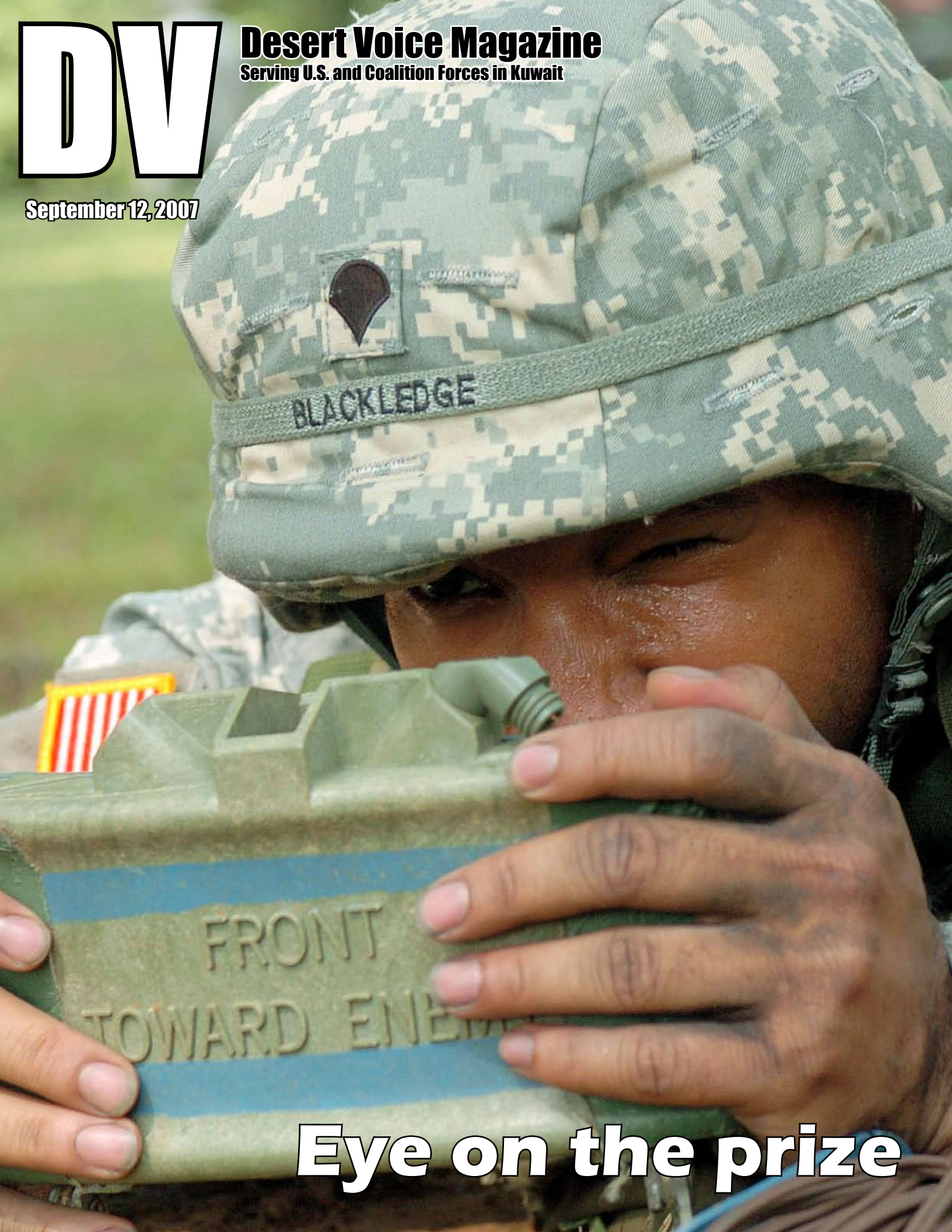


DV

Desert Voice Magazine

Serving U.S. and Coalition Forces in Kuwait

September 12, 2007



Eye on the prize

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On the cover

Sp. Iraq Rahiim Blackledge, Area Support Group-Qatar, sets up a claymore mine during Third Army/U.S. Army Central's Soldier and NCO of the year competition at Fort McPherson, Ga., Aug 27. For the full story turn to page 4.

Courtesy photo

Contact us

Comments, questions, suggestions story ideas? Call the Desert Voice editor at 430-6334 or e-mail at desertvoice@arifjan.arcent.army.mil.

Respecting our host nation's religious culture

*Story by
Chuck Sprague
401st AFSB Public Affairs*

Ramadan, "a month of blessings," is an Islamic religious period and one of the five pillars of faith marked by prayer, fasting and charity celebrated by more than a billion Muslims, and will start this year on Sept. 12, depending upon the full moon sighting.

Military, Department of Defense and other civilian workers should remember that we are guests in Kuwait. We must show respect and courtesy toward Islam and be familiar with religious traditions and practices during this Holy period.

Ramadan starts the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which is a lunar calendar based on the phases of the moon, rather than the solar Georgian calendar followed by most western cultures. Therefore, Ramadan occurs about ten days earlier in the calendar year than the year before.

It is celebrated as the month that Allah (Arabic for God) began the revelation for the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, through the Angel Gabriel.

Muslims abide by a strict regimen of fasting from sunrise to sunset; no food, smoking or drinking (including water), during daylight hours.

Most restaurants are closed during the fasting period and open for business after sunset. All Coalition Forces and civilians off-post and within the Arab community, should refrain from eating, chewing gum, drinking or smoking in public during daylight hours in respect of Islam. This includes vehicles, shops and other public areas. Failure to do so could levy a fine or even jail time.

Please be considerate of followers

of Islam who are on the military staff, contractors and foreign country national workers on post. Refrain from eating, drinking or smoking in front of them during the fasting period. When you are off post, dress conservatively during Ramadan. Tight-fitting clothing should be avoided and arms and legs should be covered for both men and women.

During Ramadan, all roads become congested just before dusk. Try to stay off the roads to reduce exposure to hazardous driving conditions. The last ten nights of Ramadan are the most important and many increase their devotional practices. For many Muslims, the 27th night is considered to be the holiest night of the year.

Why fast?

The fast serves many purposes in Islam and is consistent with other prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, such as Jesus. It is an annual act of cleansing the body and soul and reminds the devout the premise of self-control. As the body craves food and drink, it reminds the heart that the body and soul must be nourished with religious devotion.

Most followers of the faith begin fasting and participate in Ramadan activities during adolescence.

Charity and good deeds are practiced in Islam, but during Ramadan, generosity and gratitude have special significance.

The Festival of Eid al-Fitr (festival of breaking the fast) ends the Ramadan period on Oct. 13, or on the sighting of the moon.

Muslims find great joy in Eid al-Fitr, but many will agree that the joy of breaking the month-long fast is secondary to other feelings, such as thankfulness, remembrance, achievement and peace. 

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Friends play vital role in suicide prevention

Story by
Spc. Wes Landrum
Desert Voice staff writer

Editor's note: The following Soldier's name has been changed to protect his identity.

"Johnny" and "Marie" were the best of friends. Johnny and Marie had been friends for a long time as they had grown up together. Johnny remembers his best friend was full of life and eager to move on with the next phase of her life.

"Marie made high school fun my junior year," he said. "Where one went, the other was sure to follow."

All that quickly changed when Marie made the cheerleading team and became pregnant. She was then shunned by her new "friends." That's when Marie's world ended.

"I received a phone call from her saying she was through with her life," Johnny said. "Her parents were out of the house so I made a quick call to them and informed them of the situation."

Johnny arrived too late. As he entered Marie's house, a gunshot rang out. Marie had taken her life.

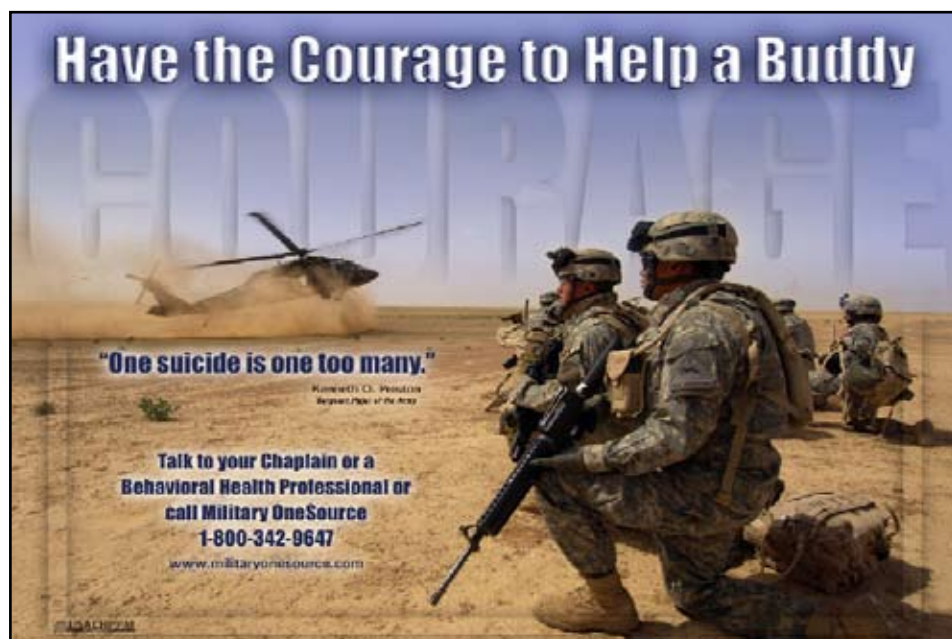
"I tried to stop the bleeding but nothing I did helped," he said. "It was like I was helpless. Then I heard her whisper to me 'Hold me.'"

Marie's parents came home, with the paramedics in tow, only to find Johnny, shirt stained with blood, holding Marie's lifeless body.

Suicide Prevention Week is this week. This year's theme is "Suicide Prevention: Moving Forward with Education and Training." Suicide is the most final and the most traumatic solution to a problem, said. Chaplain (Col.) Chet Lanious, 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) senior chaplain.

"I hate to use the cliché 'permanent solution to a temporary problem' but it's true," Lanious said. "There are other ways to solve a problem rather than committing suicide."

In 2006, 99 Soldiers committed



suicide. The 99 deaths were the highest rate of suicide in the Army since record-keeping began 26 years ago.

Failed personal relationships, legal and financial problems, and the stress of their jobs were factors that motivated Soldiers to commit suicide.

"Unfortunately, suicide is very often a compulsive act," said Col. Elspeth Ritchie, psychiatry consultant to the Pentagon. "Very often a young Soldier gets a 'Dear John' or 'Dear Jane' e-mail and then takes his weapon and shoots himself."

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Larry Blum, Third Army/U.S. Army Central deputy chaplain, said anytime a Soldier takes their life, it's serious. He said it's important to look for indicators to tell if a person is contemplating ending his life.

"Know your battle buddy," he said. "As a battle buddy, whether or not they've told you something's wrong, you can ask questions to see if they are alright."

Lanious said friends are the key to preventing suicide. He said friends know what is normal and what is not when it comes to behavior.

"If your battle buddy gets bad news from home, anything that rocks their world, those are the kinds of

things that bring on thoughts of suicide," Lanious said. "Friends, knowing what's going on in their battle buddy's life and identifying with some of those problems, can encourage them that there are answers and solutions out there."

There are outlets to get Soldiers help if they need it. Chaplains stand ready to help as well as mental health, Blum said. He said leaders need to pay attention for any sudden change in a Soldier's behavior and not be afraid to send them to get help.

"Have them make an appointment to see mental health," Blum said. "If they won't go, command-refer them."

Johnny stops by the cemetery whenever he goes home and pays a visit to Marie. He sees the picture of the 18-year-old girl in her cheerleader uniform on the tombstone and talks to her as if she's there with him carrying on a conversation. Johnny said even though Marie died in 1995, her death still haunts him today.

"Back then, there was not a lot of emphasis on suicide prevention. If I had known the warning signs, I could have stopped her from taking her life," Johnny said. "If there had been some way of reaching out to her, I would still have my friend with me today." 

Soldiers compete for Third Army year



Pfc. Patrick Ray Murphy, assigned to the 132nd Engineer Det, uses the radio during a common task training event to test their ability on a military radio, at Fort McPherson, Ga., Aug 27.

*Story and photos by
Staff Sgt. Alex Licea
Third Army/USARCENT Public Affairs*

FORT MCPHERSON, Ga. – Being named the Soldier and noncommissioned officer of the year for a military unit can be a momentous event in a Soldier's life.

For six Soldiers, the stress of competing against their peers from subordinate units within Third Army/U.S. Army Central for the title of Third Army Soldier and NCO of the year was something they all strived for. For two Soldiers, the pressure of competing would pay off. At the end of the day, they were able to say they are the best Soldiers in U.S. Army Central.

Sgt. Sadat Allhassan, a native of Bronx, N.Y., and Pfc. Patrick Ray Murphy, a native of Cottage Grove, Minn., emerged as the winners of the 2007 Third Army/USARCENT

NCO and Soldier of the Year competition during a ceremony Aug. 30 at Third Army Headquarters on Fort McPherson. The ceremony concluded after four days of back-to-back testing for the six Soldiers involved.

The Soldiers and NCOs competed against one another in events such as the Army Physical Fitness Test, a five-station warrior tasks and drills exercise, day and night land navigation, M-16 rifle marksmanship, a written test and a formal military board, where they were evaluated on their appearance, military bearing and knowledge in a number of key areas.

"All the hard work has really paid off but it's not time to relax," said Allhassan, 26, a motor transport operator with 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) on Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. "It feels great to win especially against great competitors."



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Reeba Critser

Sgt. Sadat Allhassan, a motor transport operator with 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) in Kuwait, writes down his name on this target after qualifying at the M4 Rifle range Aug. 27, 2007 at Fort McPherson, Ga. Allhassan, from Bronx, N.Y., competed for the title Aug. 27 to 30 at Fort McPherson, Ga. The contest included common tasks testing, weapons range, day and night land navigation, a written exam and a board appearance. The winners of this competition will head to Fort Lee, Va., in October to compete for the title of the 2007 Department of the Army Soldier and NCO of the Year.

ly top honors

Murphy added similar sentiments and said this experience will help him as his military career continues.

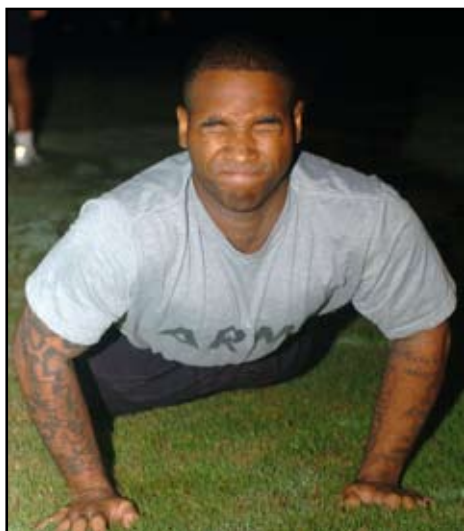
"This whole experience is definitely a benefit to me as I grow as a Soldier," he said. "When I become an NCO, I will know how to train my Soldiers for this type of event."

In addition to advancing to the next round, Allhassan and Murphy each received a plaque and a host of gifts from various sponsors of the competition.

For Third Army's top enlisted Soldier, Command Sgt. Maj. Franklin G. Ashe, events such as this are a way for both Soldiers and NCOs to grow and improve in their military career, and eventually help improve the Army.

"This gives our NCOs and Soldiers an opportunity to better themselves professionally and separate themselves from their peers in a positive way," said Ashe. "This is a competition, and competition is good because it gives these Soldiers a chance to be sharp. Events like this keep our Army professional."

Despite the fact that the U.S. military has committed the last six years to fighting terrorism abroad,



Spc. Iraq Rahiim Blackledge, ASG-Qatar, uses his last burst of energy to do a push-up during the Army Physical Fitness Test at the Third Army Soldier and NCO of the year competition, at Fort McPherson, Ga., Aug. 27.



Pfc. Andrew Linares, A Btry., 3rd Bn., 43rd ADA, currently deployed to Kuwait, applies a medical field dressing during a common task training event to test his ability in providing first aid at Fort McPherson, Ga., Aug. 27.

Ashe feels that programs and competitions such as this are still vital to today's fighting force.

"If we don't focus on events like these and this war continues we can come out of the end of this war as a 'hollow' Army," he said. "Competition is a great training event and a good chance to develop Soldiers and NCOs."

The other Soldiers who competed were:

- Staff Sgt. Rennick Beneby, a healthcare specialist with Area Support Group-Kuwait, Camp Arifjan.
- Staff Sgt. Ralph Blue, the training air and sea noncommissioned officer-in-charge with Area Support Group-Qatar.
- Spc. Iraq Blackledge, a human resources specialist, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, ASG-Qatar.
- Pfc. Andrew Linares, a patriot fire control enhanced operator and

maintainer with A Battery, 3rd Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery, on Camp Arifjan.

All the competitors also received signature coins from the Third Army/USARCENT commanding general and command sergeant major and a framed copy of Gen. George Patton's famous speech, among other gifts.

Although Allhassan and Murphy will be representing Third Army/USARCENT at the next level, none of their fellow competitors regret competing in the event.

"I was not worried about winning," said Linares, a native of Allen Park, Mich. "I'm glad I made it this far, and I would definitely want to win this event in the future."

The winners will next compete for the title of Department of the Army NCO and Soldier of the Year at Fort Lee, Va., in October. 

Third Ar



my remembers Sept. 11

Story by
Pfc. Christopher T. Grammer
Desert Voice staff writer

The alarm clock rings and wakes Cyrus Khemalaap, who immediately hits the snooze button. While he gets ready for the day, a talk radio station gives the news. He begins to wash his face when a female voice interrupts the broadcast and delivers a message no one was ready to hear. The twin towers of the World Trade Center were gone.

"That's when time stopped," relates New York City native Petty Officer 2nd Class Cyrus Khemalaap, assigned to the Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group currently in the Third Army/U.S. Army Central area of operations.

Shock and disbelief was felt by the American public on Sept. 11, 2001, as they watched news stations cover the disaster as it unfolded.

The first plane struck the north tower around 8:45 a.m. A second plane hit the south tower only 15 minutes later. All airports, bridges and tunnels in the city area were closed. Within two hours the towers were rendered down to dust and debris.

Among the feelings of sadness and confusion caused by the attack was anger and cries for retribution, Khemalaap said.

"It was not only an attack on America, it was an attack on our homes," Khemalaap said.

This attack was a harsh lesson to a nation which was becoming increasingly complacent, Khemalaap said. Though the attacks were intended to bring the nation to its knees, it only succeeded in strengthening the people's resolve and expanded American influence.

"Our nation cannot afford to be isolated from the world, we need to be out there representing our country," Khemalaap said.

Where were you on Sept. 11?

This is a question asked constantly that produces a different answer each time, but is usually answered in great detail as if drilled into the memory of people world-wide.

"I was stationed in Germany as the community chaplain at Vilseck Grafenwoehr," said Chaplain (Col.) Chet Lanious, 1st Support Command (Theatre) command chaplain. "I felt disbelief and a realization that life had changed for us (in the military) forever."

For some, the loss of friends and family to the attacks on Sept. 11 made the situation all the more real.

"A few days after (the attacks) my mom called me and told me that the daughter of a family friend had died when the towers collapsed,"

Khemalaap said.

The family friend was a nurse at St. Lukes-Roosevelt Hospital. Her daughter, Salanya Lawansrimuan, a graduate of Boston University, had started working at the twin towers just seven months earlier, Khemalaap said.

The morning of Sept. 11, Lawansrimuan's older brother had dropped her off at for work. He returned home from dropping her off to see the towers collapse on television.

Lawansrimuan is one among many who started that day like it was just another day in New York City, only to have it brought to an abrupt and violent close.

For Khemalaap and many others in the military the attacks were not only a source of sadness but of motivation.

"I believe that being in the military is the best way to serve our country in a time of need and honor our friends, and those who died on Sept. 11," Khemalaap said.

The events that day affected the military in a profound way, bringing about a war on terror and radical idealism.

"September 11 is far more real to the people serving in the military than it is for most Americans, who do not feel the effects day-to-day of being at war," Lanious said.

Those who serve in the United States military today continue to serve in combat zones as a part of today's all volunteer military. They chose to serve their country when it needed them and stood up against our nation's enemies.

"I believe that our nation is stronger because of (the attacks) and we are more aware of what goes on around us," Khemalaap said. 



Photo by Staff Sgt. Anishka Fulton

New York native Petty Officer 2nd Class Cyrus Khemalaap, assigned to Naval Expeditionary Logistics Support Group documents equipment rolling off a ship at port in Kuwait, Aug 14. He is deployed to Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Servicemen

Story by
Spc. Wes Landrum
Desert Voice Staff Writer

The sun had yet to bless the earth with her rays when the horn sounded signaling the runners to start the Labor Day 5K Fun Run at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Sept. 3.

On a day traditionally set aside in the United States to take a break from work and devote the day to rest, more than 500 Third Army/U.S. Army Central personnel gathered in the early hours of the morning to participate in the event.

Lt. Col Michael O. Logusz, G-9 Civil Affairs Third Army/U.S. Army Central, from Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., said the run was great fun and there was no better place to be than at the run.

"I wanted to be where the action was and demonstrate that we can all do this run," he said. "It doesn't matter what time you did it in, just come out and have fun and a great time."

The 5K run route presented runners with challenges such as hills, dips, and curves. Master Sgt. Ruby Murray, 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) G-3 FRAGO noncommissioned officer-in-charge, came out with fellow members of the Sgt. Audie Murphy Club. She said having more fun runs will ultimately help put the Soldiers' minds at ease.

Photo by Sgt. Jacob McDonald

Runners in black from the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club pass another runner as they move toward the finish line during the Camp Arifjan Labor Day 5K Fun Run, Sept. 3.

Members "labor" during fun run



Photo by Sgt. Jacob McDonald

Participants in the Third Army/U.S. Army Central sponsored Camp Arifjan Labor Day 5K Fun Run stretch their calves before moving to the start line Sept. 3.

"If you build their spirit up from the inside, if they had a bad day or a bad night, just coming out here motivating their body will make the rest of their day fine," she said.

Labor Day, "the last official day of summer," is a day that people take off to rest and relax. Murray said when it comes to being a member of the Sgt. Audie Murphy Club, there are no days off.

"This is something that we live and breathe. It's just leadership style," Mur-

ray said. "In order to get into this elite club, you must portray the role of Audie Murphy who always led from the front. Regardless of the time of day, we came out and volunteered our services. When we're not pulling road guard for the event, we're participating in it."

Petty Officer 1st Class Mark Spillane, Navy Customs Battalion Sierra and a native of Kernsville, N.C., said team incentive was the deciding factor in running the 5k fun run. Having just been selected for Chief Petty Officer,

he and the other inductees decided to run together as a group.

"A run like this helps us build teamwork because we're running this together," Spillane said.

While the run was just for fun, the participants said overall cohesion, not just unit cohesion, is the big goal.

"We see Marine, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force and Army participating," Logusz said. "It's like all the branches were one big unit. I saw a lot of good morale out here today." 



Background photo by Spc. Wes Landrum

Runners take off from the starting line during the Camp Arifjan Labor Day 5K Fun Run, Sept. 3.

Local charities reach out to servicemembers half a world away

Story and photo by
Spc. Giancarlo Casem
Desert Voice staff writer

They arrived in boxes, nondescript cardboard boxes. What those boxes contained however meant the world to their final recipients.

The Navy Expeditionary Medical Facility-Kuwait Theater Transient Hold Detachment received a shipment of clothes from charities and churches from the U.S., Aug. 31.

"I was very excited," said Sgt. Reginald Frye, a combat medic with the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment based out of Vilseck, Germany. "All I had when I got here were the clothes on my back. It helped me out financially because I didn't have to spend money out of my pocket."

Frye, a native of Kansas City, Mo., is one of the servicemembers currently recuperating from injuries at the TTHD. The TTHD houses injured servicemembers from Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

The TTHD's patients are sent to recuperate from their injuries. They have 30 days to return to duty, if they need more than that, they are then evacuated to Landstuhl, Germany, for further medical procedures.

The latest shipment of clothes was the product of the collaboration between the 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) chaplain's section, charities and churches back in the U.S.

As part of their duties, the chaplains make sure servicemembers' religious and spiritual needs are met. The 1st TSC chaplains visited the TTHD and learned about the need for personal clothing items, said Col. Chet Lanious, 1st TSC, command chaplain.

"I visited the theater transient detachment and I discovered that a lot of the Soldiers had been (medically evacuated) here and were recuperating from surgery and injuries they had sustained," said the Carlisle, Pa., native. "I then found out most of them arrived here without their personal stuff, so there was a constant need for shorts, t-shirts and socks."



Lt. Cdr. Robert Propes, from Expeditionary Medical Facility-Kuwait, and a native of Jacksonville, Fla., and Sgt. Reginald Frye, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, unload a box full of donated clothes, at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, Aug. 31.

Lanious said the packages that were previously sent did not meet some of the needs of the TTHD's residents.

"There was a large supply of personal hygiene items," he said. "But the clothing they would wear during their recuperation and physical therapy was in short supply."

As charities and churches approached Lanious with ideas for care packages, he told them what the servicemembers at the TTHD really needed. However, he could not anticipate the magnitude of their response, Lanious said.

"I didn't know what to expect," said the Fayetteville, N.C., resident. "I didn't have any way of measuring the response. We received over 40 boxes today."

For the servicemembers who actually received these items, it was a much needed morale and spiritual boost.

"I had on my (physical training) gear and shoes, that was about it," said Sgt. Miranda Horry, a truck driver with the 25th Transportation Company, 787th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

Horry said she was evacuated from Iraq to Kuwait for medical reasons and did not have time to pack her personal effects. However, she was relieved to have some of her needs met here in Kuwait.

"I was happy," said the Picayune, Miss., native. "I wanted to take a

shower, I wanted to feel fresh, but I didn't have anything here. I was sent here to be taken care of and rest, I was actually able to do that, it's a blessing."

The TTHD has a collection of clothes donated by groups back in the U.S. They are readily available and convenient for the patients without having to walk to the Post Exchange for clothes, Frye said.

The change of environment was essential for servicemembers. While they are in the TTHD, they can concentrate on recuperation and recovery from surgery. They are also evaluated for further medical procedures and tests, all without the constant danger of enemy indirect fire.

"We received incoming mortar rounds, I hit my head on the doorway of a tank," said Pvt. Luis Montanez-Nunez, a petroleum supply specialist with the 26th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division, out of Fort Stewart, Ga. He said he suffered a head injury and is undergoing further tests here in Kuwait. He was surprised and welcomed the choice of wearing civilian clothes.

"I left with my (Army Combat Uniform), underwear, socks and one Army blanket," said the native of Caguas, Puerto Rico, who now calls El Paso, Texas, his home. "I was surprised when they gave me civilian clothes; I got to be relaxed and to be like I was at home, comfortable." **A**

Safety is everyone's responsibility

By Col. Mike Carroll
Third Army/U.S. Army Central
Chief of Staff

As the new Chief of Staff (Forward) for Third Army/U.S. Army Central, one of the tasks I do is to read the accident reports that come from our units. I'm probably like a lot of you who dreads another lecture on safety. I even would groan and probably expect 30 minutes of banter from Charlie Brown's teacher.

However, after reading these reports, this is a serious matter. I'll just provide the root causes of recent accidents for our professional Soldiers so we all can "see the next one coming" and stop it.

Well here are some recent cases in our area of responsibility:

- A non-tactical vehicle passenger was killed in a roll over, the passenger was not wearing a seatbelt.
- A truck rammed another truck ahead of it because it was following too closely in the dust on a gravel road.
- An NTV rolled over while turning on a gravel road due to excessive speed at night.
- Attempting to clear a weapon with a loaded magazine in the

weapon.

• A truck rammed another truck ahead of it because the lead vehicle's brake lights did not work and both drivers already knew about it.

• A Humvee rolled over with neither the driver nor senior occupant wearing seatbelts.

I always think, "this can never happen to me." So could these apply to me? Well, I do ride in NTVs daily. I get in Humvees with others driving. I draw my weapon to travel off-post and I clear it several times each day as we travel. I travel in daytime during dusty conditions and have to move late at night.

So I have to do the pre-combat inspections I learned to do on my armored personnel carrier back when I was a lieutenant. I ask myself: Do I have ID Cards? Weapons? Magazines in ammo pouch? Vehicle dispatch? Off-post memo? Seatbelts? Fuel? Clean windows? Water? Cell phone? Strip maps?

Doing these checks each time has not made me late for a meeting yet, they don't take very long and I am making sure I am as safe as possible. This is something we can each do, isn't it? **A**

Just One Question...

"Where were you when Sept. 11 happened?"



"I was getting ready to start college at the University of Washington. I was asleep when I heard it. I thought it was a joke."

1st Lt. Ann Merkle
Amboy, Wash.
S-4

Combat Logistics Bn., 22nd Marine Exp. Unit



"I woke up that morning. While eating cereal, I saw it on the TV."

Pfc. Daniel Ranzenberger
Sacramento, Calif.
Airframe mechanic
601st Aviation Support Battalion



"I was an instructor at Fort Leonard Wood instructing entry-level motor transportation drivers."

Staff Sgt. Paul Hausner
Shawnee, Kan.
Battalion gunnery sergeant
Combat Logistics Bn., 22nd Marine Exp. Unit

Why I serve:

Spc. Chris Ballard
25B IT specialist
336 Finance Management
Center



The Asheville, N.C., native explains why he chose to join the military.

"Where else can I go half way around the world and get paid to do it?"



Courtesy photo

Some accidents are avoidable by implementing safety checks.



9/11 six years later

Third Army/U.S. Army Central servicemembers remember the events of Sept. 11, 2001. For the full story, turn to page 6.