



the AVIATOR

telling the Soldiers' story

November, 2015



**A SOLDIER'S
FIRST FLIGHT**

**AERIAL
GUNNERY**

**FINAL STEPS
TO DEPLOYMENT**

A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from Company A, 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, Task Force Longknife, circles the airfield before landing at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 29.

A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew member from Company A, 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, Task Force Longknife, looks out the window during a flight at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 29.



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WEAPONS TIGHT

Photo series by Spc. Jhoana Mendez

Oregon and Washington Army National Guard Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment, Task Force Long Knife, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, conducted aerial gunnery training in their CH-47 Chinook helicopters during their mobilization period at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 26.

“For a lot of Soldiers this is their first exposure to aerial gunnery.
They have to get used to it.”

-Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kevin Crisp,
Pilot in command



CH-47 Chinook helicopter gunners pick up ammunition for their weapon qualification.



Soldiers prepare a CH-47 Chinook helicopter for flight.



Aviation crews stand by for their mission briefing.

A crew member keeps watch by the window.



“Training like this helps us mould together as a team...”

“You’re never going to find a better group than this.”

-Sgt. Jeremy Maddox, flight engineer instructor



A gunner fires his M-240B machine gun



When not seated, a crew member can still be secured by a “tail” attached to his harness.



Army medic Spc. Nicholas Hamett receives his Army Comendation Medal in Fresno, Calif., Sept. 12., for his life-saving efforts the previous month.

Combat medic saves the day

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer

As Gen. Carl von Clausewitz noted, “Whenever armed forces are used, the idea of combat must be present... The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained, the whole object of his sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching is simply that he should fight at the right place and the right time.”

For one medic, that right time turned out to be when a fellow Soldier suffered a serious injury during a training exercise.

California Army National Guard Spc. Nicholas Hamett, a medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), received an Army Commendation Medal at his home station in Fresno on Sept. 12 for his quick thinking and sound judgment while treating a casualty the month prior.

Hamett was on duty at a casualty evacuation exercise during the

CAB’s pre-mobilization training at Camp Roberts on Aug. 21 when disaster struck: a nearby Soldier injured his spine in the training lane.

“The other trainers called for me, when I saw [the casualty], he was sitting and his helmet was already off... he couldn’t move his neck,” Hamett said.

Hamett, a Fresno native and resident, has served in the Guard for nearly six years, and this wasn’t his first casualty. But this was the first time Hamett had to treat a seriously injured Soldier alone, and without the help of the senior medics in his section.

“All eyes are on you, if you don’t have the answer then no one does,” Hamett said.

Hamett decided the safest and most timely way to evacuate the Soldier was to use a nearby privately owned vehicle (POV) instead of a Humvee. Another Soldier was assigned to hold the injured man’s head in place

“Spc. Hamett’s decision to transport

the injured with an available POV rather than waiting for an AMV or EMS demonstrated critical thinking skills, saved time, and provided a more stable and comfortable ride for the injured Soldier,” said Chief Warrant Officer David Clark, the brigade safety officer.

Thanks to Hamett’s quick thinking, the injured Soldier arrived safely at the CAB’s Troop Medical Clinic (TMC), where he was picked up by an ambulance and transported to the Twin Cities Community Hospital in Templeton for surgery. He is expected to make a full recovery.

Though this decorated medic is planning to leave the Army next month, his personal journey is far from over. Engaged to be married and working as a security guard at a local department store in Fresno, he plans to move on to become a corrections officer.

Hamett joined the Guard after graduating high school in 2009. On a whim, he discussed the possibility of a military career with his cousin, an Army recruiter. As a typical teenager, Hamett wasn’t sure what he wanted to do with his life, and credits his career with the Army and the CAB with broadening his horizons.

“When I left for basic training that was the first time I had even been in an airplane,” Hamett said.

After graduating his job training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, the brand-new Soldier soon grew fascinated with the profession.

“When I was in High School, I didn’t have any aspirations in that field, but once I got into it I learned to love it,” Hamett said.

A day in the life of a 40th CAB Soldier...



Photo by Spc. Patrick Robinson



Photo by Spc. Kevin Palomera



Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer

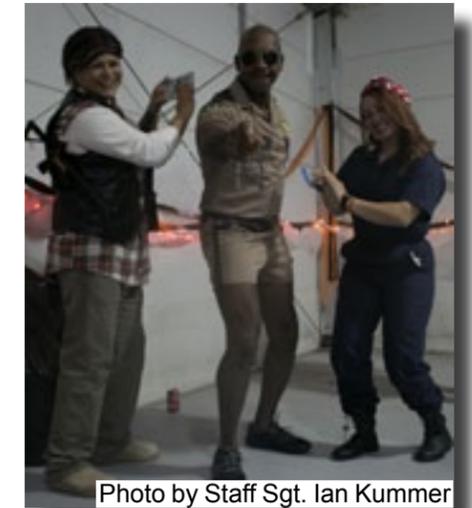


Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer

TOP LEFT: A Task Force Longknife UH-60 Black Hawk Medevac helicopter takes off from Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 29.

TOP RIGHT: 1st Sgt. Eva Rodriguez, Master Sgt. Todd Pratt, and Spc. Krystle Gaytan from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, celebrate their victories at the company’s Halloween contest at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 31. Pratt took first place, Gaytan second, and Rodriguez third.

LEFT CENTER: Sgt. Tommy Flores, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew chief with 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, conducts preventative maintenance on a Humvee.

BOTTOM LEFT: Soldiers from the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade take part in an installation motivational run at Fort Hood, Texas, Nov. 10.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Soldiers from Company A, 640th Aviation Support Battalion, tie down aviation supplies on a Palletized Load System Oct. 10.

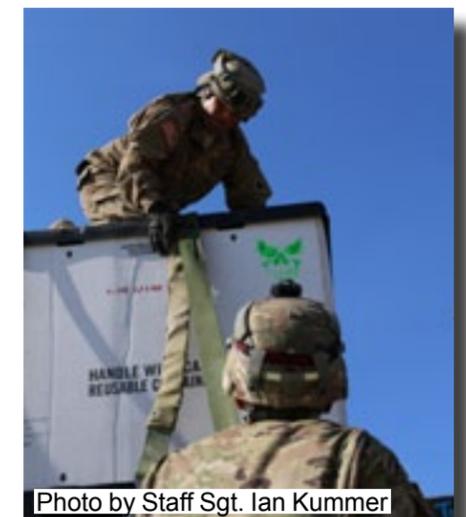


Photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer

Crew members conduct final checks and inspections of their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter before lift-off at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 15.



Junior Soldier describes her first ever flight

Commentary and photo by Spc. Rose Wolford

I am deathly afraid of heights, and the feeling of rapidly falling has never sat well with me. I can't even ride rollercoasters without my stomach turning to knots, but I am determined to conquer my fears.

I sat in a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, synching up my safety belt as tight as possible. I could hear the radio chatter from my headset as I anxiously awaited take-off. The engine started up: there was no turning back now.

Several hours earlier I mentioned to my commander, Capt. Charles Escaleras, how great it would be to catch a picture of the sunset from the air. "We should get you on a flight

today, if we can," he said. myself from the nervousness.

This was not the response I was expecting from my commander! I accompanied Escaleras to the airfield, where he informed me that he and our battalion commander, Lt. Col. Jeff Sibley, would be piloting the aircraft.

I had no idea to what extent of detail went into pre-flight planning, until I nervously watched as the pilots planned our flight. Afterward, the three of us met with the crew chief, Sgt. Rene Frago, and the gunner, Sgt. Nathan Wong, for a briefing to ensure everybody understood their tasks.

Sibley taxied the Black Hawk to the runway. As the aircraft took off in a hover, I started snapping pictures left and right, trying to distract

Our first stop: the Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP) for a refuel.

Hearing how much communication it takes while trying to land a helicopter amazed me. I listened in awe as crew members discussed each and every detail down to the inches of the landing gear.

After we touched down I quickly exited the aircraft to photograph the Soldiers refueling our helicopter.

As we lifted off from the FARP, I watched the breath-taking sight of the ground far below.

I should have taken a photo, but I

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Behavioral health officers Capt. Dustin Harris and 1st Lt. Daniel Burns emphasize the importance of maintaining a positive attitude and taking a break once in a while even in the most stressful deployments overseas.



BH officers join the 40th CAB mission

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer

Many Soldiers can relate to the stress of deploying overseas. Extended combat and support operations put personal relationships to the test as troops leave home for months at a time.

Fortunately, these service members don't have to face these challenges alone.

Behavioral health officers Cpt. Dustin Harris and 1st Lt. Daniel Burns mobilized from Fresno, Calif., for a Federal deployment with the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade Oct. 3.

This is the first time in California Guard history that behavioral health officers are deploying with the Soldiers overseas.

Soldiers are taught from the first day of basic training to be strong and resilient. However, this warrior culture comes at a price: there continues to be a widespread reluctance among deploying

Soldiers to seek help for personal issues arising from their service.

According to a 2008 study by the Army Mental Health Advisory Team V, less than half of Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) sought treatment.

This problem did not go unnoticed. New programs to educate military service members and provide them with improved behavioral health services have sprung up in every branch of the American armed forces.

In 2010 the California National Guard created a whole new behavioral health initiative. Presently there are 14 behavioral health officers assigned to the California Guard by brigade and geographic location. These trained health providers are available for any Soldier, Airman, family member or veteran who seeks their care.

"We will not turn away anyone," Burns said. Even a Soldier's family members can seek guidance

copied with a deployment. Even veterans from other branches can call us for help.

According to a 2010 study conducted by the American Psychological Organization, "Mental toughness and an expectation to master stress without difficulty are developed and reinforced as a cultural norm, with an emphasis on inner strength and self-reliance in order to 'shake off' injury and illness. Couched within a culture that explicitly trains its members to 'suck it up,' it is not difficult to see how a warrior who admits to mental health problems and seeks out mental health care might view these actions as signs of weakness."

"Eliminating stigma is a big issue," Harris said. "The issues a Soldier discusses with us are confidential. The only exception is when there is a threat of violence or self-harm."

Soldiers may worry about the increased attention from their leaders and peers by asking for time off to seek behavioral health assistance from conventional sources.

According to the same study, "Sources for mental health treatment are typically located in medical settings with hours that parallel the work and training schedule of the service member... mental health services that require the service member to leave during duty hours may serve, in some cases, as an unintentional barrier to care."

This study also emphasized that military service members are more likely to seek help from people they

serve with and share experiences

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

640th ASB Soldiers practice Army Warrior Tasks



Photo series by
Sgt. Deshea Miller

Soldiers from Headquarters Support Company, 640th Aviation Support Battalion, conducted convoy training at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 26. During this exercise the HSC Soldiers practiced the leadership, teamwork and technical skills needed to successfully complete a ground mission. Regardless of job field, every troop should be well-versed in basic Soldiering skills.



A HSC Soldier sets up a military radio mounted inside one of the vehicles.

During this exercise the HSC Soldiers practiced the discipline and technical skills needed to complete the mission.



Regardless of job or rank, every troop should have a firm grasp of basic soldiering skills. needed in a mission.



Before any convoy can start the vehicles need to be properly prepared and inspected.

By the end of the day, HSC leaders and Soldiers gained valuable experience for their upcoming deployment to Kuwait!





Task Force Longknife Soldiers put away their equipment shortly after completing a test of their pre-accident plan at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 10.

TF Longknife Soldiers train hard to fire-fight easy

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Ian Kummer

It was a warm day at the airfield. Dozens of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters sat dormant on the grass. The low rumble of vehicles could be heard in the distance. This tranquil scene suddenly exploded into action.

Soldiers hastily disembarked one of the helicopters. Minutes later emergency vehicles pulled up nearby, disgorging fire fighters in full protective gear who sprayed down the area around the aircraft.

There was no helicopter crash, no fires, and no one was hurt. This was a drill to test the involved organizations' ability to respond to a real-life emergency.

The California Army National Guard 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, tested out their new pre-accident plan with the Fort Hood Fire Department

at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 10. on a variety of domestic missions.

The drill was over, but there was more work to be done. The involved Soldiers on the airfield and the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) met afterward to discuss what they had learned.

"This is a trial by fire," said Spc. Mark Morales, a radio transmissions operator with Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) of the 1-140th. "Throw everyone into a stressful situation and see how they do."

As the chaotic simulated disaster unfolded, it was crucial for every Soldier regardless of rank or job position to communicate with the people around him.

"The TOC is hectic, if wrong information gets out things go bad real quick," Morales said.

Morales has been in the National Guard eight years and has served

Many of the Soldiers in the battalion have deployed overseas as well. All this combined experience helps make the unit stronger as a whole

Earlier training events, including a Warfighter exercise at Fort Hood last June, has given the 40th CAB opportunities to school up their new Soldiers before they start their final preparations to deploy.

"I went to Warfighter too... I feel like we have good leadership and can get the job done," said Pfc. Santos Sanchez, a blue force tracker operator with HHC, 1-140th.

Sanchez has been in the National Guard for a little over two years, and is excited to go on his first deployment with his brothers and sisters of the 40th CAB.

"Today was very eye-opening," Sanchez said. "It's a great way to get your hands dirty."

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 (760) 897-6164

BHO CONTINUED

with than they would with an outside medical professional.

"I think that will make a significant difference for our soldiers. The command making mental health a priority, highlights continuity of care, which is the support of care before, during, and after a deployment," said Lt. Col. Brinkman, the brigade flight surgeon.

Soldiers accessing or requiring behavior health care will be able to see the same provider downrange and back in California after they redeploy.

Harris and Burns serve and wear the same uniform as any other Soldier, and plan to stay with the brigade throughout every step of their deployment. They want to be readily available for Soldiers to privately seek counseling without even needing to leave the unit's assigned work and billeting areas. The behavioral health section plans to continue to provide care to the brigade's

Soldiers even after they redeploy.

"What's cool about this is we can provide continuous care to the Soldiers throughout the deployment, and even after we return home to California," Burns said. "This is the first time the California National Guard has done this. We appreciate the [brigade] commander and the executive officer for facilitating this. It's a huge privilege to be here."

"I consider our behavioral health officers essential to our mission," said Col. Jeffrey Holliday, the brigade commander.

Harris and Burns stress the importance of Soldiers not only communicating with their battle buddies, but maintaining an honest and open dialogue with their loved ones back home.

"You can't be a closed book, it is absolutely vital that you have a support system," Burns said.

The 40th CAB fully supports their deploying behavioral health

officers, and encourage every Soldier in or attached to the brigade to seek help when needed.

Any service member who would like to speak to a behavioral health officer or learn more about resources available should visit the J1 Behavioral Health website at

<http://www.calguard.ca.gov/BH/Pages/Behavioral-Health-Resources.aspx>

The Behavioral Health office also posts information and responds to questions on their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/calguardbh>

FLIGHT CONTINUED

was so taken in by the view I forgot about the camera in my hand!

"Birds 12 o'clock," Sibley said.

My stomach lurched as the helicopter dipped into a dive.

"Sorry about that," Sibley said. "I didn't want to hit the birds."

By the time we landed in Fort Hood my camera battery was almost dead. Fortunately, this was our last stop before returning to the airfield.

Before leaving I was sure to thank the crew for taking me for the day.

I knew each and every flight I would take afterward would be a remarkably less intense experience than my first.

My excitement was matched only by my confidence in the crew.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Cory Lagusker's son enjoys the day at Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos, Calif., Oct. 2. Leonardo's father, Lagusker is a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilot with 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment.



40th CAB embarks on Federal deployment

Story by Brandon Honig

Spc. Jeffrey Denney, a UH-60 Black Hawk crew chief for the California National Guard, said deploying to Iraq in 2010-11 was the best thing he ever did.

"I've always wanted to serve my country, and that want was fulfilled when I went over and served," said Denney, who was a military police officer in 2010 but volunteered to deploy as an aerial gunner with 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, part of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). "My battalion wasn't deploying; that's why I volunteered. I was feeling like I had trained for the Super Bowl but was getting benched during the game. So let me get in the game." Denney fell in love with flying

and stayed with the 1-140th, which deployed again the first week in October, this time to Kuwait. Denney has the benefit of experience this time, but he said leaving home is harder than it was in 2010 because now he has kids.

"I'm not really worried about the mission because I kind of know what to expect: I know how things are going to go. I trust my training. I trust my buddies' training," said Denney, who remarried earlier this year and has a 4-year-old daughter and three teenage stepchildren. "It's more of the, 'Let's rip the band-aid off and get out of here so we can get closer to getting back.'"

More than 1,000 soldiers of the 40th CAB deployed from Fresno and Los

Alamitos the first week in October to provide aviation and maintenance support to Army Central Command. But first they'll endure two months of training at Fort Hood, Texas, which Denney tells the greener troops will be the worst part of the next year.

"I'm dreading going to Fort Hood but excited to continue on after Fort Hood," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Cory Lagusker, a Black Hawk pilot who is on his first overseas deployment. "I'm going to see a bunch of places I've never been before, hopefully help out some people who really need it and help out the troops on the ground." Lagusker also has a 14-month-old son, whom he hates to leave behind. But Lagusker said he has always felt a calling to serve, and when war



Soldiers of the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade officially case the unit's colors at their departure ceremony at Fresno, Calif., Oct. 2.

broke out following 9/11, he knew it was something he needed to do.

Lagusker's wife, Jennifer, said she is very proud of her pilot but nervous about his deployment and about caring for [their son] on her own.

"Cory helps me with everything. He's a great father and a great husband, and not having him next to me is going to be hard," she said. "I just hope this year goes by extremely quickly."

Lauren Patterson said she and her husband, pilot Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mark Patterson, built a support network of friends and family members to pitch in while he's deployed. The unit also has a Family Readiness Group that brings spouses and children together for emotional support and to lend a hand when the need arises.

"There's a lot of women out there going through the same exact thing I'm going through, and I think support groups and coming together as one really help," she said. Spc. Lourdes Medina of the CAB's 640th Aviation Support Battalion (ASB) said she thinks the separation from loved ones will be easier on the soldiers

than it is on the people at home.

The soldiers' minds will be occupied with the mission, she said, while the loved ones see things every day that remind them of the troop overseas.

Medina also said she has a "second family" going with her to Kuwait, which will keep her spirits up.

"Everyone does become like a family here [in the ASB]. It's crazy — you have a bond with them that you don't have with other people," said the supply specialist who is deploying for the first time. "I'm so happy that I have a close group of friends and a support system for when I'm out there."

Lauren Patterson said Mark has been trying to act like he's not nervous about going to Kuwait, but she's not buying it at all, especially because it's his first deployment. He's also excited, though, she said, because it's important to him to deploy and serve his country.

"I think it takes a very special person to take time away from their family to go fight for their country that they love so much," she said. "I'm very proud of him."

40th CAB Soldiers go back to the basics

Photos by Spc. Rose Wolford

Soldiers from the California Army National Guard 40th Combat Aviation Brigade hit the ground running during a small unit tactics exercise at Fort Hood, Texas, Oct. 18, 2015. During this training scenario, Soldiers practiced surviving after a simulated UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter emergency landing.





Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, Task Force Longkife, 40th Combat Aviation Brigade, flew two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters with two CH-47 Chinook helicopters from 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment on a training flight at Fort Hood, Texas, Nov. 1. The 40th CAB was training for their scheduled deployment to Kuwait. Photo by Sgt. Desiree Harvey.



Visit the 40th Combat Aviation Brigade on Facebook!