

DESERT

SUMMER 2013

VOICE

Infantrymen shoot
for their EIB 6

NCO's American spirit
inspires, motivates 14

Mixed martial arts
unifies military 16

TOP WARRIORS
COMPETE FOR TITLE 

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ILISKIY TRAINING CENTER, Kazakhstan —Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, Third Army/ARCENT commanding general speaks during the closing ceremony of exercise Steppe Eagle 2013, Aug. 23, as U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan Kenneth J. Fairfax looks on. (Photo by Sgt. Chad Guthrie, Third Army/ARCENT Public Affairs)

Lucky 6 sends

Third Army/U.S. Army Central teammates,

I can truly say that I'm blessed to lead this great team of Soldiers and Civilians who work each day to set conditions for stability in a complex and challenging region. You have distinguished yourselves superbly.

The professionalism and devotion to duty I have seen across the theater is impressive. Each day you are advising our partners and shaping the international environment through strong military relationships. From Kuwait, to Qatar, to Jordan, to Afghanistan, to Kazakhstan, all across this huge Area Of Responsibility, you are all doing extraordinary things, and I am proud to be a member of this team.

Frankly, we continue serving in a time of uncertainty, and we must preserve America's resources while accomplishing the mission. The Army recently announced its force structure and stationing decisions including reducing end-strength, and those decisions will affect us. With this changing force structure, the Army will retain the adaptability and flexibility to provide Regionally Aligned and Mission-Tailored Forces in support of national defense requirements here in the U.S. Central Command AOR. These changes will be a challenge, but in every challenge is an opportunity.

Another challenge remains in Afghanistan. Led by 1st Sustainment Command (Theater), you continue to do tremendous work retrograding equipment from that conflict. Winding down the war is a major logistical undertaking. We have tens of thousands of vehicles, containers, and other pieces equipment that must be returned to the U.S., donated to the Afghan government, or otherwise disposed of. But this is a good thing, because redeployment is the natural outcome of the successful transition



SHAW AIR FORCE BASE, S.C. — Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, left, receives the Third Army/U.S. Army Central colors from Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. John F. Campbell, assuming command of Third Army/ARCENT during a change of command ceremony held at Patton Hall's Lucky Park, June 25. The passing of colors from the outgoing commander to the incoming one is an important military tradition signifying to soldiers their unit is never without leadership. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Salcido, Third Army/ARCENT Public Affairs)

of security responsibility to the Afghans. Because of your hard work, professionalism and sacrifices, Afghanistan has the chance for a positive future.

There does remain much to be done in this AOR, and we do need to continue to focus on safety and force protection. One area of focus must be Information Assurance. That is a critical part of force protection because information is a key element of military power. It is imperative that our war fighters have the information they need, when they need it. Our duty is to ensure that information is accessible to the joint forces, while protecting the network—and the information on it—from being accessed by our adversaries.

We also have to work hard to take care of each other. USARCENT is entering its second decade of persistent conflict and we need great leaders, servant leaders. All positions, from team leader to Field Army commander, require Soldiers to have humility, act with selfless service, demonstrate integrity and be a disciplined example for any Soldier to follow. There are many other characteristics, but the outcome is usually the same in the servant

leader's formation: a positive, infectious attitude; disciplined habits that populate their formation; and a feeling of camaraderie that permeates the organization and serves as the cement that bonds our Soldiers during the good times and most certainly during the bad. I am delighted to find servant leaders across this formation.

There is a lot left to do, but I am confident that you will be up to the task. You are prepared, you are trained, and you are more than ready to do the job our nation has called on us to do.

Soldiers, Civilians, Families, and friends of USARCENT, I look forward to working with each and every one of you in the future as we meet the complexity of our world together. May god bless each and every person; those who have soldiered and continue to soldier under our flag, the families that continue to sacrifice alongside them and the nation whose colors you continue to so proudly and ably serve.

Third, Always First.
Lucky 6



CONTENTS

In every issue

- 2 From the front
- 5 Around the AOR
- 19 Voices

News

- 6 Infantrymen shoot for EIB
- 8 Top warriors aim to be NCO, Soldier of the Year

Features

- 12 Religious advisors bond to bridge gap
- 14 NCO's American spirit inspires, motivates

In the zone

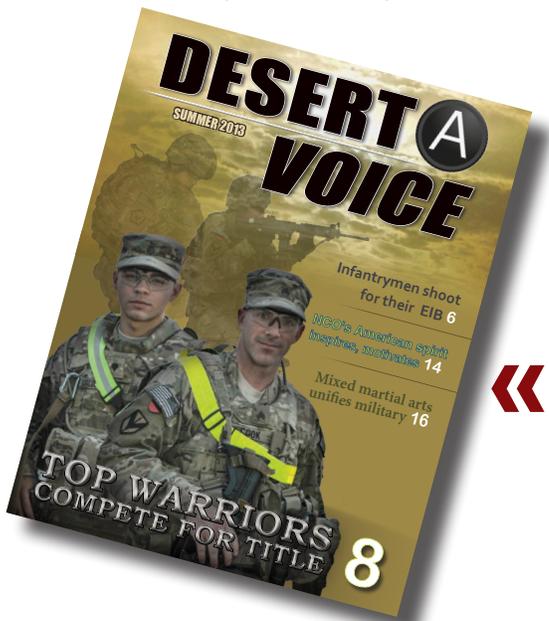
- 16 Joint services mixed martial arts
- 18 Line dancing draws big crowd



12



16



ON THE COVER 8

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Spc. Jacob R. Valderrama, left, and Sgt. William D. Cook, pose for a photo while representing the 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) in Third Army/U.S. Army Central's Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year Competition. (Photo illustration by Sgt. Micah J. VanDyke)



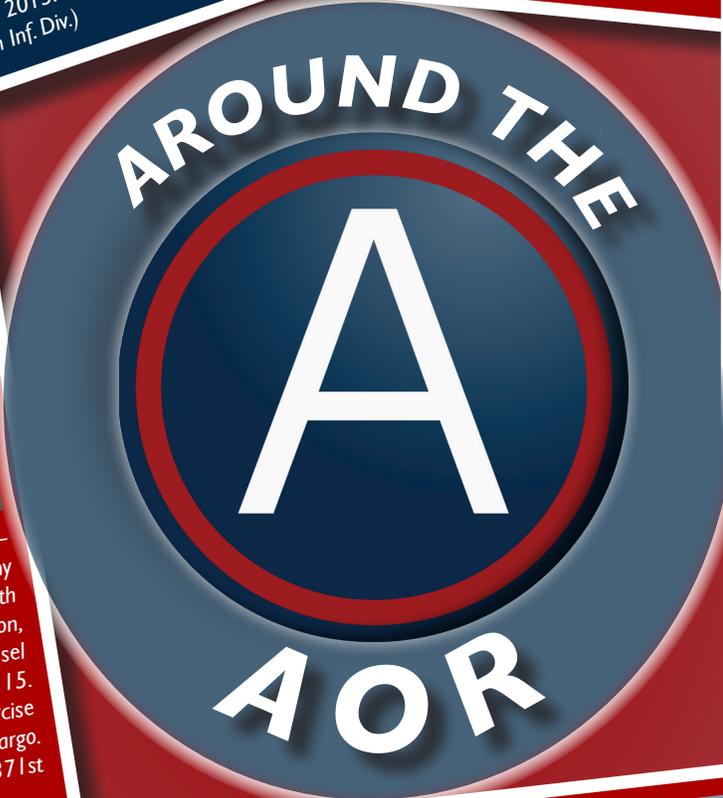
CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait — Spc. Jason Riley, artillery mechanic, 4th Battalion, 42nd Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, and Pfc. Jesse Crockett, field artillery tactical data systems specialist, Battery A, 4th Bn., vie for a dominate tactical position during the "Straight Arrow" Combatives tournament at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, June 1, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Andrew Ingram, 1st ABCT PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)



CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait — Mortar men assigned to 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, fire at simulated enemy targets during Desert Centurion, May 21, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Anthony Kozluechar, 1st ABCT PAO, 4th Infantry Division)



KUWAIT NAVAL BASE, Kuwait — Soldiers assigned to the Army Watercraft Company (Provisional) ground guide Soldiers from the 4th Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Division, onto the deck of United States Army Vessel Logistics Support Vessel-6 James A. Loux, July 15. The Soldiers participated in a training exercise loading and unloading humanitarian aid and cargo. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kimberly Hill, 371st Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs)



SHAW AIR FORCE BASE, S.C. — Soldiers gathered with Soldiers from neighboring Fort Jackson to celebrate the United States Army Warrant Officer Corps' 95th birthday celebration at Patton Hall, July 9. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Sharmain Burch, Third Army/ARCENT Public Affairs)



CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, Qatar — An Explosive Ordnance Disposal team member wraps ordnance in an attempt to seal a 'dirty bomb,' so that it will not continue to leak out hazardous material during training meant to certify members of the team to handle chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive devices that they might come across, June 3. (Photo by Jeremiah Clark, Area Support Group - Qatar Public Affairs)



KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. Army Reserve Sgt 1st Class Javier Mata, left, a native of Los Angeles, Calif., and the drive team noncommissioned officer in charge, 1st Theater Sustainment Command, gives a pre-convoy briefing prior to executing a convoy through Kabul, June 7. The Soldiers from the 1st TSC conducted a convoy from Kabul International Airport to the New Kabul Compound. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Paul Land, 1st Theater Sustainment Command)



Master Sgt. Matthew Reilly, Bradley Fighting Vehicle master gunner, 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, Pennsylvania National Guard, fires an M240 machine gun at Camp Buehring, July 24, while testing to achieve an Expert Infantryman Badge.

INFANTRYMEN SHOOT FOR EIB

By Spc. Andrew Ingram, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

UDAIRI RANGE, Kuwait — “When I crossed that finish line, it felt amazing; like all of the work I’d put in since getting to Camp Buehring had paid off,” said Pfc. Brett Kroen, after marching the final stretch of a week-long trial to prove his expertise as an infantryman.

Kroen, with the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, was among the 261 infantrymen who sought to earn the Expert Infantryman Badge during testing conducted at Camp Buehring, July 22-27.

The candidates defined themselves worthy of earning the coveted badge by

displaying their physical prowess during a physical fitness test, technical expertise during a land navigation course, tactical proficiencies during simulated individual combat scenarios and endurance by finishing the 12-mile ruck march within the three-hour time limit.

“I have a very competitive nature, so if I have to do something like this, I put my heart into it,” Kroen said. “Both my legs cramped up during the last mile of the ruck march, but I worked through the pain and drove on. There was no way I was going to quit so close to the end.”

As the week progressed many of the original 261 candidates began to fall by the

wayside; some during the APFT, others due to mistakes made during validation lanes. Good training, attention to detail and determination pushed those who walked away with the badge through the weeklong gauntlet, added Kroen. Only 51 infantrymen made it through to earn their EIB.

“The great thing about this iteration of the EIB is that we have Soldiers from all levels of the formation,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy Edwards, command sergeant major, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Reg. “We’ve got master sergeants and captains, but the ones I love to see are the young privates succeed. That tells me as a senior leader, that my Soldiers have an excellent grasp

“There was definitely some pain and stress involved but this is an accomplishment that no one can take away from me.”

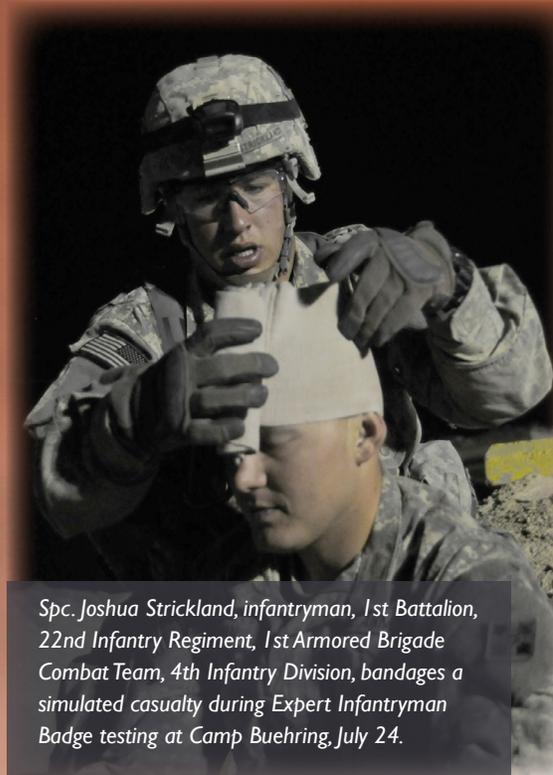
~ Beckmann



Staff Sgt. Ian Strickland, infantryman, 1st Infantry Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, travels to his next point during the land navigation part of Expert Infantryman Badge testing, at Camp Buehring, July 23.



1st Lt. Eric Berce, platoon leader, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, completes a 12-mile road march at Camp Buehring, July 27, for a chance to earn an Expert Infantryman Badge.



Spc. Joshua Strickland, infantryman, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, bandages a simulated casualty during Expert Infantryman Badge testing at Camp Buehring, July 24.

on their skills. It's difficult for Soldiers to be away from their families, but out here we have been able to focus on improving as infantrymen."

To protect Soldiers from debilitating desert heat, the bulk of the Camp Buehring EIB qualification events took place during hours of darkness.

Executing tactical lanes in the dark also added a level of realism to the experience, said Edwards, who organized and oversaw the event.

"As a Soldier you want to own the night," he said. "In Afghanistan, Soldiers must execute many of the skills and tasks we validate during EIB while on mission during hours of limited visibility, so I believe this is the best way to conduct the event."

Only 51 candidates successfully completed all of the events and were awarded EIBs.

"This is an awesome achievement for me," said Sgt. Ryan Beckmann, infantryman, Company B, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf. Reg. "There was definitely some pain and stress involved, but this is an accomplishment that no one can take away from me, and I am proud of myself and all of the infantrymen who went through this with me."

Beckmann added that he believed earning the badge will help him set an example and mentor his Soldiers.

The Army originally awarded the EIB to 10 noncommissioned officers in 1944, after a three-day competition, in order to build esprit de corps and pride within a career field

that few wished to join due to the missions and high level of danger infantrymen are likely to experience, said Command Sgt. Maj. Stephan Frennier, command sergeant major, Third Army/U.S. Army Central in a speech given at the award ceremony. Nearly 70 years later the infantrymen still undergo the challenge to set themselves apart from their peers and set a standard for their fellow Soldiers to strive for.

"The Expert Infantrymen Badge is the hardest individual award that an infantryman can earn," Frennier told the EIB recipients. "You great infantrymen have proven your competency, your character and your commitment. You are the future of our infantry, and I commend you for this accomplishment." **A**



TOP WARRIORS AIM FOR TITLE

THIRD ARMY/ARCENT'S NCO, SOLDIER OF THE YEAR

By Sgt. Ashley M. Outler

CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait — Nine of Third Army/U.S. Army Central's finest warriors faced off in a blazing desert arena, May 20-22, determined to earn the title of the command's best Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year.

Four noncommissioned officers and five Soldiers, some traveling from Afghanistan and South Carolina, eagerly put their knowledge, physical fitness and military expertise on display for a chance to represent Third Army/ARCENT at the Department of the Army competition in the fall.



Nine Soldiers and noncommissioned officers, who were deemed the top warriors of five units in Third Army/U.S. Army Central, anticipate the start of the competition that would prove who among them deserved the title of Third Army/ARCENT's NCO and Soldier of the Year during an introductory brief, May 19.

Meet The Competitors

Spc. Tamer M. El Khouly

UNIT: 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade

JOB: PATRIOT Fire Control Enhanced Operator

HOMETOWN: Orlando, Fla.

GOALS: To create foreign exchange and commodities investment courses.



Sgt. Matthew W. Leis

UNIT: 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade

JOB: PATRIOT Launching Station Enhanced Operator/Maintainer

HOMETOWN: Wichita, Kan.

GOALS: To become a first sergeant and earn a master's degree.



Spc. Cale D. Buck

UNIT: 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division

JOB: Infantryman

HOMETOWN: Waterlow, Iowa

GOALS: To attend Airborne school, become a noncommissioned officer and earn a teaching degree.



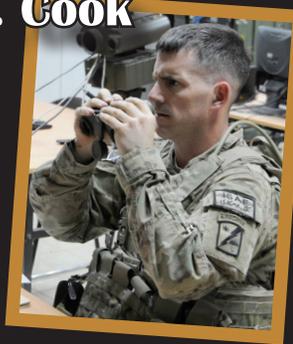
Sgt. William D. Cook

UNIT: 1st Sustainment Command (Theater)

JOB: Parachute Rigger

HOMETOWN: Dallas, Texas

GOALS: To become a High Altitude, Low Opening instructor and achieve rank of sergeant major.



Spc. Alvin L. Long

UNIT: 36th Combat Aviation Brigade

JOB: Air Traffic Control Operator

HOMETOWN: Wimberley, Texas

GOALS: To be selected for Warrant Officer Candidate School, attend flight school and become a chief warrant officer 5.



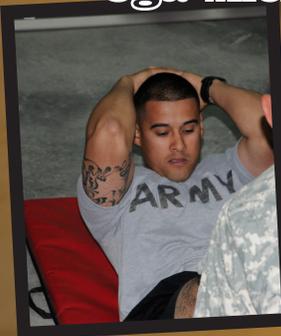
Sgt. Michael A. Rodriguez

UNIT: 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division

JOB: Computer/Detection Systems Repairer

HOMETOWN: Fort Worth, Texas

GOALS: To become a staff sergeant and a warrant officer.



Spc. Jacob R. Valderrama

UNIT: 1st Sustainment Command (Theater)

JOB: Horizontal Construction Engineer

HOMETOWN: Morgan Hill, Calif.

GOALS: Earn the rank of sergeant major and a bachelor's degree in business.



Sgt. Chelsea M. Ruiz

UNIT: 36th Combat Aviation Brigade

JOB: Satellite Communication Systems Operator/Maintainer

HOMETOWN: San Antonio, Texas

GOALS: To earn the rank of staff sergeant and a bachelor's degree in computer information systems



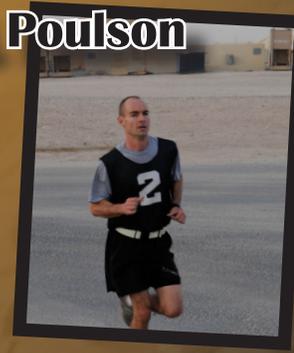
Spc. William H. Poulson

UNIT: Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion Third Army/ARCENT

JOB: Geospatial Engineer

HOMETOWN: Alachua, Fla.

GOALS: To earn a bachelor's degree in geomatics from University of Florida





Spc. Alvin L. Long, air traffic control operator, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 36th Aviation Brigade, enters the last stretch of the 2-mile run portion of an Army Physical Fitness Test, May 20, the first day of competition.



Spc. Tamer M. El Khouly, Bravo Company, 4th Battalion, 3rd Air Defense Artillery Regiment, puts on his Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear during a test of warrior tasks and battle drills, May 21.



Sgt. Michael A. Rodriguez, computer/detection devices repairer, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, writes coordinates in preparation for urban orienteering, May 20.



Sgt. Chelsea M. Ruiz, satellite communication systems operator/maintainer, 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, 36th Infantry Division, focuses on her next shot while firing the M4 carbine during a qualification range, May 21.

“I love to compete. Whether I win or lose, you are going to get my best effort at every event.”

~ Cook

“It’s about the spirit of competition. It showcases some of our best Soldiers and NCOs and helps us recognize those who go above and beyond,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Stephan Frennier, command sergeant major of Third Army/ARCENT.

The Soldiers and NCOs jumped into the competition in full stride with an Army Physical Fitness Test, followed by a written exam and late night urban orienteering course.

“What made it challenging was the quick battle rhythm of events, with an early rise and ending up with a late event, that put a little extra stress on them,” said Frennier.

They then proved themselves at an early morning weapons qualification range and demonstrated their proficiency at warrior tasks and battle drills under the blistering desert sun.

The next day they put on their finest uniforms and marched to the last event where they faced senior NCOs in a board that tested their military knowledge and bearing.

“We kept the points a secret so no one really knew where they stood against the other. You always put stress on yourself when you don’t know, which forces you to give 100% at all times trying



Sgt. William D. Cook, Third Army/ARCENT's Noncommissioned Officer of the Year and the Soldier of the Year, Spc. Jacob Valderrama, both representing 1st TSC, pose for a photo after an award ceremony at Camp Arifjan, May 25. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. James Hale)

to beat your competitors," said Frennier.

Tensions ran high, May 25, days after finishing the tight race as participants and their supporters filled the Chapel at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, in anticipation to find out who would emerge victorious.

It wasn't long before the moment was upon them. As the announcement came, Soldiers from the 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) erupted in loud cheers as both of their competitors, Sgt. William D. Cook and Spc. Jacob R. Valderrama, were deemed Third Army/ARCENT's best NCO and Soldier for 2013.

"It was a tough competition," said Valderrama, who is a horizontal construction engineer with the 557th Engineer Company, 864th Engineer Battalion, 43rd Sustainment Brigade. "I'm in a line platoon working every day, so I really don't get much of a chance to do stuff like this. Now that I have, and have been recognized for it, I couldn't be more proud of myself."

Valderrama, from Morgan Hill, Calif., and Cook, a native of Bay City, Texas, both traveled from Afghanistan to represent the 1st TSC in the competition.

"To have my leadership give me the chance to get here is a testament to them and their faith in me," said Valderrama whose photographic memory is what he says gave him the points to surpass the competitors and secure the win. "I knew I was going to be competing against the best so I knew I had to bring my best. I nailed it and hit a home run."

Cook, a parachute rigger with the 647th Quartermaster Detachment, 1st Special Troops Battalion, said that a rough start with the APFT event is what helped motivate him to do better in the following events.

"I love to compete. Whether I win or lose, you are going to get my best effort at every event; I don't take any of them off," said Cook who added that whether it's ping pong or an Army competition, he doesn't come to lose.

It was a sweet success for both Cook and Valderrama, but short lived, as they continue to shoot for the top. **A**



By Sgt. Ashley M. Outler

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — Winning both the 1st Sustainment Command (Theater) and Third Army/U.S. Army Central Soldier of the Year competitions in a span of a few months was only the beginning for the newly promoted Sgt. Jacob R. Valderrama, who was deemed U.S. Forces Command Soldier of the Year after beating out FORSCOM's best in a four day competition, July 22-25.

Valderrama, who is a horizontal construction engineer with the 557th Engineer Company, 864th Engineer Battalion, 43rd Sustainment Brigade, earned the title after proving himself in several events including an Army Physical Fitness Test, weapons qualification, a Modern Army Combatives Program proficiency test, a land navigation course and a board.

The 23-year-old is stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., and was serving his first deployment in Afghanistan when he began competing.

Valderrama's family told the Morgan Hill Times, a newspaper from his hometown of Morgan Hill, Calif., that the Army changed the once "low-key" and reserved young soccer player to a confident and competitive Soldier.

The competition is not over for Valderrama, who will now prepare to fight for a chance to be the Department of the Army Soldier of the Year in October. **A**

Features



Col. Jonathan C. Gibbs III, command chaplain, Third Army/U.S. Army Central, poses with Mohammad Al-Naqwi, a 'daawa' or teacher of Islam.

Religious advisors bond to bridge gap

By Sgt. Ashley M. Outler

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait — Differences in faith and tradition have been a cause of inequalities and conflicts throughout the history of the world and brought many Soldiers to the battlefield for the sake of liberty and justice for all.

It was on the foundation of freedom and serenity that religious advisors of the U.S. and Kuwaiti militaries built a relationship by promoting understanding and appreciation for their diversity.

“Religious beliefs have the capacity to be powerful sources of separation between individuals and groups,” said Col. Jonathan C. Gibbs III, command chaplain of Third Army/U.S. Army Central. “I believe that building relationships of trust and mutual respect between religious leaders helps strengthen those bonds by showing that differences in belief don’t have to divide us. They only do so when we make them more important than the things we share in common.”

Unit ministry teams serving in Kuwait with Third Army/ARCENT and Islamic affairs officers and imams, or Islamic worship leaders, of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense started meeting in December 2012 and were brought together by a sense of curiosity and the commonality of location and purpose.

“It’s all about developing personal relationships and, as military partners, working together to accomplish similar objectives in support of our two nations’ mutual interests,” said Gibbs. “Nothing is more critical than unity of effort, because the time to develop trust, understanding and good communication is not when a crisis erupts.”

Their partnership has been able to sprout and grow through a multitude of social engagements, educational instruction on religious practices and cultural excursions throughout Kuwait.

“Not only do I consider us friends but also brothers in arms. We are not fighting a war with each other. The battle we’re fighting is trying to build and uphold a strong relationship

between the Kuwaitis and the Americans,” said Sgt. Santana Darby, administration noncommissioned officer for the Third Army/ARCENT command chaplain office.

Building a friendship didn’t come without challenges as religious advisors from both nations worked around distinct differences in language and tradition to find mutual ground.

“Probably the most obvious difference is the degree of pluralism in our ranks which simply reflects some of the difference between our two countries and armies. The Kuwaiti military imams and Islamic affairs officers are all Sunni Muslims while in our Chaplain Corps we have Chaplains that represent over 150 different denominations and faith groups,” said Gibbs. “I think the greatest similarity is the concern and commitment both groups have for the spiritual welfare of their Soldiers.”

Islamic affairs officers and imams adapted and acknowledged the pluralism of the U.S. military by including quotes from various scriptures and religions in their spiritual lessons while tying it all in to a shared value.

“I believe the Kuwaitis realize that we’re a one-of-a-kind Armed Force. They see that we are professionals and care about making a difference in people’s lives,” said Darby.

The solidification of the friendship couldn’t have been possible without the encouragement of Kuwaiti Brig. Gen. Abdulaziz Hassan Al-Rayes, Director of Moral Guidance and Public Relations, who also happened to be the first Kuwaiti officer selected to serve as a cultural advisor and counterintelligence officer with the 1st Marine Division during Operations Desert Shield/Storm in 1991.

“The moment that touched me the most was when Brig. Gen. Al-Rayes, after several ‘war stories,’ expressed his deep affection and appreciation for the American military and the American people because, as he put it ‘The Americans gave us Kuwaitis our country back,” said Gibbs. “It was one of those moments that just make you



Maj. Krzysztof A. Kopec, brigade chaplain for 75th Fires Brigade, admires a copy of the Quran at the Bait Al-Othman Museum, Kuwait City, during a cultural exchange and social gathering with Islamic affairs officers, June 12.



Capt. Jassem M. Al-Salahi, a Kuwaiti military Islamic affairs officer, talks with Sgt. Santana Darby, administration noncommissioned officer with the Third Army/U.S. Army Central's command chaplain office, at a gathering at Camp Arifjan, May 8. proud to be an American."

At a later engagement Brig. Gen. Al-Rayes made it a point to applaud and thank the American Soldiers in attendance for being a part of the military organization that helped liberate Kuwait.

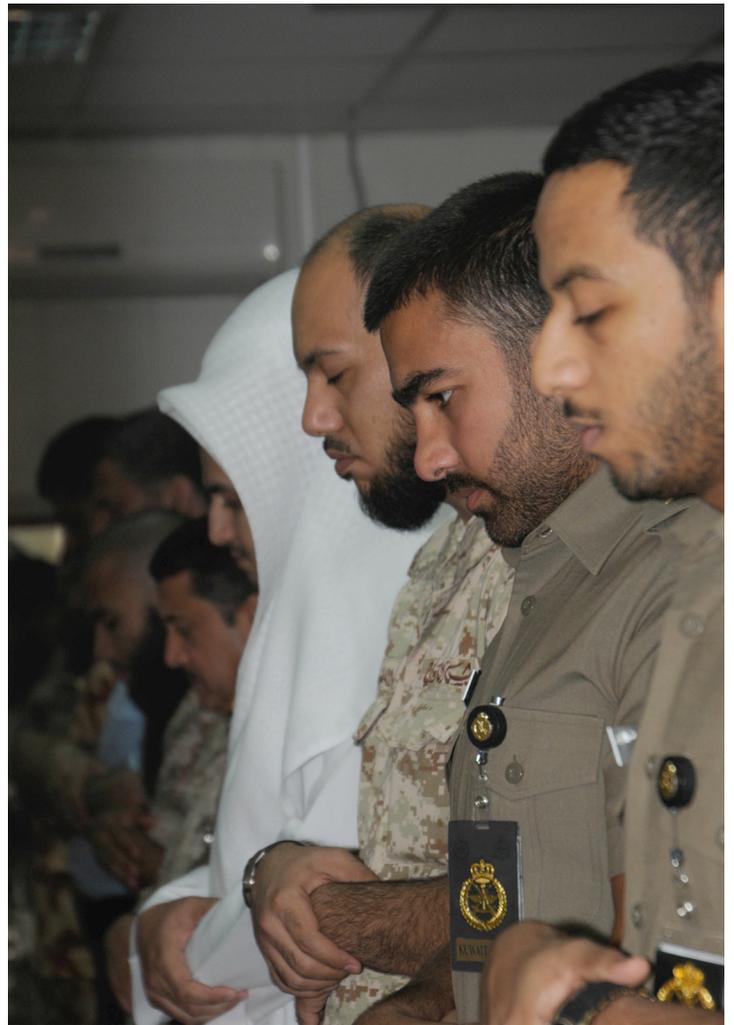
"As the world watches the friendship between the two countries, I pray that one day it influences other countries to realize that so much can be accomplished if we come together as one," said Darby.

Darby participated in almost every engagement but said he was particularly fond of a spiritual instruction about respecting parents given on May 8 at Camp Arifjan, by Mohammad Al-Naqwi, who practices 'daawa', or teaching of Islam, with Muslims and non-Muslims.

"This event covered my two most important life values; my religious and family beliefs," said Darby. "This touched home for me to see them being able to express how much family ties into their lifestyles."

From a culturally-rich journey through Bait Al-Othman Museum in Kuwait City to tours around Camp Arifjan and Camp Buehring, each engagement has offered all participants a chance to be more versatile and insightful.

"We need to look beyond the stereotypes and start seeing one another as real people, real human beings. That's not to deny that there are religious and cultural differences between us. But the things we share in our common humanity far outnumber our differences and we should focus more on those things in our dealings with one another," said Gibbs. **A**



Soldiers with the Kuwaiti military's Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations prepare for prayer at their compound in Kuwait City, during a meeting with Third Army/U.S. Army Central unit ministry teams, June 12.



Mohammad Al-Naqwi, a 'daawa' or teacher of Islam, shows Soldiers with Third Army/U.S. Army Central unit ministry teams how to drink 'Bo Teela', a traditional sparkling water and juice beverage displayed at the Bait Al-Othman Museum, Kuwait City, June 12.

NCO's patriotism inspires, motivates

By Sgt. Ashley M. Outler

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait — It is the spirit of freedom soaring honorably as the epitome of virtuous ideals and liberties so vigorously fought for and defended. They are colors of purity, valor and justice stitched together by the grace of the independence, equality and allegiance that united a nation.

From its raising during the battle of Iwo Jima, to its placement on the moon's surface at Tranquility Base, to its flying above the rubble of the World Trade Center buildings after the 9/11 attacks — the American Flag has gloriously reflected American progress, pride and hope.

It is a deep understanding and appreciation for Old Glory and the essence of America that one noncommissioned officer at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, said has given him a sense of dignity and respect that he is intent to share and spread.

“(Staff Sgt. Curtis N. Thornton) is unapologetically patriotic, from his attitude to the clothes he wears. He loves his country and it is evident in everything he does. From carrying the flag during running events to having a vast amount of professional knowledge and constantly taking care of people — he exemplifies the American ideals,” said Pfc. Andrew M. Vice, a satellite system communications operator/maintainer and one of Thornton's Soldiers in 56th Signal Company, 54th Signal Battalion, 160th Signal Brigade.

As a platoon sergeant, Thornton makes it a priority to encourage strong values and purpose in those put in his charge.

“Pride is an essential part of leadership. Without pride in what you do and who you belong to, you become lethargic. I try to instill the pride I feel not only in country, but in the unit and team, in my Soldiers so they can spread it on to others,” said Thornton. “I encourage them to get out to the various physical events around Camp Arifjan that they feel they can't do. Soldiers need those positive outlets and can learn that they are capable of far more than they thought.”

Thornton, a native of Hesperia, Calif., described his most notable act of patriotism as carrying a large flag during running events. He's completed about 40 miles with the flag in the five months he's been in Kuwait.

“I feel that running while carrying the flag not only inspires others to push themselves



Staff Sgt. Curtis N. Thornton, a platoon sergeant with 56th Signal Company, 54th Signal Battalion, 160th Signal Brigade, poses with an American flag that he ran with during the 'Run as One' 5K, at Camp Arifjan, May 18, which was sponsored by Team Rubicon and Team Red, White and Blue; an organization that he volunteers with.

a little harder, but also motivates me to continue on. It's hard to slow down and nearly impossible to stop when you are carrying the nation's colors,” said Thornton.

During the second annual March for the Fallen, hosted by the Pennsylvania National Guard, April 27-28, Thornton and his Soldiers completed a 28-mile relay using an American flag as their baton.

“Carrying the flag represented the values and freedoms that our fallen comrades lost their lives defending,” said Thornton whose team marched in honor of one of his friends, Spc. Ryan Walker, who was killed in action while serving in Iraq.

Thornton added that he hoped the march would teach his young Soldiers a little bit

more about those who have gone before them. Thornton had his team fold and case the flag carried in the march and sent it to Wounded Warrior Inc. in Pennsylvania.

“I didn't really grow up patriotic. I would say the catalyst was when I deployed during the invasion of Iraq. The things that I saw really put things into perspective and made me realize how truly great our freedoms are. This was compounded by the humanitarian and heroic acts I witnessed by my fellow Soldiers,” said Thornton who deployed with Third Infantry Division for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and deployed twice more to Iraq during his 11 years of service.

Thornton helps his community and further expresses his patriotism by volunteering



Staff Sgt. Curtis N. Thornton, a platoon sergeant with 56th Signal Company, 54th Signal Battalion, 160th Signal Brigade, carries the American flag during the 'Run as One' 5K sponsored by Team Rubicon and Team, Red, White and Blue at Camp Arifjan, May 18.



Staff Sgt. Curtis N. Thornton, a platoon sergeant with 56th Signal Company, 54th Signal Battalion, 160th Signal Brigade, helps turn a garage into an apartment for a paralyzed Army veteran while volunteering with the Warrior Brotherhood Veteran's Motorcycle Club, Nov. 24, 2012, in York County, Pa. (Courtesy photo)



Alison C. Thornton, 3, daughter of Staff Sgt. Curtis N. Thornton, a platoon sergeant with 56th Signal Company, 54th Signal Battalion, 160th Signal Brigade, 56th Signal Company, helps him clean his motorcycle at his grandma's house in Riverside, Calif., January 2013. (Courtesy photo)

with the Warrior Brotherhood Veteran's Motorcycle Club and leading the Kuwait chapter of Team Red, White and Blue. Team RWB is an organization devoted to enriching the lives of veterans through promoting physical activity.

"I became involved with both organizations because they support Veterans and do so while incorporating two things I love; motorcycles and physical activities," said Thornton. "I just feel a deep sense of pride that, despite our problems, the people always find a way to overcome and become better. There are so many people that truly care

about others and are willing to put aside differences to help their fellow Americans."

His respect for his nation and its colors has helped bring those around him together with a stronger sense of purpose.

"Staff Sgt. Thornton reminds everyone that they are a part of the finest country on earth and gets them pumped up for America," said Pfc. Matthew P. Mursewick, satellite communications technician, 56th Sig. Co., 54th Sig. Bn., 160th Sig. Bde. "I have seen it first hand, while running with him and his beautiful flag; people cheering, saluting and running to catch up. His patriotism is contagious.

You can see sheer motivation come out in other Soldiers just because of his love for his country."

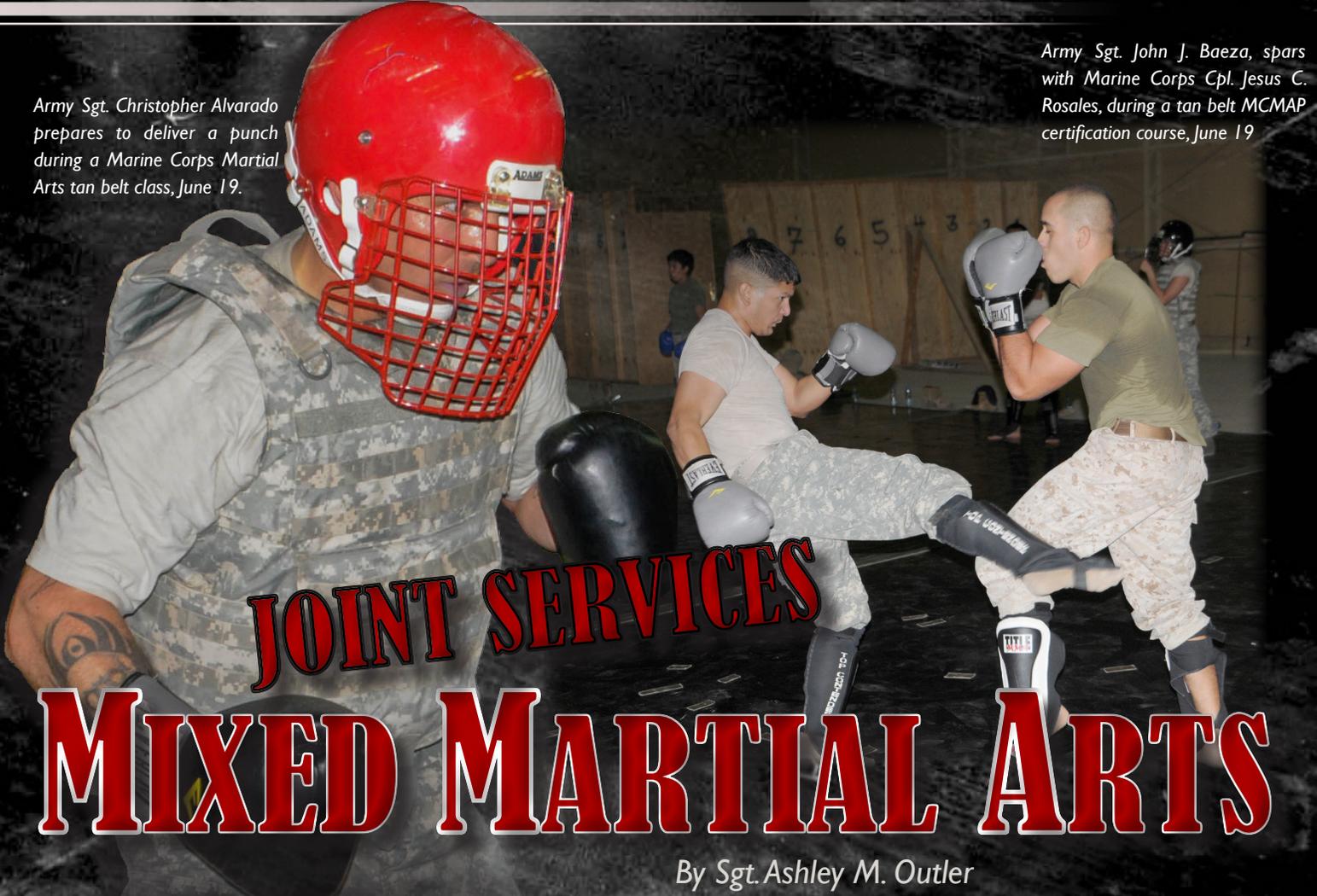
Thornton's Soldiers also describe his intelligence, thoughtfulness and approachability to be traits that make him respectable, but all reflect the values instilled by strong American pride. They are also the qualities that he raises daughter Alison with.

"To me patriotism shouldn't be something that you have because of a singular event for a few days or weeks or only on holidays," said Thornton. "If you are proud of your country you should be proud of it all the time."

In the zone

Army Sgt. Christopher Alvarado prepares to deliver a punch during a Marine Corps Martial Arts tan belt class, June 19.

Army Sgt. John J. Baeza, spars with Marine Corps Cpl. Jesus C. Rosales, during a tan belt MCMAP certification course, June 19



JOINT SERVICES MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

By Sgt. Ashley M. Outler



Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Nolan D. Kemna, practices bayonet techniques with Army Sgt. Daniel A. Heaney, during certification for the MCMAP green belt, July 11.

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait — “When someone is fearless, when pain isn’t a factor, it’s impossible to break his spirit,” said Chuck Liddell, a retired American mixed martial artist and former Ultimate Fighting Championship Light Heavyweight Champion.

Most service members are no strangers to fear and pain, as they must be prepared to fight, not for the sake of competition or glory, but to protect their lives and the lives of others.

With the purpose of promoting stronger, resilient and more versatile warfighters, certified instructors of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program and Modern Army Combatives Program in Kuwait, have joined together and opened their training to all service members willing to accept the challenge.

“We are all one team. Yes, we are separated by branch of service, but our goals are the same; we, as a whole, serve the American way of life,” said Army Sgt. Daniel A. Heaney, satellite communications systems supervisor, 56th Signal Company, 54th Signal Battalion, 160th Signal Brigade.

Heaney, a level 3 combatives instructor, has trained over 700 service members during his time in Kuwait, earned the green belt in MCMAP, and actively assists in the martial arts community.

“Training in combatives, MCMAP and other martial arts is going to make you a better fighter because you will take all of the training that you receive and you will be able to see what works best for you,” said

Air Force Col. John B. Williams, a student of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, practices uppercuts while preparing to spar during a tan belt MCMAP certification course, June 19



Students of the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program practice butt strokes during a tan belt certification course, June 19.



Marine Corps Martial Arts Program Instructors, Cpl. Eric H. Fleming, Sgt. Timothy M. LaValley, 'build a house' with Army Sgt. Daniel A. Heaney, while Marine Corps Sgt. Antoinette M. Sanders, low-crawls through, as a demonstration for MCMAP students, July 11.

Marine Corps Sgt. Timothy M. LaValley, plans and training chief, Marine Air-Ground Task Force, Marine Coordination Element – Kuwait, who is a 1st degree black belt instructor:

Unlike the Marine Corps and Army, the Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard do not have official martial arts training programs available to all members of their services.

"The MCMAP instructors were extremely generous in offering this unique opportunity to members of all services to learn their battle-tested techniques. I knew the USMC would have invaluable practical combat techniques to teach. I had to seize that opportunity," said Air Force Col. John B. Williams, deputy director/division chief current operations, Central Command Deployment and Distribution Operations, and a student of MCMAP. "We learn from each other in a very up-close and personal way how all the branches operate."

Differences in training methodology between the two programs reflect the varying mission requirements of the two branches of service, but the opportunity to experience both has offered service members at Camp Arifjan a chance to learn a diverse range of skills.

"Both courses share similar principles, however: MCMAP is developed for front line use whereas (the Modern Army Combatives Program) is hand-to-hand combat," said Heaney describing what he saw as the different areas of emphasis between the two programs.

Though the courses have strenuous demands including many long hours in the desert heat, it is worth the pain and discomfort to become stronger, more confident and disciplined individuals and members of a team, added LaValley.

"We are having a good time learning new techniques, combat conditioning, leadership training and real life tie-ins," said LaValley about instructing a joint service, tan belt MCMAP class that started July 9. "It's a fun environment that makes it easy to learn and retain the knowledge."

Modern Army Combatives skill level is determined by levels 1-4 certification and MCMAP certification is deemed by colored belts tan, gray, green, brown and black. The MCMAP black belt, which is the highest, includes six different degrees of skill level.

"MCMAP has helped me build a better foundation of my core values and leadership principles. I feel that I can lead my Soldiers more effectively and build them better as a team and work together as one," said Heaney about going through the MCMAP green belt course. "As a fighter I have become more skilled and much more capable of not only training, but to protect my family, my Soldiers, and in turn their families."

On July 26, MCMAP tan and green belt students stood beside students of level 1 Army combatives for a joint graduation ceremony at in the combatives tent at Zone 6, which further symbolized the unity of services and programs.

"I love training all the other branches of service for numerous reasons; it ties the services together, promotes great camaraderie, promotes leadership abilities and teaches them to work as a team," said LaValley. "Every time I extend MCMAP training out to the other services, I always gain a lot from them, and the knowledge I acquire from each of my courses only makes me a better leader." **A**



Pure Country Family



Story by Sgt. James Hale

CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait — After a long week at work, dealing with 110 degree weather and the stress of being away from family and friends, how do service members unwind? Well one group of service members came together to teach each other country line dances and turned that into much more.

Soldiers deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait began getting together on Saturday evenings to teach each other line dances nearly 3 years ago and it has now developed into what they call the Pure Country Family. They conduct twice a week lessons, a cookout once a week and a dance event once a month at the Zone 1 MWR where service members from all branches of the military have joined in.

“It’s all about getting these guys away from the stresses of work and deployment and just having fun,” Said 1st Lt. Douglas Quintas, the executive officer for Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, Third Army/USARCENT. “When we’re out here we go by first names. A lot of these guys never even realize that I’m an officer until they run into me in uniform somewhere else on post. I think that’s another thing that helps us deal with the stress. We get to see that all different ranks enjoy some of the same things, deal with the same stresses and need to decompress every once in a while.”

The Pure Country Family teaches line dancing and couples dancing by passing on what they have learned to incoming members and by learning dances from the new members who country dance back home.

“Being a part of the Pure Country Family gives you a few hours every week of feeling like you’re back home,” said

Staff Sgt. Michael Epperson, a logistics information noncommissioned officer for the 135th Expeditionary Sustainment Command, Alabama National Guard. “We call it Pure Country Family because out here we treat each other like family. Everyone pitches in to help make this happen each week and everyone leaves work at work.”

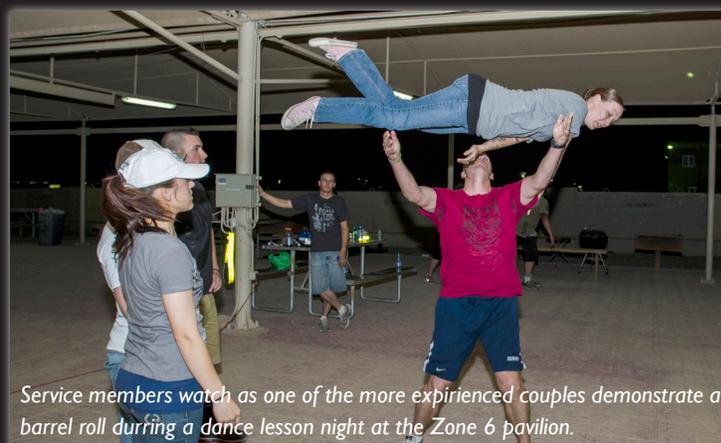
Along with learning new dances and getting to decompress, these service members also get a great workout.

“These dances definitely work your muscles,” said Spc. Wesley Triche, a welder with the 205th Engineer Battalion, Louisiana National Guard. “Along with having a great time, you get an awesome cardio workout too. But all the hard work learning the dances, setting up the pavilion and everything else we put into this really pays off when you see all these smiling faces here after a long day at work.”

For those who would like to learn how to do these dances or just want to listen to some good country music, the Pure Country Family meets every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday at 7pm under the Zone 6 1400 block pavilion. [A](#)



Service members deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait show off what they've learned by doing partner country dances at the Zone 1 MWR.



Service members watch as one of the more experienced couples demonstrate a barrel roll during a dance lesson night at the Zone 6 pavilion.

Brothers and Sisters in arms family at heart.
Some bonds run deeper than blood. - PCF

Voices

HOW DO YOU SHOW SUPPORT FOR YOUR FAVORITE TEAM OR SPORT?



Sgt. Rachel Grumbles
Chaplains Assistant
Third Army/U.S. Army Central Unit Ministry Team

"Whenever there is a University of Texas football game on, you will find me wherever it's showing, wearing my burnt orange. Hook em' Horns!"

~Grumbles

"Years and years of disappointment take their toll, but we always come back for more. That's what defines a Cleveland sports fan; our loyalty and unity to the city and its teams."

~Sanford



Cpl. Ian A. Sanford
Embark Noncommissioned Officer
Marine Coordination Center - Kuwait



Mr. Ryan Dombrowski
Civilian Contractor
Third Army/U.S. Army Central Personnel Security Detail

"I support my favorite fighters by becoming their 'hype-man'. It's a sport where anything can happen and it usually comes down to who wants it more."

~Dombrowski



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