DEPT. OF THE ARMY
NCO OF THE YEAR

Operation
Toy Drop

Uganda
VETCAP
Positive Changes in Uganda

1st Lt. Lucas Wangerin, a physician assistant with Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa’s 411th Civil Affairs Battalion, discusses vaccinations with Ugandan animal and human health care workers during a One Health mission in the Kaabong district Aug. 19, 2013.

(Read more on Pg. 28)
One of the questions I’m frequently asked as I travel around to units is: What is the future of civil affairs and MISO? I don’t have a crystal ball, but I can tell you what we have done to try to ensure that the mission command structure of our civil affairs and MISO forces best supports the Army.

As many of you know, from 1990 to 2006, USACAPOC(A) was a multicomponent command assigned to US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC). That is, USACAPOC was the headquarters for not only the Army Reserve CA and PSYOP forces in the continental US, but for the active component (AC) CA and PSYOP forces as well. During that time, all CA and PSYOP forces were designated as special operations forces (SOF).

In 2006, all Army Reserve civil affairs and MISO forces were moved from USASOC to USARC and redesignated as conventional units. The active component CA and MISO units – then the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion and the 4th PSYOP Group – remained SOF and remained assigned to USASOC. Since 2006, the AC CA and MISO forces have both grown. The AC CA force now consists of the 85th CA Brigade, assigned to FORSCOM; and the 95th CA Brigade, assigned to USA- SOC. The MISO Command (MISOC) has been activated in USASOC and contains two AC MISO groups.

As for MISO, it looks increasingly likely that our two PSYOP groups, the 2nd and the 7th, will have some sort of command relationship with the MISOC. What that command relationship will be – i.e., whether they will be assigned, whether they will remain assigned to USARC and the MISOC will have operational control, or whether they will have some other command relationship – remains to be seen. In fact, planning for this move has begun. We are engaged with USARC, USASOC, and the MISOC to make sure that we get this right and don’t repeat previous mistakes.

CA, on the other hand, is more complicated, because there are more stakeholders. There have been a number of studies that have concluded that reuniting the CA force will solve a number of problems.

We have advocated for that course of action. Our position, currently, is that all CA units should be reunited under a single, two-star, multicomponent CA command. We have also stated publicly that we believe the new CA command should be assigned to USASOC. Although this is not the only feasible course of action, we believe that as long as the CA proponent, the US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, belongs to USASOC, then the CA operating force also should belong to USASOC. We also believe that reuniting the force under USASOC will allow the commander of the new CA command to serve as a general officer advocate for CA throughout the Army.

Again, I don’t have a crystal ball, and this is complicated stuff. I don’t know that the CA force will look any different in five years than it does today. But, until a decision is made one way or the other, we will continue to make sure that our voice is heard.
As we move forward in 2014, we need to do our part as both leaders and individual Soldiers to develop ourselves and our troops. This is more critical now than ever, as a smaller force needs to be more efficient. We can start by attending the appropriate level of professional military education for our rank and grade. Remember the Soldier’s Creed and NCO Creed: “trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills” and “I will strive to remain technically and tactically proficient.”

**The Soldier’s Creed:**

I am an American Soldier.
I am a warrior and a member of a team.
I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.
I will always place the mission first.
I will never accept defeat.
I will never quit.
I will never leave a fallen comrade.
I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.
I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.
I am an expert and I am a professional.
I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.
I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.
I am an American Soldier.

**The NCO Creed:**

No one is more professional than I. I am a noncommissioned officer, a leader of Soldiers. As a noncommissioned officer, I realize that I am a member of a time honored corps, which is known as “The Backbone of the Army”. I am proud of the Corps of noncommissioned officers and will at all times conduct myself so as to bring credit upon the Corps, the military service and my country regardless of the situation in which I find myself. I will not use my grade or position to attain pleasure, profit, or personal safety.

Competence is my watchword. My two basic responsibilities will always be uppermost in my mind—accomplishment of my mission and the welfare of my Soldiers. I will strive to remain technically and tactically proficient. I am aware of my role as a noncommissioned officer. I will fulfill my responsibilities inherent in that role. All Soldiers are entitled to outstanding leadership; I will provide that leadership. I know my Soldiers and I will always place their needs above my own. I will communicate consistently with my Soldiers and never leave them uninformed. I will be fair and impartial when recommending both rewards and punishment.

Officers of my unit will have maximum time to accomplish their duties; they will not have to accomplish mine. I will earn their respect and confidence as well as that of my Soldiers. I will be loyal to those with whom I serve; seniors, peers, and subordinates alike. I will exercise initiative by taking appropriate action in the absence of orders. I will not compromise my integrity, nor my moral courage. I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, noncommissioned officers, leaders!
The 350th Civil Affairs Command got a new hand on its rudder during its change of command ceremony here, Nov. 3, 2013. Brig. Gen. Mark McQueen passed the unit’s colors to Col. William Mason III in front of service members from the Army Reserve and the Navy in Chevalier Hall.

“By any measure, Brig. Gen. McQueen has been an enormously successful CACOM commander,” said Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs, Commanding General, U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), during his remarks at the ceremony.

Representatives from each of the command’s subordinate units, as well as leaders from the Pensacola Naval community and city government, attended the ceremony and reception.

McQueen took the opportunity to assure his successor that he was stepping into a positive situation. “I believe you’re embarking on the best years of your Army career,” he said to Mason, then enumerated a selection of achievements that highlighted the successes of each of the CACOM’s subordinate units.

Mason, who is scheduled for promotion to brigadier general in the spring of 2014, had brief remarks centered on what he considered vital with his career trajectory: his Family.

“I’m truly fortunate to have her by my side,” he said of his wife, Denise, as he addressed the assembled Soldiers and expressed his desire to stress support for Soldiers’ Families. “We may recruit Soldiers, but we retain Families.”

McQueen was promoted to major general in November. He is now in Germany, serving as the new Deputy Commanding General for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, United States Army Europe.
Fort Meade, Md.

Brig. Gen. Ed Burley (left), the outgoing Commanding General of the 352nd Civil Affairs Command, receives the command’s colors from Command Sgt. Maj. Earl Rocca (right), the 352nd CACOM command sergeant major, during the 352nd CACOM change of command ceremony held at Fort Meade, Md. Brig. Gen. Alan Stolte (middle) is the new Commanding General.

Preparation and hard work set the scene for a fall morning filled with activity at McGlachlin Parade Field as a Maryland civil affairs unit welcomed its new commander during a change of command ceremony Sunday.

With geese flying overhead at one point, the balmy morning gave way to swaying unit colors in the November breeze as Brig. Gen. Alan Stolte assumed command of the 352nd Civil Affairs Command from Brig. Gen. Ed Burley.

With tenured experience from 1994 to 2010 that includes involvement in operations in Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan, Stolte’s responsibilities increased as he served in key leadership roles beginning in the early 2000s.

In command or key leadership positions in civil affairs units from Maryland to New Jersey, Stolte made a significant mark in his career when he became deputy commanding general of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), which was his previous position before assuming command of the 352nd CACOM.

In his remarks during the ceremony, Stolte expressed sincere acknowledgment for his wife, Ermelinda, who was treated for a serious health issue over the past year.

He also focused on his new command.

“To the Soldiers of the 352nd CACOM, I am extremely honored to be your new commander,” Stolte said.

Now the 15th commanding general of the 352nd, Stolte gave much credit to the 352nd CACOM for answering the call of duty over the past 12 years.

“We still must remain vigilant,” Stolte said as he spoke on the ending of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Radical extremist networks are still rallying around the world, and the Middle East is still far from being stable, he said.

Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs, Commanding General of USACAPOC (A), gave high regard to both the outgoing and incoming commanders during his remarks.

“I often tell anyone who is willing to listen to me that being a CACOM commander is one the toughest one-star commands in the Army,” Jacobs said.

Burley handled both of his responsibilities masterfully — his position as former commander and a demanding civilian professional, said Jacobs.

There could be no one better to fill this role than Stolte, said Jacobs. Stolte worked directly for Jacobs in his previous position. With all his previous experience, no one understands the civil affairs mission better than Stolte, Jacobs said.

As the 352nd CACOM recently recognized the 10-year anniversary of the Iraq invasion during the unit’s dining out event in May, Burley said farewell to the command with a reminder of the important role that the Soldiers of the 352nd play.

“You are builders, healers, teachers and leaders, who bring order out of the chaos of conflict,” Burley said.
The weeks before Thanksgiving 2013 saw media and marketers devote attention to the rare coincidence of Thanksgiving Day with the first day of Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights that normally occurs sometime in December. Once several people had remarked on this calendar curiosity to me, I found myself thinking about what Thanksgiving and Hanukkah might actually have in common, even when they were not on the same day. After that, my mind wandered on to what these two holidays might have in common with Christmas.

Each of these holidays has a different story and commemorates a different main event. In celebrating Thanksgiving, we remember the Pilgrims of Massachusetts who, having suffered terrible hardships in their first year as colonists in the New World, still held a feast to thank God for having survived. On Hanukkah, Jews celebrate the miracle of God’s assistance in defeating the much larger forces of an enemy that was attempting to completely suppress the Jewish religion and way of life. At Christmas, Christians remember the birth of God’s son and celebrate the miraculous path to forgiveness and redemption that God’s gift opened to believers.

A common theme of these holidays, regardless of their differing stories, is people struggling with and overcoming major challenges. Thanksgiving describes people overcoming challenges to their physical survival. Hanukkah commemorates people struggling against tyranny that threatened their spiritual and, in some cases, physical existence. The promise of Christmas was, in part, deliverance for a people struggling under a repressive Roman occupation that had cost them their independence and deprived them of part of their homeland.

Overcoming challenges is a theme that fits nicely with the Soldiers and mission of our Command. All Soldiers are regularly expected and required to overcome spiritual, physical, and mental challenges, just as we are in USACAPOC. In addition, we, as part of our mission, are tasked with helping others facing certain types of challenges to overcome them. In doing this, we often experience the blessing of bringing light to the dark corners of people’s lives. We help them understand that life is worth the struggle, that challenges can be overcome. Since we sometimes forget this ourselves, it is worthwhile as we celebrate our holidays to recall that those who came before us struggled and overcame the challenges they faced. If they did, so can we.

In the New Year before us, most of us will face challenges. As we do, let us remember that struggle is part of life, that overcoming is possible, and that we can, in fact, experience light in life’s dark corners.
Not many people can say that they’ve been around since an organization’s inception, but Connie Almueti can. “I was the first Department of Army civilian employee hired in this command when it started in 1988, I loved it and it became part of me.”

Her civil career began in 1967 here with the XVIII Airborne Corps before moving to the United States Army Special Operations Command then ultimately finding her home with the United States Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), where she stayed for 25 years.

Almueti has the distinct honor of serving as the administrative support specialist to every commanding general USACAPOC(A) has ever had, seven in total, from 1988 until 2013.

She says her biggest accomplishment was being the first woman inducted into the Civil Affairs Hall of Fame and receiving a plaque from the Order of the Secretary of the Army with the General Winfield Scott Regimental Medallion.

During her retirement ceremony the current Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs said that her sage advice and counsel, tremendous organizational skills and ever-present cheerfulness were absolutely indispensable.

After a 45 year career, Almueti’s plans for retirement include taking the North Carolina Master Gardener’s Course, volunteering in the community and spending time with her grandchildren.

Connie Almueti, former administrative support specialist to the commanding general, is awarded the Meritorious Civilian Service Award by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jacobs. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Andy Yoshimura)
U.S. Army paratroopers parachute to the earth from a C-130 aircraft during the 16th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop, Dec. 7, 2013 at Sicily Drop Zone, Fort. Bragg, N.C. Operation Toy Drop is the largest combined airborne operation in the world, with nine allied nations participating. These paratroopers have donated toys that will be distributed to children’s homes and social service agencies in the local community. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Austin Berner, 982nd Combat Camera (Airborne)
Sixteen years ago, it took a small group of thoughtful people to inspire change and make an impact. Army Reserve Soldier Staff Sgt. Randy Oler, a civil affairs specialist, masterminded a tradition that has evolved this year to include units and Soldiers on Fort Bragg and nine foreign countries, bringing more toys and smiles to local underprivileged children.
The impact that Oler created is evident in the massive growth in the number of toys collected and paratroopers jumping each year. However, since the beginning, it has taken a committed team to continue the successful execution of Operation Toy Drop.

This will be the 13th year that Sgt. 1st Class Catherine Reese has been part of the Operation Toy Drop staff. As the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the toy collection and distribution detail, she is committed to ensuring her favorite part of the operation remains strong and continues to grow.

“I think it is easy to be on the toy detail, it’s the heart of the operation; to give toys to children who need them,” she said.

In 1998, Oler went step-by-step, handshake followed by handshake, and made multiple phone calls over eight months before the first Operation Toy Drop. It kicked off in partnership with German paratroopers and the Fort Bragg community. More than 550 toys were collected that year.

Each year since, Operation Toy Drop continued to expand in order to bring more smiles to children nation wide. Even after Oler’s passing in 2004, the holiday tradition he conspired continued on. It was renamed The Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop and is now the largest, combined airborne operation in the world. It is hosted by the Army Reserve’s United States Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne). This year, with the help of units on Fort Bragg, allied foreign soldiers and jumpmasters, 6,000 toys were collected.

Drop boxes were available at each Post Exchange on Fort Bragg for donations of new, unwrapped toys. Additionally, Soldiers based at Fort Bragg had the opportunity to donate a toy on lottery day, in hopes of earning an esteemed seat on an airborne operation with allied jumpmasters in order to earn foreign jump wings. Hundreds of Soldiers waited in line, but only 500 parachute slots were available. However, Soldiers still come back every year.

“I keep coming back just because I’ve been on the receiving end of open heartedness, big heartedness, and I love that I can provide that for someone else,” said Sgt. Jeremiah Jackson, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 319th Army Field Artillery Regiment.

This year was the second time Jackson has been first in line. He encouraged his comrades to participate this year and hopes that more units on Fort Bragg will become involved in the event.

“How many times a year do you get to say, yes, as an organization, we fully, fully, FULLY helped out? “ asked Jackson.

Willie Wellbrock calls out lottery ticket numbers during the 16th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop lottery, Dec. 6 at Pope Field, N.C. There were more than 500 parachutes up for the lottery. Hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), Operation Toy Drop is the largest combined airborne operation in the world. The donated toys will be distributed to children’s homes and social service in the local community. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)
(Top) Soldiers wait for their ticket number to be called at Green Ramp, Pope Field Dec. 6, 2013 on lottery day during the 16th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Operation Toy Drop. (Middle) A Soldier carries his donated toy. (Right) A toy donation box is filled to the top with toys for children in need. (U.S. Army photos by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)
More than 1,500 paratroopers donned their equipment on jump day. Although there were adverse weather conditions that delayed the planes from taking off, about half did continue on with the jump, earning their foreign jumpwings after successfully completing their airborne jump onto Sicily Drop Zone.

“It’s my first Operation Toy Drop and a good way to spend my Saturday,” said Staff Sgt. Michael Head, 82nd Airborne Division, as he packed his chute before walking off of the drop zone.

Head received Chile jumpwings in the past, but after being supervised by a Canadian jumpmaster, he looked forward to receiving his first set of Canadian jumpwings.

As C-130s flew overhead at Sicily Drop Zone, Families and friends gathered in the cold at the viewing area to watch their loved ones earn their foreign jumpwings and participate in the pinning ceremony.

In addition to the drop boxes and lottery day toy collections, USACAPOC(A) continued to collect toys during special operation forces week. The combined airborne operations and toy collections allowed more than 3,000 paratroopers to jump during Operation Toy Drop.

Despite the weather conditions this year and the delayed airborne operations, the spirit of the Soldiers’ giving held strong throughout the operation, and will be the reason why the 16th Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop will be another success.

“I’m sure that he’d (Randy Oler) be amazed at how it’s grown, and grown in number of toys collected,” said Reese.
A paratrooper packs up his parachute after successfully jumping from a C-130 during Operation Toy Drop, Dec. 7, 2013 on Sicily Drop Zone. Hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), the 16th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop is the largest combined airborne operation in the world, with nine allied countries participating. A paratrooper donated a new, unwrapped toy in exchange for a lottery ticket for the chance of jumping with allied jumpmasters, earning themselves foreign jumpwings. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)
“Randy was a gentle giant, his heart was so much larger than his six-foot-four inch frame,” smiled Master Sgt. Dwight Simon. “I can’t give just one memory that I cherish of him. He was just fun to be around.”

Simon, primary jumpmaster for the 16th Annual Randy Oler Operation Toy Drop, is one of the many friends of the event’s founder, Sgt. 1st Class Randy Oler, who speaks of Oler’s larger than life appearance and an even bigger heart.

“I knew Randy for about six years, four of which I worked with and for him. At one time he was the HHC (Headquarters and Headquarters Company) Training NCO (noncommissioned officer), Operations NCO and acting first sergeant all at the same time,” said Simon. “I’m not sure how he did it, but he was able to handle all three jobs at once. As a young jumpmaster back then, it was a pleasure to learn from him.”

Hosted by the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), Operation Toy Drop is the world’s largest combined airborne operation. The event gives the military the opportunity to help Families in need over the holiday season. Paratroopers bring an unwrapped toy to donate, and then get a chance to earn foreign jump wings from countries around the world.

Oler, a former Special Forces Soldier and Ranger, founded the operation in 1998 with the help and support of friends around Fort Bragg, and other military installations. The first event was small and collected few toys. In the years that followed, the operation grew, grossing more than 100,000 toy donations. This year, the event drew more than 4,000 paratroopers, 6,000 toys, and allied jumpmasters from nine countries.

“This operation is very large and at times it becomes difficult keeping up with all the moving pieces,” explained Simon. “We all work very long hours during Toy Drop but I can say I enjoy every moment of it.”

A 13-year veteran to Operation Toy Drop, Simon is the second man in charge of the whole event. The primary jumpmaster’s duties include taking care of the other jumpmasters as well as ensuring they are prepared for whichever aircraft used to conduct the airborne operation as safely as possible. This year, air operations included C-130 aircraft, UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter, CASA 212 aircraft and German C-160 aircrafts.

“Over the years I have really benefited from being a part of the jumpmaster team and training with our allies,” continued Simon. “I guess you can say I’m lucky to be the primary; this is my first year being primary for Operation Toy Drop. I’ve actually watched the role throughout the years, and actually had the chance to see Oler act as the primary. I got to learn a lot of things from him.”

“But the best year I had during Operation Toy Drop was the year I got the chance to deliver toys to the orphanages,” continued...
Simon. “I had watched Oler, through late nights and early mornings, deliver toys to children years ago, and it’s humbling to continue on the tradition.”

On April 20, 2004, Sgt. 1st Class Randall R. Oler suffered a heart attack while performing jumpmaster duties. After his death, the operation was dedicated to him.

“I was asked by one of our former commanders a few years ago what I thought Randy would think about the operation today,” reflected Simon. “At that time, I told him I didn't think Randy would have liked it because it had become so large. After that year’s operation was over I had a change of heart; I think Randy would love what Operation Toy Drop has become...as long as he could just be in the background and not take any of the credit. That’s just how he was.”

“It’s good to see how our allied jumpmasters conduct their airborne operations,” explained Simon. “Out of the (nine) countries we have, each one does something different. We show them how we do it and they show us how they do it, its good to get that experience.”

“I think Operation Toy Drop is in a good place right now,” continued Simon. “It provides a great multinational training opportunity for our jumpmasters and paratroopers at the same time giving back to the community that supports us.”

Toys donated through the event will be distributed to children’s homes and social service agencies around the local community.

“I've sort of started the tradition of getting a boy and girl’s bicycle for the last four years or so,” smiled Simon. “I mean, every kid wants a bike!”

Simon added that nothing gets better than combining the humanitarian aspect of Operation Toy Drop with airborne operations. Since visiting a family member at Fort Bragg in 1987, he knew he didn't want to be anything else but a paratrooper and he’s been doing just that for 20 years. Originally from Johnstown, Pa., Simon joined the military in 1989. When he isn't jumping out of airplanes, he is a civilian with the Department of the Army, also working for USACAPOC(A).

“I would like to thank everyone who played a part in the planning and execution Operation Toy Drop sixteen. Everyone’s hard work was very much appreciated and I look forward to working on Operation Toy Drop seventeen,” said Simon. “And as always, a special thanks to the ‘originals’ of Operation Toy Drop. The one's who were there with Randy from the start.”
I’m not the epitome of what ‘Army’ looks like. I’m four-foot-eleven inches. It’s almost entertaining to me,” said Maj. Dena DeLucia, a civil affairs officer with the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne).

“Everyone wants to envision a five-foot-ten, big, bronzing man standing at attention representing the Army. But really, any time you put the uniform on, you’re representing the military and anyone foolish enough to stand at attention for a good cause, it becomes more of an obligation to gain attention to those who serve and sacrifice.”

For the second year in a row, DeLucia volunteered to stand at attention for a total of ten hours, Sept. 7, 2013, raising $9,759 to help benefit Active Heroes, a charity who has helped over 1,900 military Families, veterans and wounded warriors with financial support, programs to combat post traumatic stress disorder and veteran suicide. Alongside a representative from the Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard, and the only female to participate ever, DeLucia was part of the reason the charity was able to raise $38,269 in support of a North Carolina endowment for military Families in need.

The Stand at Attention competition, held at the Triangle Towne Center in Raleigh, N.C., pitted different branches in the military against one another to see who could stand the longest and who could raise the most money in their branch’s namesake. For the third year, all branches lasted the full ten hours and it came down to which branch actually raised the most. All day, it was a race between Navy and Marines. This year’s North Carolina competition was in honor of Master at Arms Attention!

“THESE FOLKS STOOD AT ATTENTION FOR TEN HOURS...”

– MAJ. DENA DELUCIA
Second Class Philip Bordeaux, a Durham native, who was killed in a car accident just weeks prior to the competition.

“Last year, I just happened to be the first person to volunteer. This year, after learning about the honoring of Philip and finding out the Army volunteer had to back out last minute, I of course had to step in again,” explained DeLucia, who volunteered just days before the competition this year. “I had to be there for Cathy (Bordeaux’s mother).”

The Bordeaux Family was also surprised to find out that from now on the Stand Event in Raleigh, N.C. will continue to be named in honor of Philip as well as the North Carolina Endowment.

“First, I want to thank all the folks that came and stood to represent each branch of the military,” Cathy said in a Facebook post. “These folks stood at attention for ten hours to raise money for their fellow brothers and sisters in the military … In the end we raised over $38,000 for military Families, $8,000 over our goal. Philip would be so proud.”

As for preparing for such an event, DeLucia really didn’t need to do much.

“It’s all about the standards and discipline of the military,” she explained. “The Army ensures we are always prepared. Whether it’s standing at attention for ten hours, or getting ready for a combat convoy, we will always be ready.

“Active Heroes does a lot of good work for veterans, and I enjoy volunteering my time to any charity that helps out veterans,” she continued. “I’ve been deployed four times, I understand what it means to serve. Anyone who raises their right hand to defend our constitution, for whatever reason, they’re doing something that 99.9 percent of Americans don’t do. And that’s to serve. Everyone in the United States needs to thank them and if it’s by supporting a local veterans’ charity, I’m for it.”

Raleigh, N.C.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. SHARILYN WELLS
Story by Sgt. 1st Class Andy Yoshimura

U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Jason Manella, a civil affairs specialist assigned to the 445th Civil Affairs Command, competes in the 10-kilometer ruck march event of the 2013 Best Warrior Competition at Fort McCoy, Wis., June 26, 2013. Manella went on to win the Department of the Army Best Warrior Competition in October at Fort Lee, Va. (Photo illustration)
When Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond Chandler III announced Sgt. 1st Class Jason Manella, an Army Reserve civil affairs specialist from the 445th Civil Affairs Battalion, as the 2013 Department of the Army Noncommissioned Officer of the Year during the DA Best Warrior Competition here, Manella was frozen and in complete shock.

“I was hoping to come in second or third because I am with such great competitors that I had no confidence that I was beating them in any way. So when they called my name, it was such a surprise that it definitely took a minute to comprehend.”

“It is an honor and I want to represent other traumatic brain injury wounded warriors and speed them into recovery,” added Manella.

Many had called Manella the underdog, just recovering from TBI last year when his convoy hit an improvised explosive device in the Kandahar province of Afghanistan. During his rehab, he decided to pick up the Army Study Guide and numerous manuals to help with his therapy.

Some have also doubted that he could compete at the Department of the Army level, which only pushed Manella harder.

“I talked to a few Soldiers when I was overseas and told them that I wanted to be the U.S. Army Reserve Command Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. They didn’t believe me, and that disbelief drove me. That was a year and a half ago, and here I am today.”

“Here, I feel as an Army Reserve Soldier that automatically they assume I am the underdog,” said Manella. “They don’t feel that since we only work one weekend a month and two weeks out of the year that I would be the Soldier that really stands out.”

For Manella, the two weeks out of the year is just the minimum. He feels that there are many opportunities for Soldiers to better themselves, such as utilizing the Noncommissioned Officer Education System and even volunteer for missions.

“I feel that it was advantageous to me because of my multiple deployments by having my boots on the ground,” he said.

In 2006, Manella competed as a junior enlisted Soldier finishing runner-up as the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) Soldier of the Year. Seven years later, he missed competing at his battalion’s Best Warrior competition due to a deployment and was given an exception to compete at the 351st Civil Affairs Command Best Warrior Competition earlier this spring at Fort Hunter Liggett, Calif.

“The timing was perfect because I was not going to school at the time and I just got back from deployment,” said Manella.

There, Manella went on to win and competed against the top Soldiers during the USACAPOC(A) Best Warrior Competition at Fort Bragg, N.C. in May.

As the USACAPOC(A) NCO of the Year, he represented his unit and command at the USARC Best Warrior Competition in Fort McCoy, Wis. where once again finished first, landing him here at the Army level.

“This competition is much more intense than I expected. It is much more rapid getting through many events and it is definitely challenging and fun,” said Manella.

Day one was challenging for most of the 23 competitors who took part in a grueling 18-mile, 16-station evaluation course. The competitors were graded and timed in HMMWV tire changing, weapons assembly and qualification on the M9 Pistol, M4 Carbine Rifle and the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon, reaction in a chemical environment, village engagement, map reading and overlay, a grueling four-mile 40-pound ammunition can carry, SINCGARS assembly and communication check, react to an ambush, clearing casualty during an IED attack, and performing first aid.

“I felt like I was able to take various events from the previous competition and after each competition I learned where I was weak at and capitalized that training to the next competition,” said Manella.

“I want to represent other traumatic brain injury wounded warriors.”

-- Sgt. 1st Class Jason Manella
Manella is the first Army Reserve Soldier to win the DA Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. In 2008, Spc. David Obray, also an Army Reserve Soldier, was the DA Soldier of the Year.

“I thought as an Army Reserve Soldier, it might be harder to compete with the other active duty guys but they have been very receptive and we talk about overseas stories,” said Manella. “We are all NCOs and we are all getting along very well. I feel that it doesn’t hinder me at all, as far as the events themselves. There is some sort of expectation that Army Reserve Soldiers are out of shape, ill-prepared, not as competent as active duty Soldiers. We train just as hard to the same standards, we just don’t do it as often.”

What drove Manella over the edge when competing against his peers was his tenacity. He was able to grasp and understand each task at all of the competition that he competed in.

“The whole competition is about finding a well-rounded Soldier. So I may not have been the best in each event but I felt that I did all of the tasks pretty well.”

Manella, a Fremont, Calif. native, will now spend the next few months doing television interviews, and attending events preparing for the 351st Civil Affairs Command’s 2014 Best Warrior Competition, not as a competitor but as an adviser and sponsor.

“I want to take this knowledge and experience back to my unit. I had a great time. This is definitely unique in my military career and I will cherish this moment forever. I can take this experience back and train other Soldiers to do Best Warrior. This has helped me out personally as a leader,” added Manella. Quitting was never in Manella’s mind as an underweight private in basic training, as an injured Soldier in Afghanistan, and as a noncommissioned officer competing in four Best Warrior Competitions, paving his way as the Army Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.
Sgt. 1st Class Jason Manella, of the 445th Civil Affairs Battalion, crawls through an obstacle as part of the Department of the Army Best Warrior Competition on Fort Lee, Va., Nov. 20, 2013. Manella, along with 11 other Soldiers, were evaluated in numerous tasks and competed for the title of Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Andy Yoshimura)
Army Reserve Soldiers from the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion in Buckeye, Ariz., came to Phoenix on Sept. 27, 2013, to volunteer their time and give the children of Maryvale Preparatory Academy something they have never had before: a playground.

Thanks to Kaboom, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to give children everywhere a place to play, Maryvale was given the pieces to build a beautiful new playground. However, they still needed to put those pieces together.

Many parents came out to help assemble the playground, including Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Cook, Charlie Company, 492nd CA Bn., training noncommissioned officer-in-charge.

“It meant a lot having support from the 492nd,” said Cook. “I was able to get my leave approved on short notice so I could come out here and be a part of this.”

Cook was also able to get helping hands from his own unit, including Master Sgt. Scott Fortune, operations noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 492nd CA Bn.

“I came because Sgt. 1st Class Cook mentioned they were doing a big project to build the kids a playground. They haven’t ever had one before, so I came out to lend a hand,” said Fortune. “The experience has been great. It’s amazing to see all these people working together.” With more than 250 volunteers putting in 1,200 plus man-hours the playground was built in less than six hours.

“I’m speechless when I look at what we have given to these children,” said Mac Esau, headmaster of the Maryvale Preparatory Academy. “We have given them the gift of play.”

At the end of the school day, the children got to see the playground for the first time and were eager to play on it. However, because the cement needed 36 hours to dry, they had to endure a long weekend before being able to play. They showed their appreciation by screaming thank you, in unison, to all the volunteers.
Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Cook helps remove the bubble wrap off a piece of the new playground at the Maryvale Preparatory Academy in Phoenix on September 27, 2013. Cook is a training noncommissioned officer and is one of the Soldiers with the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion, who joined more than 250 volunteers to build the new playground. (Photo illustration)
Bravo Company of the 412th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne), maximized community resources by using a local theater company to provide role players for its civil military operations training.

Conflict resolution was the primary training objective.

“It’s a win-win situation,” said Capt. Patrick Seaman, commander of Bravo Company. “The theater actors get to act, and our Soldiers receive valuable interaction and training.”

Seaman organized the training and decided to use local theater talent to role play Afghan citizens, primarily shopkeepers, to add realism to the scenarios.

During the training, Soldiers were led into multiple communities that had different shopkeepers dealing with the same problems.

“We teach them the five W’s of key leader engagements,” said Staff Sgt. Alexis Feliciano, training non-commissioned officer for Bravo Company. “After our Soldiers learn to ask the right questions...who, what, when, where and why...they learn to look for clues to solve problems.”

“I learned what questions to ask,” said Spc. Andrew Miller. “I learned to look for telltale signs too.”

The Star Academy role players subtly placed small objects in the scenarios for the Soldiers to notice.

“A guy with an ink pen in his pocket knows how to read,” said Feliciano. “Also, he can write, so you have to watch him to make sure he is not gathering and writing down intelligence that can be used against us.”

Seaman prepared the role players to be enigmatic and build guesswork and problem solving into their skits.

“This training helped me with piecing together puzzles about when people bring problems to the civil affairs teams,” said Spc. Jacob Beatty.

Soldiers who have not deployed conducted realistic interaction with local shopkeepers, a task that experienced civil affairs Soldiers are familiar with. The experienced Soldiers mentored and monitored the inexperienced.

Soldiers channeled their conflict resolution queries directly into the performers’ strength: acting.

“We are the complaint department,” said Susan Laney, the artistic director for Star Academy. “We navigate Soldiers through the interview process, where we play concerned Afghan citizens with serious issues we need resolved.”

Hours of preparation and rehearsal made the training event worthwhile. The actors acted out their scenes with intense emotion, and the Soldiers reacted and performed valuable civil affairs engagements.
Pfc. Rachel Kington, of the 412th Civil Affairs Battalion, comforts two women, a mother and daughter, who came to see the civil affairs team September 7, 2013 in Scioto Audubon Metro Park, Columbus, Ohio.

412th Civil Affairs Battalion Soldiers interview a local shopkeeper who claims to have information about a member of the insurgency September 7, 2013 in Scioto Audubon Metro Park, Columbus, Ohio.

“I learned what questions to ask. I learned to look for telltale signs too.”

— Spc. Andrew Miller
Positive Changes in Uganda

Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa eradicates diseases

Uganda, the Pearl of Africa, is a lush, green, mountainous country home to 34.1 million people. The people who live there share the land with mountain gorillas, zebras, rhinos, other wildlife and domesticated animals.

However, cohabitating with this wide array of animals comes at a cost when deadly diseases can spread from animals to humans or vice versa.


These missions brought Ugandan health professionals together to work on eradicating the spread of preventable zoonotic diseases, animal diseases such as rabies or psittacosis, which can be transmitted to humans. Field experts shared knowledge and experience with one another to help their communities reduce the outbreak of these diseases in both people and wildlife.

"In (Kaabong) and other areas of Uganda, we see a rise in particularly dangerous diseases that could potentially be pandemics in the future," said U.S. Army Capt. Gilbert Barrett, 443rd Civil Affairs Battalion One Health team leader. "One of the goals of One Health is to eradicate or control these types of diseases as quickly as possible."

Additional areas discussed were nutrition, sanitation, family planning, first aid, environment conservation, and sources of infection.

Those in attendance included animal and human health professionals, students, village health team members, and representatives from the African Field Epidemiology Network, wildlife ranges, and Uganda’s People Defense Force.

"The One Health concept helps spread disease awareness and prevention on relevant topics that could erupt within the local communities," said Maj. (Dr.) Godwin Bagashe Bagyenzi, a UPDF zoonotic diseases leader who took part in the Kabale One Health mission in September.

He said the benefits of these meetings stem from face–to–face dissemination of research and best practices, the most effective way of sharing this essential information in the local context.

"(The) One Health concept is (useful) here in Uganda because it pulls all (health) professionals together ... in a joint effort to train and share information about ... issues that are affecting our communities," Godwin said.

Along with the classroom discussions, members also visited community farms, hospitals, and local villages to provide additional training to people living in those communities.

Story and photos by U.S. Tech Sgt. Chad Thompson, and U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Chad Warren
areas. This offered the One Health students the opportunity to share what they learned.

"We believe the members who have been trained are going to serve as change agents in their communities," said Herbert Kazoora, an AFENET epidemiologist who took part in the Kaabong One Health mission in August. "They are going to educate the communities where they come from and emphasize disease prevention and control strategies that we have taught them in this course."

At the conclusion of the One Health event in Kaabong, District Chief Administrative Officer Charles Uma expressed his gratitude for the U.S. Mission Uganda’s work and emphasized the importance of nations helping one another.

"When Ebola struck in the year 2000, it nearly divided us as a country. It was the (Center for Disease Control) from America who rescued us," he said gratefully. "We can’t afford to remain as islands, but must come together as one."

Healthy citizens are the cornerstone of a strong military, and CJTF–HOA is committed to ensuring the lasting health of Uganda, a key partner in the African Union Mission in East Africa.

Sgt. Daniel Sanders (center) and Sgt. 1st Class Tannia Dillon demonstrate how to sling a broken arm during a One Health mission in Kabale, Uganda, Sept. 11, 2013. Sanders is a health care specialist with the 443rd Civil Affairs Battalion and Dillon is a medic with the 1st Infantry Division.
Coping with an Active Shooter

Evacuate  Hide  Take Action
Information

Call 911 (or other local emergency number) when it is safe to do so.

You should provide the following information to the Police or the 911 Operator:

- Location of the shooter
- Number of shooters
- Physical description of shooters
- Number and type of weapons the shooter have
- Number of possible victims

Coping with an Active Shooter

- Be aware of your surroundings and possible dangers
- Take note of the nearest exists in any facility you visit
- If you are in an office at the time of an attack, stay there and secure the door
- Only as a last resort should you attempt to take action against the shooter
In its 16th year, Operation Toy Drop is well established as being the largest combined airborne operation joining jump masters from around the world and toys donated by paratroopers for a good cause during the holiday season, yet many aren’t aware of what goes on behind the scenes to pull off such an event.

For the first time ever, the communication portion of Operation Toy Drop is changing. Soldiers of the 360th Civil Affairs Brigade, based at Fort Jackson, S.C., are preparing for their contribution to Operation Toy Drop; making sure communication runs smoothly.

“Last year we did a pre-run,” said Gerald Thorpe, team leader for the U. S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) G6 Tactical Communications. “We rented a truck and set up a communication center and operated on Sicily Drop Zone. This year we are actually using a unit.”

In years past, all communication was transmitted using radios, phones or pen and paper. This year, the intent is to have a satellite system transmitting information using computers to send emails, essentially expediting the flow of information from the personnel on the aircraft, at the drop zone and at the location where Soldiers will be manifested for a jump.

Before the unit executes their mission at Fort Bragg they are first conducting a communication exercise.

“Today, we are getting ready to practice our tactical operation center mission for the upcoming Operation Toy Drop,” said 1st Lt. Angel Brooks, assistant communications officer for the 360th. “We’ll have a tent set up inside that will hold the S1 (administrative) operations and also S6 (communication) operations. Plus we’ll have a satellite dish that will help provide communication and also another piece of equipment that will use cell phone towers to provide network coverage, just in case the network goes down.”

As part of any military mission, conducting a rehearsal is a critical step to ensuring success. However, when you are talking about communication for an event that lasts eight days involving active and reserve units from both the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force as well as nine allied nations, plus the 4,000 paratroopers that will be participating, it’s an especially important step.

“Communication is everything,” said Brooks. “This exercise helps us become proficient in our job and make sure that the S6 maintains a high level of standard.”

Planning for the COMEX began earlier this year when the USACAPOC(A) G6 Operations and Training Officer, Maj. Christopher Murphy began coordinating and planning with the unit and contractors. He said that Toy Drop was a venue that already existed and thought it would be a good idea to incorporate communications training for subordinate units using equipment organic to their unit and allowing them to perform a real world mission.

In August, Thorpe and his team conducted initial training for the Soldiers who would be supporting Operation Toy Drop. This time for the COMEX, they are making sure that the Soldiers are comfortable with the equipment, know how to operate it and trouble shoot any issues that may arise.

“My specific role is that I’ll be with one of the SDNLs (Special Operations Forces Deployable Node—Lightweight), not as an operator but more of the maintenance side,” said Sgt. Dante Graham, a signal support specialist. “The best part for me is learning how to do the generators since this is my first time ever having to do anything with those and learning more about the SDNL. I like knowing more about the job.”

More than just doing the hands on training, Thorpe and his team have been coordinating with U.S. Special Operations Command and Joint Communications Support Element in Tampa, averaging more than 60 hours of manpower per week making sure the equipment works and USACAPOC(A) has air time established throughout Operation Toy Drop.

“I think everyone is kind of excited about it because it’s the first time we’re doing it,” said Murphy. Depending on how this works we’ll do it again next year with a different brigade so that way someone else can get more experience deploying their equipment, setting it up and getting some experience that they may not normally get.”

Operation Toy Drop occurred Saturday, Dec. 7, 2013 at Sicily Drop Zone on Fort Bragg, N.C. and continued the week of Dec. 9-13, 2013 at Luzon Drop Zone on Camp Mackall, N.C.
Soldiers with the 360th Civil Affairs Brigade, based at Fort Jackson, S.C., set up a tactical operation center during a Communication Exercise, Nov. 16, 2013. The COMEX allows the Soldiers a chance to set up the center from start to finish. They practice loading, unloading and assembling the tents, as well as setting up and testing communication equipment that will be used during Operation Toy Drop to help relay information such as number of paratroopers on the manifest.

(Background) In preparation for Operation Toy Drop, 1st Lt. Angel Brooks, of the 360th Civil Affairs Brigade, based at Fort Jackson, S.C., sets up a tent during a Communication Exercise, Nov. 16, 2013.
A Dream Come True

Story by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells

After over 20 years in the military, Sgt. 1st Class Penny Mills figured she had accomplished all her career goals that she could while serving, but one still lingered — the dream of being selected to play softball for the All Army Team. Mills has played softball all her life. At age 8, she realized that playing softball was not only fun, but a skill she excelled in. At age 41, the psychological operations non-commissioned officer from the Army Reserve’s U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), made the cut for the 2013 All Army Women’s Softball Team.

“I’ve been wanting to try out for so long, but never had the opportunity for a number of reasons,” explained Mills. “But my chain of command really supported me this time and after three years of putting in a packet, I was selected. I was super excited to be able to represent (my command). It’s a really big deal to me.”

Mills, a native of Coolidge, W.V., came into the Army in 1990 as a parachute rigger. For nine-and-a-half years she inspected, packed and jumped parachutes before making the decision to switch to military information support operations. In 2006, she deployed to Iraq.

“I had a basketball scholarship before joining the Army, but school was demanding and I was afraid of losing the scholarship,” said Mills. “I didn’t want to leave the burden of paying for my education on my parents. I wanted to do it on my own. So I talked with my school counselor, who suggested the Army. And it was the best decision I made. I love it! I love defending our country, the camaraderie, and the lifestyle itself.”

Now representing the 393rd Psychological Operations Company, 16th PSYOP Battalion out of Aurora, Ill., Mills headed to Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., to begin her strict and vigorous training with the other 25 women selected from Army posts around the world. Only 15 women would end up making the final cut.

From sunup to sundown, the team lived, breathed and ate softball. The day started at 6:30 a.m., with a workout to the gym. Followed by field time and a short break for lunch with more batting and field practice in the afternoon. After dinner, the team would play a double header with other teams from the area. Weekends were full of traveling and tournaments all over the country.

Keeping up with the hectic schedule was a little bit of a challenge for the 41 year-old rookie. “I’m pretty proud of myself for hanging in there with the younger girls. I’m definitely the oldest rookie, second oldest on the team,” laughed Mills. “But the girls are sweet and look out for me. They make sure I don’t hurt myself.”

Mills knew it would be a challenge physically. Before tryouts, she ran and worked out daily. She was also part of the travel league at Fort Bragg, participating in tournaments and hitting the batting cages regularly.

“I just had to make sure I was in great shape,” she said. “While on the team, Mills’ strong skill is pitching. When not pitching for the team, she plays first base.

“I’ve been pitching for about six years,” explained Mills. “Even though I am older, I’m still considered a rookie on the team. I am always learning something from the veterans. They’ve really helped me improve my batting. It’s just like in the military and in life. I’m learning something new every day. I came onto the team with an open mind and was willing to learn.”

“I think we have a young, fast team,” Mills said about her teammates and looking towards the future. “That, and with me and (Lt. Col. Terri Andreoni) being the older players, we bring a lot of experience to the team. It’s really going to help us out. These girls come from all over the world. We’ve got some from Korea, Texas, Chicago…we really have a lot of talent on the team.”

Skill, talent and experience paid off for the All Army Women’s Softball Team, as they pulled out the win over Air Force with an 8-0 score.

“You know, it’s really about the experience and meeting these girls. Making new friends. The camaraderie is just great,” said Mills. “I love everything about the game, but it’s really about the people you meet that make the experience worth the while.”
Sgt. Paul Robbins uses the Defense Advance GPS Receiver on the land navigation course during the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) Best Warrior Competition at Fort Bragg, N.C., April 30. Competitors came from around the country to compete April 29 through May 3 to earn the honor of representing the command at the U.S. Army Reserve Command’s competition in June. (U.S Army photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)
Sgt. 1st Class Tara Genkinger, of the 305th Tactical Psychological Operations Company, plays a local villager during a situational training exercise. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Saska Ball)

Spc. Matthew Chasin, 443rd Civil Affairs Battalion, crosses the monkey bars during the obstacle course portion of the Best Warrior Competition held at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)

Soldiers of Bravo Company, 422nd Civil Affairs Battalion, and the 401st Civil Affairs Battalion, participate in Exercise Southern Raider with the 37th Canadian Brigade Group and Royal British Marine Commandos. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Saska Ball)

Jumpmasters from Canada and Italy learn about aircraft procedures in a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter during the 16th Annual Randy Oler Memorial Toy Drop at Fort Bragg, N.C. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)
A Soldier with the 422nd Civil Affairs Battalion, participates in Exercise Southern Raider. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Saska Ball)

Army Reserve Soldiers from the 492nd Civil Affairs Battalion assess the Horny Toad Farm in Phoenix. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Andy Yoshimura)

Sgt. Austin Garmon, of the 305th Tactical Psychological Operations Company, talks to a role player as part of a situational training exercise. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Saska Ball)

U.S Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Soldiers earn their Pathfinder Badge. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Felix Fimbres)

Spc. Erik Lorenz of the 312th Psychological Operations Company, talks with a role player during training dealing with face-to-face interaction with a local populace. (U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)

Army Reserve Soldiers with the 4th Parachute Regiment, from the United Kingdom, and U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), participate in Operation Black Warrior’s realistic medical training at Reservoir Training Facility, July 17. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Sharilyn Wells)
In February 2014, Columbia Pictures will release the movie “Monuments Men” starring George Clooney and Matt Damon, which tells the story of Allied Soldiers working to save artwork in Nazi Germany. During a recent trip to The Metropolitan Museum of Art here, Hollywood came to life as more than 40 Soldiers with the 353rd Civil Affairs Command learned how to become modern day guardians of history.

“Preserving history is not only important for any society but also in the wrong hands artifacts can be used to fund terrorism,” said Staff Sgt. Martin Sierra, a civil affairs noncommissioned officer with the 353rd. “They can be used as leverage in negotiations and extortion, the failure to safeguard and secure these items can cost lives and place the lives of both Soldiers and civilians in jeopardy.”

“Definitely this trip provided situational awareness and added a different element on how we fight wars,” Sierra said. “There is so much value in this type of training because it’s important to train in this area and deploy with the ability to identify, secure, and protect historical artifacts.”

Soldiers learned how to preserve sensitive sites during the presentation about archaeological considerations during military operations, which taught Soldiers examples of regional burial grounds, aerial imagery, and how the protection of cultural property could help strengthen force protection.

Col. Mark Yanaway, chief of operations for the command, said Soldiers didn’t realize that cultural protection is a civil affairs mission but his unit is slowly starting to realize the importance of preserving history while developing relationships with non-government agencies that protect artifacts.

“Culture is important to people and their cultural property is important to them,” Yanaway said. “People and their cultural property represent them, their ethnicity, their nation and how they think of themselves. If it is destroyed then it’s like you’re attacking them and when you attack people they don’t like it, so by protecting it we’re protecting the people.”

Corrine Wegener, a cultural heritage preservation officer with the Smithsonian Institute, and former U.S. Army Civil Affairs Officer, briefed the unit on the 1954 Hague Convention and shared her personal deployment experiences with the Soldiers.

During her military career, Wegener deployed with the 352nd Civil Affairs Command to Baghdad during the height
Soldiers in the 353rd Civil Affairs Command visit The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Islamic Art exhibit on November 17, 2013 in New York. The Soldiers learned about the importance of preserving and how to do it properly.

of looting. Wegner and her team worked to stabilize the collection of items taken from the Iraqi Museum.

“If you walk into a situation where you don’t understand what’s going on with the civilian population, to include things that will make them angry like the destruction of a cultural site, then you’re not doing the full spectrum of what you could be doing to make the mission successful,” said Wegner.

After Soldiers finished the in-house presentations, they toured the Departments of Islamic Art, Ancient Near Eastern Art, and the Armor gallery where museum curators shared their favorite exhibits with the unit. Later, the Soldiers were taken underground to the laboratory at Sherman Fairchild Center for objects conservation. During the lab visit, Soldiers went over periodic tables, an electromagnetic map, and artifact preservation techniques.

“Civil affairs Soldiers don’t receive enough hands-on training from professional curators on identifying, packaging, and handling artifacts so this trip allowed us to see first-hand what to do, and not through the usual death by PowerPoint,” Sierra said. “We operate in various environments which can impact the way we handle artifacts so knowing the chemical makeup of the artifacts or at least given a general idea of the chemical make up will help us to properly handle objects without affecting them.”

As museum curators and conservators shared their historical knowledge with the group they offered future assistance to Soldiers in hopes of enhancing the unit’s readiness. “Now our Soldiers know which organizations to reach out to, which will ease worries on who they should to talk to,” said Yanaway. “In return, now these people know the Soldiers and can build relationships so our Soldiers can perform future missions no matter where we go.”

After a day filled with presentations and tours, Soldiers were reminded that past acts of historical preservation not only saved lost artwork, but built the foundation of the modern day civil affairs mission.

“I’m not only glad those group of Soldiers were able to discover the importance and need to recover the stolen artwork during WWII, but more importantly for the U.S. military to recognize the value in formulating special units, such as Civil Affairs, to continue the mission,” Sierra said.