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MAGAZINE

Fall 2009



Mountain Company sets sights on Afghanistan

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On the Cover: Spc. Andrew Cormier checks for possible insurgents in a mock Afghan village during Mountain Company's annual training at Camp Ethan Allen in Vermont in June. The NHARNG infantry unit is deploying to Afghanistan later this year. Photo: Lori Duff, NHNG-PA

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Mountain Company hones tactics for Afghan deployment

By 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA

CAMP ETHAN ALLEN, Vermont – “Smoke rising from trees 40 meters ahead.”

Soldiers from Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), passed the news back to their squad leader, Staff Sgt. Michael Kiernan. He motioned to continue on. The squad moved forward, walking slowly along the dirt pathway leading down toward their objective.

It was a “regular village” Kiernan had said – a village whose local population had generally been friendly to U.S. troops. Kiernan and his squad were on their way to meet the local tribal leader. The squad moved quietly past a man in local Afghan clothes sitting next to a fire. A few meters away, the husk of a burned-out car lay rusting in the tall grass.

As Spc. Dustin Rogers led the squad’s Alpha team past the first set of small huts, a local man waving a large wooden staff burst into the formation shouting in broken English, “Taliban last night! Still here!”

Kiernan’s squad was at the Camp Ethan Allen Training Site in Vermont in June, home of 3rd Battalion and host to the latest round of training they must complete before they deploy to Afghanistan later this winter.

Under the command of Capt. Daniel Newman, Charlie Company will arrive in Afghanistan with nearly 140 soldiers. Half of those soldiers have deployed previously, and more than 20 deployed with Charlie Company to Iraq in 2004. They will be a part of the first complete deployment of the Vermont-based 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), which includes more than 3,100 soldiers from all over New England.



Spc. Bernard Hudgens, center, and other Charlie Company soldiers take a well deserved break during their annual training at Camp Ethan Allen in Vermont in June. Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA

When Maj. Raymond Valas led Charlie Company to Iraq four years ago, soldiers didn’t know what the mission would be until shortly before they landed in country. They were prepared to conduct stability and support operations, he said. On their first trip into their area of operations, they pulled into the tail end of a firefight.

Lt. Col. Robert Charlesworth, commander of 3rd Battalion, originally deployed to Afghanistan in 2003. He says there

was far less experience to guide the training the first time. Today, Charlie Company soldiers have been able to train for a clearly defined mission for more than a year.

The training, Charlesworth says, “is much more in-depth, less on-the-fly.”

Staff Sgt. Christopher McWilliams, who deployed with Charlie Company to Iraq in 2004, can see the difference. The training now involves more group tasks and “more strict tasks, conditions and standards,” he said, referring to the Army’s structured method for teaching soldiering skills. The focus has also changed, with an increased emphasis on dismounted operations – the types of operations Charlie Company soldiers must master to be successful in Afghanistan.

To help build those skills, Kiernan and other leaders faced complex scenarios modeled after situations they can expect to encounter in Afghanistan.



Two Charlie Company soldiers guard a suspected insurgent in a mock Afghan village at Camp Ethan Allen in Vermont in June. Photo: Lori Duff, NHNG-PA

Understanding Afghanistan

“Where they at?” asked Kiernan quickly, trying to calm the tribal elder long enough to understand what he was saying. The squad had already begun to assume firing positions, clearing a small shack nearby to prevent an ambush. A loud explosion down the road interrupted Kiernan’s conversation.

“Man taking pictures!” shouted a soldier behind Kiernan. A man wearing Afghan clothes stood watching from a nearby building with a camera and a cell phone, observing the soldiers as they reacted to the detonation. As Kiernan’s Bravo team, led by Spc. Jason Nestor, began to clear the huts between the squad and the Afghan observer, a shrill whistle filled the air.

Shouts of “Incoming!” erupted throughout the squad as they dropped to the ground. The whistle gave way to an ear-ringing blast as the artillery simulator detonated on the road. Immediately after the explosion, the sound of small arms fire broke out from the far side.

By the time Charlie Company arrives in Afghanistan, says Charlesworth, “These guys are going to be very confident in their ability to do this mission.”

To accomplish their mission, the soldiers of Charlie Company must transition from trainees to trainers. They will embed with Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police forces, providing one-on-one counseling and guidance for their Afghan counterparts.

“The mission is not necessarily ‘close with and destroy the enemy,’” said McWilliams.

While in garrison, soldiers will spend the bulk of their day with their Afghan counterparts. From breakfast and tea in the morning until close of business, the Afghans will rely on the soldiers’ training and expertise. Charlie Company soldiers will help develop training, coach the Afghans through activities and help solve problems.

During operations in the field, Charlie Company soldiers will embed with the Afghans, providing ongoing support and guidance as they accomplish missions together. The greatest challenges, says Charlesworth, will be adjusting to the culture and to the physical environment.

Afghanistan has higher elevations and harsher terrain than Iraq. And unlike Iraq, Afghanistan has few paved roads and – in many areas – no roads at all. The lack of infrastructure is emblematic of deeper cultural contrasts. While the Iraqis had a standing army and a sense of national unity, the Afghans have been fighting a civil war since the former Soviet Union left in 1989.

Loyalties are tribal and locally oriented, says McWilliams. “Folks in Afghanistan know their valley, and that’s where they stay.”

Mastering Counterinsurgency

“Sniper on that building!” shouted a soldier from Kiernan’s Alpha team. The small arms fire had come from their 12 o’clock, from a two-story building at the end of a long stretch of road.

“Go clear that building!” ordered Kiernan. As his Alpha team began bounding up the road, Kiernan placed his remaining men to provide overwatch for the forward element.

The rapid pop of 5.56mm blanks signaled the beginning of Alpha team’s engagement with the enemy sniper. As Rogers’ team pushed through to clear the sniper from the building, Kiernan heard a soldier from Bravo team shout, “Man down!”

Nestor had moved Bravo team to the building with the Afghan observer. When they attempted to detain the observer, the Afghan actor had grabbed a mock AK-47 and fired at the



Spc. Bernard Hudgens leads a search for insurgents in a mock Afghan village at Camp Ethan Allen in Vermont. Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA

team resulting in a simulated injury for one of Nestor’s soldiers.

As the remainder of Kiernan’s squad cleared the last buildings, his radio telephone operator radioed for a medevac to retrieve the injured soldier. With the village secured, the simulation ended.

Before they left Camp Ethan Allen, Charlie Company soldiers completed training ranging from medical warrior tasks and media awareness to crew-served weapons operation and mounted land navigation. The range of tasks reflected the complexity of counterinsurgency operations.

In the after-action review for Kiernan’s urban operations training, Capt. George Rodriguez, an observer controller, warned the squad saying, “Team leaders dictate foreign policy.” He discussed with the squad how to handle the sanctity of mosques during a conflict, and the need to put the pieces of an event together to see the big picture.

The training is designed to get everyone working together as a squad, said Sgt. 1st Class Sacha Gregoire, Charlie Company’s training assessor. And they will need what they’ve learned when the unit goes to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, later this year.

JRTC will test the overall teamwork and professionalism of the 3rd Battalion, serving as the culminating training exercise before they deploy to Afghanistan. They will interact with Afghan nationals while completing multi-day scenarios meant to hammer home mastery of their collective tasks. ♦

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Active duty returns to Pease

Routine refueling signifies new era for 157th Air Refueling Wing

By Tech. Sgt. Angela Stebbins, 157th ARW-PA

NEWINGTON – In the operations log, the Aug. 14 refueling of a C-17 high above the White Mountains and western Maine will reflect an otherwise routine mission for the 157th Air Refueling Wing.

What made the midsummer flight a significant historic footnote was the fact that it was the maiden voyage for Lt. Col. Chris Leist as the commander of the Wing's new active associate, the 64th Air Refueling Squadron.

"When I heard this unit was going to be open for an active associate, I almost fell out of my chair," said Leist, who transferred with his family in July from McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas. Leist, whose mother is from Goffstown, said he looked forward to standing up the permanent, active duty flying unit and being a part of a new chapter in the Wing's history.

"We get to learn from what we consider to be experts in the airframes," he said, after his flight and a round of applause from a group of airmen. "Some of the maintainers here have up to 40 years of experience, and that is not something we have on the active duty side. If you have a full career, you get 20, maybe 30 years, but definitely not 40, so we can gain efficiencies and learn how to fix and fly airplanes better. Once we leave here, we get to take those experiences and efficiencies back to the active duty side and pass it on."

The Air Force's active associate model is based on the premise that a melding of Guard and active duty resources will translate into a more efficient and better trained total force. Ideally, the taxpayer gets a better bang for his buck.

"In an age of declining resources, we want these airplanes to be used as efficiently as they can, and with the help of the active duty we can do that," said Col. Paul Hutchinson, commander of the 157th Operations Group. "With the active associate model, we gain many benefits of the active duty presence. Using the existing infrastructure that is currently underutilized, we can increase the efficiency of operations and ultimately provide increased capabilities to both state and federal missions."

It may also help keep the Air Guard at Pease from any future base closure considerations. Since becoming the sole military operation at Pease in 1991 – when the Air Force had to pack its bags under a federal closure act – the Wing has been wary of its mortality.

At the time of the closure, a nationwide economic boom went bust. The seacoast was hit especially hard. Businesses went belly-up, new construction was abandoned, and with the

departure of 3,500 Air Force personnel and another 1,000 civil service and civilian employees, went about \$1 million a day from the local economy.

Nearly 20 years later, the former air base is a solid tradeport



From left, Maj. Marc Zubricki and Leist plan the Aug. 14 refueling mission.



Lt. Col. Chris Leist checks gauges on the oxygen system before taking his first flight in a 157th ARW tanker as the new active associate commander Aug. 14. Photos: Master Sgt. Tim Psaledakis, 157 ARW-PA

populated by the kinds of companies that have been weathering the effects of an even worse recession thanks to wise business decisions and strategic thinking.

N.H.'s Air Guard leadership applied the same kind of acumen to the business of flying, building a force from the inside out that is as strong and viable as it has been since relocating from Manchester in 1966.

It survived a second round of base closures while being the recipient of tens of millions of federal dollars for base reconstruction including runway improvements, a new fire department and a new clinic that serves area veterans. In the past two years, more than \$20 million in federal funding has been appropriated for a new headquarters and flight operations center.

The leadership expanded the Wing's mission to include the transport of injured service members and equipment. And after several years of intensive politicking, Pease was chosen as one of only three Air National Guard bases in the country to field an active associate flying squadron.

By September 2011, the 64th is expected to be at full strength with 135 airmen. It will complement the 157th's 24-7 mission set by falling in on the current fleet of tankers, adding an additional 1,300 missions annually, and, N.H. Guard leaders hope, put the Wing in a better position to replace its aging fleet of Stratotankers with a new generation of refueler.

"This is a win-win for all involved," Hutchinson said. "The New Hampshire Air National Guard already flies more hours than any other like-size unit in the country. We execute at a very high rate, but I believe the active duty being here will allow us to do more. We gain the active duty knowledge, experience and manpower. The Guard may have a more experienced force, but the active duty has a more varied experience, having been to several different bases, under several different commands, working with several different aircraft, so we take those two separate strengths and blend them together as one to become more efficient." ♦



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"Food Just Like Mama Used To Make"

3rd Battalion fields new rocket system

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

CENTER STRAFFORD – They arrived this spring – the 3rd Battalion’s new high mobility rocket systems or HIMARS, hunkered down like 24,000-pound steely-eyed, verdant grasshoppers, each packing a punch equal to six M198 howitzers.

“This has been a long time in the planning process,” said Lt. Col. Thomas Spencer, 3rd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery commander. “This is a great piece of equipment. It’s really a force multiplier. It’s more accurate to put steel on target.”

But when 3rd Battalion deploys to the Middle East next year with the 197th Fires Brigade, each of the \$3 million systems will stay home. Despite a concerted effort by N.H. Guard leadership to lobby Big

Army for a fires mission, the 197th is scheduled to deploy to Kuwait in support of a security and stabilization mission. The HIMARS will be stored until the unit’s return.

It’s the second time that N.H.’s Army Guard field artillery component will deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom for a mission other than its primary. In 2004, they supported security missions. Many Army units are performing nonstandard missions, said Col. Peter Corey, 197th Fires Brigade commander.

“Sure, it’s a little disappointing for an artilleryman to not have the opportunity to apply their skills after what has been in some cases many years of training,” he said. “It’s a little like being a fireman who trains their whole life to put out fires and then never gets an opportunity to put out a fire.

“So, yes, it can leave someone with an incomplete sense of fulfillment. But that doesn’t diminish the importance of the jobs and skills you’ve got – you’re there, you’re ready and you’re capable. It does help ease the disappointment to a large degree to know the nation needs us to do this. Just because they’re not kinetic skills, it’s no less important to the nation’s strategic objective.”

The fielding of the HIMARS culminated with a live fire exercise at Fort Drum in September. It was the first time a HIMARS was fired there.

“We’ve run into a few rumble strips but all in all the training has gone well,” said Sgt. 1st Class Walter Dellinger, A Battery Operations NCO. “Learning this is a team effort. This really makes people step up their game. The soldiers are taking direction really well, and most of these are a bunch of young guys who are truly motivated to learn this equipment.”

Dellinger added that the modernization of the field artillery system has been tougher on the “older guys” because of the emphasis on computer knowledge. “It’s not as hands on as it used to be.”

It will be difficult to put the “fun” away, said 1st Lt. Christopher Thompson of Det. 1, Battery A, but added that during the deployment, the battalion will have HIMARS training built in to retain the new skills.

“The good news is there are a lot of professional, very skilled soldiers and leaders who have proven within the field artillery community time and time again that they can quickly adapt, overcome and succeed at any mission the nation asks us to do,” Corey said. ❖

Staff Sgt. James Chesnis and driver Spc. Brett Chaloux of Battery A, 3/197th FA, check the launcher module during simulated training at the Regional Training Institute in July.
Photo: Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA



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157th Civil Engineers train in 'Gitmo'

By Army Sgt. Andrew Hillegass, JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba – Members of the N.H. Air Guard's 157th Civil Engineering Squadron deployed to U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay are not running short of real-world conditions to prepare themselves for possible overseas deployment.

Since arriving on the island at the beginning of August, they have immersed themselves in almost nonstop work, completing a number of projects in a short time.

"We have kept very busy here. In the first four days we were here, we completed about 10 days worth of work," said the noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Senior Master Sgt. Bill Russell.

Although not the first location for the unit, which provides a gamut of services from construction to electrical and plumbing repair, Joint Task Force Guantanamo is proving an important training tool for the airmen.

"It is great coming down here, even if for two weeks, because we are helping out everyone here in Guantanamo, not just the JTF," added Russell, who has more than 20 years with the Air National Guard.

Lt. Col. Mike Busby, commander of the 157th, enjoys what Guantanamo provides for his service members. The location has not only provided real-world training for the unit, but it also gives them the chance to experience an environment that differs greatly from their home state.

"When we come down, we have to deal with elevated temperatures, being away from home and even the living conditions. Those are the things that are going to make the difference when we deploy," said Busby.

The list of projects the team has been involved with ranged from the relatively small, such as swapping out some electrical panels at the public works self-help building, to slightly more labor intensive projects like resurfacing the roof of the naval station's hospital.

"Our guys were out at the hospital the first week we were here, working on their roof. It gives my guys the opportunity to complete a job that not only gave my guys roofing experience but also saved the base nearly \$50,000 in contractor costs," praised Russell, a nine-year active duty veteran.

In addition to resurfacing the hospital roof, they are also putting the finishing touches on a new gazebo, running electrical lines to the structure so they will be able to hook up lights and a ceiling fan.

For Busby, who has been in the unit for more than 20 years as both enlisted and officer, this kind of on-the-job training is the type of thing that not only boosts the morale of his airmen but also provides them with invaluable training that his unit has been lacking over the last few years.

"Over the last 10 years, we have lost many personnel because they want to get out and do their jobs instead of preparing for inspections and other things that we have had in years past," said Busby.

1st Lt. Carrie Smith, an engineering officer, echoed Busby's emphasis on training as a great tool to enhance morale and teamwork within their unit of approximately 90 personnel.

"It is great that we get to come down here and have the opportunity to use equipment that we may not have back at home



Master Sgt. Todd Buttrick and Airman 1st Class Mark Quinn, members of the 157th Civil Engineering Squadron, secure a metal bracket to a tabletop at Windmill Beach, Aug. 10. The 157th CES is deployed to Joint Task Force Guantanamo for two weeks of training. JTF Guantanamo photo: Army Sgt. Andrew Hillegass

station. Our guys get to come down here and interact with one another and build on teamwork. We don't have to send our guys off to school to get the same training we are able to do down here," praised Smith.

Busby also recognizes the importance of overseas DFTs for his unit. He has noticed over the last 10 to 15 years the demographic of his unit has become younger. This leaves him with a force that may not hold the same jobs in the civilian world as they do in his unit.

"Years ago, we had a lot more people that were doing their jobs outside of the military, so that lent us a great deal of expertise and knowledge for our guys to draw on," reflected Busby, who spent nine years enlisted as an electrician.

However, in the same breath Busby is quick to commend the younger airmen for their willingness to work outside their comfort zone and says that attitude gives him comfort for the future of his engineering squadron.

"I have guys who are plumbers by trade but have no problem when there are no plumbing jobs left, of picking up a hammer and helping out the construction guys. The degree to which they help each other out is amazing. These guys are one of a kind," said Busby. ❖



160th Engineers storm South Dakota

Story and photos by Lori Duff, NHNG-PA

BLACK HILLS NATIONAL FOREST, South Dakota –

After four days of rain at their annual training in South Dakota, the soldiers of the 160th Engineering Company were taking a beating – and that was before the tornadoes hit.

Tents dripped. Boots were caked in mud. Sleeping bags were cold. And everything, literally everything, was wet.

But the soldiers weren't bothered by the "suck factor" – what really annoyed them was that they couldn't be working more.

"These are people that like to be doing things," said Sgt. 1st Class Chuck Rice.

At the evening briefing, Rice, 46, the "grandpa" and detachment sergeant of the unit, announced the next day's weather.

"You know the deal. Rain," he said.

"We are going to adjust fire."

"We are going to fight Mother Nature."

"We're going to breach that obstacle. I don't care what we have to do."

Operation Golden Coyote

The detachment was part of a 30-state training dubbed "Golden Coyote," managed out of Ellsworth Air Force Base and hosted by the Black Hills National Forest, June 6-20.

This was the 25th year for the annual operation, which included 3,800 soldiers participating in missions ranging from medical to transportation.

For its part, N.H. Army Guard's 29 soldiers and two visiting engineers from Great Britain were tasked with building a retaining wall, re-roofing a Forest Service house and constructing an obstacle course for the South Dakota officer candidate program.

Transformed in 2007 to meet the needs of a more mobile force, the 210th Engineering Company, a utilities detachment, was remade into the 160th Engineers, a vertical construction

platoon of carpenters, plumbers, electricians and light equipment operators.

Many of the soldiers in the unit are brand new. Half of them are under the age of 21. Sixteen of the unit's assigned 57 soldiers will deploy to Afghanistan with Charlie Company later this year. A few have come straight from basic training.

Training for the Superbowl

It was 5 a.m. The 160th was headed to Pease Air National Guard Base, sharing snacks and sleeping. A serious mustache growing competition was already underway.

The day before, the unit had loaded up a New York Air National Guard C-5 galaxy plane with all their vehicles, supplies and gear during a joint operation with the N.H. Air Guard.

It was an exercise in preparedness that went beyond their annual training to the real life possibility of a future deployment. In 2004, the 210th Engineers deployed to Afghanistan, one of the first mobilizations in the state. That trip was the first time the unit had airlifted their equipment.

"Nowadays," said Warrant Officer Michael Dugan, acting executive officer of the unit, "we have to train with the intent to deploy."

1st Lt. Paige Riordan, 160th commander, and Rice, too, are focused on this reality.

During Rice's military career, he has deployed five times. With that in mind, he tackled annual training like coaching a football team – so that when it is time, the unit will be ready to go "over the pond and head for the Superbowl."

Greg Bohls, Forest Service coordinator for Golden Coyote, said that about 75-80 percent of the units participating last year had deployed overseas.

Their service, Bohls said, is something that locals in South Dakota are proud to support. Regional contractors, who are

From left, Pvt. Nick Phelps, Pfc. Kyle Kilgren, Spc. Tony Rorick and Sgt. Shaun Delbene of the 160th Engineers, strip shingles from a U.S. Forest Service roof in the Black Hills of South Dakota during their annual training.

allowed to bid on projects that the units work on, have never complained and have always encouraged the training.

“They are very understanding – especially when people are going overseas on war missions. They understand that it is very important to train here without bullets flying at you,” he said.

Keeping morale up

The unit arrived at Ellsworth Air Force Base to a wet field of calf-high grass. Planes moved on distant runways as the unit began the process of unloading tents and setting up camp.

It was the first two-week training in which Riordan had served as commander of the unit. Under her were three new squad leaders and a bevy of fresh soldiers.

“We’re not only figuring out how to run a detachment but figuring out how to work together,” said Riordan.

Deciding where they want the tents in the wet field was their first tactical challenge. Where is the wind coming from? Where is the high ground? Should the doors face each other? Should they be aligned in rows or fanned out in a circle?

The training, said Rice, is not just about teaching job-specific skills but also training soldiers to become leaders.

At the evening meeting, he encouraged squad leaders to “make sure your soldiers are fed and warm. Keep morale up, because if morale goes down on day two, we aren’t going to get it back.”

Engineers like to work

The rains began in earnest that night. By Monday, the squads were itching to get busy. “As soon as they got to the job site, you could see how happy they were – even though it was raining,” said Dugan.

Convoying an hour to their work location, the heavy vehicles lumbered along the highway and through the Black Hills to the town of Nemo.

Scaffolding was erected for the roofing project, and the wall crew began clearing rocks and dirt from the site.

The 160th Engineers like to work. They are carpenters, plumbers and electricians. Their hands are part of the trade.

Some join with construction skills already mastered. A private may be more versed in a specific construction project than a sergeant because of real world experience.

Others have decided to become engineers, said Riordan, to learn construction skills that they can use in civilian occupations.

“These are hands-on people,” said Rice. “These are blue collar workers, but there’s a whole lot more to engineers.”

Pfc. Erin Howard, 31, joined the Guard to set an example for her five-year-old daughter.

Pvt. 2 James Lafond, 19, is a plumber by trade, but what he really likes to do is drive – anything.

Pfc. Brett Starcher, 38, had a career in construction and dreamed of joining the Army but didn’t get the chance until last year.

Pfc. William Genest, 26, a father of three, is hoping his service will lead to a college education.

Staff Sgt. Jon Shutt, 26, is a fifth-grade teacher who deployed to Iraq with the Maine Engineers.

Sgt. Adam Ferland, 37, is a former Navy seaman who made water in Desert Storm.

Rice has always been an engineer – “from birth,” he says.

For some of the older soldiers in the unit, the training is an opportunity to pass on skills.

When the ground tamper refused to start for the wall building crew, Sgt. James McCabe, 46, a veteran of the unit who deployed to Afghanistan, offered this advice, “Talk to it sweet.”

To which squad leader Shutt responded, “I’d give it a big wet kiss, if I thought it would do any good.”

In the end, the strong arms and quiet persistence of Pfc. Tim Lanciani paid off, and the tamper was up and running.

McCabe shared instruction on how to operate it, and the team was good to go.

“If we can teach them to be leaders, they can take our jobs,” said Sgt. Steve Hartwell, 55, a former marine who had deployed with the Vermont National Guard and who was a quiet presence on the job site. “You’ve got to lead by example. You can’t lead by your mouth.”

Is it time to eat yet?

At the end of the week, the rain hadn’t stopped, and chow had become something to look forward to.

The results of the mustache competition were also starting to show. And the joking had begun.

“It’s like something died on your lip.”

“Does Campbell even have a mustache?”

“He works on it every night.”

Music was a staple in the van, and it didn’t take much to get the unit singing along – a little Bad Company, the Lunch Lady song. People slept, texted girlfriends, talked on cell phones.

“It’s all about attitude,” said Rice.

The rain didn’t stop.

During the second week, three tornadoes touched down, and afternoon storm warnings included hail, lightning, and flash floods. But the training didn’t stop.

Rice’s plan was to charge out there. Build confidence. Teach leaders. Teach soldiers. Teach a lieutenant and go from there.

For the team, it was about the training, weather and all.

“I care about these soldiers like somebody cared about me.

The only reward you need is that you are always remembered by a good platoon sergeant,” said Rice. “You can’t beat them. You’ve got to lead them. Hopefully, I’m effective. You never know. You only know later down the road. You step away after five years, and you see the guys you brought up leading the way. You see a young lieutenant and some day she’ll be a colonel and she’ll be an effective leader.”

The rewards are there, he said.

After wrestling Mother Nature and all her might, Rice is sure the 160th has come back “a little stronger and a little wiser.” ♦



Staff Sgt. Russ Evans attempts to shave using a humvee mirror. It rained nearly every day during the 160th Engineer’s annual training.



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Presidential landings

With Obama visit, Wing greets its fourth commander in chief

By *Ist. Lt. Sherri Pierce, 157 ARW-PAO*

NEWINGTON – The measured salutes span two decades.

Since 1991, when the active duty Air Force left Pease, the N.H. Air Guard has been the official greeter for the president of the United States when he visits New Hampshire on Air Force One.

President Barack Obama's arrival on Aug. 11 to tout his health care plan in nearby Portsmouth marked the fourth different commander in chief to set foot on the Pease tarmac since former President George H. W. Bush was in office. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush made frequent stops during their terms. Over that span, three different commanders of the 157th Air Refueling Wing and three Adjutants General have personally welcomed them.

In the past five years, the Wing has supported seven POTUS visits. They are occasionally accompanied by foreign heads of state. Several years ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived at Pease to join President Bush for a weekend of talks at the Bush summer retreat in Kennebunkport, Maine.

Although brief – President Obama's visit lasted five minutes, before he departed for Portsmouth High School in a pre-staged motorcade – the amount of preparation takes more than a week.

The key is to “work in concert with the Secret Service and the White House to properly and safely host the president of the United States and continue to do the missions we are assigned,” said Col. Richard Martell, commander of the 157th Air Refueling Wing.

Nearly every squadron in the Wing – from Security Forces, Logistics Readiness, Air Traffic Control, Maintenance, Civil Engineering and Public Affairs – is involved.

“As much work as a POTUS visit is, we are never at a shortage of volunteers to come in to work the event, no matter how long the stay is,” said Maj. Richard Hamilton, the Wing's security force commander. “We have established a professional and reciprocal relationship



Col. Richard Martell, 157th Air Refueling Wing commander, greets President Barack Obama upon his arrival at Pease Air National Guard Base on Aug. 11. Photo: Tech Sgt. Aaron Vezeau, 157 ARW-PA

with all of the agencies we work with. The comments from the Secret Service consistently identify what a great group of (members) we have in our unit.”

From mission planning, arranging transportation, ensuring the base is safe and secure to mowing the grass, moving barricades and arranging media – nothing

is overlooked during a POTUS visit.

“We are consistently given feedback that we have POTUS support down to a science, since we have done it for so many years,” said Lt. Col. Rob Burrus of Wing plans, “but we don't get complacent, because it is such a high visibility event.” ♦



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N.H. teachers find common ground in El Salvador



First graders at San José Villanueva school in El Salvador have a lesson in computers with their teacher, Nelson Correia. Last year, his students created a Web site that won an international competition and earned them more than 400 new children's laptops.

Story and photos by Lori Duff, NHNG-PA

SAN JOSÉ VILLANUEVA, El Salvador – On a final day of the N.H. National Guard-sponsored teacher exchange, the children of the San José Villanueva school in El Salvador surged forward for a round of hugs and autographs.

Little arms wrapped the waists of the Bow Middle and High School teachers as they took photos and said their goodbyes. It was the end of a three-day educational visit from five New Hampshire teachers, the first of what they hope will be many to their new partner school.

Their primary goal was to begin a five-year exchange through the NHNG State Partnership Program to share ideas and practices about progressive education, teacher training, teacher selection and recruiting, teaching aids development, foreign language education, vocational education, and higher education preparation.

Their secondary goal was to create a lasting friendship.

“The teachers themselves, the students themselves – they are just like we are in Bow. I think it’s something that people need to keep in mind, especially in this climate that we are in, in the world – that we are all the same, that we are all facing the same problems,” said Derek DeAngelis, a Bow humanities teacher.

The first phase of the program began in August with the Bow teachers’ visit to San José Villanueva. The Salvadoran teachers are scheduled to visit Bow sometime in November.

The initial exchanges were funded by the National Guard with the goal of developing an independent partnership after five years. Step one was getting to know each other.

Bienvenidos a los norteamericanos

It was Tuesday, and the weather in San José Villanueva hovered in the high 80s. Surrounded by an external wall, the



Bow Middle and High School teachers gather in the courtyard at San José Villanueva in El Salvador to discuss their reflections of the school during an NHNG-sponsored teacher exchange from Aug 10-14.

school's cement block classrooms opened to tree-shaded courtyards and outdoor hallways.

Dark-haired girls with headbands and white socks sat next to boys with neatly combed hair in Maria Ayala's language classroom. Their uniforms were pressed. They were attentive and eager to engage.

Ayala was paired with Bow High School Spanish teacher Heather Rosenbleeth for the exchange.

As Ayala clasped her hand, Rosenbleeth stood up in front of the class and introduced herself in Spanish.

"Me llamo Heather Rosenbleeth. Soy profesora de español."

Ayala explained the mission of the exchange to the students, welcomed the visitors, and then had the students bow their heads in prayer.

In Spanish, she thanked God for sending the teachers. She prayed for a beneficial exchange, and she asked that they be used as tools for His higher purpose. With no textbooks for support and 48 students in the class, teaching began.

In many ways, Ayala is representative of the teachers in El Salvador. She works hard for her modest income. She rises at 4 a.m. to take care of household chores and get her 80-year-old father ready for the day. Then she walks to the bus stop for her hour-long ride.

School begins at 7:15 a.m. It's hot, and because her doors and walls are open to the courtyard, she has to shout to be heard over the noise of gym students. At lunch she takes a quick break – then begins teaching an entirely new set of students.

In total, over 1,100 students come through the school every day. School ends at 6 p.m. and Ayala usually gets home after 7:30. Her total salary is \$400 a month, but like most teachers, she does it because she believes in it.

"They have a lot they could complain about," said Muriel Hall. "Class size, noise, lack of materials, heat. But they don't complain. They do the best with what they've got and are looking to see how they can make it better."

The cultural landscape of El Salvador

The teachers are part of a larger vision for the NHNG State Partnership Program. Since its inception in 2000, the program has coordinated more than 40 events with El Salvador, ranging from military, congressional, university and state agency exchanges. Nationwide, nearly every state and territory has a partner country in Eastern Europe, Central and South America or Africa. Some have two.

Most recently, El Salvador's new Minister of Defense, Brig. Gen. David Munguia Payes, traveled to New Hampshire in August for a series of meetings with N.H. Guard and state leadership. Earlier this year, two U.S. Fish and Game officers who specialize in scuba search and rescue, traveled to El Salvador to meet their counterparts who train as members of the country's Special Forces.

"We all live in the same world," said Capt. José Rodríguez, who works as a liaison officer for NHNG's SPP with the U.S.

Military Group in El Salvador. "We have to engage and react, and we never know when we are going to be in need of their assistance, or they are going to be in need of our assistance."

The smallest country in Central America, the Republic of El Salvador is a five-hour flight from Boston, tucked between the southern borders of Guatemala and Honduras. A fault line running down the center of the country connects five prominent volcanoes. It is home to nearly seven million people. More than one million reside in the country's capital of San Salvador, which was originally nicknamed "El Valle de las Hamacas," or The Valley of the Hammocks, by Spanish explorers because of the frequent seismic activity.

From 1980 to 1992, a painful civil war claimed the lives of 75,000 people. Since then, the country has struggled to build a stable economic base despite crime, corruption and a growing gang problem. This year, Mauricio Funes, a former political commentator representing the left-wing party FMLN, was elected president. It was the first time since the 1992 peace accords were signed, that the right-wing Arena party did not occupy the country's highest office.

An estimated 1.5 to 2 million Salvadorans live in the U.S. and send remittances to families at home – accounting for about 17 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

Income disparity between the rich and the poor is marked, and it plays out in San José Villanueva. About 30 minutes outside the capital, the town has seen increased development, including the addition of an exclusive, gated community.

For the average person, without an external income source, the cost of living may exceed their monthly wages.

While school in El Salvador is free, many wealthier people opt to send their children to private institutions due to smaller classes and material considerations.

Students at San José Villanueva come from all over the area – some walking up to five miles to get to school. "When you see these kids and they're all dressed so nicely, you don't realize how hard it is for them to come to school," said Wilhelm.

But they learn with enthusiasm and pride.

"These kids may be different, as far as how they live, but they're certainly not different on what they think or what they do. How they want to learn. How important education is," said DeAngelis.

It's a sentiment that all the teachers shared and a lesson they hoped to bring home.

"You don't need all of the fancy equipment and expensive toys to be able to really excel and do well, you just need the dedication, the enthusiasm and the desire to pick yourself up and move ahead and move forward," said Rosenbleeth.

A model school

Inside the school's computer lab, the only air-conditioned classroom in the school, Nelson Correia instructed a group of first graders on the basics of a computer.

"Este es un ratón [This is a mouse]," he said. Pretty soon the class was playing a simple, animated children's game.



Bow Middle School teacher Muriel Hall works with a student at San José Villanueva school in El Salvador as part of an NHNG-sponsored teacher exchange from Aug 10-14.



Students at San José Villanueva school surround Bow High School Spanish teacher Heather Rosenbleeth in their classroom during an NHNG-sponsored teacher exchange from Aug. 10-14.

Correia is one of the visionaries at the school. In 2001, there were no computers in town, so Correia taught with drawings.

By 2008, Correia's instruction had advanced to the point that his students were gaining scholarships based on technological proficiency, and last fall his students designed a Web site which won an international contest. Their prize was 469 children's laptop computers.

Some day Correia hopes the entire town can have wireless access and a public cyber location where anyone can have access to the Internet or e-mail.

"It's going to be awesome to work with Nelson," said Hall, a computer teacher. "He knows a lot in terms of systems, and I could do a lot with integrating technology into the existing curriculum."

That's just the beginning of the teachers' ideas about working together. The two schools have discussed teacher trainings, material needs, a return exchange, Internet correspondence, and DiAngelis already has students interested in working with San José Villanueva for their senior projects.

The beginning

The pairing of Bow and San José Villanueva grew out of a random connection at a Concord church where Maj. Ray Valas, NHNG International Affairs Officer, heard a speech by Mike Jenkins.

The former El Salvador Peace Corps volunteer had formed with his wife, Susan, the nonprofit Epilogos Charities to benefit the people of his old village.

Mike and Susan were married at San José Villanueva in 1965, and Julio Rivera, the Salvadoran president at the time, not only attended their wedding, but escorted Susan down the aisle.

After they finished their Peace Corps service, they moved back to Concord and worked for the next 38 years. In 2001, they decided to go back to El Salvador and renew their vows in the same church where they were married.

To their surprise, the turnout from the town was enormous.

"All these kids we had taught were grown into community leaders," said Mike. "And the school and health clinic we started were still going."

After retirement and serious illnesses, the Jenkinsons came back to El Salvador to help. "We thought we were going to croak," Mike said, "but now we don't have time to die."

Through their hospitality, they provided a host for the visiting Bow teachers and served as a bridge between the two cultures.

The Jenkinsons are also a part of the newly created State Partnership Council. Formed in 2008 with the help of the N.H.

Guard, the council consists of 12 agencies from government organizations to church groups that have an active interest and involvement in El Salvador. The committee facilitates cooperative efforts and joint projects. Partnerships such as the University of New Hampshire and the University of El Salvador have already become self-sustaining.

Goodbye ceremony

By Thursday the exchange was drawing to an end. In the morning heat, the entire San José Villanueva school gathered in the courtyard for a presentation and exchange of thanks.

Girls dressed in traditional skirts danced. Handmade Salvadoran gifts were offered.

School director Miguel Angel Arriaga shared his hope that the exchange would be the beginning of a brotherhood between the two schools.

"This is your school," he told the Bow teachers through a translator.

"For me, this was the most powerful statement made during the three days," said Hall. "I remember sitting there and thinking, 'I've just assumed a tremendous responsibility.'"

The reception left an indelible impression on the teachers from New Hampshire.

"It was just like they really loved you," said Rosenbleeth. "They didn't even know you, and they loved you." ♦

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197th Fires Brigade goes digital in a **BIG** way

By Spc. David Tille, 197th Fires Brigade PA

FORT DRUM, New York – The 197th Fires Brigade completed the largest scale simulation exercise ever held at Fort Drum's state-of-the-art Battle Command Training Center during its annual training Aug. 1-15.

The Army Battle Command System exercise was the culmination of more than a year-long battle drill for the brigade, Operation Sand Blast, in which U.S. forces assist a notional ally to repel an enemy invasion.

It involved more than 200 N.H. citizen-soldiers as well as the brigade's support battalions from Michigan, West Virginia, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and the brigade's higher headquarters, the 42nd Infantry Division from New York.

"This is the first time our brigade staff has operated or trained in the same location as all of our subordinate battalions," said Col. Pete Corey, commander of the 197th. "It gives us an opportunity to refine our standard operating procedures and to draft our digital SOPs."

The timing is right as the brigade and its support battalions, about 2,800 soldiers, are scheduled to deploy next year in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Before the start of the exercise, the unit had familiarization on 15 to 20 percent of the systems, Corey said. "We've improved 1,000 percent. It's astounding to see how well soldiers are working with systems and ironing out the process of how information flows"

The intent of the exercise was not to "win the war," Corey said, but "to develop some level of competence in the Fires Brigade doctrine."



Capt. Eric Perrault prepares a correspondence during the 197th Fires Brigade's battle drill held at Fort Drum's BCTC on Aug. 1-15. Photo: Spc. David Tille, 197th Fires-PA

"We've gone to a fully digital net-centric command and control," he explained. "That net-centric warfare has completely changed how we do business. In the past, information flowed pretty much in stove pipes, but with everything networked, information is shared pretty much in real time between the upper and lower echelon."

What impressed the BCTC staff most was the ambition displayed by the soldiers to learn and use the ABCS. For many, it was their first hands-on opportunity.

"This was an outstanding performance by the brigade and all six battalions from all personnel from private to colonel," said Frank Dunbar, Chief, Collective Training Branch, Fort Drum, BCTC. ❖

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Moving and spontaneous

In a span of five days in late August, family and friends said goodbye to the 238th Medical Company, which deployed for its second tour of duty in Iraq; and welcomed home Team Granite, the N.H. Guard's sixth embedded training team to serve in Afghanistan, mentoring the country's newest soldiers and policemen.

As scripted as we have made these ceremonies over the last eight years, they are equally as moving and spontaneous.

The children, especially, can make saps out of us all.

What follows in the next four pages are some of the most powerful images to date of what serves as book-ends to the cycle of war for N.H. National Guardsmen and their families.

They were shot by Lori Duff and 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, who along with Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, continue to raise the level of journalistic excellence in the New Hampshire National Guard Magazine with their writing and photography.

– Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO



Capt. Tyler Chamberlain hugs his girlfriend, Melissa Bratter, at the Manchester Boston Regional Airport Aug. 21 after arriving home from a year-long deployment in Afghanistan with the Embedded Training Team. Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA



Spc. Joshua Gabriel kisses his three-month-old son, Josh, at the departure ceremony for the 238th Medical Company in Concord on Aug 22.

Photo: 2nd Lt Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA



1st Sgt. Dana Moore hugs his sons, Austin, 9, left, and Keagan, 6, at a welcome home ceremony for a N.H. Army Guard Embedded Training Team in Assembly Hall, JFHQ, Aug. 25. Moore was one of 16 soldiers who mentored Afghan army and police personnel.
Photo: Lori Duff, NHNG-PA



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Filiault leaves the Manchester Boston Regional Airport with his family Aug. 21 after arriving home from a year-long deployment to Afghanistan with the Embedded Training Team. Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA



Capt. Mark Patterson kisses his wife, Laurie, at the Manchester Boston Regional Airport on Aug. 21 after arriving home from a year-long deployment to Afghanistan. Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA



Joe Atkins, 3, sits inside a Black Hawk while his mother, Nicole Atkins, right, takes a photo Aug. 22 in Concord during the departure ceremony for the 238th Aviation Regiment. Sgt. Carey Atkins, Joe's dad, will deploy to Iraq this fall. Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA

Ceremony honors 61 New Hampshire POWs who died in captivity



Allan Gavan, a POW during World War II, accepts a U.S. flag in appreciation of his efforts in awarding Purple Hearts to those N.H. service members who died in POW camps during Korea and World War II. Photos: Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

BOSCAWEN – Though many of their epilogues have not yet been written, an important chapter has been added to the memory of 61 New Hampshire men who died as prisoners of war in World War II and Korea.

More than 100 family members and legions of spectators gathered for a special event on Aug. 8 at the State Veterans Cemetery to commemorate their service and sacrifice, and award eligibility certificates for Purple Heart medals.

Many of their remains have never been found, and until recently, they were not eligible for official acknowledgement of their death at the hands of enemy captors.

The ceremony in memoriam, co-hosted by the N.H. Chapters of Military Order of the Purple Heart and the American Ex-Prisoners of War organization, was the first of its kind in the nation.

“This is a very dignified and honorable tribute to those who endured terrible physical, mental and psychological torture in prisoner of war camps,” said Bob Jones of Meredith, a member of the N.H. chapter of the Northeast POW/MIA.

A change in the strict language to earn a Purple Heart made the ceremony possible, Allan Gavan of Moultonboro said, one of the founding organizers of the event and a member of the N.H. chapter of American Ex-Prisoners of War. Formerly, only those wounded or killed in combat action were eligible. Now the expanded criteria, passed in late 2008 under Our Fallen Prisoners of War Act, acknowledges all those who perished in prisoner of war camps following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Nationally, the change potentially affects more than 12,000 veterans who died in POW camps.

“I’m grateful for this day,” said the 84-year-old Gavan, who was a German POW in 1944 in France. “This was closure in the sense there was never a formal acknowledgement that something happened. All many of these people got was a telegram. I think individually all felt chagrined that the person they loved never got his due.”

Virginia Wilkins of Hollis hugged a photograph of her brother, Pvt. 1st Class Elliott “Russell” Lund, a teenaged paratrooper with the 17th Airborne Division. He died in a POW camp one month before the war’s end. The photograph, she said, gave her comfort and helped her feel like he was right there with her.

“This was his day,” Wilkins said. “You know, all these years I always felt like he should have gotten something. I felt like he deserved something. But I didn’t know, so this was quite a surprise – and quite an honor. This was a very nice ceremony, very emotional. And long overdue.”

Wilkins recalled that she was shielded from much of the trauma of her brother being lost in the war because she was only 13 at the time, but knows her parents received a telegram informing them he had gone missing in Belgium on Jan. 4, 1945. On Feb. 2, they received another informing them he was a POW. Then, after the war ended – a third and final telegram letting them know he died on April 1, 1945. No details were provided and none of his belongings were returned.

Virginia Wilkins of Hollis holds a photograph of her brother, Pvt. 1st Class Elliott “Russell” Lund, who died in a POW camp in 1945, one month before World War II ended.

Years later, survivors who had been captured with him wrote his parents, sharing the bits and pieces of what they knew. Stringing together these witness accounts helped the family learn a little of what had happened to their eldest son. This way of filling in the blanks, through letter writing with survivors, is not an uncommon scenario for families, and in many cases proved the only way families could gather any information of what had happened.

“This is a thing you never get over,” Wilkins said. “There’s always going to be an empty spot, especially on holidays.”

One of her sons whom she named after her brother, Russell Wilkins, became interested and immersed in learning about his uncle and others who served. He authored the book, “Missing in Belgium” that was released in 2008. In doing the research for the book, her son learned that more than 70,000 Americans remain missing and unaccounted for from World War II. In many cases, those who were captured died among strangers.

Families from across the United States made the trip to New Hampshire to participate in the Purple Heart ceremony.



KEEPER OF A LEGACY

Cousin of Harl Pease Jr. reflects on Granite State ace, Medal of Honor recipient

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

GOFFSTOWN – Fay Benton was not expecting the phone call inviting her to the Purple Heart ceremony at the Veterans Cemetery Aug. 8. She had no idea her cousin Harl Pease Jr. was even eligible for another Purple Heart for his service during World War II. But indeed he was, and as she accepted the certificate in honor of the man for whom Pease Air National Guard Base is named, she felt a familiar reverence that has by now become a decades-old companion.

The legacy of Harl Pease Jr. starts with his birth in Plymouth April 10, 1917, and extends beyond World War II when he was first recognized as an astute and gallant war hero, and where he was ultimately lost. The years since the young pilot met an untimely death have been filled with his parents' efforts to keep his memory alive, a concern which eventually fell to his cousin Fay when Pease's parents and his one sister passed away.

At the time of their passing, his parents still believed that their only son had perished during a bombing raid when his B-17 Flying Fortress crashed into a jungle.

It was Benton who learned the truth years later – that he had narrowly survived the crash only to die months later at the hands of the Japanese in a prisoner of war camp tucked away in Rabaul, New Britain, New Guinea.

At her modest home in Goffstown, adorned with photographs and other memorabilia detailing Pease's life, including an oil painting of Pease that once hung at the air base, the gracious and genteel 79-year-old reflected on the cousin she grew to adore.

"I was only 12 years old when he died," Benton said. "I remember I really looked up to him. I used to think he was so very fun-loving, and very handsome, I think. It was heart-breaking to lose him.

"I was so surprised, so astonished when I learned what really happened. In a way, it was good Harl's parents didn't know the terrible ending that he had. I don't think they could have taken it.

(Continued on page 28)



Fay Benton accepts a proclamation on behalf of her cousin, Harl Pease Jr., a World War II pilot, from Maj. Gen. William Reddel, the Adjutant General of the N.H. National Guard, during a ceremony Aug. 8 to honor 61 N.H. POWs who died in captivity.

For many, emotions remained raw and fresh, ranging from private sentiment to anger that it took the country so long to understand.

"If people would only understand what that means, 'the ultimate sacrifice,'" said Gavan. "Those are kind of shallow words. You can't sacrifice anything more than your life, can you? Do people really understand what these people did for them? The more you think about it, somebody actually died for you. These families get it. There are shared experiences here that are hard to communicate."

The actual Purple Hearts will be presented to the next of kin after the Department of Defense verifies the information and completes the process.

During the ceremony, the name of each fallen warrior was read, along with the name of the family member in representation. For each name, a candle symbolizing the soldier was lit. As the next of kin was escorted to the stage, Maj. Gen. William Reddel, the Adjutant General of the New Hampshire National Guard, presented the eligibility certificate. A bell was rung, and a moment of silence followed.

"I thought the ceremony was actually perfect," said Fay Benton, cousin of slain POW Harl Pease Jr. "I'm going to keep the candle. I think I'm going to light it on Harl's birthday. It's so important to do this, so important for the families."

As he addressed the crowd, Maj. Gen. Reddel commented, "The brave men and women in our United States military have always answered the call to service. We do so by signing a blank check to the government of the United States for up to and including our life."

Finding the next of kin to let them know about the change in the DOD directive proved arduous, Gavan said. Names have been modified over the years, families relocated, or the family lines have run dry. Of the 61 New Hampshire POWs, more than half of their families had been located and had members represented at the ceremony.

"The State of New Hampshire was the first in the nation to finally acknowledge the POWs from WW II and Korean War who died in captivity," Reddel said. "I was honored to represent the current generation of service members as we paid tribute to those warriors. There is no greater act of selflessness, no clearer example of what it means to be a citizen and an American hero than to give one's life for our country."

The story isn't over yet, Gavan said.

"This won't culminate today; we are not done yet," Gavan said. "I assure you we will continue to work tirelessly to make this happen. We will keep looking until we find all the families who should be heir to the Purple Hearts." ♦

Keeper of a Legacy *(Continued from page 27)*

It was really terrible for Uncle Harl and Aunt Bessie – he was the only son they had, and it was the end of the Pease family line, because of course he never lived long enough to get married. That was an awful, awful feeling in the family.”

As a carefree youth growing up in Plymouth, Pease was a typical teen. He and his sister, Charlotte, enjoyed boating in Squam Lake, and he liked to play high jinks on his professors. He enjoyed great fun and escapades, but he was also a solid, accomplished student.

He graduated from Tilton Prep School and then went on to college at the University of New Hampshire.

Benton remembered learning later that as a young man, Pease was a tad restless and wanted a life beyond the small community of Plymouth, N.H. He felt a hunger to somehow fan out and leave his mark on this world.

After graduating from UNH in 1939 with a degree in Business Administration, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. A year later, he was commissioned a second lieutenant and completed flight school. He was immediately called to active duty and sent to the Pacific Theater for B-17 bombing missions with the 19th Bomb Group.

Benton discovered some of the particulars of the last mission Pease went on from a manuscript of a book written by John H. Mitchell, “On Wings We Conquer.” Where there have been gaps in her knowledge, she filled it in with the information from the account.

It was also through Mitchell that Benton was introduced to Father George Lepping, a Marist priest who had been in the POW camp with Pease and later grimly recounted his final fate. The three became linked by their common tie and remained close and long-standing friends throughout the years.

Leading up to his last mission, Pease was on a run when one of the engines on his B-17 failed, and he was forced to turn back to his base in Australia. His aircraft was deemed out of commission. Knowing his unit was slated to deploy the next morning, Aug. 7, 1942, to Papua, New Guinea, to support a vital mission, Pease and his crew worked all night to fix one of the many unserviceable B-17s on the base.

No way did they want their squadron going without them on this air raid.

“Harl and his crew confiscated a bomb-weary B-17 used for training,” said Benton. “With the crew’s help and his best friend, Captain Ed Jacquet, they made intense repairs to make it airborne.”

After working tirelessly all night and with only a few hours sleep, Pease and his crew joined their squadron at Port Moresby, New Guinea. From there, they took off with their group to bomb targets at Rabaul, on the island of New Britain.

Rabaul was the major Japanese naval and air base for the projected invasion of Australia, and this air bombing was planned in conjunction with the Marine landing at Guadalcanal.

“Approaching the airfield target, the group was suddenly attacked by more than 30 Japanese fighters,” Benton said.

Pease and his crew shot down many of the Zero fighters, fought their way to the target, and bombed it successfully. The B-17, however, was badly crippled, and it fell behind the formation. The Japanese fighters decided to focus their efforts on that plane.

“They just went for him because they knew he was having trouble,” Benton said.

Witnesses from the squadron saw Pease’s plane drop a flaming bomb bay tank, and moments later saw the aircraft go down in flames. Though no one witnessed the actual crash, everyone presumed all nine men had been killed.

“What they didn’t know at the time was Harl and another crew member had managed to bail out,” Benton said.

But as their parachutes were gliding to the ground, Japanese machine gunners opened fire. Pease was shot in the calf and badly hurt. Two men, Pease and gunner Sgt. Chester Czechowski, were captured and taken to a POW camp in Rabaul.

When he asked for medical aid for his wounds, the Japanese laughed at him and said they don’t treat American airmen, Benton recalled. Other prisoners treated his wounds until he could walk again. During visits years later with the Benton family, Lepping shared his regrets with taking so long to contact the family to share what he knew.

He recalled both the other prisoners and guards themselves held Pease in high esteem. In fact, the Japanese guards called him “Captain Boeing” because of their respect for him and the Flying Fortresses.

Lepping told Benton her cousin was clever and brave. Though conversations between prisoners were forbidden, he had found a way around that. When a question was posed to him, he used to respond in long monologues, entertaining his fellow captives. He told how pilots used the stars to steer planes. He told how pilots would put warm beer in the planes because they were so cold, and that way they could have cold beer when they finished a mission.

“He was a leader without trying to be one,” Lepping once said.

But on the morning of Oct. 8, 1942, Pease, Czechowski, two other Americans and two Australians, were told by the Japanese guards to get their picks and shovels and come with them.

On that date, Pease and the five other men were forced to dig their own graves. Afterwards, they were beheaded.

To this day, the remains have never been recovered.

Benton points to a photo hanging on her wall of President Franklin D. Roosevelt presenting to Pease’s parents a Medal of Honor, awarded posthumously to Pease for his heroism in combat. He was also awarded a Purple Heart. At that time, however, no one knew his true fate.

“The military listed him as missing in action,” Benton said. “And that’s so vague; it’s not a final thing. Uncle Harl and Aunt Bessie always had the hope that maybe he would be found. Of course as the years went by – anyway, holding out hope for him kept them going.”

In 1957, Congress approved the recommendation to name a new Air Force base in Newington, N.H., after Capt. Harl Pease Jr. His parents, Benton – then a new mother – her husband, Charles, and many of Pease’s comrades from the war were present.

“They were very proud of him; they loved him very much,” Benton said. “I don’t think they ever got over losing him.”

Benton calls herself “the keeper of the flame.”

“Every once in a while if something can happen to jog people’s memory, they won’t forget him,” she said. ❖

*In 1957,
Congress
approved the
recommendation
to name a new
Air Force base in
Newington, N.H.,
after Capt. Harl
Pease Jr.*

Spc. Seth Haapanen's parents share their personal tragedy to help other soldiers

By Lori Duff, NHNG PA

The last day Linda Haapanen saw her son Seth alive, he told her he wasn't feeling well. So she went over and gave him a big hug. He squeezed her back. Then he rested his head in her arms.

He turned to leave, walked down the stairs and said, "I love you, Mom," just as he always said.

Less than 12 hours later, on Oct. 28, 2008, Seth Haapanen took his own life.

As a specialist with the N.H. National Guard's 237th Military Police Company, he had returned home four months earlier from a year-long deployment in Iraq.

For Seth's family, his passing left unanswered questions about a harrowing overseas tour and its potential effects on his life at home.

Although they may never know all the factors that led to his death, through their story, their grief and their loss, the Haapanens hope to send a message to soldiers that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. They want to encourage troops to get help, whether they think they need it or not. And they want the Army to take a tougher look at how soldiers suffering traumatic experiences are initially treated, counseled and later integrated into life back home.

Going to war

Seth grew up the middle child between four sisters on a 250-acre Christian campground in Monterey, Mass., where his parents served as camp directors. Loving and mischievous, he had a penchant for both picking on the girls and protecting them.

His sister Gabriele likes to tell the story about Seth's youthful idea of fun – which included practicing his paintball aim by putting his little sisters in bright sweatshirts and telling them to "start running."

Seth spent his high school years home schooled by his mother in Massachusetts, then moved to Alton in summer 2006. It was an environment filled with faith and service. He had dreams of joining the military and then becoming a local police officer or state trooper. So he sent away for anything the Army offered – free duffel bags, hats and T-shirts. His goal was to join the recently formed 237th Military Police Company.

When he found out he made it into the unit, he was thrilled.

The night before he left for basic training in spring 2007, his mother, Linda, asked him, "Seth, are you sure you want to do this?"

Seth replied, "I'd rather fight them over on their own soil than to be fighting them here on our streets."

He was a protector, said his mother. "He liked making sure that people's rights were carried out."

When the company was sent to Iraq in June 2007, Haapanen left with the prayers and the pride of his family. He had just turned 20.

With their departure, the 237th MPs became one of the youngest units deployed in N.H. history.

A Year in Iraq

"This was our group of kids," said then Adjutant General of the N.H. National Guard, Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark, at their Freedom Salute ceremony a year later.



Seth Haapanen and his parents, Rich and Linda Haapanen, before his deployment with the NHARNG's 237th MPs to Iraq in 2007.

Photo: Courtesy of the Haapanen family

At least half of the soldiers in the company were 21 or younger – and with increased demand for MP duties such as convoy security, route surveillance, handling of prisoners and police intelligence in Iraq – most had signed up anticipating an overseas tour.

For motivated soldiers with a taste for action, the company provided a perfect outlet.

Seth's unit joined the 1132nd MP Company of the North Carolina Army National Guard in Rustamiyah and began training Iraqi policemen. Their schedule was grueling.

They rose between 4 and 4:30 a.m., brushed their teeth, suited up with gear and headed to the tactical operations center. They got their weapons from the arms room, set up the truck at the motor pool, then headed out to visit their sector.

Their day on the road started at Iraqi police stations where they worked on presence patrols and often hit the streets on foot. By 6 p.m. they headed home to work out the stress of the day at the gym, go to chow, shower and play "Call of Duty" on the Xbox.

After four-and-a-half months, Seth and three others moved north to Taji to fill out a platoon and support police training efforts there. The forward operating base, on the northern edge of Baghdad, was more rural than Rustamiyah, with dustier streets and roaming stray dogs.

Laid out against a landscape of beige sand, the cement-walled base was as large as a city. Rows of CONEX aluminum trailers housed soldiers, two to a room where they slept between wood paneled walls in air-conditioned comfort after days in persistent, 100-degree heat.

Nicknamed "Happy" by his buddies for his ever-present smile, Seth shared a room with medic Sgt. David "D.J." Stelmat of Littleton.

The platoon worked with seven Iraqi police stations – monitoring activity and patrolling the area with their counterparts while training new policemen. On the soldiers' dismounted foot patrols, children would swarm them, asking for treats and

candy. Several times Seth called home and asked his parents to send toys and sweets so he could pass them out to little hands.

At first, the deployment progressed smoothly. Things were quiet. Then in the spring, enemy attacks started. While on their way to a routine Iraqi police station visit, the road in front of Seth Haapanen's vehicle exploded.

The detonation blew out his front tire and sent shrapnel into team leader Sgt. Robert Tabares sitting at Seth's side. The blast inside the enclosed vehicle rocked Seth's head and ears. Tabares had to be medically evacuated; his wounds were so severe that he was eventually sent back to the states.

Four days later, the worst happened again. On March 22, the vehicle of Seth's roommate, medic Sgt. David Stelmat Jr., drove over an improvised explosive device.

Stelmat; Sgt. Thomas C. Ray II, the gunner; Sgt. David B. Williams, the team leader; and two Iraqi translators were all killed in the ensuing blast, which lifted the truck off the road, rocketing it into the air and igniting the vehicle's pyrotechnics.

Seth arrived early at the scene and became part of the team that later dealt with and collected the five men's remains. Within a 24- to 48-hour period, Seth again went through the Army protocol for soldiers after an attack – a visit to the aid station for medical assessment, a unit debrief and a session with a mental health professional.

The families, waiting at home, heard that something had happened and were anxiously hoping for news. When Seth finally got a chance to call, he told his parents that his roommate had died.

"I can't do this anymore," he said to his mom. "I can't go out on another mission."

His family encouraged him to get help. Eventually, they said, he went to talk to the chaplain who told him he had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and probably a Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and should see a doctor.

Haapanen was waiting to see someone, he told his parents, but in the meantime, he went out on another mission.

The work of the war didn't stop. Neither did the casualties. In April, Staff Sgt. Emanuel Pickett died. Then less than a week later, Sgt. Lance Eakes, who moved to Taji to replace Stelmat, was killed.

The emotional toll was devastating for the entire unit. Seth's friends said that his ever-present smile faded the day Stelmat died. A little more than two months later, on June 10, 2008, the 237th MPs arrived in Mississippi.

Coming home

They had come from a 24-hour world to 9-to-5 society – and the things that they brought back were real.

The group went through demobilization at Camp Shelby, Miss., as soldiers and families urgently waited to be reunited. They moved through days of administrative and medical checks that mirrored their mobilization process. Each soldier's data was checked and verified, and their medical health documented. They also started their initial enrollment with the Veterans Administration.

Unlike their active duty counterparts, when the 237th arrived in country, they still were not "home," and declaring problems or issues while standing in line at Camp Shelby would ultimately delay their arrival back in New Hampshire.

Seth made it home just in time to surprise his sister Gabriele at her graduation from Prospect Mountain High School in Alton. He walked up on the stage in his uniform, shielded by sunglasses, to a standing ovation from the crowd.

As he and his sister hugged, the audience cried. To the outside world, he looked tall and tan and serious, but inside, the headaches were killing him. He seemed emotionally fine to his family, friends and fellow soldiers, who were overjoyed to have him home.

They wonder now if his reintegration should have been lengthened. In hindsight his mother wishes soldiers would be forced to take more time checking in – and being checked.

"They need to be slowed down," Linda said. "They are all going to say they are fine."

Upon their arrival in Concord, the group completed a mandatory Reverse Soldier Readiness Process as part of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

The three-day program was aimed at catching problems that might slip by during the demobilization phase in Mississippi. One day was spent on personnel actions to make sure a soldier's administrative paperwork was in order, their health insurance ready, their pay up to date and their legal issues addressed.

The second day was spent on medical and dental checks. Every soldier was also required to meet with a representative for a mandatory discussion about counseling.

The last day was spent on soldier and family wellness and included tools for reintegration.

The last phases of the Yellow Ribbon program, dubbed "30-60-90," were

weekend meetings 30, 60, and 90 days after returning from deployment.

The days were aimed at reacquainting family members, talking about substance abuse, and dealing with stress and anger management. Classes were followed by final medical exams and post-deployment health reassessments to catch potential mental health problems.

The goal was to lengthen the reintegration process in order to catch issues that may not be evident on their first weekend home.

His parents say that Seth talked to them about listening to a lecture about PTSD while sitting in a circle of soldiers. Many times they didn't open up about their experiences.

"The first thing that soldiers do is to look at the [combat] patch to see if the one who's facilitating can really relate to what they've experienced," said his father Rich. "They want facilitators who can relate to what they are going through."

Some also say that soldiers can't be expected to readjust according to a schedule. The work of processing overseas experiences and reconciling them with life at home may take longer than 90 days. Most soldiers say their deployments left them permanently changed.

Seth's family was ecstatic to have him back. He seemed happy. He didn't show signs of distance, anger or sadness. But he was having terrible headaches and was in serious pain, his parents said.

He took a post-deployment mental health screening with the VA in June where his traumatic brain injury was noted. He also tested positive for PTSD. He answered "yes" to questions such as "*Have you ever had an experience that was so horrible or upsetting that, IN THE PAST MONTH, you: Have had any nightmares about it or thought about it when you did not want to? Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that remind you of it? Were constantly on guard, watchful or easily startled? Felt numb or detached from others, activities or your surroundings?*"

But it wasn't until September that he talked to the VA again, calling with a headache that "feels like a sledgehammer on my head."

Around this time he also called his father and said, "Dad, I nearly blacked out while I was driving, the headache was so bad." But he made it to his room, and said he was just going to try to sleep it off.

A few days later, the pain was still so severe that he went to the emergency room at Concord Hospital. His family



Seth Hapapanen hams it up with his sisters and friends before his deployment to Iraq with the 237th MPs in 2007. Photo: Courtesy of the Haapanen family

said medical personnel put him on an IV and told him it was a bad migraine.

“The cycle that we understand was happening was with the headaches,” said Rich. “He wasn’t getting good sleep, and the times when he would fall asleep, he would wake up many times with nightmares of what he saw [in Iraq].”

By Oct. 21, when he went to the VA for a mental health diagnostic, he was having trouble working because of headaches, blurred vision, pain and light sensitivity. His memories, dreams and flashbacks were overwhelming him, and he had begun using increasing amounts of alcohol to cope with his feelings and inability to sleep.

He told his parents that the VA told him to take baby steps “to turn off the TV [at night] and turn the clock radio around,” Linda said.

“Maybe in Seth’s mind it was too little too late,” Rich said.

His VA records state in an “assessment of danger to self” that he posed “no significant risk.”

He was scheduled for a return visit six days later, but he never showed up.

On Oct. 27, 2008, Seth went to Alton to check the mail and visit with his mother. It was the last time she saw him.

The Aftermath

“When you think about some of the classic things that someone does before they commit suicide – those weren’t there. Giving things away for example,” said Rich. “Those weren’t there. So it just wasn’t on our radar screen for us to be concerned in that way.”

At Seth’s funeral, Rich stood at the church altar and made a plea to soldiers coming home from overseas deployments to get help. And if they feel like they are not getting the response they need, they should find someone who will go to bat for them.

The family wonders if, for Seth, the help was too slow in coming.

They want to encourage those in charge to find ways to work harder at diagnosing problems and following through with treatment, sooner rather than later. They also think there should be more time taken with out-processing and more focus on recruiting facilitators with combat experience.

“The military needs to encourage soldiers to get help,” said Rich.

Since Seth’s death, the N.H. National Guard has been part of a national “Stand Down” on suicide prevention that brings

training to every soldier in the organization. It is a move that leaders hope will prevent the loss of another soldier.

The Guard has also appointed a full-time suicide prevention manager and hired its first director of psychological health.

But for his family, his friends and his fellow soldiers, it has been a time of tears. Tears full of all the moments of future loss – graduations, marriages – all the joy that they would never share.

His parents can’t help but ask the what-ifs. They accept that God is in control and that God knows – but that peace also contains a terrible irony.

“God is a sovereign God, ultimately in control of all things at all times. God has a plan. How do you reconcile that?” Rich asks. “I can’t. But I still believe in a sovereign God.”

His sisters are afraid they might forget him. And so they got tattoos, each one different, all bearing his initials.

They buried him near his childhood home next to his grandfather. There’s a picture from that moment – a photo of his sisters bowed down in grief next to his grave; and from a corner on high, a streak of sunlight breaks out in a solar ring. ❖

Army Promotions & Awards

Sergeant
Matthew Bacon
George Bakas
Douglas Benton
Gerald Carrier

Charles Crocker
Shaun Delbene
Joshua Ewalt
Patrick Filkins
William Garneau

Ashley Gayhart
Bruce Hamilton
Jason Harrison
Kenneth Harvey
Christian Hodge

James Howell Jr.
Donald Jones
Nicholas Labrecque
Peter LaFlamme
James Lawn

Samey Mao
Jason Marsella
Patrick McGinnis
Joseph Myers
Paul Pakenham
Joseph Paradis
John Petro
Hermanus Pretorius
Andrew Quigley
Rachel Robak
Dustin Rogers
William Roth
Kathryn Stansfield
Clay Walters
Michelle Warren
John Webb
Craig Wike
Jason Wood

Christopher Smith
Christopher Taylor

Sergeant
First Class
Peter Bill
Bryan Donisi
Brian McKay
David Penn
Robert Stansfield
Timothy Swan
Robert Valarese

First Sergeant
Jason Augustus

Sergeant Major
Stephen Houten

Chief Warrant Officer 2
Charlie Morgan

First Lieutenant
Jonathan Alexander

Major
Justin Strevig

Brigadier General
Harry Miller



Chief Warrant Officer 3 Tina Corliss poses with family during her recent promotion.

Photo: Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey

Staff Sergeant
Robert Brown
Rachael Fleharty-Strevig
Peter Frechette
Timothy Joslyn
Gary Lytle
Andrew Perry
Robert Pinard
David Pryzby
Robert Raiche
Raymond Saucier
Jonathon Shallow

Air Promotions & Awards

Airman 1st Class
Benjamin Bauman
David Turner
Luke Underwood
Ronald Williams Jr.
Christopher Wood
Sean Wood

Senior Airman
Benjamin Kipp
Matthew Openshaw

Staff Sergeant
Constantia Dunlap
Danielle Lewis
Ryan Merrill
Jeffery Seale
Alexander Smith
Ray Thomas
Benjamin Whitehill

Technical Sergeant
Kenneth Kelley
Steven Logan
Michael Petrin

Master Sergeant
Conrad Anctil
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