

JOINT HOMETOWN NEWS SERVICE DEFENSE MEDIA ACTIVITY



Telling the Soldier's & Airman's story back home

Getting your troops recognized for their efforts back home in front of family and friends is easier than it has ever been. Once the exclusive control of public affairs, today more and more units and commanders have created unit public affairs representatives as close as the company or squadron orderly room. First sergeants, platoon and section sergeants now have the ability to help their troops fill out the hometown news release form.

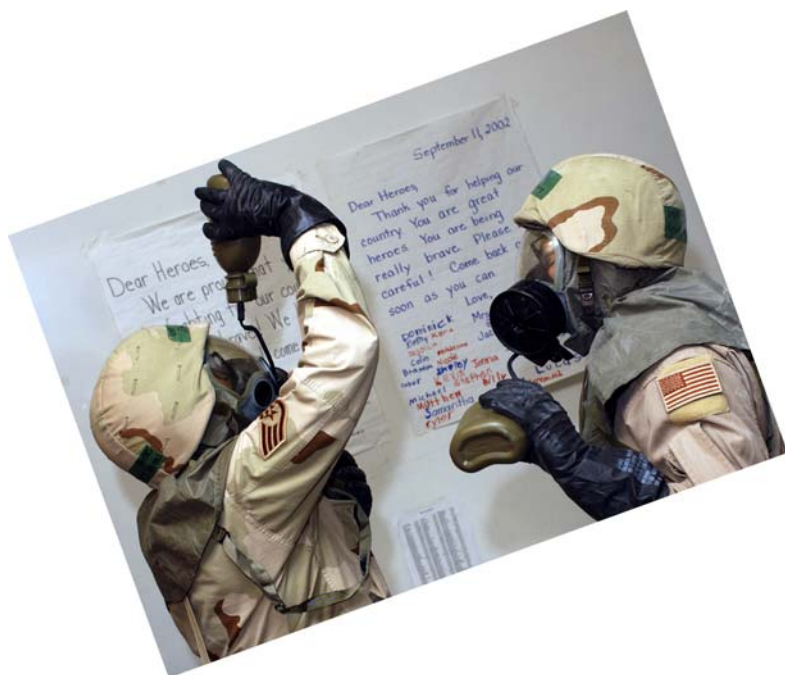
This guidebook is designed for everyone from the seasoned public affairs pro to the unit representative, first sergeant or concerned leader looking for ways to get his or her troops recognized back home.

There have been quite a few changes in the hometown news release form and its processing that makes it easier to both fill out, process and release to media outlets. PAOs can now set up paperless, transportable electronic forms that can be placed on the desktops in orderly rooms, personnel shops, PAOs -- with anyone who takes care of troops and has access to a computer and a web browser.

We've created a web site called Hometown Link that we hope will be the "one stop source" for everything you need to manage a hometown news release program. This guidebook, along with the forms, products, contact info, even promotional and statistical information can now be found and downloaded from the site.

We hope the following pages will guide you through the process of our most important job -- taking care of our troops, no matter where they may be.





The Process

Rules, guidelines, tips for perfect hometown

At one time, getting a hometown news release form submitted and accepted and to the media in a timely manner was -- well let's say -- not always an easy task. The categories were rather restrictive, there was a 30-day window for submissions and it wasn't unheard of to have a backlog of 50,000+ forms.

Today, technology has helped to dramatically reduce the backlog, categories are wide open and getting the forms to us is as easy and as quick as the click of a mouse.

Timeliness

There was a time when a hometown news release form was considered invalid if received more than 30 days past the date it was signed. Then the pendulum began to swing the opposite direction and there was no date restriction. After receiving more than just a few hometowners more than two years old, we decided we probably needed to put some type of timeliness stipulation to our hometown news release submissions.

Today, we look at hometown news submission forms as too old if they exceed 90 days. That's not to say that we will reject every form more than 90 days old, but we will look at the event to determine if the

news release we would generate would be considered yesterday's news. If someone receives a Commendation Medal and the citation is within three months, we will process the form. If the event is tied to a certain high visibility event such as the funeral of a president or participation in a high visibility exercise, or a graduation from basic training or tech school/AIT, it is considered a timely story and would not be processed if received more than 30 days after the fact. A good rule of thumb -- if you wouldn't publish the story in your post or base newspaper because of timeliness, it probably won't work as an external release either.

Categories

If there is one phase of the hometown news release process that stays in constant flux, it would be our story categories. Every day new stories are created, old ones deleted and others updated or changed to fit the needs of public affairs offices.

The creation of a new stock story is as simple as a cover page or news release with background information about the event. Attach the page to the front of your submissions and we'll create a stock story specifically for those submissions.

The Process

Schools, deployments, awards, promotions just a few of many categories available

Here are a few guidelines for story categories:

Schools

Hometown news release submissions from schools of any type, whether basic training, tech school/AIT, ALS, PLDC, BNCOC, NCO Academy, ANCO, etc., should be generated from the school only. If a service member fills out a school graduation at his or her next duty assignment, it will be processed as “arrival for duty.”

Awards & Decorations

We have a stock story for just about every Army and Air Force medal there is, but the real “meat” of our news releases on awards and medals comes from the specific accomplishments of each service member. Our most important information for these types of stories is generated from the award citations on each individual.



These details allow each story to be tailored to the accomplishments of the individual and not just a general statement about the award. Add either a head and shoulders photograph or an image of the award ceremony, and you have the perfect release for hometown newspapers.

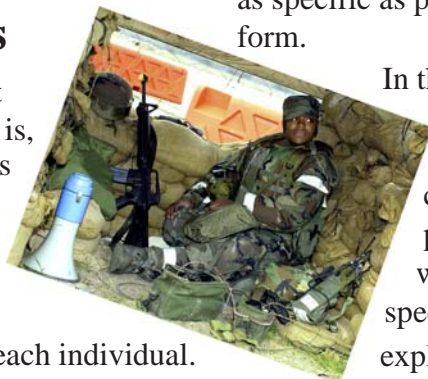
Retirement

Retirement stories are the final “swan song” of service members and are the most comprehensive story we do. In addition to the hometown news release form, we need an informal biography of the service member’s career, as well as a citation to accompany a retirement award and a head and shoulder photograph for a complete feature package.



Deployments

With deployments and redeployments becoming a way of life for both Soldiers and Airmen, telling their stories has become an ever increasing role of Hometown News. To create the most accurate, up-to-date article possible, it’s important to be as specific as possible on the hometown news release form.



In the event block, state whether the service member has recently been deployed, has been deployed for a certain amount of months or is redeploying back to his or her home unit. If we don’t have a stock story on file for a specific unit, provide a paragraph or two to explain the unit’s mission. When possible,

provide an “environmental portrait” or a head and shoulders photo to accompany the release.

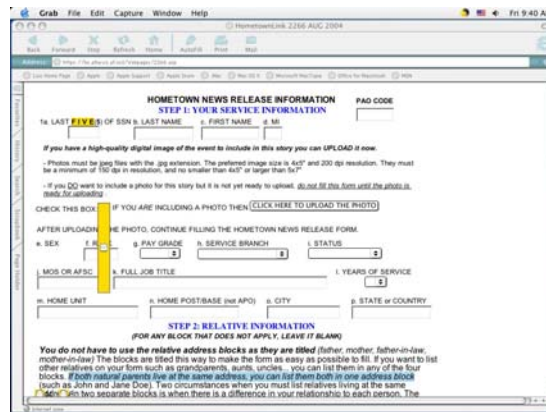
Promotions

While promotions are fairly self explanatory, there are a few things to look out for. Make sure to put the rank “promoted to” in the event block. Also, if the event is “selected for” promotion, make sure it is clearly stated in the event block. Unless it is for a general officer, we normally don’t run “frocking” stories.



Exercises

When submitting exercise hometowners, make sure to add a cover story or a couple of paragraphs explaining the exercise. Also, give us a head up when submitting more than 100 forms.



The Forms

With the proliferation of hometown news release forms on the web site, as well as via the paperless process, on Formflow, or scan form for basic training, trying to figure out the best form to use is not always simple.

Currently there's no IMT version of the DD Form 2266, but we still have the ability to download and process the Formflow version.

Through the Hometown News web site, PAOs can have service members fill out the html version of the 2266 and submit directly to the Hometown News

Service. There's also a paperless process that allows PAOs to place the form on their unit Intranet, e-mail the form down to the orderly room, personnel office or individual, receive the form back to review, then submit to Hometown News .

While much of the information requested on the forms is self explanatory, there are a few areas that may need a little extra clarification. Here are a few things to keep in mind when having service members fill out a version of the DD Form 2266:

PAO Code

This three or five-digit code has become increasingly valuable for customers submitting hometown news release forms. The code identifies an organization and allows customers to track their hometown news release submissions and releases. When customers register for access to the "PAOs Only" page of Hometown Link they can go into the "PAO Statistics" link, enter their PAO Code and access their submission and release figures.

Once a PAO Code is established, it's important to keep the point of contact information current in our database. When hometown news releases are e-mailed to media outlets on a service member, the person listed as the POC will get an e-mail with the service member's name and a list of the media outlets we sent the releases to. Without a current POC, an organization won't be able to receive the proper feedback on their submissions.

The 'social'

When service members began sending hometowners via e-mail and through our web site, we were no longer allowed to use social security numbers. Socials were never sent to media outlets, but were entered into our database to be gauged against the daily casualty list of those who died while on duty. Because of privacy concerns, the casualty report we receive now only uses the last five of a service member's social security number. Putting in the last five on the hometown news release forms allows us to track casualties, and helps identify service members who may have the same name. On those online forms that also accept digital images, using the last five, along with a person's last name, allows the system to create photo numbers that help us match the right image with the right release. And, as before, those numbers are used internally and are not released.

The Forms

HOMETOWN NEWS RELEASE INFORMATION
STEP 1: YOUR SERVICE INFORMATION

1a. LAST FIVE(S) OF SSN b. LAST NAME c. FIRST NAME d. MI

PAO CODE

If you have a high-quality digital image of the event to include in this story you can UPLOAD it now.

Event

When listing the event, giving us enough information to locate the appropriate stock story is critical. Don't say simply "promotion." Give us the rank. "Promoted to staff sergeant." If someone was named soldier or airman of the quarter, give us the level of competition. "Soldier of the Quarter for the 25th Infantry Division." If the event is a new exercise or an award that is outside the mainstream of military awards, attach a paragraph or two about the award, event, exercise, etc., to help us create a stock story. For graduations from military schools ranging from basic training to AIT/tech school, airman leadership school, PLDC, BNCOC, ANCOG, NCO Academy, etc., the hometown news release forms need to be generated from the school.

Next of Kin

For those processing hometown news release forms, the next-of-kin ties are the most important element on the form. These names and addresses determine where we send releases and ensure that the proper media outlets receive the correct releases.

Many large newspapers have zoned editions and many suburban papers only cover a specific area. For that reason, it's important that the service member gives us the street name of his or her next of kin, along with the city, state and ZIP Code.

For ties, we prefer Mom and/or Dad, but will also accept most blood relatives including adult brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, etc. If Mom and Dad are divorced and live in different areas, we will send the releases to both locations. If the service member has step parents, make sure they are properly identified on the form. For instance, if Mom has remarried, in the blocks where you list Mom, also list the stepfather and identify him as such. The same for stepmothers. We try not to assume a specific relationship, so make sure the service member clearly states the relationship on the form.

Spouses/In-Laws

We never use the spouse as a hometown tie. With many of our stories focusing on training, deployment, schools and other events that may show the service member away from home, releasing hometown stories that mention the fact that the service member spouse is away from home is a huge security concern.

But we do need the spouse's name when we use in-laws as a next-of-kin tie. For example: "Jones' wife, Mary, is the daughter of ..." Using the son or daughter of the ties makes the release more relevant to editors.

In addition to not sending directly to spouses' hometowns, other ties that we do not pick up include fiancés, girlfriends, boyfriends and friends.

If there are no next-of-kin ties available, we can pick up the high school as a tie, provided it is located in the U.S.

The Details

While many of the elements on the various versions of the DD Form 2266 are self-explanatory, they are still extremely important to the successful completion of the finished release.

Unit/Job Title

Remember when submitting information about organizations and job titles -- don't assume that everyone knows the unit and job title abbreviations. Rather than write A/3/320FA, spell out Battery A, 3rd Battalion, 320th Field Artillery. Or instead of 49LSS write 49th Logistics Support Squadron. Use the same logic with job titles. Rather than write "92A" in the job title block, put "automated logistics specialist."

High School

The biggest mistake we see with the high school tie is in the 'year graduated.' Make sure it is the year and not simply '12 years.'

Going Paperless

Tools allow PAOs to send electronic 2266 direct to customers on unit Intranet

There are now two electronic ways to fill out the hometown news release form. You no longer need to mail, fax or e-mail scanned paper forms.

The first electronic version of the DD Form 2266 can be found on the Hometown News web site, <http://hn.afnews.af.mil>: Hometown Link under the "PAOs Only" button. PAOs and UPARs can register through the "PAOs Only" link to access the forms and the process.

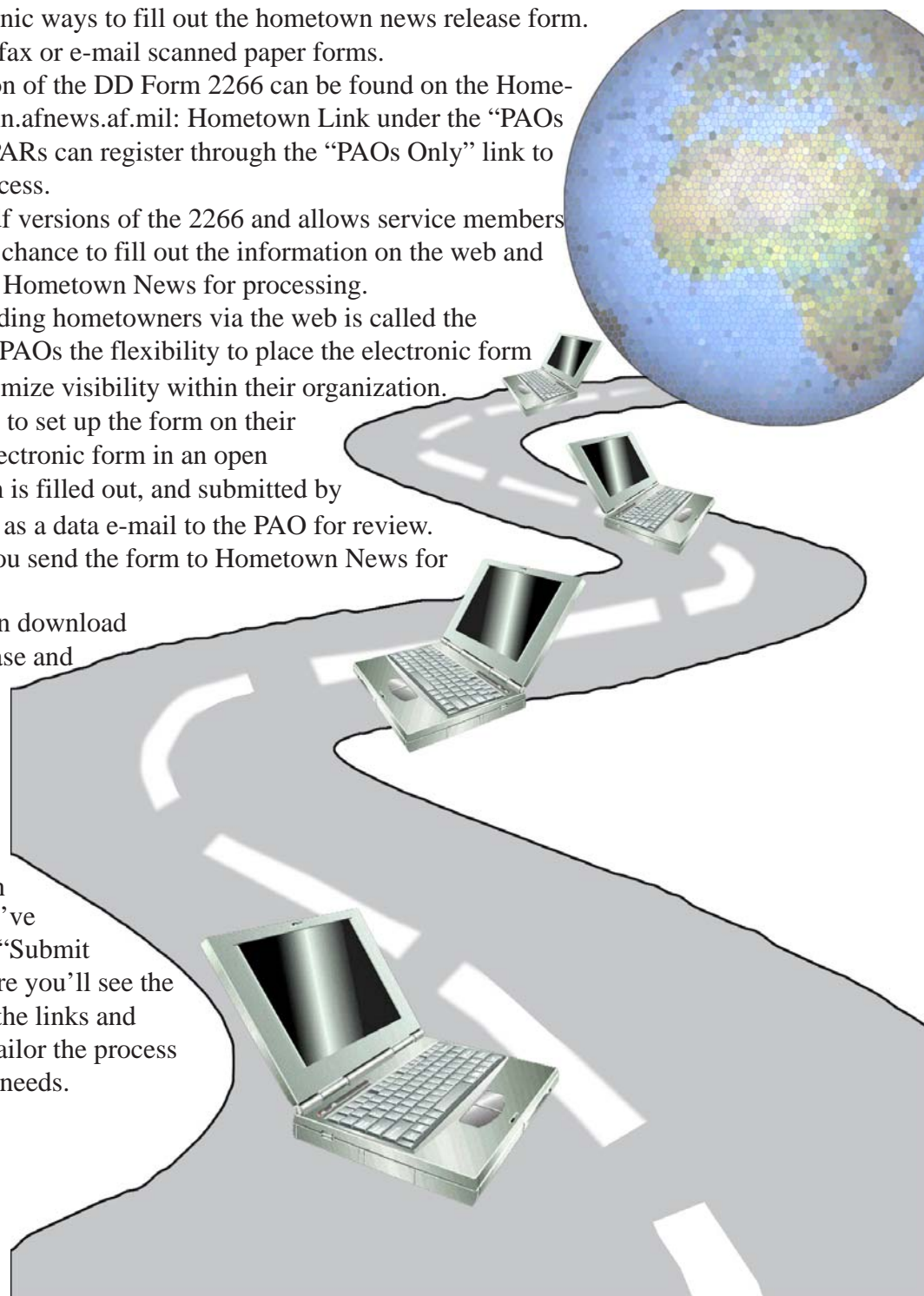
The site offers html and pdf versions of the 2266 and allows service members who come to your office the chance to fill out the information on the web and submit their form directly to Hometown News for processing.

The other process for sending hometowners via the web is called the 'Paperless 2266' and allows PAOs the flexibility to place the electronic form wherever they feel will maximize visibility within their organization.

The process allows PAOs to set up the form on their unit's Intranet and run the electronic form in an open environment. When the form is filled out, and submitted by the individual, it is then sent as a data e-mail to the PAO for review. Once you review the data, you send the form to Hometown News for processing.

Hometown News can then download the information into a database and begin processing the information without the need to manually re-type into the system.

To get the process started, go to the "PAOs Only" link on the Hometown News home page. Once you've accessed the page, go to the "Submit a DD Form 2266" link. There you'll see the "go paperless" link. Follow the links and Hometown News will help tailor the process to the individual customer's needs.





Images

Newspaper editors are screaming for ‘more photos!’ For those who design the weekly “in-the-military” columns, incorporating photos with the copy allows for attractive design options. For family and friends, images bring their sons and daughters in uniform a little closer to home.



When submitting a hometown news release form, consider attaching a close-up image of the individual to accompany the hometown news release.

Today, when hometown news releases are sent to the appropriate media outlets, they are sent exclusively via e-mail. Images are now attached to those electronic releases as .jpg files and are downloaded directly into many newspaper pagination programs. Here are a few guidelines to help provide good, solid images for newspaper usage:

Image Quality

Images should be submitted as .jpg files with a minimum size of 3 1/2” x 5” and a maximum size of



5” x 7”. The file size should not be larger than 1.1 megabytes. If going through the color correction process, doublecheck the final result before sending. We often receive well-composed images with blue or red tints in the face.



When composing images to accompany hometown news release forms, the most important thing to consider

is the face. Every aspect of the individual should be clear and easy to indentify. A ‘straight-on’ look is preferred over the three-quarter profile because it provides a clearer identification of the individual. A close-up environmental portrait or ‘on-the-job’ shot is preferred, but the old fashioned ‘mug shot’ is preferred over a long shot or one where the person cannot be easily identified.



If an image contains two or more individuals, make sure each person is clearly identified in the caption. Make sure an explanation of the action is clearly spelled out.

Give the rank and position of anyone presenting an award or pinning on a promotion and make sure that any unit designations are clearly identified.

When filling out the hometown news release form online, or through the paperless process, images can now be attached directly to the form.

The name of the file should be the last name plus the last five of the social security number.

