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National Guard

MAGAZINE

Fall 2008



A Great Act of Love

**The story of
Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño**

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On the Cover: *Nelida Bagley offers encouragement to her son, Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño, before a morning therapy session at the West Roxbury veterans hospital in West Roxbury, Mass., on Feb. 9, 2008. Pequeño, a NH Guard soldier, suffered a severe brain injury two and a half years ago in Iraq when his observation post was ambushed.*

Photo: Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO

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Fredette receives Bronze Star for combat tour

NH Army Guard's first female command sergeant major exemplifies selfless service



Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark, the Adjutant General of the NH Guard, congratulates Command Sgt. Maj. Kandy Fredette after presenting her the Bronze Star Medal for service during her tour of duty in Iraq.
Photo: 2nd Lt. Amanda Ponn, 114th MPAD

By Cadet Amanda Ponn, Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey and Sgt. Kathleen Briere, 114th MPAD

CONCORD – Command Sgt. Maj. Kandy Fredette, command sergeant major of 54th Troop Command, received the Bronze Star Medal for service in Iraq during a ceremony here at the State Military Reservation on June 22.

She deployed as a first sergeant with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, from June 2005 to May 2006.

The acknowledgement of her service during Operation Iraqi Freedom was long overdue, said Lt. Col. Shawn O'Brien, commander, 54th Troop Command.

It's vital, he said, to acknowledge appreciation of service of soldiers and their accomplishments.

The recommendation for the Bronze Star was submitted by Capt. Jeremy Coleman, Fredette's commander during the tour. It was presented by Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark, the Adjutant General of the NH National Guard.

"I have an appreciation for women in the U.S. military, and if I can play any part in recognizing their success, I'm happy to do so," Clark said. "You've been extremely humble. If we hadn't kept (the ceremony) a secret, we wouldn't have been able to drag you here."

Fredette admitted to feeling a great deal of modesty when she was presented the award.

"I have a hard time receiving awards," said Fredette, who has broken through

several glass ceilings in her career with the NH Army Guard, becoming the organization's first female first sergeant and now command sergeant major.

"I wasn't the only one there, and I did not earn it by myself," she said.

The citation read, in part, "Her personal leadership style and tireless efforts were instrumental in motivating the maintenance force to perform at an exceptional rate, contributing to the brigade's overwhelming success."

Coleman submitted a letter avowing Fredette's accomplishments and professional conduct during combat. The 2/28th BCT endured heavy losses during their tenure in Operation Iraqi Freedom, suffering 80 killed in action.

"Her dedication and attention to detail is unmatched, and ensured that we were able to bring as many 'Iron Soldiers' home from the fight as possible," the letter read in part. "It is of great satisfaction that Command Sgt. Maj. Fredette is being awarded the Bronze Star Medal for me and the soldiers she led, who have credited her for the success of Bravo Company and the overall BCT during our deployment."

Coleman also wrote in the letter, "From the robust duties as staff NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) to the very hectic and challenging responsibility of leading troops in combat as the company first sergeant, Command Sgt. Maj. Fredette not only excelled but set the standard for soldiers to follow."

At the ceremony, Fredette shared the accolades with her 18-year-old daughter Jacqueline, who was tearful as her mom held the award. "My daughter saw that I was getting upset because I was thinking about all the guys we left behind who will never come home," she said. "And my daughter really earned this too – it was my family who allowed me to mobilize and do my job." ♦

Security Forces team deploys to Afghanistan

Story and photos by 1st Lt. Sherri Pierce, 157th Air Refueling Wing PAO

NEWINGTON, N.H. – For family and friends of the 23 airmen of the 157th Air Refueling Wing Security Forces deploying to Afghanistan, the ceremony at Pease Air National Guard Base on Aug. 9 was bittersweet.

They spent cherished time with loved ones, but it would be the last time for about six months. After a few short hours, the group deployed to Afghanistan where they will perform air base defense missions as part of the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing.

*During the gathering,
the room was filled with spouses,
brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers
who wiped away tears
while children ran around and played –
bringing life
to a somewhat solemn gathering.*

Prior to deploying, the airmen spent two weeks at Fort Bliss, Texas, for theater-specific training. For some members, this is their third deployment, but it is everyone's first time deploying to Afghanistan.

During the gathering, the room was filled with spouses, brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers who wiped away tears while children ran around and played – bringing life to a somewhat solemn gathering.

Also in attendance were the Pease Greeters, about 100 retired military members and other men and women who see-off service members and welcome them home.

"We come here as fellow Americans to pay our respects," said Ed Johnson, chairman of the Pease Greeters. "We respect the sacrifices you make and we respect the sacrifices that the families are experiencing."

As is customary for each departure, the retired military members stood at attention and saluted the departing security forces members.

"We, the old warriors, salute you, the new warriors," said Johnson.

The Pease Greeters also gave each member phone cards to keep in touch with their families.

Families are not just service members' immediate relations, said Bonnie Lee Rice, the Wing's family program coordinator. "It includes the parents, spouses, significant others, neighbors, friends, aunts, uncles, whoever."

"New Hampshire provides a lot of great support for families," said Staff Sgt. Justin Woody, who married his wife, Britney, just two weeks before deploying. "I feel confident about the support she will get."

Staff Sgt. Edward Dubaniewicz of the 157th Security Forces kisses his daughter, Sierra, before departing for a six-month tour in Afghanistan on Aug. 9.



Continued on page 4

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Security Forces team deploys to Afghanistan

Continued from page 3

Staff Sgt. Paul Dovich feels “very confident that the Wing will be there if (his family) needs anything.”

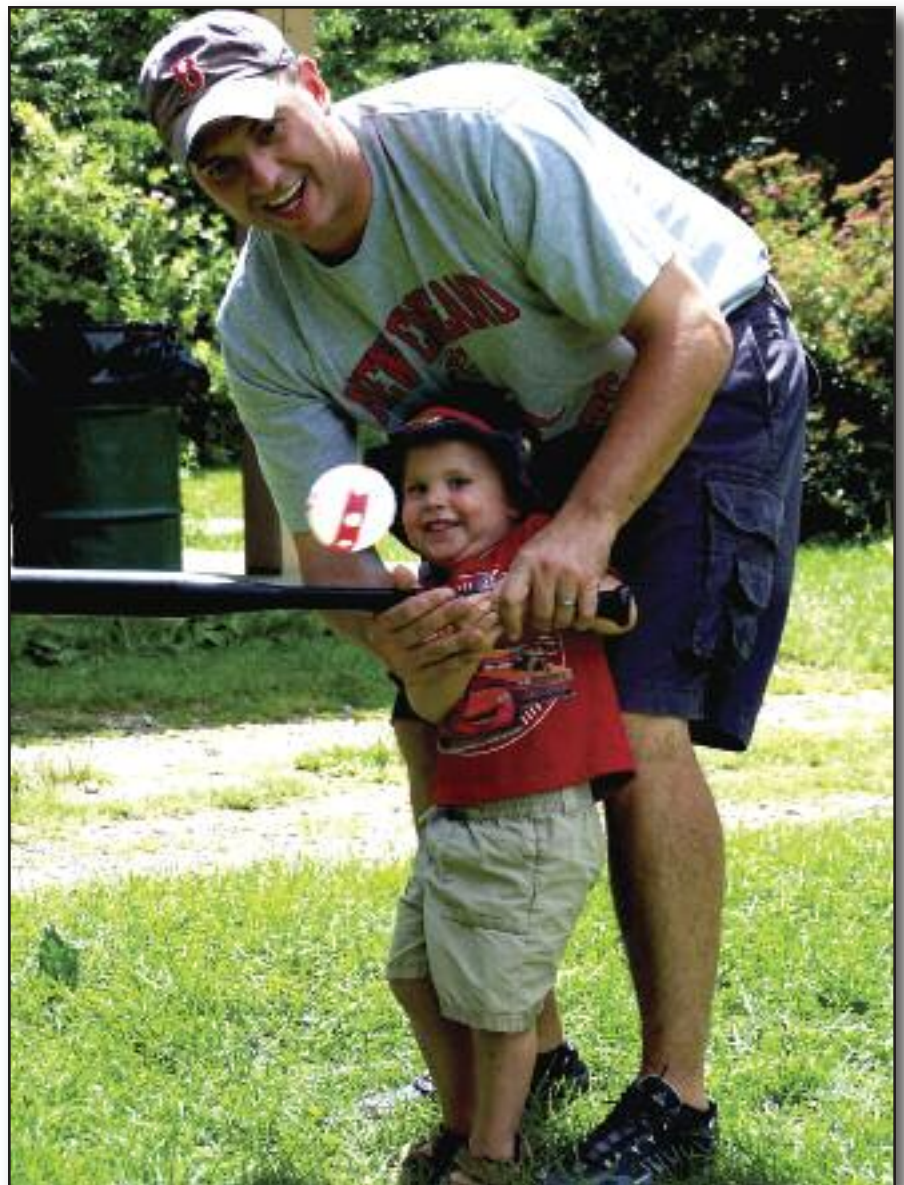
“We are prepared to support any and all needs of the families,” said Rice. “I am always available via office phone, cell phone or e-mail 24-7.”

While everyone no doubt looks forward to the homecoming, no one is more excited than two members of the security forces team who will come back to families larger than the ones they left.

Staff Sgt. Edward Dubaniewicz’s wife, Alayna, is expecting their second child. Their other daughter, Sierra, is 18 months. Due in September, Alayna said, “I wish he is here when the baby is born but I have family and friends nearby to help.”

The couple said they will communicate as much as possible through e-mails and a Web cam they purchased for their home.

Master Sgt. Bill Charland’s wife, Judy, is also expecting their second child during the deployment. While Charland won’t physically be able to be with his wife during delivery, he will be able to view the birth thanks to Web cam and telecommunications equipment from Portsmouth Regional Hospital. ♦



Staff Sgt. Paul Dovich helps son, Aiden, swing at a ball during a July 30 family day at Stratham Hill Park for airmen of the 157th Security Forces deploying to Afghanistan.

Police training teaches Afghans about service

By Kristen Noel, Special to American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Coalition trainers and mentors are making progress turning around corrupt police forces in southern Afghanistan, a military official said.

Afghan National Police forces have an “awful reputation” in many communities for practices such as shaking people down and selling weapons to criminals, NH Army Guard Col. John Cuddy, commander of Regional Police Advisory Command South, told online journalists and bloggers in a teleconference July 9.

“We’re trying to teach them [and] show them what is best for their country and the people of Afghanistan,” said Cuddy. “What’s best for them doesn’t involve corruption on a daily basis.”

Cuddy, who has been in Afghanistan for three months and is one of about 40 NH Guardsmen serving there, oversees all U.S. military transition teams in the southern region of the country. The main concentration now, he said, is the focused district development program to train, mentor and equip Afghan National Police forces.

“This program is being executed

across the country,” he said, “but for us in the south, I think it’s a larger undertaking.”

The training aspect of the focused district development program, Cuddy explained, removes Afghan police forces from their district for eight weeks of instruction at the regional training center in the city of Kandahar. The district police are replaced during the eight-week period by the Afghan Civil Order Police, “who are a highly trained, effective police force,” he said.

Cuddy said local populations tend to welcome the substitution of the Afghan Civil Order Police, due to district police forces’ reputation for corruption. “Anecdotally, we have heard that the local population says, ‘We love the ANCO; don’t take them away,’ you know. These are the good police.”

However, Cuddy said, his teams are getting positive feedback from the local citizens when the district police return to their communities after the eight-week training cycle. “We’re getting feedback that, ‘Hey, this is really working. They’re

more professional. They’re not stealing from us. They’re not shaking us down on the road,’” the colonel said.

So far, almost 800 Afghan police in the southern region have completed the focused district development training, Cuddy said.

“The police are learning a lot of human-rights training [and] ethical training,” he explained, “and for the first time, some of these guys are getting what it is to be a police officer – what it is to serve and protect. We’re seeing the Afghans come to the police with their concerns more, providing tips of where the Taliban are, [and] where their weapons caches are.”

Acceptance by the local citizens is crucial to winning the counterinsurgency in southern Afghanistan, Cuddy said, because the fight truly is to win over the population.

“The people are the front line of this battle,” Cuddy explained. “If we can get them to trust in the government and trust in the police, I think we’ll come a long way in winning this counterinsurgency.” ♦



Soldiers from the NH Guard’s sixth embedded training team are recognized during a deployment ceremony on Sept 3. The composite unit will serve in Afghanistan as mentors to the country’s army and police force. Photo: Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO

(Editor's note: Tyler, 12, and his sister, Cori, 13, are the children of Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, a military journalist with the 114th MPAD. They agreed to pen the following stories about this year's Healthy Choice Kids Camp, sponsored by NHNG Counterdrug Task Force.)

Kids Camp rocks another summer

By Tyler Dempsey

The annual National Guard Counterdrug Kids Camp, based in Concord, July 7-10 was a big hit.

A lot of kids liked it because they made new friends, learned new skills and had a great time. The organizers of the event, like Sgt. 1st Class Janet Richards, designed activities in the camp such as rock climbing, archery and fishing to build kids' self-esteem.

"Some of the activities are things you might not have been able to experience at home, like cartooning or archery or even fishing," Richards said. "At the same time the activities are designed to teach leadership and problem solving skills."

The very first day of the camp was spent doing teamwork games. One of them involved hanging onto a part of a rope and leaning back. Then after a couple times of leaning back, we would lean back and then sit down. After a few times of that, we also played Capture the Flag and Sword and the Stone. They were fun games.

We did a lot on Tuesday. The first thing we did was we set a plane on fire, which was really fun and also neat. We set the plane on fire with a computer – when we clicked on a place on the plane, smoke would come out, then if you clicked it again, it would light on fire. There was a small fire truck called "Crash 5," which would put out the fire you started. In "Crash 5" were two kids who would run out the water and actually put out the fire.

Then there was a trailer filled with an oversized maze, which had no light to simulate a room full of black smoke fire-fighters could get lost in. There were all kinds of obstacles that you would go through. Firefighters actually use this for training, and we learned quickly that if we did not use teamwork we would not be able to get through it. Then we did rock climbing, which was in my opinion a blast, and it was my first time climbing on real rock face rather than just simulated rocks.

The training and activities were possible because Counterdrug and the Fire Academy partnered for this week.



Spc. Mandy Neveu, of 54th Troop Command, NHARNG, leads a cheer at the Healthy Choices Kids Camp in July. Photo: 1st Mike Daigle, Deputy State PAO



This is the only camp held exclusively for Army and Air National Guard kids, and Richards said she has heard all kinds of positive things about this year's camp and many repeat campers considered this the best camp yet.

The camp is only for military kids because of the different risk factors they have.

"Normally kids in our communities don't have things such as a parent deploying or going away for weekend training like military kids face," Richards said. "Some kids only have one parent and if that parent deploys, local people in the communities may not understand what the children are going through unless there is an understanding of the military culture."

That's the background of why this has been called the Healthy Choices Camp.

"Healthy choices and building self-esteem is a big part of the camp because self-esteem gets you through making good choices," Richards said.

Wednesday was a great day also. We went to a comic book workshop where we learned how to draw cartoon expressions, which was really fun. Then we went to archery and the volunteer gave us safety tips and taught us how to shoot the bow and arrow. Then he gave us a serious speech to make sure we knew to put the animal in the least amount of pain possible. Then we went fishing which was a lot of fun, and gave us all a great amount of new skills including being patient.

Richards said without all the volunteers, this camp would not have been possible, calling them the backbone of the camp.

"It has taken years to cultivate the relationships with the volunteers, who all really care about what they are doing out here," she said.

"Once, someone asked me how I knew the camp was working," she said. "I know it's successful because some of the campers who grew up throughout these camps have now joined the National Guard, and have wanted to come back and help with the camp. They know it's important and that it can change lives."

The last day, a Thursday, was spent out in nature. We hiked. During the hike we learned about always knowing where you are, and how to recognize and identify some types of trees. We learned about staying on the trail and not ruining nature's beauty, and not to take short cuts in hiking. We also did all kinds of relays and finished the week with an ice cream social.

Camper Ally Bradley first came to camp four years ago when her dad went to Iraq.

"I've been doing this camp for four years and it has always been fun," she said. "I will be back next year." ❖

Firefighting, rock climbing and drawing cartoons

A summer camp I come back to year after year

By Cori Dempsey

On mornings like this, with the hot summer air seeping through my windows, I know that no matter how hot it gets, the day will be full of adventure.

The day is July 7 and more than 100 military kids are waking up to go to this year's New Hampshire National Guard Healthy Choices Kids Camp. I have been to this camp for five years and I am still so excited, and I know many other kids are too.

The New Hampshire Healthy Choices Kids Camp is a camp designed exclusively for military kids. The camp, divided in age groups, consists of four days of playing games that help children deal with peer pressure and the feelings of a parent leaving for war.

This camp was created seven years ago by Sgt. 1st Class Janet Richards; partly because when she sent her children to camp the prices were just too expensive for military families.

"I wanted to make a camp that was free for other families from the Guard," Richards said of the camp, which is held twice a year.

This camp is completely free. To memorialize their experiences, every child in the camp is given a water bottle, hat and T-shirt.

"I get money from the government for certain things, like hats and water bottles. But, our budget is very limited," said Richards.

The first day of camp is just about making friends and getting to know one another. The campers play communication games that build teamwork. With the older kids, they also have discussions about peer pressure and challenges that go on at school. Many games that were played involved a number of campers, and were designed so people could apply the lessons learned at home and in life in general.

According to Richards, preparations for the camp involve a lot of time and thought throughout the year. Volunteers are sought to help with the exhilarating activities such as fishing, rock climbing and archery. Some of the helpers act as field guides to assist the campers in their journey across the camp. And last but not least, they also designate people to help make the food and snacks throughout the day.

"You just can't have the camp without the many volunteers," Richards said. "They are really the backbone of the camp."

The camp is commonly held at New Boston Air Tracking Station. This year, New Boston was closed so the Kids Camp program partnered with the New Hampshire Fire Academy. The area was perfect! Many kids enjoyed the extra activities that were available at the academy. The groups were able to transition from one activity to another every day and many commented that when they arrived at the designated area for the fire

activities they were more than thrilled.

"The camp was so exciting and everyone here made the camp special, and the staff made sure the campers had a good time," said camper Jillian Lemay.

Each age group was split into smaller teams. Then each small team rotated through the stations. The stations consisted of learning how to make a fire using computer technology, and how to properly coordinate putting out the fire, and how to use your senses in an environment where you cannot see.

The first station where fires were started was just a room with one computer and a lot of desks. One at a time, campers learned how to start the fire on the computer for training purposes, and then another camper would use the speaking device and give the real commands to the other campers in the truck waiting to put out the fire.

The second station was in a fire truck. There were two campers and a firefighter and once given their instructions that they can put out the fire they learned how to operate the truck to put the fire out – then they got to put the fire out themselves.

It is common knowledge that firefighters have to go into burning buildings where there is often a lot of smoke, so they must learn how to use their other senses to get out of the burning building with anyone that was left inside. To do this they must be trained to use their other senses to find their way around the unfamiliar environment. Training consists of going into a trailer that has been designed into a maze with two floors. Nearly pitch black they must find a way to escape.

To campers, being able to experience the actual training of real firefighters was very exhilarating.

The firefighting extravaganza wasn't the only exciting activity. There was also a cartoon workshop. A real cartoonist came in and taught campers about his work and how to "cheat" when you draw. This gave kids a new idea about when you draw. You don't have to give your masterpiece extraordinary detail for it to be, well ... extraordinary. He showed campers how to make cartoons with simple pictures that would create an image inside the reader's head. Cartoons are used all over America on magazines, billboards, tissue boxes, etc.

This camp has really given the campers an amazing experience, and according to Richards, many of the campers come back year after year. ♦



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FIELD BRIEFS

NH Guard units complete summer training

By 1st Sgt. Mike Daigle, Deputy State PAO

The 3643rd Brigade Support Battalion (Fires) completed its first annual training as a unit in June.

Almost 250 soldiers from the unit trained at Fort Devens, Camp Ethan Allan Training Site in Vermont and at home station.

“Our focus for our first annual training together was warrior tasks,” said Capt. Davis Ulricson, training officer for 3643rd BSB, 3/197th Fires Brigade. “This training gave us a report card of where we are as far as individual skills and working together.”

The mission of the 3643rd BSB (Fires) is to plan, coordinate,

synchronize and execute replenishment operations in support of Fires Brigade operations.

“Our unit is made up of people from many units, some from the artillery, most of us are learning new jobs here in HHC,” said Sgt 1st Class Wayne Hemmingway, HHC, 3643rd BSB, Claremont. “I would say there are now mostly positive feelings about the transformation. The biggest thing at this AT was people wanted to learn their new job and perform well.”

Hemmingway is a transportation coordinator; he sets SP times, gets convoy clearances and makes sure things move efficiently.

Ulricson thinks the unit is further along in its training than many would have expected.

“We are clear on where we need to go and what we need to focus on, Ulricson said. “We are going to focus on driver training, the military decision making process for our staff and then move on to squad, platoon and company level training.”

Members of the unit were able to conduct weapons training during their time at Fort Devens. The unit fired the M203, the M2 Heavy Barreled Machine gun and the M16, set up a Tactical Operations Center (TOC) and operated as a unit. Some of the unit was also able to train with some of their new equipment

“The ‘Gee Whiz’ technical stuff we have, and have coming, is amazing,” Hemmingway said. “I am excited about my position and excited about the unit, it is a great time to be in this unit.” ♦

Sgt. Richard Shannessy and Spc. Ashley Gayhart plot a convoy course during the 3643rd BSB annual training in Vermont in June. Photo: 1st Sgt. Mike Daigle, Deputy PAO

Soldiers of the 3643rd BSB gather around their commander and executive officer, Lt. Col. Daniel Wilson and Maj. James Challender, during annual training at Fort Devens in June. Wilson and Challender had their heads shaved as the result of a bet the soldiers won by meeting the unit's Guard Recruiting Assistant Program (G-RAP) goal for the year. Photo: 2nd Lt. Amanda Ponn, 114th MPAD



Wing soars in combat readiness test

By 1st Lt. Sherri Pierce,
157th Air Refueling Wing PAO

Every five years, each Air Force unit goes through what is called an Operational Readiness Inspection. It is the SAT of Wing tests so-to-speak and it rates the Wing's readiness for war in a simulated combat environment. In June 2008, the members of the 157th Air Refueling Wing took the test and proved they are more than ready for the challenge.

Inspectors for the Air Mobility Command arrived at Pease Air National Guard Base in June for the first of the two-part inspection. The nuclear operational readiness inspection "is an inspection designed to evaluate the Units' readiness to support the U.S. STRATCOM mission," said Capt. Nelson Perron.

The inspector general presented a scenario that world tensions had escalated to a "point that the 157 ARW had to generate aircrews and aircraft in support of a nuclear mission," Perron added.

The second phase was a multi-wing deployment to "Nagoya Air Base, Japan," at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center in Wisconsin. Members of the 157th ARW joined with members of the 128th Air Refueling Wing and the 105th Air Wing to form the 875th Air Expeditionary Wing. In this portion of the inspection, the IG tests the Wing's combat readiness. They scrutinize the way the Wing mobilizes, deploys to a "war zone" and how they redeploy back home.

Lt. Col. Mark Schmitz, IG team chief, Senior Master Sgt. Robert Aguilar, Jr., IG inspection superintendent, and Master Sgt. Mark Beale, IG inspection manager, presented the results to the 157th ARW in a Wing-wide forum on Aug. 2.

Although the results cannot be released publicly, the 157th ARW is definitely ready.

"It was really, really great work by the entire Wing. It is a great honor for me to be in Concord representing you," said Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark, the Adjutant General of the New Hampshire National Guard.

"There are two phrases I heard throughout the briefing 'outstanding teamwork' and 'mission accomplished.' I couldn't be prouder to represent you, us, as commander of the New Hampshire Air National Guard," said Brig. Gen. Mark Sears. "You are, without question, the most outstanding team I have ever worked with."

In addition to the ratings the Wing received as a whole, several groups were recognized for outstanding teamwork, and



Royal Netherlands Air Force Maj. J.A. Oele observes as Royal Netherlands Air Force Sgt. 1st Class L. Kikkert and U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Megan Kincaid provide simulated medical care to U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Pina Iennaco during the Joint Medical Modules 2008 while deployed to Soesterberg Air Base, Netherlands, April 14-25. Iennaco and Kincaid are with the 157th Air Refueling Wing out of Pease Air National Guard Base, Portsmouth, N. H. Photo: Tech. Sgt. Thomas Johnson, 157 ARW PA

about 45 individuals were given either an IG team chief coin or a coin from Sears for going above and beyond their duties.

Chief Master Sgt. David Eaton, 157th Air Refueling Wing command chief master sergeant, received a team chief's coin on behalf of all the senior non-commissioned officers.

"We are the world's finest air, space and cyberspace force and it is a testament to our senior NCOs," Schmitz said.

Col. Richard Martell, 157th ARW Wing commander, also received a coin of excellence from the IG.

"It was a distinct pleasure to work with this unit," Schmitz said. "You were focused, driven and motivated, and epitomize the motto 'Live free or die.' I salute you for your superb work." ♦

3rd Battalion gets reflective at Fort Indiantown Gap

By Pfc. Coltin Heller, Special from the Pennsylvania National Guard PA Team

FORT INDIANTOWN GAP, Pa. – When you think of field artillery, you think rockets, cannons and other earth shaking weapons. Most field artillery units are no exception to the rule; however, there is a twist.

In June, soldiers from 3rd Battalion of the 197th Field Artillery, NH Army Guard, shifted the focus of their annual training from their big guns to other weapons, such as the M-16A2 and the M203 40mm grenade launcher used by many other soldiers.

"This isn't normal training for us," said Sgt. William Chaussee, a fire direction control chief from B Battery 3/197. "As a field artillery unit we do more training with the weapons we use in the field."

The soldiers were conducting reflexive fire drills, and familiarizing themselves with the weapons they were training on. Starting at five meters the soldiers squared off on multicolored pop-up targets with their weapons in the low ready state. As the target came up the soldiers raised their weapons, took aim, fired twice, then lowered their weapons. After several rounds, the distance increased and the drill repeated.

"Since we don't get to fire the other weapon systems very often, this is great training for us," said cannon crew member Pfc. Jeffery Gagnon.

The soldiers were also taught the correct stance when conducting reflexive fire.

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A Great Act of Love

The story of Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño

By Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO



Jose Pequeño doesn't feel like being a good soldier this morning. It's Friday, Feb. 9, 2008, and the snow showers outside his room at the veterans hospital in West Roxbury, Mass., aren't helping the staff sergeant's disposition despite the gentle commands of an occupational therapist. He steadies a digital picture frame close to Pequeño's face, trying to get him to move his eyes right.

A photo from a trip to Puerto Rico dissolves into one of Pequeño celebrating Christmas with his family. Others show him with his riding buddies and fellow comrades in the New Hampshire National Guard. They are a repeating loop of the past and present and at the moment Pequeño is acting as if they are someone else's memories.

"He's mad at me because I brought him shopping yesterday," says his mother, Nelida Bagley, who has spent the last two and half years caring for her son after he suffered a traumatic brain injury in Iraq when his observation post was ambushed.

She has been at Pequeño's bedside every day – at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Bethesda Naval Medical Center, the Tampa VA Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center and West Roxbury. She has bathed and fed him, administered his medicine and lifted him countless times between his bed and wheelchair. She is so attuned to her son's needs that medical staff consult her before making decisions about his treatment.

"He was feeling the snow and wind on his face," she continues to a group of visitors. "But when I brought him inside the store, he closed his eyes and went to sleep. We went out of the store and he opened them up."

No one knows for sure what Pequeño is thinking at any given moment. He cannot speak or write. He cannot type. He cannot move or walk on his own.

Pequeño lost nearly 50 percent of his brain mass or half of his cerebellum and cognitive cortex in the attack, according to his surgeon, Dr. Rocco Armonda. He was in a coma for four and half months before he started responding to faces and voices. By Armonda's account, Pequeño is



one of the most severely wounded American servicemen to return home from either of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"In previous wars, he would not have survived this injury," said Armonda, an Army colonel and West Point graduate who is considered the Army's premiere neurosurgeon. "If he didn't have the body armor and the combat medic there at the scene to protect his airway, then we would never have had a patient to operate on."

In the last five years, Armonda has cared for more than 400 combat neurotrauma casualties, performing more than 1,200 procedures. From March 2003 to February 2004, he served in Iraq as commander of the 207th Neurosurgery Team.

"Ten to 15 of those cases are as severe as Jose's condition," he said. "Five or six of those are worse than Jose's where they are not interacting with their environment at all."

Pequeño has demonstrated simple emotions like comfort and discomfort through facial expressions.

He has smiled, grimaced and made eye contact, Armonda said. "In many ways, it is like how a child learns to socialize and communicate before they can speak."

The Ambush

On March 1, 2006, at around 2 p.m., Pequeño was in his humvee calling in a series of explosions near his observation post, when he suddenly stopped transmitting over the radio.

He had been in country for nine months and was one of a group of 28 NH Army Guardsmen who had dubbed themselves the Snow Stormers. They had volunteered

to deploy to Iraq with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 28th Infantry Division, from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and were among a larger collection of citizen-soldiers from northern New England described by a Vermonter as "a bunch of middle-age fat guys who gave better than they got."

Pequeño, who at 32 was not quite middle-age or fat, had felt a compulsion to deploy, especially with so many younger soldiers going, Ms. Bagley said. "They needed someone to take care of them," he had told his mother on many occasions.

A former Marine, Pequeño joined the NH Guard in 1997, serving with his stepfather in the 2nd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery and then in the 237th Military Police Company.

He joined his stepfather's unit in Berlin because he felt they weren't spending enough time together, his stepfather, Bob Bagley said.

"Joey ended up being my assistant in the arm's room," said Mr. Bagley, who had served in the Marines as well. Pequeño's grandfather was a Marine and Vietnam veteran. "You have no idea what it meant to me. It was the best thing that could have happened."


After Pequeño was medically discharged from the Marines for a back injury, he felt he had failed his stepfather and grandfather.

"Joey had always attempted to fulfill an obligation to my father and I that was never pressed by either of us," Mr. Bagley said. "He thought he had to go over and above, and I'll tell you, he did."

In his civilian work, Pequeño became a police officer and eventually police chief of Sugar Hill in 2002, a small town of 630 in Franconia Notch.

When New Hampshire was asked to fill a platoon-size element to augment the Pennsylvania brigade, Pequeño took the place of a younger soldier after he counseled him to finish college. No one else knew about the conversation in which Pequeño promised the soldier he would get his chance to serve.

Based at Camp Ramadi, the brigade had seen heavy combat from the summer of 2005 through the first quarter of 2006, losing 80 soldiers. Pequeño had earned a Purple Heart earlier in the tour when his humvee was struck by a roadside bomb and rocket propelled grenade. He was a team leader in a support platoon filled with a mix of artillerymen, military police, tankers, cooks and truck drivers. They were leftover troops who didn't fit anywhere else, said Sgt. Thomas Middleton, a



During his stay at the West Roxbury, Mass., VA hospital earlier this year, Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño had daily therapy sessions. His mother, Nelida Bagley (pictured above) has been by his side since he suffered a severe brain injury two and half years ago in Iraq when his observation post was ambushed. Photos: Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO





Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño gives a thumbs up while deployed in Ramadi, Iraq. Courtesy photo.

Vermont Guard medic assigned to the platoon. “They were stand-ins for other units like the infantry.”

Pequeño, he said, made an impression on the platoon during its pre-deployment training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. He applied his civilian skills as an emergency medical technician to help qualify more than 100 soldiers as combat lifesavers.

“He was better qualified than a first-year medic,” Middleton said. “He was dynamic, knowledgeable and the kind of instructor who didn’t talk any differently to a commissioned officer than he did to a private first class.”

In Ramadi, Pequeño’s three-man team rotated between four observation posts and two roving patrols along a main supply route or MSR. Their primary job was to prevent insurgents from planting roadside bombs. They also conducted foot patrols in some of the local villages.

His gunner was 21-year-old specialist Richard Ghent, a fellow NH Guardsman who was injured with Pequeño in the earlier attack. His driver was Spc. Christopher Merchant, a Vermont Guardsman who joined them halfway through their tour. In a short time, they had become a close-knit trio. Pequeño and Merchant were the elders, both fathers, both looking out for Ghent as if he were a kid brother.

“We always knew what each other’s next move was going to be,” Ghent said.

Ghent described Pequeño as one of the stricter team leaders in the platoon. “He was by-the-book, but he always had a good reason for it,” he said.

Since Merchant joined them, their patrols along the MSR had been relatively ordinary until that afternoon when two truck bombs destroyed the front of an Iraqi police station about 100 meters northeast of their OP on an overpass.

The explosions distracted the team’s attention long enough for an insurgent to lob a grenade with perfect aim from the opposite direction.

It hit Ghent in the chest and dropped through the turret of the humvee before detonating and killing Merchant instantly and blowing Ghent out of the vehicle. Ghent managed to scramble to his feet and unload his entire clip of 9 mm ammo at three insurgents who had climbed an embankment after the bombs were detonated. One fired an RPG at the humvee, but so close that it did not have time enough to arm itself.

When reinforcements arrived, Ghent was standing on the bridge by the humvee yelling that Merchant and Pequeño were dead. Merchant sat motionless in the driver’s seat, his head slumped forward, his glasses still on. Pequeño was halfway out the door, laying face up on the ground, unconscious.

Ghent had chased after the insurgents, killing one and wounding a second, their blood leaving a trail back down to the highway. The third insurgent fired a burst from his AK-47 before they fled in a vehicle, hitting Ghent with a round just below his left arm pit.

Ghent, who would receive a Silver Star for his actions that day, does not remember much of what he did, saying it was all a blur. After he received the nation’s third highest military award for valor, the Rochester resident quietly accepted the duties of a local hero, handling media interviews and guest appearances with modest appreciation.

“Sometimes, I feel the only reason I survived was because the way (Staff Sgt. Pequeño) was,” Ghent said. “His leadership and mentoring – he was always going over things, making sure our weapons were clean and we knew where our magazines were at all times. He did a lot of hip-pocket training on our down days.”

The ambush had grown into a coordinated attack with enemy fire coming from a sheik’s compound located about 800 meters northwest of the overpass, recalled Middleton, who was among the first to respond. He arrived at the bridge with the platoon leader and platoon sergeant. As many as 30 insurgents were shooting from the compound’s roof line, he said.

Ghent was about to be transported back to a forward operating base when Middleton held up the driver long enough to dress Ghent’s wounds. His legs peppered with shrapnel and a bullet wound in his back; Ghent was still shouting that Merchant and Pequeño were dead.

“I grabbed him and told him they are not dead until I say they’re dead,” Middleton said.

The platoon leader and platoon sergeant immediately began returning fire from the bridge, which was on high ground. After he treated Ghent, Middleton joined them. As bullets flew under their humvee, the three Vermonters shot down into the compound, relying on tracer rounds to find their mark from such a long distance. Four American tanks – among a quick reaction force that would grow to about 60 U.S. soldiers – eventually were positioned between the bridge and compound. Their main guns erased any advantage the insurgents had and brought an end to a battle that lasted more than 40 minutes and suffered no other U.S. casualties.

Thirty-five fighting positions and thousands of rounds of brass were discovered in the compound. According to the official report, seven insurgents were killed, eight were wounded and 28 were captured. Some of them were Iraqi police from the local station, Middleton said.

Pequeño is alive

Several minutes into the firefight, Middleton thought he saw Pequeño move and realized he was gasping for breath. "He was spitting blood with each exhale," Middleton said. A portion of his skull had been blown away. His brain was visible.

Middleton hesitated before he treated Pequeño.

"I had been a nurse, medic and EMT for a long, long time," Middleton said. "I have worked with a lot of people who were vegetables or on ventilators for a long time and I didn't want that to happen to Pequeño. That went through my head before I initiated care for him."

After he cleared Pequeño's airway, Middleton reached into a cargo pocket for his prayer book. A Eucharistic minister for his church in Vermont, he read the Rites of Viaticum. He didn't think Pequeño would make it.

"I didn't want to bring him back, but the impact on the platoon when we lose a man is immeasurable," Middleton said. "It would be worse so with Pequeño. He was a strong leader. He was the spine of the platoon. I didn't want to put the tube (into his airway), but I saved him. For the sake of the rest of the platoon, I knew there was no way I could pull Jose off life support. He surprised all of us by surviving."

Five months later, during the last week of August 2006, Middleton visited Pequeño at Walter Reed. Since he had returned home, he had been carrying a deep sense of guilt for stabilizing Pequeño.

Initially, no one else was in the room when Middleton arrived. Pequeño appeared to be sleeping. Middleton apologized to him then said a prayer, using the same prayer book he carried in Iraq. It was stained with blood from the fellow soldiers and insurgents he had treated on the battlefield. It was the same prayer book Middleton used to read Pequeño his last rites.

When Ms. Bagley and Pequeño's sister Elizabeth came into the room, they woke up Pequeño.

"I could not believe it – how much function he had retained," Middleton said.

But when he learned that Ms. Bagley and Elizabeth had been keeping a daily vigil by Pequeño, Middleton said he felt even more remorse. "I felt so horrible I put Jose in that place and sentenced those two to this life."

Middleton met with Pequeño's three children that day. "We sat out on the grass in front of Walter Reed in the sunshine and I told them what a good man he was and how many people he had helped in Iraq," Middleton said.

Before he left, Middleton apologized to Ms. Bagley for saving her son.

"Don't you ever think that way," Ms. Bagley said to him. "You brought him back to us and that's all we can ask."

Middleton, a career firefighter for the city of Burlington, Vermont who wrote a book about his year in Iraq, visited with Pequeño again at West Roxbury. He struggles with post traumatic stress, but feels better about his actions that day on the bridge. His manuscript, titled "Autumn of Innocence," is being reviewed by a New England publishing house. He wrote it after his wife suggested the idea as a way to deal with the memories of his tour of combat. Now he feels it's his duty to publish it.

"Part of it is the loyalty to the men I served with," Middleton said. "The bigger part is that American people need to know from an unbiased perspective. It's not a Democrat or Republican telling them."

A mother's devotion

To begin to understand Ms. Bagley's devotion to her son, you have to start with the phone call she received from a neurosurgeon at a military hospital in Germany shortly after Pequeño's initial evaluation.

"What the doctor said to me, his exact words were, 'I finished the evaluation. Such a young person. Such a good looking person. Such a young life. It's such a shame he's going to die.' Those were his exact words," Ms. Bagley said. "It felt like someone grabbed my heart and ripped it. It was a pain I cannot describe. I said, 'No, he's going to make it. I'm going to touch him and he's going to be warm.'"

When she hung up the phone, Ms. Bagley asked God to give her a second chance.

"Every time he gets an infection or set back I pray, 'God don't take him away from me.'" Ms. Bagley said. "It's a second chance to teach everything to my son. Maybe I can do it better."

At the time, Ms. Bagley was working two jobs and renting a house in North Woodstock. She stopped working and paid the rent for another year before she put her furniture in storage. Ms. Bagley, who is 55, has relied on a number of veteran's organizations, non-profits and private donations for housing and transportation.

"They have been a tremendous support," Ms. Bagley said.

If Ms. Bagley is not caring for Pequeño herself, she is scrutinizing his nurses and therapists. She is proud to say that her son hasn't had one bed sore in the 30 months she has been at his side.

"The nurses do a wonderful job, but they have other patients to take care of," Ms. Bagley said. "I work with the PT (physical therapist), OT (occupational therapist) and speech therapist. I can do everything they can do. If I don't understand, I ask questions."

During a session of physical therapy at West Roxbury, Ms. Bagley offers encouragement while therapist, Michelle Nelson, straightens Pequeño's left arm, stretching the muscles. A second therapist supports Pequeño's upper body from behind. He is sitting on a specialized platform looking directly at Nelson.

"Jose, good job," she says. "You are keeping your head up today, buddy."

"Don't touch his head," says Ms. Bagley with a smile. She begins to rub a spot between his eyes. "He goes right to sleep when you do this."

The deep bond between Ms. Bagley and her son is not uncommon for Armonda to see with patients and most often he said it's a mother, "the protector dedicating her life 24/7."

"A patient in his state has such great needs and she has such great capacity to give," Armonda said. "It's almost like a mother who is forever dedicated to the care of an infant. It's hard to put into words unless you see it. It's to the point where it's not infrequent that we have to remind (Nelida) to eat and sleep."

When Ms. Bagley has gotten tangled in bureaucratic procedures, she has relied on a number of military personnel to help advise her. Michael Rice, who was the N.H. Army Guard's top non-commissioned enlisted officer when Pequeño was injured, has become Ms. Bagley's most trusted ally along with his wife Kathy.

Rice, who retired as a state command sergeant major, feels indebted to Pequeño because he said, "Pequeño was injured on my watch."

“I don’t do anything without talking to Mike and Kathy,” said Ms. Bagley, who is resolute in her own right. She has forged connections all the way up the military chain of command to include President Bush’s top military advisor, Admiral Mike Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

“Their devotion to one another certainly inspired me,” said Mullen, who met Ms. Bagley and Jose more than a year ago during a visit to Bethesda. “We too often forget the challenges that our families bear when they become caregivers, and it’s not that they perform that role out of obligation. It’s truly a labor of love, and I just believe we need to do all we can to help them through that trying time and give them all the support and assistance we can. There’s nothing like having a loved one around when you’re recovering, and we need to make that easier, more seamless.”

Through his visits with Pequeño and other wounded service members, Mullen said he has gained “a deeper appreciation for how hard our wounded work to get well, how much we ask of their families to help them do that and how much we all need to do to focus not just on their disability – that’s important – but also on their ability, on making sure we get it right for them for the rest of their lives.”

Ms. Bagley said Mullen has always been available either directly or through his personal staff.



Elizabeth Bagley shares a quiet moment with her big brother, Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño, earlier this year. She has spent her weekends and days off helping her mother care for him since he was injured in Iraq.

Photo: Courtesy of Elizabeth Bagley

“I’m not asking help for me, but for him,” Ms. Bagley said. “Jose went and gave everything. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to. Why can’t we give back a little bit?”

A profound effect on others

Soon after his first visit to Walter Reed, Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark, the Adjutant General of the New Hampshire National Guard, had a new screen saver created for his office computer. It was a collage of three NH Guardsmen – the two who had been killed in action since 9/11 – Sgt. Jeremiah Holmes and Spc. Alan Burgess – and Pequeño, who remains New Hampshire’s most critically wounded soldier from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since then, Sgt. David Stelmat’s photo has been added. Stelmat, like Holmes and Burgess, was killed by a roadside bomb earlier this year.

“This is my reminder of those that have either come home to be buried or have not come home at all,” Clark said. “After 30 months, Jose continues to be hospitalized and in need of daily care. It also reminds me of just how serious our business is and the responsibility that we have to the soldiers, airmen and families that serve in our units.”

In a forceful display of empathy, Clark penned an open letter later that spring to the 2,700 soldiers and airmen of the NH National Guard as well as the public. He lamented what had been a trying time for New Hampshire’s military community after it lost five soldiers and one Marine in the span of two months. He encouraged citizens to join a community effort in Pequeño’s hometown of Lisbon, which eventually raised \$150,000 to build a wheelchair accessible home for Pequeño.

The letter appeared as a column on the front page of the state’s largest newspaper, the *Union Leader*, as well as in many local dailies.

“I ask that you continue to keep (Pequeño) in your prayers,” Clark wrote. “It may be a very long time before he returns to New Hampshire.”

Clark has been persistent with his campaign to ensure Pequeño is not forgotten by the organization. A year ago, after Pequeño was relocated from Tampa to West Roxbury, Clark e-mailed directions on how to get there. Pequeño was responding to visitors, especially those in uniform, he said. The familiar faces and voices were therapeutic.

“He and his family deserve our support forever,” Clark said. “His sacrifice was certainly as great as those that have lost their lives, and his challenges continue every day.”

Pequeño’s legal guardian, Paul Chudzicki, approved the move to Massachusetts, believing more people would visit Pequeño if he was closer to home.

This June, however, after a second, unsuccessful surgery at Bethesda to repair Pequeño’s skull, Chudzicki decided it was best to bring Pequeño back to the Tampa facility where he could recover, and for the fact he did not get as many visitors as Chudzicki and others had hoped. Most were the same people who spent time with him in Florida and Washington, D.C. to include fellow guardsmen who served with him in Iraq and close family friends.

“I don’t know why more people did not visit Jose,” Chudzicki said. “I can speculate that it’s two years down the road and our lives are busy and people move on. It was a beast of a winter. It could be a combination of those kinds of things.”

Ms. Bagley was less forgiving. She pointed out that none of



Staff Sgt. Jose Pequeño and his daughter, Mercedes, during a visit to the New England Aquarium in Boston earlier this year. Photo: Courtesy of Elizabeth Bagley

the state's elected leaders visited Pequeño at West Roxbury or have spent a considerable amount of time with him in either Washington D.C. or Tampa. She was especially sad that so few came from his hometown.

"Jose was not just a military person from New Hampshire," she said. "He was a police officer from New Hampshire; he was a chief of police in New Hampshire. People from Washington DC and other states have spent time with Jose including a congressman and his wife from Florida and another from New Jersey. I don't ask them (to visit Jose) but maybe that's what I am doing wrong."

Capt. Davis Ulricson, a NH Army Guardsman and north country resident, wrestled for months with the idea of seeing Pequeño, his friend and former soldier.

"I remember hearing about his injury," Ulricson said. "It happened just about the time my son was born. I wasn't in any hurry to visit him. I wanted to remember Jose just the way I remembered Jose."

When Ulricson was deployed to Iraq, Pequeño checked up on his wife and children. "Everybody knew him. He was your typical small town cop. He was dedicated and involved."

After he and two other NH Guardsmen visited Pequeño in West Roxbury, Ulricson admitted he was being selfish. "When

you see Jose, it's the reality of war," he said. "We have some guys who have Purple Hearts, but no amputees. He's missing half his skull. That's the reality of what we don't see."

"If you knew him before, it's not going to hurt you to see him," Ulricson added. "In my mind he was gone, but I am glad I visited him and met his mother. I'm changed for it."

His reasons could partly explain why others have felt anxious about visiting Pequeño, to include the mother of his oldest child, Lori Chabe. "Seeing him injured was the hardest part for me," she said. It had been three years since Chabe had seen Pequeño, at a playground in Bethel, Maine, with his children. "I was fine after. He is still Jose. I've made it a point to tell other people who I know are feeling the same way."

Like her mother, Mercedes, 13, was nervous about seeing her father for the first time, hiding behind her grandmother when Pequeño was at Walter Reed.

"It's fine now," she said. "He's still Dad. I did not lose him. I can still joke around with him."

Mercedes spent most of her summer vacation helping her grandmother and aunt care for her father.

"Mercedes treats him the same way," Ms. Bagley said. "She talks to him. She's kissing him. No matter how he is, he is still Jose. He is still her father."



Jose Pequeño, then a guide at Lost River Gorge, reunites with Alphonse and Monique Camara and their daughter, Kayla, in a July 1996 ceremony hosted by then NH Gov. Steve Merrill to honor Pequeño for saving Kayla's life after she fell into an underground river at the White Mountain tourist attraction.

Photo: Courtesy of Lorna Colquhoun, *Union Leader* correspondent

A journal Elizabeth started on a nonprofit Web site called Caring Bridge has generated more than 144,000 visits since she posted the first entry on March 4, 2006, when she and her mother were waiting at Walter Reed for Pequeño's arrival.

On the same site, a guest book has logged 2,572 personal messages to Pequeño. Many are from family and friends. Some are from the residents he served as police chief and the soldiers he served with in Iraq. Others are from people who heard of Pequeño's story.

"Jose, I have never had the honor of meeting you, but heard about you and Caring Bridge in an article in our local paper," wrote Diane Ramus a year ago on Oct. 3. "Thank you for your bravery and service to our country. I wish that you didn't have these struggles and hardships to bear, after all that you have already endured. I'll keep you and your family in my prayers."

Pequeño was born in New Orleans – his mother is from Puerto Rico and his birth father from Cuba. Raised in the north country, he signed up for the Marines with his mother's consent while a senior at Berlin High School. Five years later, after his discharge, Pequeño became a household name for rescuing 18-month-old Kayla Camara at a White Mountain tourist attraction.

He was one of two guides at the Lost River Gorge who came to the aid of Alphonse and Monique Camara after their daughter fell into a subterranean river. They were passing her through an 11-inch wide opening known as the "Lemon Squeezer" when she slipped down into the water. Kayla was submerged for more than a minute before Pequeño seized her out of the water and administered CPR.

Every year since then, Kayla and her parents, who live in Massachusetts, have visited Pequeño. When they learned of his injuries, they rearranged their summer vacation to visit him during his initial stay at Walter Reed.

"When he was injured, it was like hearing that a member of our family was hurt," said Kayla's father Alphonse Camara. "I consider him a brother."

Kayla, who is 13 now, was too young to remember that day, but has grown up knowing Pequeño was someone special.

"I think of him as another dad or another uncle to me," she said. "He's just a different person to me because of what happened to me."

Pequeño's prognosis

As Pequeño's physician, Armonda said that he is not in a position to judge his patient's quality of life.

"It is very difficult for us to say what is right and wrong about what a patient's outcome is after an injury," he said.

"The problem is that the patient can't voice his wishes. It comes down to what the family wants. You can't just decide this life is not worth living because of the patient's condition. That's pretty superficial. Who are we to say that relationship isn't worth preserving? It's a very ethical question. It's not really your call as a physician to say that's not a worthwhile relationship. In some ways it is a deeper

bond than many of us share."

Ms. Bagley will tell you that her son can say "hi," "mom," and "I." She remembers tears forming in his eyes while she was praying at his bedside after a particularly trying day, and the smile that formed after a high school friend recounted his escapades at a wedding reception that earned him the nickname "Jose Cuervo."

"I have this intuition that he understands and acknowledges a lot more than he can express and his mother is very in tune with that," Armonda said.

Pequeño behaves differently in different environments, Armonda said. "There is that awareness. To some extent, it's like reading tea leaves. Sometimes it's facial features. I've heard him say words that can possibly be interpreted as ("hi" or "mom"). They are clearly directed toward her. It had a greeting to it and a label to it that is consistent. He didn't use the same label for me or someone else."

On occasion, Pequeño has been less than cooperative with his therapists to the point where Ms. Bagley has called his father. The first time, at West Roxbury, proved to be a revelation for the medical staff.

Over a speaker phone, Mr. Bagley addressed his son as if they were back in the armory in Berlin.

"You need to get your dead ass out of your chair and start moving," he commanded. "If I have to get my dead ass down there, it will be the last time you'll want to see me."

Pequeño reacted by opening his eyes and looking around the room, presumably for his father.

"Keep talking," Ms. Bagley said to his father. "(The staff) needs to see this."

Mr. Bagley has been able to motivate Pequeño in a way only a father and brother-in-arms could.

"Joey is in there. He recognizes me," Mr. Bagley said. "He acknowledges my voice."

Such subtle responses are considered dramatic improve-

ments for Pequeño and they are a key discriminate between someone who is in a vegetative state, Armonda said.

Twice, Armonda and his surgical team have attempted to rebuild Pequeño's skull, a high risk procedure known as a cranioplasty in which the missing bone is replaced with a plate that protects the brain and allows it to heal. Without it, Pequeño is vulnerable to secondary injury. The slightest bump could be harmful.

Both times infections forced the removal of the plate. Pequeño's prognosis for a third operation depends on his body's ability to recover, Armonda said. It won't be considered again until at least six months, if not a year, from his last surgery, which was in May.

Armonda said many of his colleagues would not elect to perform the surgery based on the risk of the procedure versus the benefit or potential for improvement.

"At some point a plateau does occur," he said. "The big items – being independent, being able to ambulate, being able to communicate on his own – I don't see him being able to do that."

Embracing nonverbal communications may be the best that can be hoped for, Armonda said.

"We have an obligation to be frank with the family so there is not this unrealistic expectation that (Pequeño) will be able to communicate and ambulate independently," Armonda said. "There is an artful way to do that without destroying hope."

"There is a huge investment of life into his care. You are seeing the interaction of a child who is totally dependant on their parent and a parent who has these expectations of improvement, these expectations of hope and you have to be careful of how you address that. It's a very fragile thing."

Ms. Bagley says that her son is still the same proud soldier eager to live up to the service of his stepfather and grandfather; the same loving, self-effacing father who played Santa Claus and mimicked Scooby Doo to the delight of his children; the same caring son and older brother who became the man of the house after his parents divorced; and still the much adored police chief in Sugar Hill where he earned a reputation as being too nice to be a cop.

"His eyes tell you a lot," said Elizabeth, 10 years Pequeño's junior. She has spent her weekends helping her mother care for him. "You know he's there. He's still there. He's just kind of trapped."

Elizabeth, like her mother, has been chastised for spending too much time with Pequeño.

"I'm 23-years-old. I have a lot of high school friends who I still stay in touch with, but they don't understand how I can spend my weekends here, and

work during the week," she said. "He is my brother. After my parents divorced, he was my dad and my best friend. He's the one I turned to. He would lay out my options. He would never tell me what to do. How could I not be here?"

As each month passes, Ms. Bagley accepts the possibility her son will need care for the rest of his life.

"I'm not saying my son is going to be 100 percent," Ms. Bagley said. "I hope, but in reality, I know better. But if I can give him 50, 60 or 70 percent – anything I can give him will be worth it. This is a lifelong journey for my son."

Pequeño will remain in Tampa, where he is being considered for outpatient services. Elizabeth has found work there and she and her mother are considering a permanent home for the three of them. In the near future, Chudzicki says, returning to his hometown of Lisbon is not a viable option for Pequeño.

He still battles infections, his body weathering each bout. "He is a fighter," Ms. Bagley said. "Jose has tremendous will power."

He also has his mother.

"I kept asking why Jose, why Jose, and I've stopped asking that question," she said. "If it was meant to help us be strong; if it was meant to help others, it was worth it. I don't want anybody to go through what we have gone through. We've gone through Hell. I am sorry to use that word, but there is no other word." ♦

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Army Promotions & Awards

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James Garrity
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William Genest
Kyle Grandmont
William Hickerson
Matthew Hull
Sara McPherson
Alexander O'Connor
Corey Paradis
Brett Starcher

Private 1st Class

Richard Sheehan
Nathan Adcock
Amy Austin
Aaron Deangelis
Gordon Farrar
Jonathan Dingman
Mason Favereau
Theresa Fortier
Seth Fuller
William Duggan
Christopher Elwell
Joseph Cote
Alexander Green
Brett Chaloux
Russell Pzenny
Shane Roosa
Corey Collins
Kehan Connors
Shane Gladding
Jason Kovarik
Fabian Trudeau
Shawn Judd
Clayton Kuusisto
Jeffrey Key
John Vanderbeck
Stephen Burrows
Tyler Mailhot

Kristin Martin
Ashley Maxner
Jesus Salamanca
John Meadows
Patrick Peryer
Michel Lamontagne
Brittany Milligan

Specialist

Scott Dimond
James Dirosa
Brandon Hunt
Ryan Gauthier
Jonathan Georges
Stephen Thomas
Pieter Laubscher
Nicholas Magoon
James Ploss
Mathew Pelchat
Hermanus Pretorius
Stephen Simms
Luke Sullivan
Douglas Clark
Sean Dubia

Sergeant

Thomas Hossfeld
Donald Kilian
William Cleveland
Eric Dancause
Matthew Molburg
Michael Shields
Scott Bacon

Staff Sergeant

Luis Cepeda
Jon Shutt
Dawn Cookson

Sergeant 1st Class

Jon Cilley

Jesse Emery
Jeffrey Garand
Dion Rowan
Robert Shea
Jason Wovkanech
Sacha Gregoire
Sean Pinsonneault
Matthew Canavan

Master Sergeant

Bruce Pouliot

Chief Warrant 2

Iain Hamilton

1st Lieutenant

Amanda Smith
Jeremy Wilcox
Kent Wyman

Captain

Kennith Kruger
Mark Patterson
Jeffrey Pettee

Major

Bryan Gray
Michael Terry

Colonel

James Moody

Col. James Moody receives his new rank from his wife during his promotion in the Hall of Flags, JFHQ, Concord, in August.

Photo: 1st Sgt. Mike Daigle, Deputy State PAO



FIELD BRIEFS

Continued from page 17

“It’s better to be square on your target, that way if you get hit, you have a better chance of being hit in one of your plates. You can also more readily move if you are facing your target,” said Chaussee. “As the battlefield becomes more urban, we could possibly find ourselves being deployed as something other than field artillery. This training is excellent as it helps us be more adaptable.” ❖

Continued on page 20



Master Sgt. Erik White, an airman with the 157th Security Forces prepares to engage the enemy during a training exercise while deployed to the 875th Air Expeditionary Wing, Nagoya, Japan on June 18.

Photo: Tech Sgt. Aaron Vezeau, 157 ARW PA

Air Promotions & Awards

Capt. Suzanne Barricklow receives her new rank, compliments of her three children, during a promotion ceremony in July. Barricklow is the state equal employment manager and sexual assault response coordinator. Photo: 1st Sgt. Mike Daigle, Deputy State PAO



Promotions

Brigadier General
William Reddell III

Lieutenant Colonel
Shawn Burrus

Captain
Suzanne Barrickow

First Lieutenant
Sherri Pierce
Felix Wong

Senior Master Sergeant
Tracy Hoag
Tony Manix
Alfred Orsini

Master Sergeant
Garrick Lewis
Dominick Noyes
Joseph McGill
Tammy Daigle

Technical Sergeant
Brad Clark
Maria Dulin
Benjamin Northcutt
Joseph Samson
Robert Rojek

Staff Sergeant
Samnang Seng
Nicholas DiSalvo
Mehan Kincaid
John Michniewicz
Justin Toiano

Senior Airman
Nichole McCarthy
Jennifer Rouleau
John Stevens

Airman 1st Class
Caitlyn Chateaufeur
Alexa Schimme
Jonathan Yelle
Kyle Starkweather
Thomas Demers

Awards and Decorations

Meritorious Service Medal



Master Sgt. Richard P. Dole
Chief Master Sgt. Thomas J. Moore
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Maj. Sean P. Mooney
Master Sgt. Joel J. Jamrog
Lt. Col. Daniel E. Hogan II
(3rd Oak-leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. Kelly L. Beddie
Senior Master Sgt. Michael A. Gagne
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Lt. Col. Nicole Desilets-Bixler
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Lt. Col. Richard P. Greenwood
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Lt. Col. Peter F. Sullivan
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Maj. Charles R. Smith
Master Sgt. Michael F. Ploof
Master Sgt. Rodney L. Venable
Lt. Col. James P. Ryan
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. Thomas G. Gaglione

Air Force Commendation Medal



Master Sgt. Luz V. Deering
Master Sgt. John R. Carlson
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Capt. Eric M. Elliot
Master Sgt. Daniel A. Cassady
Master Sgt. Dale H. Snowden
Tech. Sgt. Mark J. Porter
Staff Sgt. Marc P. Sweet
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Tech. Sgt. Randall M. Robertson
Tech. Sgt. Richard J. Blais
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. Myron J. Dippold
(1st Oak-leaf Cluster)
Master Sgt. Edgardo M. Alicea
Master Sgt. Alan D. Poulin
Tech. Sgt. Michael M. Mickelonis
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. Thomas Vasile III
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Tech. Sgt. Peter C. Doyle

Tech. Sgt. John J. Bober
Master Sgt. Melissa M. Theriault
Master Sgt. Brain S. Elliott
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. Keith J. Thibeault
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Tech. Sgt. Barron M. Brissett Jr.
Senior Master Sgt. John O. Jordan III

Air Force Achievement Medal



Tech. Sgt. Patrice H. Foggarty
(2nd Oak Leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. John D. Birnie
Capt. Scott W. Doughty
Tech. Sgt. Adam M. Hughes
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Master Sgt. Daniel S. Jancsy
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
2nd Lt. Thomas J. Mueller
(1st Oak cluster)
Staff Sgt. Thomas J. Moore, Jr.
(1st Oak-leaf cluster)
Tech. Sgt. Aaron P. Vezeau
(2nd Oak-leaf cluster)
Staff Sgt. Emilio Garcia

197th Fire Brigade strikes gold in South Dakota

By Staff Sgt. Neal Mitchell, HHB, 197th Fires Brigade

Thirty soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 197th Fires Brigade participated in the 2008 Annual Golden Coyote training exercise in South Dakota, June 7-21.

HHB's two week annual training mission to the southern Black Hills of South Dakota was arranged for and led by Capt. Michael Moranti, the unit's company commander.

"Capt. Moranti was really thinking outside the box to arrange for this AT in South Dakota," said Sgt. 1st Class Jesse H. Emery, chief surveyor for the 197th FiB. Having the unit's soldiers exposed to an exotic location that isn't the usual Fort Drum, N.Y., or Fort Devens, Mass., makes a big difference in soldier morale, said Emery.

"If you want to know what it was like in the S.D. Dakota Badlands just rent the movie 'Starship Troopers' and pay special attention to the scenes filmed in the desolate canyons," said Emery. "It's the most inhospitable place that I have ever been in, it's on a par with the deserts in Iraq," he said.

In addition to participating in the routine duties involved in running the forward operating base they were assigned to, the unit also had its own Warrior Task Training plan which included convoy training, land navigation, military operations in urban terrain, Combat Life Saving qualification and Black Hawk UH-60 helicopter flights, said Moranti.

Unlike the standard brigade AT where the enlisted soldiers support the Tactical Operation Center staff, this AT was designed to focus on warrior tasks in order to challenge the lower enlisted leadership and introduce troop leading procedures at every level, said Moranti. The plan was to get the WTT done but at the same time build the team, he said.

Despite doing what some people would call routine WTT, it wasn't just your typical AT, said Emery. "There was always something on the horizon that was coming up that was interesting and challenging," he said.

HHB soldiers were immediately challenged June 8 to complete a 10 kilometer march up the Crazy Horse Memorial. The



Sgt. 1st Class Jesse H. Emery and Staff Sgt. Anthony P. Damata from HHB, 197th FiB, stand in front of the unfinished Crazy Horse Memorial in South Dakota. Photo: Courtesy of HHB, 197th FiB

memorial is an unfinished carving, born out of the rough rock of a mountain ridge, to honor the Native American Lakota leader Crazy Horse.

Later that week the soldiers tackled a more serious hike up Harney Peak. At 7,242 feet, the peak is the highest point in South Dakota and from its lofty summit you can see four states on a clear day. Both hikes fostered a higher degree of teamwork and small unit leadership, and instilled a sense of individual accomplishment under realistic circumstances, said Emery.

Everything we had planned for AT was accomplished to include bonus training at the FOB, and night vision goggle helicopter and convoy operations, said Moranti. The unit's performance on the convoy lanes was so good that the training evaluators gave HHB a "go" as they were now fully qualified to be deployed, he said.

"HHB's experience at Golden Coyote this year was excellent," said Emery, "It sets such a high standard for a training location I'm worried that the newer soldiers will expect this kind of exciting location every year."

For 24 years the Golden Coyote exercise has tested the ability of National Guard engineering and support units to mobilize equipment, deploy to a battle zone, coordinate combat and service support missions and re-deploy back to home station. This year's Golden Coyote exercise included 92 units with approximately 4,000 servicemembers from 27 states and four foreign nations. ♦



Members of the 157th Medical Group work on a "patient" with members of the Canadian military and other participants in Patriot '08 held at Volk Field, Wis., early this summer. Patriot '08 was a National Guard-sponsored training exercise that involved Guard, active duty and reserve units from both the Army and Air, as well as Canadian, Dutch and British soldiers. It was a two-day, large-scale exercise that took place in three different locations: Camp Ripley, Minn.; Fort McCoy, Wis.; and Volk Airfield, Wis. Photo: Col. Gretchen Dunkelberger, 157 ARW Medical Group

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