

THE FIELD REPORT

JULY 2012

**Dog days
before
deployment**

Civilians send comic books
to deployed servicemembers

Rugby: Military vs.
Civilians at JBLM

Welcome home:
I Corps returns



AMERICA'S ARMY:

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Coba, a 3-year-old chocolate lab and tactical explosives detector dog, chews contently on a tennis ball as David Sheffer, her handler and a dog trainer with Vohne Liche Kennels in Denver, Ind., explains the capabilities of the dog. *Photo by Sgt. Christopher Gaylord*

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THE FIELD REPORT

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I used a Designated Driver!



***What have
YOU done to save
a life today?***



**ARMY SAFE
IS ARMY STRONG**



Taking JOY in time together



Children burst into excited laughter and commotion as their bus approached an open field with tents and military vehicles.

Family members of the 56th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, 62nd Medical Brigade, got to experience field life with their soldier during Family Field Day held here, June 14.

The event was held in conjunction with the Defense Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear and high-yield Explosives Response Force homeland security mission field training exercise, June 11-15.

The battalion was out in the field to practice saving lives, prevent further injuries and provide critical support to those affected in the CBRNE scenarios.

The training stopped around 4 p.m. in preparation for the families arrival for dinner and to see their soldier's work area.

"We are on what's called a pause in exercise," said Lt. Col. Kimberlee Aiello, brigade commander of the 56th MMB. "We wanted to show what the medical support field looks like and spend dinner with family before resuming the mission."

Capt. David Chappell, commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment 56th MMB said, "The intent of Family Field Day is to allow children to see what moms and dads do while they are out in the field. We bring the families out to enjoy time with their soldier."

"On the way out here, my 4-year-old son Matthew said, 'Look, there are Army trucks. This is the best ride ever,'" said Maria-Teresa Correll, wife of Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Correll, the first sergeant for the 153rd Blood Detachment.

Throughout the two-hour event, families enjoyed everything from pizza to barbecue. Many children took turns walking through tents and getting in military ambulances for pictures.

Spc. Billy Sherman, a medic with the 575th Area Support Medical Company said, "I showed my children the different laboratory, radiology and dental workstations, but their favorite part was when they played in the truck, which is where I spend most of my time."

Our secretary and chief of staff of the Army acknowledges by signing the Army Covenant that family members serve side-by-side with our Soldiers, enduring their hardships and provided the unconditional love and support that truly make our Army strong.

"We are a team," Aiello said. "We're a family and our extended families need to come out and see what we do and be a part of our team."

Soldiers may be the strength of our nation, but their strength may come from their families.

"The battalion supports the families, so it motivates me to give 100 percent at work," said Staff Sgt. Barry Gentry, an operations officer detachment sergeant for the 56th MMB.

Aiello said the soldiers worked long, late hours with very little sleep during their mission in the field so this was time to relax and spend time with family while still having the opportunity for them to see what they do in the field.

"We stopped the field exercise to enjoy time with our families," Aiello said. "Now that the families are departing, we will begin our redeployment plan."

Ultimately, family members left with a new appreciation for some of the challenges that soldiers face when they work and live in the field environment. For the Soldiers, it was a moment to relax and spend time with their families.



Story and photos by

Staff Sgt. Teresa L. Adams

28th Public Affairs Detachment

Place
Stamp
Here

We found a home

One home cares for veterans
for over 100 years

Dear Veterans,

For more than 100 years, the Washington Veterans Home has cared for its service members on a 31-acre bluff overlooking the Puget Sound near Port Orchard, Wash. Over time, the facility has been upgraded with new “Neighborhoods” that are designed to maximize views of the Sinclair Inlet and the facility’s Town Square, which has several support services.

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs manages three veterans homes located in Ortting, Spokane and Retsil, Wash. All three facilities have the same goal, to provide responsive medical and supportive care to veterans who can no longer provide for themselves.

The three facilities are Medicaid and Medicare certified, and provide its residents with 24-hour nursing care. The residents receive quality medical and pharmacy services along with physical and occupational therapies.

“The people who live in our home range in ages from 40 to 102,” said Tami N. Reuter, the activities director and volunteer coordinator at the Retsil home. “It’s an ever changing population as people are waiting much longer prior to seeking live-in skilled nursing care.”

Residents may require long-term care or stay short-term with the expectation of returning to their communities.

A veteran’s eligibility requirements for admission include; having served any branch of the United States Armed Forces, residing in Wash., or being the spouse or widow of an eligible veteran. Residents must have a medical need to live there.

Don Veverka, a native of Port Orchard, Wash., and the superintendent of the Restil home, says that what they do best is take care of veterans by respecting the service they provided to our country. “We staff generously,” said Veverka. “We maximize each veteran’s benefits, either through the state, Medicare and Medicaid, or the Federal Veterans Administration.”

It isn’t the building that makes this place a home to the residents; it is the quality medical care, the volunteers that come to visit the veterans and the overall feeling of community provided to the 260 residents who reside within its walls.

Arthur Granstrom, a 96-year-old veteran who served as a mess sergeant from 1940 to 1945 during WWII, is comfortable living at the Retsil home.

“I retired, I used up all my finances and finally wound up here,” Granstrom said. “It’s home for me. Given my age, I chose it as a final place to live.”

At the home there is an overwhelming feeling of enthusiasm and care directed toward the residents. The volunteers take great pride in the care that they provide to the veterans and their spouses.

Julie M. Graham, a native of Manchester, Wash., has volunteered at the Veterans home for over 25 years.

“When I started coming here, this big beautiful building wasn’t here,” says Graham. “Very few Veterans had family visiting them and they were alone. It’s important for them to have companionship and know that people care, that’s why I am here.”

Celebrating

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Teresa L. Adams,
28th Public Affairs Detachment



one who served



Students gathered to perform a musical, sing jazz and wish a happy birthday to a very special veteran. These students are no strangers

to recognizing Soldiers. They know the history behind each note they sing.

More than 100 veterans, parents and faculty members gathered at Tyee Park Elementary School, Lakewood, Wash., at the annual spring concert where fourth and fifth grade students performed the musical adaption of the Charles Dickens classic, "Oliver Twist."

Following the musical, students in first, second and third-grade performed an upbeat jazz concert involving scat, improvisation, and 5-year-old "Guest Conductor" Yuri Castillo directing the final swing tune of the day, "Start your day with a song!"

Retired Chief Petty Officer, Donald R. Green, who served on the USS Pyro during the attacks on Pearl Harbor, was invited to attend the concert on this special day.

At the beginning of the concert, students at Tyee Park took a moment to recognize Green and sing, "Happy Birthday." They presented him with a bright orange banner that said "Remember Pearl Harbor," which had more than 400 signatures for the veterans 90th birthday.

Tracey Lundquist, Tyee Park's music and literature teacher, has afforded her students many opportunities to visit service members and to witness firsthand

what it means to serve.

While reading with her kids about World War II, she had Pearl Harbor survivors and Tuskegee Airmen talk to her students and provide first-hand accounts of their lessons.

"It is like we have torn out the pages of history and wrapped them around the kids," Lundquist said. "Sometime youth gets in the way and these kids just don't realize how fortunate they are to have the veterans walk among us and share their stories."

"At 90, Don is still full of zip and energy, added Lundquist. "I can always count on him to share his history with my students and come support our programs."

Green says that it is very important for student to be introduced to opportunities within the military.

"I've been coming here for 12 years, said Green. "I have a story to tell."

Adrianna H. Brown, a fifth-grade student grader who performed during Oliver Twist, has great respect for Green and was happy to see him attend the spring concert.

"He is a veteran and risked his life to protect our freedom," said Brown. "He likes to see us perform and he shows us that we shouldn't take our freedom for granted."



The End of the Long Road Home

Story and photos by Spc. Adam L. Mathis,
17th Public Affairs Detachment

“I’m proud of every one of them, and with that, I Corps, dismissed!”

With those words from the I Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Mike Scaparrotti, a cheer went up from the Soldiers who had just landed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord June 13. Those words brought I Corps’ one-year deployment in Afghanistan to an end.

“It’s great to be home, glad to be back around my family, but a part of me wishes I was still ... over there because it was the most fulfilling year of my life,” said I Corps’ Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell.

It was fulfilling for Troxell because of the amount of progress made in Afghanistan while I Corps served as the core staff for the International Security Assistance Force’s command group from 2011 to 2012. When they arrived, U.S. or coalition forces led in 90 percent of the fighting. However, by the time I Corps left, U.S. Soldiers were able to take on a greater supporting role while Afghan security personnel took the lead in combat.

“Just seeing that transformation has told me that we are getting this thing in the right direction,” said Troxell.

Progress was made in part due to the efforts of other units from JBLM while I Corps was in Afghanistan. Scaparrotti said the work of some of the infantry brigades had improved the security situation in the southern region, and those improvements have made progress toward helping Afghanistan reach their goals.

“What we’re doing in Afghanistan is not without a cost, but I would tell the American people that we’re making progress, that this fight is one of strategic importance,” said Scaparrotti. “It’s important not only to that region, but more importantly, it’s vital to us in terms of ending this extremist insurgency that means to impact on our way of life and the values that we cherish, and we’re making a difference.”



What's under the hood?

Story and photos by Sgt. Micah VanDyke,
28th Public Affairs Detachment

According to weather reports, Saturday was supposed to be a rainy day, which is normal for the Pacific Northwest, despite it being almost summer-time.



Fate or luck intervened and pushed out the bad weather early so Soldiers and Airmen could enjoy the second annual Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers Domestic vs. Import Car Show at North Fort, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., June 9.

The BOSS car show began last year to provide Soldiers and Airmen with a way to showcase their vehicles and get some exposure to the car show scene. The show, being geared for the amateur, was still worth entering for the more experienced contestant.

"It's a very simple show with basic categories and entries because we're trying to help them learn the steps, learn the ropes and just go through the element of car show etiquette," said Spc. Monique Hinton, assigned to garrison headquarters, JBLM, who is currently the BOSS special activities coordinator and helped establish the show.

"The car show came about as a learning opportunity for guys to start getting involved in the car scene and being able to interact with others who share their interests," Hinton added.

This year's show was fortunate enough to have several experienced judges volunteer their time and provide the contestants with legitimate scoring in the different categories. Some of the categories included: best import, best sound, best-in-show and best-motorcycle-domestic along with many others. This gave the show versatility and appealed to the interests of many Soldiers and Airmen. The BOSS representatives work hard to make this possible.

"You have participation in something that is generally out of their genre and it's nice to see these guys come in with their cars that they've spent a lot of time, and sometimes a lot of money, in order to make it what they envisioned," said Robert Fry, a car show judge who is the manager of both JBLM Automotive Skills Development Centers. He judged last year's show and also runs the 4th of July car show on base.

An easy-going vibe throughout the show helped many contestants relax as this was their first car show. They appreciated the chance to enter their vehicle in the show.

"It's a good way to meet a lot of people from different backgrounds that are into different types of cars and car shows," said Air Force Lt. Col. Jason Ginn, operations officer for the 4th Airlift Squadron, McChord Field. "You bring your car to show it off. If you have something neat and put a lot of time and money into it, this affords you an opportunity to display your hard work."

Ginn took home the "best-in-show" trophy for entering his pristine Pontiac GTO. He enjoyed the show by admiring the cars on display.

"It was exciting and unexpected, I came out here just to have a good time and relax and just kick back," Ginn said about his win.

The BOSS Domestic vs. Import Car Show is making great strides toward becoming a mainstay event every summer at JBLM, and BOSS hopes it continues to expand each year.



COMICS FOR HEROES



No amount of space goes unused when Gabi Trautman when sends a care package to those deployed. Gabi said she sends packages of her own donations plus goods from the community about every three months.

Story and photos by Spc. Adam L. Mathis,
17th Public Affairs Detachment

For Gabi Trautman, stuffing envelopes is a competition.

Starting a care package for deployed servicemembers with comic books is almost a cliché for her, being the owner of Olympia Cards and Comics, but from a gamer's standpoint it is a great opening move: comics are a good, space-economical base for filling a flat-rate envelope.

Her opponent in this contest is the post office's flat rate requirement. As long as the envelope closes by itself—meaning the cardboard flap with the adhesive can connect with the main body of the envelope—the flat-rate parcel is good to ship.

But her personal strategy game with the post office is not all that motivates her to send these packages to Soldiers about every three months. As she fills the last odd spaces with loose candy, a tangible reminder of why she helps the military sits to her left at the end of an aisle of comic books: a graphic novel about her deceased brother.

“Even though I’m obviously a civilian, I’ve never left the mentality of being in the Army,” said Gabi.

That mentality comes from having a father whose career was the military. The youngest of five children, Gabi lived in Iran and Germany before her father retired out of what was then Ft. Lewis. She went on to work at and then take ownership of the

cards and comic book store. Two of her siblings continued the military tradition: one graduated from West Point, the other became the subject of “Shooters.”

Her brother served as a green beret and deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. While Gabi does not know, or perhaps want to know, the details of his service, she remembers doing for him what she does for every Soldier—sending packages.

“But normally when I would send my brother care packages, he would actually ask for stuff for the Afghani kids instead of for himself,” said Gabi. “A lot of the pictures that he would send him would be him with the Afghani boys. He was there to help, that was his view.”

And helping was how he died. In 2005, her brother, David, served as a contractor in Iraq and died defending a U.S. official.

David’s life served as part of the inspiration for Gabi’s husband, Eric, to co-write a graphic novel about the military. Eric said that many military stories miss the point, telling a sensational story about violence and not about people. He decided to change that.

Originally, Eric wanted to publish a novel, but the work was so bad that he has locked it away, not to be read by even his wife.

“Literally every time I sat down to write, I was second guessing myself so much,” said Eric. “Literally with every word I was like, ‘Is this going to be the one that offends Dave’s wife? Is this going to be the one that upsets my wife’s father? Is this going to be the one that makes my wife cry?’”

When he hit a dry patch in his graphic novel production, however, Eric decided to give the story a second chance in this more visual medium. The advantage of this, according to Eric, is that pictures can create an atmosphere that strictly prose authors spend pages creating.

“In a graphic novel, as long as guys are dressed in authentic uniforms and behaving in an authentic way on the page, a lot of work is already done to set the mood and the tone and immerse the reader in that without pages of description,” said Eric.

“Every time we ask these kids to go out and be

in these incredibly heightened circumstances and they lose a little bit of themselves every time they have to pull the trigger and they do it so we can sleep in our beds at night and then we ignore them. That’s wrong; that bothers me.”

There are two groups of servicemembers who receive care packages from Gabi: people she knows and people whose address has been given to her.

The people she knows often are members of the community that gathers at her store. Gabi designed the store to be a sanctuary that keeps the outside world at bay. Within the world of gamers, comic book readers, and card collectors, even military rank can be left outside.

“We’re equivalent of bartender or the psychiatrist,” said Eric. “I hear all about the breakups, and the marital troubles ... I know a bunch of special forces guys and every time they lose a guy we know it,” said Eric.

Sadly for Gabi, the military lifestyle often takes people from her community. Changes of station and deployments limit their time in the area after Gabi has put in the effort to build relationships.

“It’s hard for me because I get to know these people and they’re only here for four years and then they’re gone,” said Gabi. “So, that’s hard for me.”

The soldiers she knows well receive very specific care packages from her, crammed with things she knows that person likes. But whether she knows them, they are family, or are merely an address that someone dropped off at her door, Gabi will support those who are deployed.

“I mean the Soldiers that I know well and I know who they are, I can make specific care packages, but the Soldiers I don’t know, I mean they’re still getting stuff that says somebody out there is thinking of you,” said Gabi. “I’ve never been there obviously, but I would imagine that being in the middle of the desert and wondering someday, ‘Why am I this filthy,’ you know, and then getting a care package from someone you don’t know well saying, ‘Hey I care about you,’ is good.”

AUGUST 8, 2003

I’ve spent most of my life on or around this base. My dad was already locked in here when I was born, and I followed right in his footsteps like it was the family business or something.



But I don't even want to be here now.



A page from the graphic novel “Shooters” that was produced in part by Eric Trautmann. The main character of the story is based on the life of his brother-in-law, who died in Iraq while defending a diplomat. (Art by Steve Lieber. Text by Eric Trautmann & Brandon Jerwa. Copyright 2012 DC Comics, Steve Lieber, Eric Trautman & Brandon Jerwa)

I can't look anyone in the eye.

They're all going to come up to me afterwards, and we'll have those sad little conversations about how much I liked their son or husband or brother, and how he died a hero. They'll say "God bless you" and look at me with sympathy...

...but deep down inside, they'll hate me.

They get in their cars and leave and wonder "Why was he the lucky one?" Why was I the one to come home, instead of their son, or husband, or brother?

I wonder the same thing.





One ball, every branch of the military,
a bunch of civilians came together at
Joint Base Lewis-McChord to prove
something on the field

Keeping Possession



Sgt. Cliff Davidson, assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, Fort Hood, Texas, a member of the “U.S. Military Select” team leaps over his teammate, Maj. Nate Conkey, an instructor for the Department of Physical Education, West Point, N.Y., during the match against the “East Palo Alto” team at JBLM.



Interception, tackle, turnover, and kick-off; these words make most Americans think of football. Yet, many are starting to associate these words with rugby, which is where American football derived most of its terminology.

Rugby 7s have been added to the world stage as an Olympic Sport and is scheduled to make its debut in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil in the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Last year, Nick Punimata, who hosted the inaugural Best of the West 7s (7 players) Rugby Invitational Cup held June 23-24 at Cowan Field on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, (JBLM) Wash., envisioned a rugby tournament where military members would compete.

The “U.S. Military Select Team” coached by Kevin Swiryn, a former U.S. National Rugby team player in both 15s and 7s rugby games, consists of Servicemembers from every branch of service. Most team members hadn’t played rugby for months or even years. Yet, with less than a week of practice, they used their military discipline and got themselves prepared to compete with teams that have been playing together, some, for as long as five years.

“What these guys do is really special,” said Swiryn. “It’s an honor to coach them in something that’s fun, exciting and gives them a break from their day-to-day lives.”



(Left) Senior Airman Erik Hartley, a crew chief assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, Peoria, Ill., a member of the "U.S. Military Select Team" powers his way against a "Pacific Rover" player to gain field position on Cowan Field at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

Saturday, they divided up ten teams into two groups of five. In rugby, this is known as "pool play." The military team was one of two teams to finish undefeated in the first day's pool play. They were ranked fourth out of five teams prior to that section of the tournament. That day, they came out on top, placing first in their pool play.

Local rugby team owner, Waisale Serevi, co-founder of "Serevi Rugby", whose team is named "Serevi Select", was very impressed with the military team when his players scrimmaged against them Thursday.

Serevi played international rugby for 21 years and his national team won two World Cups for Fiji with him serving as their captain.

Serevi said the military team may be the team to beat in future tournaments. He admired how they started from scratch and went up against the elite and won.

The "U.S. Military Select Team" captain, Maj. Nate Conkey, an instructor at the Department of Physical Education, West Point, N.Y., was a crucial component to the team's success and was awarded the "Man

of the Match", which is the rugby equivalent to a football or baseball team's "Most Valuable Player Award."

"It's symbolic of the team effort," said Conkey. "Any one on our squad could've taken that award. It was an amazing experience. The forging of bonds and friendships with these guys will last a lifetime."

On the final day of the tournament, the remaining four teams in the championship bracket (known as the finals in many sports) squared off in two intense rugby matches leaving the "Serevi Select Team" and the "Pacific Coast Grizzlies" to compete in the final match to become the inaugural champion.

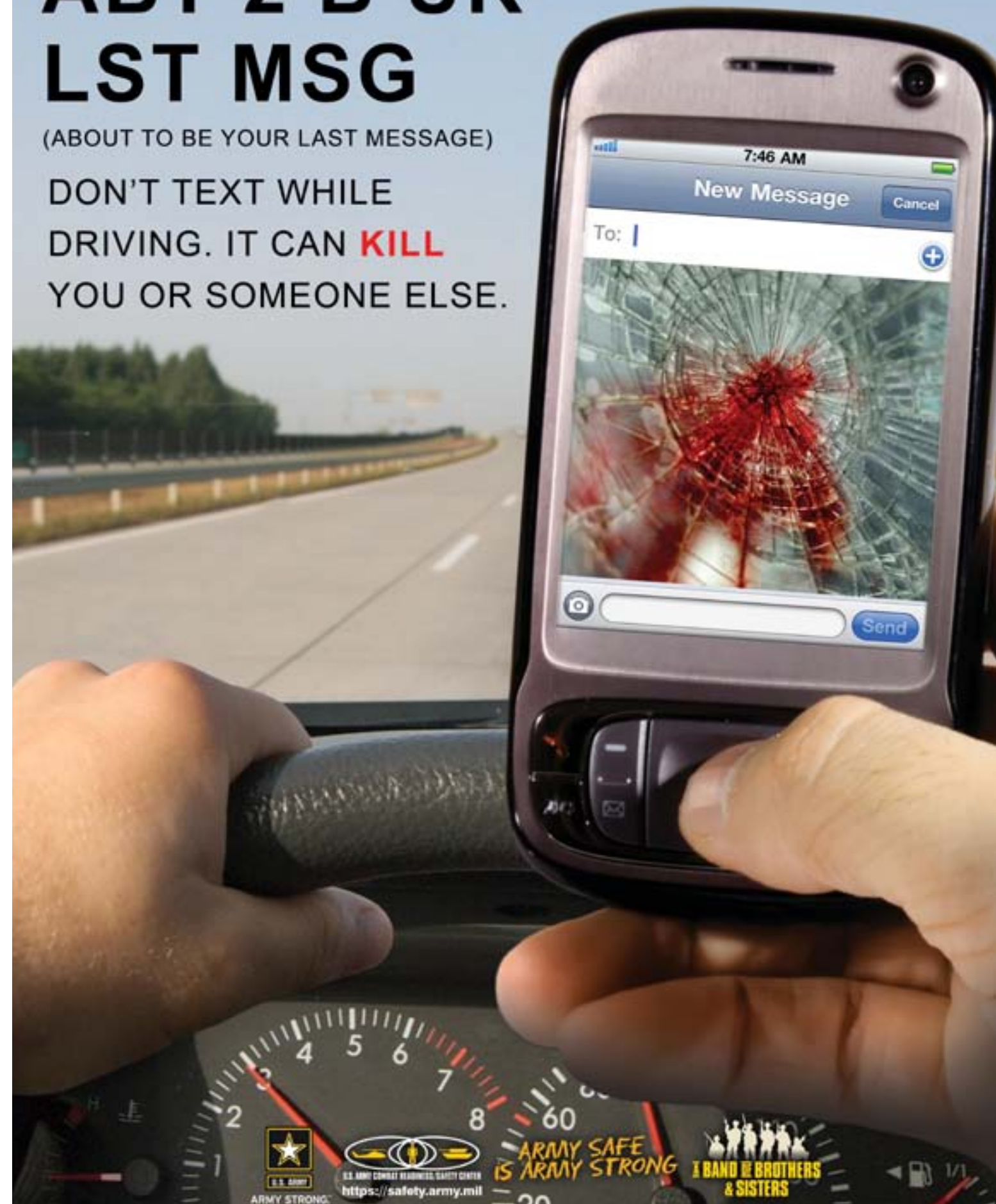
Luckily, the sport of rugby has different championship levels to accommodate teams with a variety of skill levels. With only one loss, the military team competed for the second level championship and repeated their first day's success.

The "Serevi Select Team" from Seattle, Wash., took first place overall, second place went to the "Pacific Coast Grizzlies" who are based in the San Francisco Bay area of California, and third place was awarded to "U.S. Military Select Team" from JBLM.

ABT 2 B UR LST MSG

(ABOUT TO BE YOUR LAST MESSAGE)

DON'T TEXT WHILE
DRIVING. IT CAN **KILL**
YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE.





Your Best Friend in the Desert

They hunt for bombs, intimidate the enemy and can find wounded Soldiers, but perhaps their greatest role is to serve as a reminder of home.

Story by Sgt. Christopher Gaylord,
5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Her tail wags uncontrollably as passersby brush their hands across her fur, Coba, a 3-year-old chocolate lab, often stands for a lot of things.

She's the dog troops leave at home before deploying; the one they grew up with. She's a fond memory, a beacon of happiness, temporarily if nothing else, in a place far from home.

"I just have to ask. Can I pet her?," a Soldier asked Coba's trainer, who brought Coba to the National Training Center to demonstrate her capabilities as a bomb-sniffing dog, where soldiers with the 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division are making final preparations for a fall deployment to Afghanistan.

"I miss my dog," the soldier said, kneeling down to stroke Coba's coat of thick, brown fur, his gentler side clearly getting the best of him.

Coba serves as a tactical explosives detector dog, or TEDD, a canine trained under a two-year-old program whose job it is to sniff out bombs in combat zones. She's man's best friend and also one of his best weapons on today's battlefield.

Her handler, David Sheffer, who works as a trainer for Vohne Liche Kennels in Denver, Ind., where Coba and the other TEDDs learn their trade, brought her to a mock forward operating base at NTC June 14 so soldiers, civilians and Afghan role players could see her talents.

Fourth Brigade will soon select 25 soldiers from across its ranks and from different career fields to

train at Vohne Liche before the brigade's fall deployment to Afghanistan. Once overseas, their sole jobs will be to care for and escort their issued dogs to regions in need of explosives detection capabilities and to interpret the behaviors of their furry friends.

To find the right soldiers for the demanding two-month course, Sheffer spent June 5 to 15 travelling to various companies and platoons in the brigade spread out across NTC.

"We're trying to show and demonstrate the capabilities of these dogs to build some excitement with the soldiers that are out here to get them exposed to this program and to get the commanders used to working the dogs in this environment," said Sheffer, a San Antonio native. "It is definitely a force enhancer and a force multiplier."

Army observers monitoring training for the soldiers of 4th Brigade, who run, oversee and assess the performance of units at NTC, hid small paper sacks of explosive residue inside the tent for Coba to locate.

A small audience of soldiers watched closely as Coba sought out the scents with ease, stopping briefly to lick the face of a sergeant first class sitting in the room.

Sheffer flicked the fingers of one hand as if to spritz water across the floor as he used the other to hold Coba's leash with absolute grace, allowing her

to lead him around the confined area.

“Woo, good girl!” he cheered.

Then, he took her outside to show her off to an assembly of soldiers, Afghan role players portraying Afghan army soldiers and government civilians.

For Sheffer, who spent 14 of his 22 years as an Air Force military policeman working with dogs, showcasing the abilities of four-legged secret weapons like Cobra is an important mission.

But it tends to be the more dog-like things that ultimately draw troops in.

“Obviously, her ideal mission is to go out and find explosives, but if it will help the Soldier, sailor, airman and Marine get through, then I’ll call her a therapy dog also,” said Sheffer as Cobra relaxed on the tent floor, a tennis ball laid before her paws next to a pool of water she lapped from a Dixie cup moments before.

“Most of them have pets at home that they miss, and it just brings them closer to their families and pets back home,” he said. “Everywhere we go, people stop and say, ‘oh, I miss my dog. It’s so great to see your dog out here.’”

Sheffer travels to installations and training centers across the country seeking out the right soldiers to lead the uniquely trained dogs overseas. This is the second appearance the TEDDs have made at NTC.

But wherever Sheffer goes, the reactions are the same, and the softer side of troops shows through.

“Every time we went out to a platoon or company, the Soldiers wanted to come over and pet the animals,” he said.

About Labrador Retrievers

Labrador Retrievers were first used in Newfoundland to help pull in nets of fish and catch any that escaped from fishing lines. After being cross-bred with other types of dogs, they became useful for roles outside of hunting and are now very adaptable dogs.

The most popular breed of dog in the United States, labs are ideally kind, not displaying aggressiveness toward humans or other animals. “The most distinguishing characteristics of the Labrador Retriever are its short, dense, weather resistant coat, an ‘otter’ tail; a clean-cut head with broad back skull and moderate stop; powerful jaws; and its ‘kind,’ friendly eyes, expressing character, intelligence and good temperament.”

Information taken from the American Kennel Club’s website: www.akc.org.

“What it does is lift the Soldiers’ spirit,” said Sgt. 1st Class Kelly Pippin, the training observer who followed Sheffer and his dog around for their visit to the training center. “They see something that reminds them of home and that first pet they might have had.”

And to Sheffer, that can be a game changer for not only motivation but job performance.

“It’s just a little piece of home, he said. “And the happier you are, the better you’re going to function.

“That’s just the psychology of any job; if you’re out there and something made you happy, it’s just going to boost your morale and make you want to go out and perform.”

Pippin, a 21-year Army military policeman who oversaw the deployment of explosives detection dogs to various operating bases across Afghanistan on his most recent deployment, has witnessed that first hand.

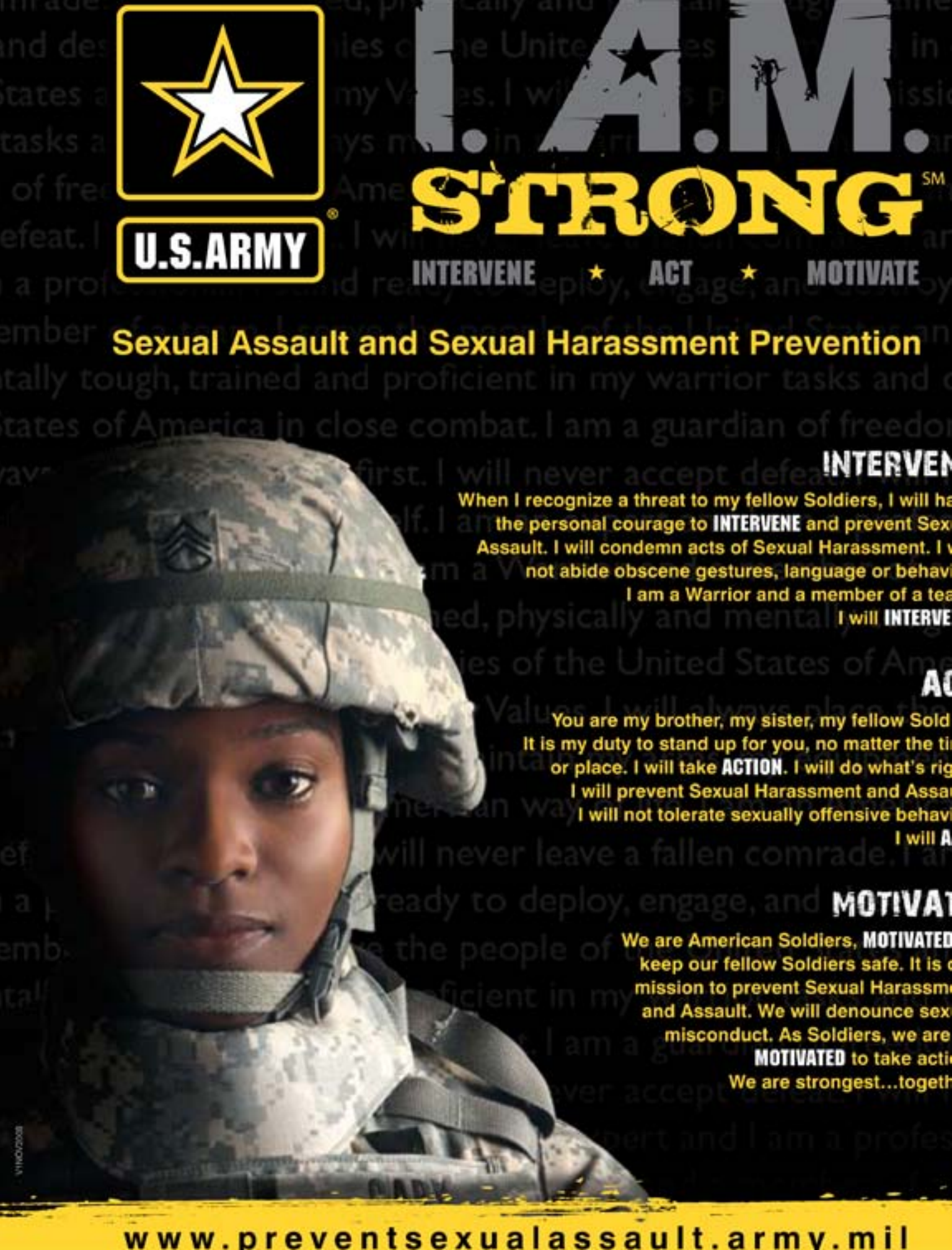
“I’ve had Soldiers say, ‘hey, sergeant, can I play with your dog?’ And then they’re like, ‘hey, sergeant, I’m ready, let’s go!’” he said.

“For some strange reason, petting a dog, whatever anger’s built up, goes right away,” he added. “It’s a great stress reliever to play with the dog.”

It’s a proven fact, Pippin said, that the dogs work as successful explosives detection devices.

But this device, trying to cool off in middle of the Mojave Desert, is different. It will lick you; it will love you; it will take you back to a place you miss.

And almost always, it will bring out the best in you.



THE FINAL REPORT

My Quiet Place

Editor-in-Chief Capt. Kenneth A. Stewart finds relaxation from deployment with the birds

Returning home from a deployment is always a mixed bag. While downrange we dream of getting back to family and loved ones, but the transition is rarely as smooth as we imagine.

I returned from a deployment to Afghanistan last October with members of the 17th Public Affairs Detachment. After the long-embraces, the happy tears at the airport and the first taste of Mama's cooking, reality began to set in.

A lot had changed in the year I was gone. This is probably true of most servicemembers. Our loved ones do not go into suspended animation while we are away. Their lives go on, they grow, they find new ways of doing things. These changes are usually positive, but they are changes nonetheless, and change can cause stress.

For me the stress was amplified by the reality that my military career was coming to an end. I dropped my retirement paperwork just two weeks after returning home.

As pressure mounted, I realized that I needed to find a productive way to blow-off steam. I need to find my quiet place, but finding that place is not always easy. For me, help came in the form of a movie.

"The Big Year," starring Jack Black, Steve Martin and Owen Wilson tells the story of a group of men competing in an annual bird watching competition. Their task is to travel throughout North America and to identify as many birds as possible in a single calendar year.

I have never thought much of bird watching, but as I watched the film, my interest was piqued. I

enjoy the outdoors, I love photography and I have always had a fascination with science, bird watching combines all three. The more I watched, the less silly bird watching seemed to be. By the end of the movie, I was hooked. I located a local chapter of the Audubon Society and signed up for a bird watching trip at Fort Steilacoom.

My first excursion was memorable. With a borrowed set of binoculars in one hand and a used field guide in the other, I marched up to a group of birders and introduced myself. A few moments later, we were hiking around a lake where we encountered our first bird, an American flicker.

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and I consider myself somewhat of an authority on the local wildlife, but I wasn't prepared for what I was about

to see. My binoculars revealed a world all around me that I never realized existed. I found myself looking at some of the most beautiful creatures I had ever seen, and I was shocked by the realization that they had been there the whole time.

As I looked at bright, yellow American goldfinches, blue tree swallow, and vibrantly red-headed woodpeckers, something

wonderful happened. I relaxed.

For the first time in months, I felt connected. I felt calm. The deployment stress retreated, the fear of retirement melted away and as the natural world unfolded all around me, I began to feel an intoxicating sense of peace.

Birding is not for everyone. I realize that not everyone is ready to join the, "brotherhood of bird nerds," but it worked for me.

The transition home from a deployment is rarely what we imagine it will be. Even when returning home is as wonderful as we expected, there are almost always challenges. How we deal with those challenges has the potential to affect our lives and the lives of our loved ones for years to come.

I have found that one of the keys to a successful return home is the ability to leave the war behind and the strength to find that elusive quiet place that each of us has inside. I found that place, with a pair of binoculars and a field guide. Where will you find yours?





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