghan economy and helping others, building trust and relationships with the Afghans,” said Staff Sgt. Marcus Harris, an engineer for 3rd Platoon, 124th Engineering Company, who hails from Aiken. “We really are making a difference.”

With more than two months in theater, the 124th Engineering Company will continue its ongoing base closure and transfer efforts until its redeployment sometime in 2014.
Rugged Soldiers Shave Heads to Support Cancer Patients

By 2nd Lt. Antonia Pearse
TF Rugged Public Affairs

Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan — Different types of cancer affects many people and their families every year. It is a hard fight, and for two Pennsylvania families this nightmare has become daily life.

Staff Sgt. Christopher Glass, an Operations Section Construction Supervisor for the 365th Engineer Battalion, 130th Eng. Brigade, recently found out that one of his relatives has cancer and that it has metastasized to his neck. In response, Glass declared that he would shave his head to support his family back home.

“I shaved my head because many cancer patients lose their hair from the chemotherapy treatments,” explained Glass. “I told him that if he was found to have a positive cancer test, I would shave my head in support of him.”

Since it is hard to find a person nowadays that has not been affected by cancer in some way, Glass asked a few of his peers if they would shave their heads with him. What he never expected, was the number of Soldiers that turned out to shave their heads alongside him in a show of support.

“I asked a few people to shave their heads with me and take a photograph to send back to him. Word spread throughout personnel in the battalion and the list continued to grow. It was all by word of mouth,” Glass said as a response to the unexpected turn-out.

Task Force Rugged Soldiers in other locations, such as Forward Operating Base Gamberi, decided to shave their heads as well when they heard the story. They also plan to take a picture to send to Glass’s family.

Glass remarked, “[This] shows that people really care about a serious situation and that they have a heart for a good cause. It also shows the respect that they have for me, and the respect that they have for the cause.”

While these Soldiers shaved their heads in support of one family, 1st Sgt. Richard Davis, Forward Support Company, 365th Eng. Bn., heard Pennsylvania native Delaney Brown’s story and how she is struggling this Christmas with leukemia.

Davis sprang into action and assisted in making a short video to support Brown and her family, as well to wish her a Merry Christmas. Once edited, the video was posted on Facebook. The attention the video has received on “Team Laney’s” (Brown’s) Facebook page is nothing short of inspiring. As of this news release, the video has been viewed by over 1,700 people.

Spc. Garrett McGrath, a Radio COMSEC Repairer, FSC, 365th Eng. Bn., also shaved his head in support of Glass’s family. When asked how he heard about it, McGrath replied, “During the filming of the video shout out to Brown, Glass put it out that his relative had cancer as well.” McGrath also went on to say that he shaved his head, “As a sign of support for Delaney Brown, Staff Sgt. Glass’s relative and anyone else battling cancer.”

The symbolism behind shaving the heads is to show... They are not alone in their fight

Cpl. Derek Counterman, a Fueler, FSC, 365th Eng. Bn., also shaved his head and explained, “One of my NCOs informed me about SSG Glass’s relative’s being diagnosed with cancer and that the battalion wanted to send a picture of us to support. It hit home because I have three family members with cancer. I shaved my head for them because it is the least I can do to show them they are not alone in their battles just as they support all of us here in Afghanistan.”

There are an estimated 1.7 million new cancer cases each year in the U.S.

The probability of an American developing cancer over their lifetime is one in two and a half.

Survival rates for most cancers have improved signifi-
behind long rail units, difficult land, because in and (Continued from page 2)

ghanistan. Although it is always difficult to lose high performing units, higher headquarters is looking to the remaining personnel in theater to cover gaps left and work in a more expeditionary environment.

The units that departed leave this ongoing conflict with a long list of accomplishments behind them. Col. Diana Holland, JTF Sapper Commander, said the brigade is only confident in their ability to continue the mission without them because they have always performed above and beyond expectations.

The Explosive Hazards Team has been responsible for the training and expertise on improvised explosive devices in theater. With Soldiers in both Bagram and Kandahar, the two major hubs in Afghanistan, they provided subject matter experts on the tactics, techniques and procedures seen by the enemies of Afghanistan.

The EHT tailored training for incoming Soldiers to the region where they would be primarily operating. This training included Blow In Place (BIP) courses and the Reception, Staging, Onward movement and Integration (RSOI) training.

Soldiers such as Sgt. Joshua Judson, with 15th EHT, also looked for new equipment and tools that could be used to better help the combat engineers on the ground defeat devices being used. The Survey and Design Team has had oversight and responsibility for all major surveying projects as well as creating the designs for projects throughout the Coalition Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan (CJOA-A).

Soldiers with the team have traveled across the country of Afghanistan to capture data, assist units and advise construction cells. The S&D team was closely linked with the brigade construction and engineering section (J7) to ensure coordination at all levels.

The Soldiers left in the J7 section now take on any future responsibility left by the S&D detachment for all future projects.

The Mine Dog Detachment has given support to hundreds of named operations and missions during their time in theater. They not only provided the expertise in dog handling techniques to the combat units, but also assisted the units whenever required.

With so few dog handlers in the Engineer Regiment, many of the handlers and the dogs have deployed numerous times with the same mission. Sgt. 1st Class David Richmond, the detachment NCOIC and kennel master, explained that being with the last dogs in theater was somewhat surreal. He had deployed numerous times with many of the same individuals, and now their job and requirement in country had come to an end.

Joint Task Force Sapper continues to plan and war-game the increasing requirement to consolidate the engineers across Afghanistan. The biggest hurdle remains however, to not take away assets to quickly leaving potentially devastating effects.

Lt. Col. Sebastian Pastor, JTF Sapper Chief of Staff is confident in the staff to not only complete this task, but to do it in the smartest approach feasible.
Community pulls together to give Troops quilts this winter

By Spc. Christian Soto & Capt. Mason Flemmer
455th Eng. Co., TF Bayonet

Southern Afghanistan — The Soldiers of the 455th Engineer Company received a most welcome gift from back home, 140 quilts handmade by students and community members from across the Pacific Northwest.

Capt. Mason Flemmer, an orchestra teacher at Central Valley High School and Greenacres Middle School in Spokane Valley, Washington, wanted his students to help make a difference. With the cold Afghan winter drawing near, the students came together with the local community support to help keep the soldiers warm and comfortable.

The massive undertaking was spearheaded by Mrs. Carolyn Schafer, CVHS Family and Consumer Sciences instructor. With help from the students of GMS, her Central Valley quilting class began making quilts for the Soldiers. What is normally an end of trimester project to fabricate a quilt to take home for themselves ultimately became a welcome assignment to donate their time and effort to the Soldiers of the 455th Eng. Co.

A retired math and science teacher from Bowdish Middle School, Mrs. Heidi French learned about the project and wanted to help too. French sewed four quilts herself and found more to donate. During a summer visit to the small north Spokane town of Metaline Falls with her husband she shared the news about the project with the people of Sweet Creek Creations quilting shop. The quilting shop produced and eagerly donated a quilt that same weekend.

On another visit to the shop two weeks later, 10 more handmade quilts were waiting for her. At the send off ceremony for the 455th she was approached and greeted by Cpl. Baker, a Soldier in the 455th and a former student of French. One of the quilts in particular was crafted specially for him and arrived with a very special personal note.

Local News KXLY-4, Good Morning Northwest, got word of the project and decided to broadcast live from the school at the packing party which began at 5 a.m. A total of 140 quilts were assembled by hand and packed for shipment.

Struggling to come up with the funds necessary to ship the care packages overseas, Schafer feared they would have to be sent in groups. Learning of this financial hurdle the group was encountering, a viewer stepped forward during the broadcast to donate $1,700 to ensure every last care package would make it to its intended destination. The viewer asked to remain anonymous and could only be identified as an Army Vietnam Veteran.

The quilts arrived just in time for the Holidays in care packages; stuffed full of assorted snacks and other essentials the Soldiers may want or need during their deployment. A few of the recipients were pleasantly surprised to find personal notes and items of affection from their loved ones back home included in the care packages.

One of the Soldiers to receive a handmade quilt was Spc. Christian Soto. Hailing from the Windy City, he and a fellow member of his home unit volunteered to deploy with the 455th to Afghanistan to clear routes of improvised explosive devices.

“The time and effort your own family and friends go through to put together care packages means so much because they too shoulder the burden of the deployment,” said Soto. “But to receive an unsolicited care package and one made with such love as this, is exceptionally touching. I can’t even begin to say how much this means to me.”

Indeed the burdens of the deployment were made that much more bearable thanks in large part to the enormous effort and gracious contributions from the friends, families, and communities back home. The 455th Eng. Co. will be forever thankful.
146 Wisconsin Soldiers return home from Afghanistan

Story by Cary Docter
Fox 6 News Milwaukee

WAUKESHA (WITI) — Soldiers from Pewaukee’s 372nd Engineer Company returned home on Christmas Eve — Tuesday, December 24th after a seven-month deployment to Afghanistan.

The engineers served in a variety of positions throughout Southern and Eastern Afghanistan training Afghan Army engineers, supporting Coalition forces, and working on special missions with Australian and Romanian Coalition Partners.

The 146 soldiers were honored at a “welcome home” ceremony at the Waukesha County Expo Center at 2 p.m., Dec. 24th. The Schmitz family knows what the perfect Christmas gift is! Having their loved one, Sgt. Joel Schmitz home just in time for Christmas!

“I can’t even express the emotion,” Samantha Schmitz said.

The 146 Wisconsin Soldiers return home from Afghanistan

Loved ones of Sgt. Schmitz were among those in the crowd as the soldiers were welcomed home on Tuesday.

“To have Joel home, safe and sound is the best Christmas present ever!” Sgt. Schmitz’ mother-in-law said.

Also on hand was Leah Hrbacek — awaiting her husband, who had never had a chance to hold his newborn son. In fact, her husband requested that no man hold the baby boy until he gets home to do it first.

“Grandpa, great-grandpa, uncles — everyone is waiting to hold him after today,” Hrbacek said.

For this group, getting their brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, mothers and fathers home just in time for Christmas was all they could have asked for.

“Honestly, this is all I wanted — to be home with family and friends,” a soldier told FOX6 News Tuesday.

8th Engineers return to Fort Hood in time for Christmas

Story by Madison Lozano
Killeen Daily Herald

WEST FORT HOOD — More than 125 soldiers with the 36th Engineer Brigade returned from Afghanistan in recent days, part of a flurry of homecomings for Fort Hood troops coming home early from the war-torn region.

Sunday evening, just before midnight, 63 soldiers of the 8th Forward Support Company and Headquarter and Headquarters Company, 8th Engineer Battalion, 36th Engineer Brigade, as well as about 15 1st Cavalry Division soldiers and several National Guardsmen entered the West Fort Hood gym to cheers from the gathered crowd. Another planeload of 36th Engineer soldiers had returned a few days earlier on Dec. 11th.

As midnight approached Sunday, families were beaming with anticipation.

“When he left, she was a baby,” said Brittany Lopez, lamenting the early milestones her husband, Capt. Harold Lopez, missed.

Now, 1-year-old Elliana has transitioned from crawling and standing to walking and talking in the seven months her father was gone.

The companies were expected to return early next year, but the Lopez family was delighted to be reunited before Christmas.

Brigade commander Col. Heath Roscoe was on-site to release the troops to eager families.

“Welcome home,” he said. “We missed you, and we’re proud of you.”

Harold Lopez kissed his baby daughter. It was the couple’s first deployment together, though Harold’s second. Both are from Texas, but were only stationed at Fort Hood for two months before the deployment.

“I had a good support system,” Brittany Lopez said, of her surrounding friends and family.

Though a poor internet connection made Skype and FaceTime impossible for the family, the USO helped Harold Lopez record DVDs of him reading to his daughter.

“She saw his face and heard his voice every day,” Brittany Lopez said. “She knows who her daddy is.”

In fact, Elliana’s first word was dada, which she babbled as she pointed at his image on their television screen.

The Lopezes will spend Christmas visiting family in San Antonio, but first, “I just want to get him home,” Brittany said.

The Headquarters and Headquarters Company commander, Capt. Darell Coffey, stood alongside his ecstatic wife, and was elated to be back on U.S. soil.

“We had an awesome team,...” Brittany Lopez said, as the trio headed home.

“... but we did great,” he said. “We had all positive remarks from the other units we were supporting. We did outstanding.”

The homecoming was one of several in the past few weeks as the U.S. footprint in Afghanistan continues to shrink.

There are about 44,000 American service members in the country, including roughly 6,000 from Fort Hood, III Corps and Fort Hood Command Sgt. Maj. Scott C. Schroeder said in an interview with the Herald.

American troop levels in Afghanistan should drop by another 10,000 service members over the next three months, he said.

Many of the local units were able to come home months ahead of schedule, making the holidays sweeter.

“It still doesn’t feel real,” Brittany Lopez said, as the trio headed home.
Brigade Headquarters & Headquarters Company (HHC)

Aloha Sapper families,

Your HHC Soldiers are doing great! The unit has been working hard, but your support from the home-front has made a memorable and joyous holiday season. Recently the company reflected on our hard work and came together for a holiday dinner and talent show.

The evening showcased the amazing talents of our Soldiers to include dancing, singing, and art. Special appreciation goes to Sgt. 1st Class Campbell, 1st Lt Schoenhof, and the countless others who made the night a blast!

The cohesion of our company, along with the well-wishes, support, and care packages from home have given us so much to be thankful for, and have made for a positive end to the year.

With the start of a 2014, the company will be moving to a new location in Kabul. Although we will be at a different base, our Soldiers will be doing their same jobs. The new location will allow our unit to better coordinate throughout Afghanistan and hopefully make even more of a beneficial impact!

One small advantage of the move is that your Soldiers will now have access to free wireless internet.

Lastly, this will be my final contribution to the Sapper Sentinel. I am currently conducting a change of command with Capt. Matt Jordan, and he will be the new HHC commander in January. Erika and I have been honored to serve with the 130th and too meet so many amazing men, women, and families. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all that you have done for us. Matt Jordan and his wife Michelle are 100% dedicated to the team and are ready to lead! As always, keep us in your thoughts and prayers for you are in ours. Combat Ready!

-Capt. Victor Gronenthal
Commander,

JTF Sapper Public Affairs: Media Guidelines for Soldiers

Military service is a great privilege and carries great responsibility—including a great responsibility to the American people, so we strive to reach out and connect with the public and tell them about our mission and our Soldiers. One way we do that is through the media. Soldiers are encouraged to speak with the media, mission permitting, and in the proper, professional, and honest way. Here’s some guidelines.

**Media Rules of Engagement**
- Maintain operations security (OPSEC)
- Be courteous and professional
- Check ID and press credentials. If proper credentials are not produced, refer them to your chain of command or your battalion unit public affairs representative
- You are authorized/encouraged to speak to credentialed media, mission permitting
- Any media on base must have an escort
- Know your rights: You don’t have to be interviewed or answer all questions. You may end the interview at any time
- Inform chain of command and PAO after any media encounter, including a summary of topics discussed, questions/answers, name of reporter and agency, and when it will print/broadcast

**OPSEC Guidelines**
- Don’t discuss or release information on:
  - Specific dates/times, numbers of troops, equipment, critical supplies, or casualties
  - Future or ongoing operations or projects including any postponed or cancelled
  - Security precautions on base/outposts
  - Details/imagery of base layout/security
  - Intel collection / ISR activities and TTPs
  - Special Ops units and activities
  - COMSEC / electronic countermeasures
  - Enemy TTPs and effectiveness, including targeting, direct/indirect fire, and IEDs
  - Specific RDE or Escalation of Force
  - Ongoing search and rescue operations
  - Any vital to troop safety / OPSEC

  *Off limits to media: Classified environments (TOCs, CPs, etc.), documents (orders, maps, reports, etc.), and displays (FBCB2, BFT, etc.)*

**Advice for Media Interviews**
- Be yourself. Be open, honest, and courteous
- Look professional. Be in the proper uniform
- Understand our mission and our message
- Think before you answer. Take your time
- Tell the truth. Never lie or intentionally mislead
- Stay in your lane, and speak at your level.

Discuss only what you personally know about and are responsible for. Don’t speak for others. Use “I” not “we” when stating an opinion
- Don’t comment on higher-level national policy
- Don’t speculate or answer ‘what if’ questions
- No jargon, acronyms, slang or technical terms
- Keep remarks brief, clear and concise
- Everything you say is “on the record.” If you don’t want it in the news, don’t say it or do it
- If you don’t know the answer to a question or can’t discuss it, say so. Don’t say “no comment”
- Inform chain of command and PAO afterward
There’s help when you need it...

Crisis Intervention Hotline

Warriors: Need someone to talk to, or have a buddy here who needs help?

The Crisis Intervention Hotline is staffed 24/7. If you need to talk to a counselor, you can reach them from any NIPR phone by dialing 1-1-1. You can also reach Crisis Counselors by Afghan Local National Phone by dialing 070-113-2000, (wait for tone) then 1-1-1. Also reach Crisis Counselors by NIPR email at OECRISISHOTLINE@afghan.swa.army.mil.

Remember, you aren’t alone!

About this Photo:
Seabees from NMCB28 check proper alignment of HESCO barriers according to the plans (Photo by U.S. Navy MC1 John Banfield)
Chaplain’s Closing, Maj. John Sedwick

“Honor the Fallen”

The topic for December’s Chaplain “Amen Corner” is “Honor the Fallen,” which comprises one-third of the Army Chaplain Corps’ principal missions — along with “Nurture the Living” and “Comfort the Wounded.”

Less than two weeks ago the members of Task Force Sapper and Task Force Coda shouldered the burden and performed the sacred responsibility of “Honor the Fallen” by celebrating the life of Petty Officer 1st Class James Smith, who passed away earlier this month at the military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany.

In addition to producing a memorial ceremony that endeavored to render appropriate honors to Petty Officer Smith’s extraordinary service to our nation as a Navy Seabee, the Religious Support Teams from Task Force Sapper and Task Force Coda also served to nurture the living and comfort the wounded — Smith’s shipmates who have been devastated by his death.

I never received the opportunity to meet Petty Officer Smith, but I spoke with one of his closest friends from Task Force Coda. This grief-stricken Navy Seabee recalled that Smith had challenged him to dedicate all of his future efforts to live by the Navy core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. This Seabee credits Smith with speaking into his life and positively impacting his future.

Petty Officer Smith’s untimely and unexpected death should encourage all of us to pursue positive relationships with a great sense of urgency — because we don’t know how much time God will grant us to live on this earth.

We should also strive to be like Petty Officer 1st Class James Smith and take every opportunity to speak into others’ lives and positively impact the futures of those around us.

We wish fair winds and following seas to Petty Officer 1st Class James Smith who made a difference in the lives of his family members and shipmates.

Remember to pause for a moment and give thanks to God for Petty Officer Smith who served our nation as a member of the U.S. Navy Reserve for more than 20 years.

We should also remember his family who will experience all future holidays without his physical presence.

May God bless you and your family members during this holiday season.

I give thanks to God for all of our military families (especially those who have loved ones serving in harm’s way) for giving your spouse, parent or child your “blessing” to serve.
Remembering our Fallen
JTF Sapper, Afghanistan

Petty Officer 1st Class James Smith
Our Mission: Deploy in support of the International Security Assistance Force and, at the invitation of the Government of Afghanistan, provide theater engineer support to include development of the Afghan National Army engineer force, ISAF troop construction, and route clearance, to help build a pathway to peace and prosperity for the people of Afghanistan.

Questions or comments? Email 1st Lt. Laura Beth Beebe Public Affairs Officer laura.b.beebe@swa.army.mil Facebook.com/TheaterEngineerBrigade