

Wednesday,
July 15, 2009
Issue 16

The Desert Raven



81st BCT Monthly Command Information Newsletter

The 81st BCT heads home



Col. Ronald Kapral and Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney, the commander and command sergeant major of the 81st Brigade Combat Team case the 81st BCT colors in a traditional ceremony July 13, 2009 on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, signifying the return of the 81st BCT to the U.S. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Gauthier)

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Message from 81st BCT Commander

*By Col. Ronald Kapral
81st BCT commander*

It is hard to believe, but our mission in Iraq is almost over. We have logged millions of miles, conducted hundreds of missions and displayed the 81st Brigade patch proudly across the entire country of Iraq.

The Soldiers have done everything they were asked to do and then some. We have made numerous improvements throughout Iraq and accomplished all of our assigned missions. I am proud to be part of such a great team.

I want to thank you for your dedication to duty and the professional way you have carried out your assignments. I want to thank all of the families, friends, employers and many organizations back in the States who continue to support the Soldiers and their families. We could not have done this without your help.

As we close out this mission, we must get ready for the next – going home and getting reintegrated into the lives we left behind. We need to attack this with the same enthusiasm you displayed when we started.


The demob process is painful. We all want to get home, and the last thing we want to do is stand in long lines or sit and listen to someone give us another briefing about our VA benefits. Believe it or not, this may be the most important task you have been asked to accomplish. The briefings provide information that will help you understand the benefits you have earned and



are extremely important to you and your families. Be patient, listen and we will all get through this together.

I want to close out my final Desert Raven with a special thought. Victory always comes with a price. My thoughts and prayers go out to the Soldiers who sustained injuries while serving. I wish you a speedy recovery. There is one

Soldier who I will never forget. He made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. Spc. Samuel Stone, you will never be forgotten.

Thanks to all of you. You are the greatest Soldiers in the U.S. Army. 

Message from 81st BCT Command Sergeant Major

*By Command Sgt. Maj.
Robert Sweeney
81st BCT command sergeant*

Our mission is nearly over and our replacements are finally here! I know you are all going to do your best in teaching the lessons you have learned during this mission.

You're currently the "Best of the Best" at what you do and it is now your time to pass the torch to the new team.


I am proud of every Soldier in this brigade! You all may not realize it, but you have completed some remarkable missions with outstanding results! Every senior leader the commander and I have encountered praises the hard work, dedication, professionalism and commitment you



have displayed regardless of the mission, a true mark of a professional Soldier and team.

To our families and friends - you have been solid as rocks and have endured your own hardships along the way. You also have earned the title of being the "Best of the Best"! When you reflect back on all of this, you'll see you have also done some pretty amazing things that you never thought you would encounter!

For me personally, my wife Joan and my son Brian were my true heroes during this deployment! I am sure my son will remind me of this as I begin to hear those familiar words: "Dad, my gas tank is almost empty, can I use your ATM Card?" Then I will know I am home and all is well!

As we all descend on Fort McCoy sand and go on different ways back to civilian life, I wish you all the best in your lives and may your dreams come true. It has been a privilege and honor to Soldier with each and every one of you, for you are the best! Raven 7 Out. 



Mission complete: 81st cases their colors

By Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr
81st BCT Public Affairs

During a ceremony held on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, July 13, 2009, Col. Ronald M. Kapral and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert J. Sweeney rolled up the 81st Brigade Combat Team colors and once again placed them in a protective case, signaling the brigade's return to the U.S. nearly nine months after arriving in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The 81st BCT, made up of Soldiers from the Washington Army National Guard and California Army National Guard, mobilized Aug. 18, 2008 and conducted roughly seven weeks of training at Fort McCoy, Wis., and Kuwait before heading to Iraq in October 2008. Upon their arrival, the 3,200 members of the 81st BCT were split among ten bases throughout the country. They excelled in duties ranging from convoy security to base defense to sustainment operations and were routinely praised for their hard work and dedication.



Col. Ronald Kapral and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney case the 81st BCT colors during a traditional ceremony that signifies the brigade's return to the U.S. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

ties ranging from convoy security to base defense to sustainment operations and were routinely praised for their hard work and dedication.

"Col. Kapral, the performance of your team has been nothing less than inspirational," said Marine Maj. Gen. Richard T. Tryon, the commanding general of Multi National Force-West in Iraq, during the July 13 ceremony. "I want to publically tip my hat to you, the command team and all the Soldiers who contributed to this mission."

"Every Soldier of this unit is a shining example of all that is good in this military and all that is good in our country,"



Flanked by Col. Matthew Lopez and Maj. Gen. Richard Tryon, Col. Ronald Kapral and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney smile at their troops during the HQ 81st BCT's transfer of authority ceremony on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, July 13. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

he added.

Many units took on duties far different from their traditional missions. Three 81st units ran Mayor's Cells for entire military installations. These cells managed base improvement projects as well as day-to-day operations, such as housing and public works. 81st Soldiers also conducted base defense operations and provided security for civilian vehicles transporting supplies to bases. They logged more than three million miles on the roads of Iraq and safely delivered several tons of cargo.

"I am in awe of these Soldiers," said Kapral, the commander of the 81st HBCT. "They come from all walks of life, many different professions, and yet when our nation and state called, they answered and performed their duty. We have taken them away from their families, friends and jobs and they did not complain or question. We trained at Yakima, Fort McCoy and Kuwait before deploying to Iraq. They have lived in tents, barracks and containerized housing units, trained in temps below freezing to over 130 degrees and still they perform their tasks without

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HQ Co. stands in formation for the casing of the 81st BCT colors July 13, 2009 on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, July 13. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)



J9: Committed to a trouble-free return for all

By Tom Riggs

J9, Transition Chief

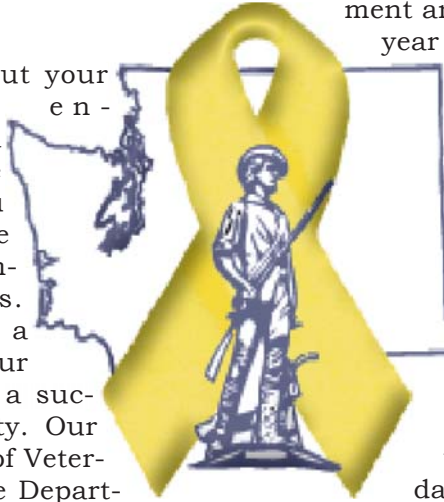
The J9 team is excited about your return and committed to ensuring your transition is a smooth one. Most of us will be in place at Fort McCoy before you finish reading this article. We have made significant efforts to streamline the demobilization process. Guaranteed, you will never have a better opportunity to access all your earned benefits and prepare for a successful life after leaving Active Duty. Our partners at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs and the Washington State Employment Security Department will all be on hand for a true "one stop shop" of services.

We are replacing briefings, handouts and slides with actual service delivery. You will be able to apply for every benefit or program available. Every form you need will be mostly filled out for you. We will not waste your time on any activity while you are with us. If you make a solid commitment now to take advantage of the programs offered - the VA, health care, employ-

ment and education, you can save more than a year in waiting time to receive benefits. You will be busy, but it will be worth it.

You can begin preparing now by going to <http://washingtonguard.org/FamiliesandVeterans/>. This website is loaded with great information and new material is being added every day. You can find information and forms to complete your travel claim in advance of arriving at Fort McCoy. The travel claim is extremely important, and can be a time consuming process. If you already have it ready to go, you can save time for other important activities on day five prior to going home. You should also review the VA information slides on this website. Knowing your entitlements will help you make more informed decisions for your future. Visit our website early and often.


Remember our commitment: Spend one day with us at Fort McCoy and then go straight home instead of spending three days in your home armory. It is important to be as prepared as possible prior to arriving at our station on Day five. This will be your day and we will do everything to make it the best possible.






A neighborly visit in Iraq

Col. Ronald Kapral, the commander of the 81st BCT, and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney, the command sergeant major of the 81st BCT, present Lt. Gen. Charles Jacoby, the commanding general of I Corps out of Fort Lewis, Wash., and Multi-National Corps-Iraq, a Washington State flag July 8, 2009 on Camp Ramadi, Iraq. The flag was flown over Camp Ramadi July 4, 2009. During a quick visit with the Washington National Guard unit, Jacoby presented five commander's coins to selected 81st BCT Soldiers for their outstanding service. He also praised the 81st BCT as a whole for their service in Iraq. "We are proud of the 81st Brigade as Soldiers, as Guardsmen and as folks from Washington." "Your reputation as an organization is very good and something we're very proud of," he added. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

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81st BCT Soldiers become U.S. citizens

An excerpt from a story featured on ABC News

Vice President Joe Biden couldn't help himself. The irony was striking. This Fourth of July the biggest naturalization ceremony ever of U.S. servicemembers was hosted at one of Saddam Hussein's most opulent palaces. Biden said after the event, "We did it in Saddam's Palace, and I can think of nothing better. That S.O.B. is rolling over in his grave right now."

Celebrating were 237 servicemembers from 59 countries who took the oath. Biden started his speech with a simple statement that drew applause.

"You know as corny as it sounds,



Two hundred thirty-seven U.S. Military members raise their right hands as they are sworn in as U.S. citizens at Al Faw Palace, in Baghdad, Iraq, July 4. Vice President Joe Biden served as guest speaker for the event. (Photo by Spc. Karah Cohen)



Sgt. Chester Tashiro Ludwig of Walla Walla, Wash., H Co., 1-161st Inf. (CAB), originally from the Federated State of Micronesia, poses with Vice President Joe Biden and friend Spc. Charley Edwin shortly after becoming a U.S. citizen. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Ludwig)

"The Vice President was the honored guest and he shook our hands and congratulated [us] for becoming U.S. Citizens. I am excited and happy about becoming an American."

damn I'm proud to be an American. It's a wonderful thing," he said in the massive Al Faw Palace, which still has Saddam Hussein's initials carved in the ceiling. "I can't think of a more stirring example of patriotism than men and women volunteering to fight for their country, before, before they are citizens,"

said the vice president, who seemed impressed by the Soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen before him.

"You've struggled for us. You've bled for us. Your brothers and sisters have died for us. Even before you took the oath you were Americans," he said nearing the end of a two-day

visit in Iraq.

Spc. Lua Mose of the 81st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team proudly held the flag and certificate she was presented after taking the oath. She arrived in the U.S. from American Samoa at the age of 4.

"My whole life growing up I thought that I was already a citizen.

See CITIZENSHIP page 22



Sgt. Jea Kyeom Lee of Edmonds, Wash., B Co., 181st BSB, originally from the Republic of Korea, takes a moment at the Vice President's podium. (Photo courtesy of Sgt. Lee)

"I am very proud of my new American citizenship and thankful for the great ceremony in Iraq in my Army Uniform. I'll never forget that moment."



(Photo not available)

Spc. Aleksander Karpsov of Seattle, A Trp, 1-303rd Cav., originally from Belarus, became a U.S. citizen and met Vice President Joe Biden.

"There is a once in a lifetime situation, you realize that it isn't going to happen again."



Web site updates, helps Veterans after deployment

Courtesy of Tricare

Since launching Aug. 5, 2008, [Afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org) has grown to provide more information and resources for service-members returning from deployment - as well as for their families.

"It's a free resource that can be very helpful for veterans transitioning back from their deployment," said Army Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, deputy director for TRICARE Management Activity.

The site provides change strategies and educational materials that address combat stress and triggers; conflict at work; re-connecting with family and friends; depression; anger; sleep problems; substance abuse; stress management; kids and deployment; spiritual guidance; living with physical injuries; and health and wellness.

The updated Web site at <http://www.afterdeployment.org> features workshops in the "Improving Relationships" program. These workshops provide service members with valuable tools for overcoming the tendency to isolate from friends and family, building relationship skills and reconnecting with partners following a deployment.

[Afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org) also added self-help workshops and activities in the "Helping Kids Deal with Deployment," "Seeking Spiritual Fitness," and "Controlling Drugs and Alcohol" sections of the Web site.

"The diversity of registered users on [Afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org) is a testimony to how wonderful the site is. Users report very positive feelings about the usefulness and quality of information available on [Afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org)," said Granger.

"We've received great feedback, and we expect the Web site to offer even more assistance to families and veterans," Granger added. "Statistics indicate that there is a balance of families, providers,



veterans, and active duty service members registered on the site."

The "Explore the Site" box on the top right of the page is a gateway to the site's many materials. Anonymous registration is required only for the workshops.

For transition behavioral health help, go to <http://www.afterdeployment.org>. For info on how TRICARE can help behavioral health, go to <http://www.tricare.mil>.

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Highlander Chaplains provide support

Task Force 1-161 chaplain ensures spiritual fitness of the Highlander Soldiers

By Capt. Mike Vincent
1-161st Inf. (CAB)

A chaplain advises a commander in all matters of morale and spiritual fitness of the Soldiers under his command. Chaplains also work to maintain the psychological fitness of the Soldiers under their responsibility and provide guidance to Soldiers working through tough times in Iraq or back home.

"The key objective in what we try to do is build relationships with the Soldiers and leave them with the knowledge that they can talk to us anytime and help them work out issues that are bothering them and provide them guidance to help them work through these issues they are facing," said Maj. Joseph R. Hammel of Surrey, BC, the 1-161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion), 81st Brigade Combat Team chaplain.

The chaplain's daily schedule is carefully planned and intensive, because the work of a chaplain is never done.

"The toughest part of this job is the Red Cross messages and delivering the news in the middle of the night. That's hard to do," said Hammel.

"I feel the pain with them and the sadness of the loss. I know how rough it must be for them to be so far from home, away from loved ones, family and then to get this news on top of it all," he continued.

The average day begins with a review of the latest serious incidents from the previous night. The next activities are the many scheduled Soldier

counselings regarding mostly relationship

and stress issues here and at home. Then, the daily scheduled ministries and bible study programs or prep for the next sermon. The afternoons are filled with the daily battle update meetings, staff meetings, chaplain meetings and meetings about having more meetings. Finally, every task force unit heading outside the wire requires a quick prayer and blessing for the Soldiers heading out.

"The schedule is challenging, but what is really hard is the counseling. If I had four counselings in a day, I would be spent. Counselings are mentally challenging tasks because, to be a good listener, you must be involved in what they are saying," said Hammel. "They want you to fix their problems, but in most cases, I can only help them endure and persevere through the hard times."

"I enjoy the chapel ministries," said Hammel. "We build so many strong relationships and fellowship through the ministries. There is that one-on-one connection with the Soldiers and I see the smiles on their faces when they leave that fill me with joy."

One of the most important services to the Soldiers on the road is the daily convoy prayer the chaplains provide.

"We had to pick up some third county national trucks for the convoy that night," said Spc. Shane J. Geesey of Tacoma, Wash., a vehicle gunner for Alpha Company, 1-161st Inf. (CAB), after his vehicle was hit by an IED.

"We were the only crew that missed the chaplain's prayer. We had never gotten

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Maj. Joeseeph R. Hammel leads 1-161st Inf. (CAB) Soldiers in prayer before a convoy Jan. 18, 2009.
(Photo by Sgt. David Isaac)






What Kind of TRICARE Doc Can You Have?

By: Shari Lopatin
TriWest Healthcare Alliance

Most military families have a primary care manager, but not everyone knows who qualifies as one.

TRICARE defines a primary care manager—frequently referred to as a PCM—as “a civilian network provider or military treatment facility provider who provides primary care services to TRICARE beneficiaries.”

Most families with TRICARE Prime or Prime Remote have a PCM. This is the person to run to for all non-emergency services. Either the beneficiary will choose or the military installation clinic will appoint a family its PCM.

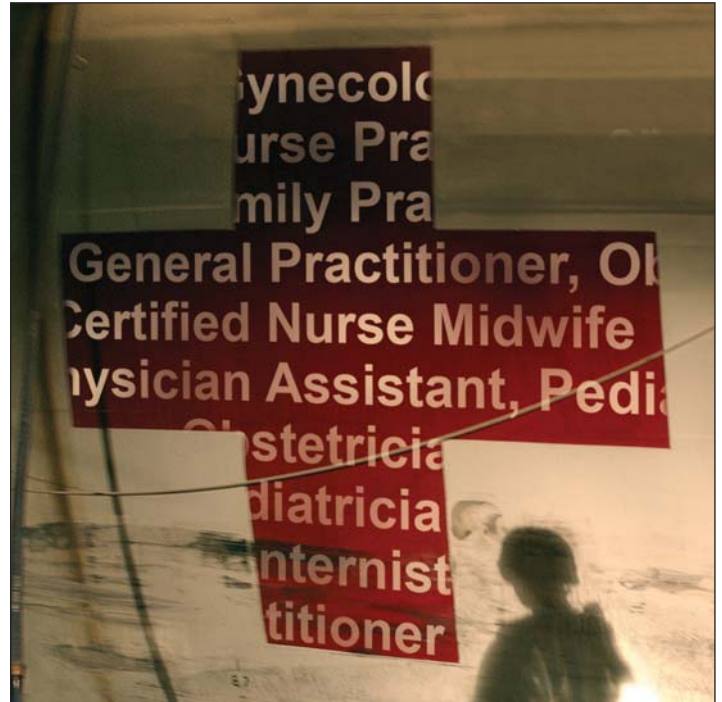
So, who to pick? A favorite gynecologist? A favorite pediatrician? Actually, a PCM may be a certified medical professional who practices within the state’s rules and regulations and has signed a contract to be a TRICARE PCM. That could be anyone from a pediatrician to a nurse practitioner. Either way, the medical professional must be within the beneficiary’s Prime Service Area. 

A PCM may be a:

- Certified nurse midwife
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- Obstetrician
- General practitioner
- Pediatrician
- Gynecologist
- Physician assistant
- Internal medicine physician

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Military Equal Opportunity

By Sgt. 1st Class Sheletha Quillin
81st BCT Equal Opportunity Advisor

The mobilization is almost over and most people are preparing to return to life in the States. Soon we will be reflecting on the people, places and events experienced during this time. While we will physically depart this location, there are things we might carry with us.

One of those things is friendships. You and your battle buddy, co-worker or roommate may have helped each other through tough times, shared lots of laughs, talked about whatever until the wee hours of the night or shared silence. Whatever the reason, if you developed or strengthened a friendship during this time, consider yourself fortunate.


Memories will surely be carried as well. Certain words, actions or occurrences will never be forgotten. May your good memories provide you with occasional smiles throughout life. If some memories are less desirable, try not to hold on to the associated negativity. Take something positive out of it, even if it is just how to avoid a reoccurrence of the experi-

ence.

Another thing you can hopefully walk away with is respect for yourself and your fellow Soldiers.

You, and many other Soldiers, may have made significant sacrifices to participate in this mobilization. Whether it was something projected or it was a “drive by” sacrifice; the result is the same. Every Soldier and family member who stood up and answered the call deserves respect.

Pride should be something each of us carries as we conclude this mission. Our Soldiers have performed their combat mission at or above the standard consistently. The combat support has aided in the success of the mission in immeasurable ways. All 81st Soldiers can be proud of our record and reputation.

All the things we might carry - friendships, memories, respect and pride to name a few - give us common ground. They apply regardless of gender, race, national origin, color or religion. We are diverse in our experiences, abilities, methodologies and interpersonal skills, but together we are one Brigade, the 81st Brigade! 





CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

By Lt. Col. Carl Steele
81st BCT Chaplain

Theodore W. Edmonds, JR CDR, CHC, USN (RET) wrote in his book "Refuge and Strength."

"Going Home Soon




Your author remembers flying back to the States with a deploying unit for the first time. One might assume that everyone was happy about going home and that the whole scene was a party atmosphere. Not so.

Most folks were delighted to be going home to welcoming families and time off to enjoy them. A small number were going home to disastrous personal situations. Some had no idea about whether there would be anybody waiting to greet them – or not.

Pay attention to the others around you, especially those trying to hide their worry and prevent their anxiety from disrupting the joy of others. Pray for them – they need it, and you can afford it.

If you are going home to delightful greetings and good times with family, do enjoy the reunion. Fall in love with your spouse all over again. You earned it, and you deserve it."

I would include remember your training. Whether it is from Battlemind or Combat Operational Stress Control watch out for others in your unit. Those who have a while yet before you return start thinking even now about how you can make that reunion a joyous time. 

The 81st BCT celebrates the 4th of July



Staff Sgt. James Hoge of Renton, Wash., a Soldier with HQ Co., 81st BCT holds up a flag he had flown over Camp Ramadi, Iraq, on the 4th of July in honor of his wife Tamar, who recently became an American citizen. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr)

Church Bulletin Bloopers

(Taken from actual church bulletins)

Hymn No. 58 -
'Gold Will Take
Care of You.'

Wednesday the Ladies Literary Society will meet. Mrs. Johnson will sing, "Put me in My Little Bed," accompanied by the Pastor.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

Thursday at 5 p. m. there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All wishing to become little mothers will please meet the pastor in the study.

Pastor is on vacation. Massages can be given to church secretary.

Our annual church picnic will be held Saturday afternoon. If it rains, it will be held in the morning.

Due to the Rector's illness, Wednesday's healing services will be discontinued until further notice.

Mrs. Johnson will be entering the hospital this week for testes.



Staff Sgt. Selina Wadsworth takes a moment by her vehicle on JBB, Iraq. (Photo by Sgt. Keith Anderson)

Good advice from an experienced NCO

*By Sgt. Keith Anderson
16th Sustainment Brigade*

"Take a deep breath and drive through it." That's the advice from Staff Sgt. Selina Joy Wadsworth, a squad leader with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 81st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team.

The force protection noncommissioned officer from Bellingham, Wash., doesn't literally "drive through it" in a Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle, though. But she never gives up.

"Take the good with the bad, as anyone would with any type of job," said Wadsworth. "Each person is going to come to a moment in their Army career where they will want to get out and quit, but do not base it on one single moment, or one single assignment. Don't be too quick to give up on what you have worked for."

Wadsworth, who is on her second deployment,

said all-in-all, her 14-year career has been positive.

"There have been a number of bad or frustrating moments in my career; however, there have been far many more magnificent challenges and opportunities that outweigh any of the negative ones," Wadsworth said.

Wadsworth said she was grateful for all the mentorship and guidance she's gotten in her Army career.

"I would have to say that nearly every NCO that I have worked for has made an impact on my career, whether positive or negative," Wadsworth said. "I'd say that the greatest leader that I had was back in my active duty unit. He showed me what it meant to be a leader and told me that to be the greatest type of leader is to be the one that you would want to lead you. I have held strong to that idea and always been a leader to my Soldiers that I would want leading me."

She said you can't always tell if you've made

"...The greatest type of leader is to be the one that you would want to lead you."

Staff Sgt. Selina Wadsworth

an impact on a Soldier, but there have been a few times where she got some positive feedback.

"I only know of a few times where a Soldier has written me a card and let me know how my service has impacted their service, and each time it has impacted my own career in such a great way," Wadsworth said. "I was told that through my leadership and work ethic, it had renewed a Soldier's sense of pride in serving and that I was the main reason that the Soldier reenlisted and continued to stay in the Army."

Being a good NCO requires a little study time, Wadsworth said.

"I would advise a new NCO to attend Warrior Leader Course as soon as possible, which just touches the surface of all the information that a new sergeant needs to know," Wadsworth said. "Find a leadership manual, I have a few different ones, and continually read about what it means to be a leader, what different type of leadership styles there are and what a leader needs to know and do. Lastly and most importantly, find a senior NCO to talk with and be your mentor."

Throughout her career, the camaraderie has been important to her, Wadsworth said.

"It seems like only yesterday I was pinned my sergeant stripes, and now I have my staff sergeant, but to look over the short time that I have already been an NCO, I'd have to say that I will always remember how hard I worked for my Soldiers and how amazing my squad has worked even harder for each other," said Wadsworth. "I clearly remember one moment out on patrol where I

See WADSWORTH page 20



Changes? Military Families have support

By Brian P. Smith
TriWest Healthcare Alliance

You can effortlessly change your child's diaper in the middle of the night. In the dark. With one hand. In the car.

While you're driving (although not recommended).

Some changes are not that easy. Military families regularly face deployments, moves and other transitions.

"Families will see a range of reactions to the changes taking place at home," says Dr. Blake Chaffee Ph.D., TriWest Healthcare Alliance vice president of integrated health care services. TriWest manages the TRICARE benefit in the 21-state west region.

"It's important that parents know there are local and online resources available that complement TRICARE's comprehensive behavioral health benefit for both parents and children," he said. These include

self-help and educational resources as well as local support available in-person or over the telephone.

TRICARE allows eight self-referred behavioral health office visits for active duty family members each fiscal year (Oct. 1 to Sept. 30). Continuing TRICARE coverage, with the required referrals and authorizations, includes up to two behavioral health sessions per week in any combination of individual, family or group sessions.

5 Great Online Resources

1. The Behavioral Health Portal at www.triwest.com includes articles and links to resources to help parents better understand and work through a child's potential behavioral issues, including depression. At www.triwest.com, select "Beneficiary" and then "Behavioral Health" from the "In the Spotlight" menu.


2. Produced by TriWest, the Help From Home video series is available to beneficiaries in the TRICARE west region at no cost. Order the two-DVD

set or view the videos online through TriWest's Behavioral Health Portal. The series offers advice from behavioral health experts and military families who have experienced the challenges of deployment and reintegration.

3. Military kids face unique stress at school, including mid-school-year moves. The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC, www.military-child.org) has tools and resources available to help the family make a successful transfer.

4. TriWest partnered with the National Military Family Association (NMFA) to produce "10 Things Military Teens Want You To Know," a collection of stories, quotes, tips and resources for those who want to better understand their world. Visit www.nmfa.org for more information and to request a copy.

5. Sesame Workshop's Talk, Listen, Connect program is designed for military families (with children ages 2 to 5) experiencing deployments, homecomings or a parent's combat-related injury. Download the videos, discussion guides and activity materials from Sesame Workshop at www.sesameworkshop.org/tlc.

More resources are available through the family programs office at your installation and at www.triwest.com. 

CHAPLAIN continued from page 7

hit before. But that night we missed the prayer and we got hit. That's the last time I will miss the chaplain's prayer."


"During the convoy prayers, I had themes that we would cover – candles on Christmas Eve, learning about Lent on Mardi Gras, celebrating Mother's and Father's Day, plus studying the religious significance of Iraq's cities – Ur, Nineveh, and Babylon," said Chaplain Kelly N. Hanson from Seattle, Wash., the chaplain for 181st Brigade Support Battalion. "The latter was a favorite of mine since it connected the year we spent on the road and at Jonit Base Balad to the spiritual history of this land. I hope each Soldier in TF 1-161 will be able to reflect on their time here from a spiritual, religious, and historical perspective both now and in the future."

The job of a chaplain's assistant is the day-to-day endless string of daily tasks, such as scheduling mission prayers, preparing for meetings or ministries and preparing the daily chaplain's report.

"It's a highly rewarding job for me. I feel that we are

helping people both emotionally and spiritually get through hard times," said Spc. Lawrence L. Softich of Spokane, Wash., one of two chaplain's assistants with Task Force 161, which is made up of Soldiers from 1-161st Inf. (CAB) and 181st BSB. "It seems there has been a spike in family issues after coming back from leave. So, we make sure the word gets out that we are here to help and talk anytime. It made me realize how important it is to take care of yourself emotionally and spiritually and maintaining yourself physically while on deployment."

The chaplain's office is the place of great challenge, great sorrow and great reward. The job has its tough times, but also its moments of joy.

"I am thankful for God's mercy in our battalion. Equal to the 161's hard training were so many people of faith and all of the families and friends praying for this battalion," said Hammiel. "I have met such a variety of people from so many backgrounds and so many places. I would have never met such wonderful people if I had not been on this deployment." 



Pacific Northwest Guard Units Practice Aero Medical Evacuation

By Sgt. David Isaac,
1-161st Inf. (CAB)

Recently, two Pacific Northwest-based Army National Guard units came together in Iraq for MEDEVAC refresher training at the Air Force Theater Hospital on Joint Base Balad, Iraq.

Soldiers from the 81st Brigade Combat Team's Task Force 1-161, made up of Soldiers from 1-161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion) and 181st Brigade Support Battalion and Oregon Army National Guard's Charlie Company, 7-158th Aviation met far from their evergreen home stations in the sandy Iraqi desert for what Sgt. Brandon Names, a crew chief from Albany, Ore., called "MEDEVAC 101."

Names said the classes change and are tailored to the training unit's requests, but typically include aircraft familiarization and operation, loading and unloading patients from the aircraft and landing zone (LZ) or pick-up zone and set-up and operations.

On this night, the Highlanders reviewed the 9-line MEDEVAC request and the information flight medics need to prepare for receiving patients while en route to the LZ, how to prepare a patient for movement on the aircraft, and loading and unloading of patients on the aircraft.

"People get excited when a helicopter shows up," said Sgt. Jason Westlund, a flight medic from Corvallis, Ore., borrowing a phrase from his platoon sergeant. He said the training was important and helps the flight crews and ground Soldiers work better together.

"On one mission, we landed and the crew chief hadn't even opened the door when the litter team had the patient at the aircraft," he said.

Names said the familiarization training helps avoid that kind of confusion on the ground during actual missions. Westlund added that the training exposes Soldiers who don't normally work around



Spc. Adam Rieker, a medic from Yakima, Wash., with HHC, 1-161st Inf. (CAB), on the top litter, and Spc. Andrew Phipps, a medic from Spokane, Wash., with C Co., 1-161st Inf. (CAB), act as patients while Sgt. Brandon Names, a crew chief from Albany, Ore., with the Oregon Army National Guard's C Co., 7-158th Aviation, observes during MEDEVAC training at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. (Photo by Sgt. David Isaac)

aircrafts with what to expect – rotor wash, blowing dust and a lot of noise.

Sgt. Merissa Merlin, a flight medic from Portland, Ore., said the better ground medics and other Soldiers understand how to work around the aircraft the more timely care the patient gets. Names agreed and said working together before the mission "is better for the patient."

Because of the training, the Soldiers felt more in sync with the flight medics and knew how to better prepare patients for transport, said Spc. Matt Moeser, a Spokane-based medic from 1-161st Inf. (CAB).


"Our missions take us outside the wire and between FOBs, so aero MEDEVAC is a very real possibility," said Sgt. 1st Class Chad Bennett, the Highlander medical platoon sergeant from Rathdrum, Idaho who coordinated the training. Bennett, who attended the basic noncommissioned officer and advanced noncommissioned officer courses with C Co., 7-158th AV's senior flight medic, added: "It's important to train with assets we'll see in a combat zone and

at home in the state area of operations."

Names agreed, saying: "There's a good chance we could end up working together when we're at home."

"There's a definite Northwest personality that we identify with and it feels like working with home," said Westlund.


That NW personality includes an affinity for well-made coffee. To help bring a bit of home to Iraq, 7-158th AV built 'Cascade Coffee' in their MWR area. Merlin, in addition to bring an instructor, doubled as a barista and said working with other Guard Soldiers from the Pacific Northwest made it "feel like we're not so far from home." Moeser, who's father is an Oregon Duck, said he liked seeing others from the Northwest, too.

C Co., 7-158th AV arrived at JBB in May and still has several months ahead in their tour, but Task Force 1-161 redeploys in just a few weeks. This brief overlap, so far from home, will ensure better and more timely patient care should these units meet on the battlefield or at home. 



1-161ST INFANTRY (CAB)



out of Moses Lake, Wash., Charlie Co. out of Bremerton, Wash., Delta Co. out of Pasco, Wash. Echo Co. out of Bellingham, Wash. and Hotel Co. out of Spokane, Wash. traveled more than 1,700,000 miles during their more than 1,800 convoy missions. Two companies from 181st Brigade Support Battalion were attached to 1-161st Inf. (CAB) during the deployment. Alpha Co. out of Seattle, Wash., conducted 1,830 Force Protection operations in and around JBB and also provided safe passage for U.S. and foreign dignitaries throughout Iraq and operational security for the JBB Hospital's Intensive Care Unit. Bravo Co., a maintenance company, out of Yakima, Wash., was tasked with convoy security operations on Contingency Operating Base Adder in Tallil, Iraq. 



The 1st battalion, 161st Infantry (Combined Arms Battalion) conducted convoy security missions out of Joint Base Balad in Balad, Iraq, effectively transporting 110 million gallons of fuel, 600,000 tons of supplies and 120 million gallons of water throughout Iraq. Through expert maintenance operations and Soldier skill, the Soldiers of Alpha Company out of Kent, Wash., Bravo Co.





1-185TH ARMOR (CAB)




1st Battalion 185th Armor (Combined Arms Battalion) performed a security force mission throughout Multi National Division-North at Contingency Operating Base Speicher near Tikrit, Iraq. The battalion's three companies provided convoy security support to corps assets, which included Coalition Force operational moves, KBR and third country national logistical convoys. The Soldiers of 1-185th Ar. (CAB) proved their combat readiness, stamina and professionalism by executing more than 1,500 missions, totaling more than 1,000,000 mission miles, throughout MND-N and Multi National Corps-Iraq without incident. Fifty-six Soldiers of Company B, based out of Riverside, Calif., six Soldiers of Company C, based out of Palmdale, Calif., and 49 Soldiers of Company D, based out of Madera, Calif., were awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and Combat Action Badge. Headquarters and Headquarters Company, based out of San Bernardino, Calif., provided command and control for all the missions.





1-303RD CAVALRY



The 1st Squadron, 303rd Cavalry Regiment conducted various missions throughout Iraq. Alpha Troop, based out of Puyallup, Wash., conducted more than 240 Combat Logistics Patrols covering more than 48,000 miles from Al Asad Air Base in Anbar Province. During their tenure as a Convoy Security Company, Alpha Troop discovered five Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and provided recovery support to 27 various incidents. Bravo Troop, based out of Kent, Wash., provided protection teams for 10 government agencies, military movement teams for the United Nations Assistance Mission Iraq and military police support at Camp Prosperity in Baghdad. Charlie and Hotel Troop, based out of Bremerton and Kent, Wash., convoyed more than 5,000,000 miles from Al Taqaddum Air Base in Anbar Province, conducting more than 1,760 Combat Logistics Patrols and escorting over 3,400 Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR) trucks safely to their destinations. 





2-146TH FIELD ARTILLERY



The 2nd Battalion, 146th Field Artillery's Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, stationed out of Olympia, Wash., conducted Mayor's Cell operations on Contingency Operating Base Marez in Mosul, Iraq. During the past nine months, the Soldiers of HHB erected 3,000 concrete barriers and 12,000 HESCO barriers, managed 450 contracted guards and processed 4,200 people for clearance onto the base, greatly improving the base's defense. They also coordinated 18 entertainment shows, operated 44 logistic projects and managed the housing for the entire base. Alpha Battery, based out of Montesano, Wash., conducted convoy security missions out of COB Marez. After driving more than 200 Convoy Logistical Patrols (CLPs), 18 A Btry Soldiers were awarded the Eagle Eye Army Commendation medal for spotting IEDs. Bravo Battery, stationed out of Longview, Wash., also conducted more than 200 CLPs, 41 recovery missions and drove more than 15,478 total miles. 120 B Btry Soldiers were awarded the combat action badge. Both A and B Batteries were awarded the Combat Action Streamer.





181ST BSB

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 181st Brigade Support Battalion, based out of Seattle, conducted Mayor's Cell operations on Contingency Operating Base Qayyarah-West in northern Iraq. They monitored base contracts totaling more than \$12,724,000 and instituted a vehicle tracking database on Q-West. They also oversaw new Iraqi businesses and conducted a workshop for hundreds of local sheiks, muqtars and city councilmen during the monthly Souq. They assisted local contractors in the "Iraqi First" initiative, ensuring contractors hired

a large percentage of local Iraqi workers and managed more than 35 construction projects totaling more than \$2.5 million. They planned and managed the living areas and building assignments for more than 6,000 base tenants, as well as provided military police services for the entire base. They provided more than 150 million gallons of water to the base and built a new waste transfer facility. They also managed all base events such as sports leagues, VIP and entertainer tours, USO tours, base theater, gym, and phone and internet centers.





81ST BSTB

8^{1st} Brigade Special Troops Battalion, based out of Everett and Kent, Wash., conducted Force Protection and Base Defense Operations (BDOC) on Contingency Operating Base Qayyarah-West in northern Iraq. The 24-hour BDOC served as the 911 center and monitored security for Q-West and the roughly 7,000 base tenants, and the Force Protection Cell used existing materials and self-help labor to replace gates, repair fencing and redesign entry control points. The Force Protection Company operated the north entry control point at COB Q-West and its surrounding area, to include 25 villages within 330 square kilometers. They completed

more than 400 combat patrols, 250 Quick Reaction Force responses and drove more than 30,000 miles through hostile territory. In the course of approximately 25 non-lethal engagements, the company provided basic medical treatment to more than 250 adults and 400 children from the local national population. The military police platoon was detached and carried out a personal security mission in support of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Additionally, the military intelligence company was detached and mobilized to provide human and signals intelligence in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. 🇺🇸





HEADQUARTERS 81ST BCT

Headquarters Company, 81st Brigade Combat Team, stationed out of Seattle, served as the Camp Command and Mayor's Cell on Camp Ramadi, a Marine base in Anbar Province. During their nine months, the Soldiers of HQ Co., improved the security for the 4,600 servicemembers of Camp Ramadi by implementing 20 Force Protection projects, rewriting access control policies and introducing a biometric identification system. They also improved the Camp life support by providing AFN television in all living and common areas and an education and testing center, developing a 911 phone response system, improving and increasing the housing, placing more than 39,000 tons of gravel, coordinating entertainment shows and activities for the entire camp, running the camp chapel and environmental program and managing more than 65 camp contracts totaling more than \$38 million. The Unmanned Aerial System platoon flew 1,500 flight hours out of Al Taqaddum, Iraq, providing counter IED support, coverage of key sites during the January 2009 elections and during tactical raids. HQ Co. also postured Camp Ramadi for its eventual turnover to the Government of Iraq and tracked the 3,200 Soldiers of the 81st BCT who were spread across ten bases in Iraq.





MRAPs of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Battery prepare to roll out on a convoy security mission in Mosul, Iraq. (Photo by 1st Sgt. Scott Catlett)

Guardsmen of 'Team Halo' Rack up 150,000 miles

Courtesy of 2-146th FA

Guardsmen in one battery on Contingency Operating Base Marez in Mosul, Iraq, have racked up 150,000 miles driven in convoys in northern Iraq.


Soldiers from "Team Halo," Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2-146th Field Artillery, 81st Brigade Combat Team have driven more than 150,000 miles throughout the Ninawa province and nearby provinces on logistics missions.

No one Soldier has driven that much, it's the accumulated amount of miles the Soldiers have driven on their missions. Every time they roll out of the gate those miles are counted, and they add up fast.

One Soldier, Sgt. Scott Weaver, a wrecker driver with HHB, 2-146th FA, has driven more than 9,000 miles accident-free.

"We stay on top of the changes and safety issues by sticking to the safety first policy," said Spc. Donald Langley, a medic from Washougal, Wash. "We could not have achieved this amount of miles without the help and support of the maintenance."

The crews perform the daily preventive maintenance, checks and services before, during and after each mission. This helps prolong the life of the vehicles that are always going out on the road. But it's not just the PMCS that has helped the "Halo" Soldiers achieve the milestone.

"Following policies alone doesn't get you the miles," said Sgt. Terrell Fox, a truck commander and native of Burien, Wash. "Putting key people in positions because you know their strengths and weaknesses is a big piece." 


HEALTH CORNER

By Lt. Col. Stephen Anderson
81st BCT Brigade Surgeon

As our deployment hits its "twilight phase" many of us are excited and looking forward to going home.

As we are packing, shipping and preparing to move ourselves, please take that extra moment and ensure safety for yourself and your fellow Soldier. Because of the great work done by all of you, we should finish the deployment with very few serious medical problems in the Brigade. We want to continue this trend by getting everyone home safely.

Also, please make sure you take the time to finish all LODs and prepare to discuss any possible medical conditions with your provider and/or the Provider at Fort McCoy. This includes any behavioral or stress-related health problems or concerns. The little extra time spent detailing any possible medical problem that occurred during the deployment, or was made worse by the deployment, can pay a huge dividend in future care. Our goal is to return everyone as healthy or healthier than when we started.

I know I can speak for all of the medical caregivers in the Brigade in saying it has been a pleasure to help care for and to serve you. 


Wadsworth continued from page 10

wrote and gave the mission's operational order and saw each person doing the work that needed to get done. It was amazing to know that I had that type of influence to be able to set Soldiers out to accomplish a mission."

She has noticed some changes in Iraq this tour, from the last time during 2004 to 2005 when she was at what is now Joint Base Balad, Wadsworth said.

"While for the most part the country is basically still the same, the Iraqi military has greatly improved," Wadsworth said. "The Iraqi soldiers were simple farmers, working a few days out of the week as a soldier in barely much of a uniform, with hardly any equipment. Today, looking at the Iraqi army while we are out on missions, they have come leaps and bounds with uniforms, equipment and training."

This deployment has gone by much more quickly than the previous deployment, Wadsworth said.

"This deployment has been fast, much quicker than I even thought it would end up being," said Wadsworth. "I have been challenged and been given an incredible opportunity to be responsible for a squad of 16 Soldiers. Being a medic on my last deployment, I was responsible for their medical needs, and in this deployment I was responsible for every aspect of their mission readiness, day-to-day needs and overall success as a squad and platoon." 



ONE BUSY NCO

Courtesy of Sgt. Lamont Tanksley
A Co., 181st BSB

Staying busy is nothing new to Sgt. Lamont Tanksley Sr. When not deployed with the 181st Brigade Support Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team, he is a realtor, landlord, husband, father of four, vending business owner and tutor at Cottonwood Elementary School in Bremerton, Wash. Given that history, it is no surprise that he has participated so actively while stationed



Sgt. Lamont Tanksley makes copies for his class May 30, 2009. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Gauthier)

with Alpha Company, 181st BSB.

Tanksley is the Operations NCO, Electronics Warfare Officer, a team leader and assistant training NCO for the 3rd ESC Personnel Security Detachment at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. He proudly smiles recalling he has also held positions as a driver, range safety, gunner, scout, truck commander, squad leader and armorer as well since the deployment began. In short, he has held every position possible in his detachment except platoon sergeant.

Laughing he stated: "I did sub for a platoon sergeant's meeting once."

"I hate not to be busy. You know what they say idle hands are . . .,"

he said when asked why he is so assertive to take on positions. "Staying busy is healthy and helps move along the days. Also, I'm retiring soon. I've been in the military since 1987 and have been on numerous deployments, so I have a wealth of knowledge and experience. It is up to us to provide an example and give that knowledge back to those staying in."

Tanksley, a former commissioned officer, who earned two college degrees while serving on active duty from 1987 to 2005, has applied for sanctuary and is awaiting a response back. He could be eligible for an active duty retirement as early as January 2010. Still, he hopes to extend for another tour before retiring.

"I've got something left in the tank, and I want to leave it all on the field," exclaimed Tanksley.

Tanksley has participated in several 5K runs, came in the top five for his age group during a 12-mile march in full gear, teaches step aerobics three days a week and often attends step classes on the same days. He volunteered at the hospital and taught college courses for Central Texas College in the evenings. Each of these activities are done outside his normal work schedule without asking for extra time off.

"Teaching both college and aerobics has been extremely rewarding. Sculpting young minds and bodies is awesome. I get a great deal of joy seeing people applying themselves and getting better. I am enrolled in the Troops to Teachers program, but I never thought I'd be teaching college courses and/or aerobics. It's invigorating. I've been doing aerobics for decades, so teaching it came naturally. It's beneficial for me and the students. I love it," said Tanksley.

"Being this active is a sacrifice. It is both tiring and empowering," said Tanksley. "I would get two meals at night on Monday, Wednesday and Friday so I would be able to eat after teaching college on Tuesday,




Sgt. Lamont Tanksley holds the A Co., 181st BSB guidon following a 12-mile march with all of his gear and a pack in January 2009. (Photo by Roy Hawkins)

Thursday and Saturday. I went straight from work to teach, the [dining facility] was closed by the time my class was over. People count on you. You can't let them down. Getting a college degree changes people's lives. It got me commissioned. My aerobics students are happy when I show up and I can't let them down by sleeping in. It's a great commitment to me because it is voluntary. None of us have to be there, so that's pretty cool to me."

"I came here with some hard and fast goals," Tanksley said. "They include my goals to learn and teach. If I am not out teaching, I definitely want to learn. I have learned a lot during my career and there is so much more I don't know yet."

He has completed two online courses, several 40-hour classes, and an 80-hour Transportation of Hazardous Materials class while in theater.

"I learn a lot just being here in a platoon where more than half of the Soldiers are under 30, maybe even under 25," he said. "We all have our own ways to cope with the deployment. I chose to stay busy and to stay fit. I hope it provides a good example to others. I think others are benefiting from my commitment and I like knowing that." 



CITIZENSHIP Continued from page 5

I didn't realize that [I wasn't] until my older teenage years," says the Army specialist who works as a paralegal.

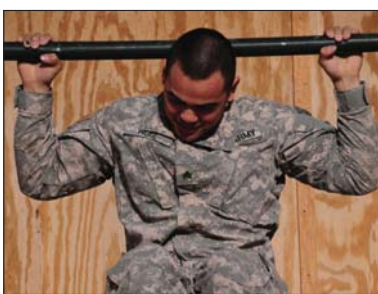
From the Seattle area, Mose has helped other Soldiers prepare their packets for citizenship and realized she could do the same for herself. About a half dozen of her "clients" took part in the same ceremony.

Like so many, Mose looks forward to the right to vote, which so many Americans don't use.

"They don't exercise the rights and the privileges we can only dream of most of our lives," she says.

Biden pointed the diversity in the crowd.

"Every hue," he said. "You represent what America has always stood for: freedom, strength, resolve, but also the remarkable, remarkable diversity we represent."



Sgt. Jaiboaz Ruiz of Tacoma, Wash., A Trp, 1-303rd Cav., originally from The Philippines, knocks out some pull ups a few months before getting his citizenship in Baghdad. (Photo by Sgt. Amanda Gauthier)

"Not a lot of people can say that they shook the Vice-President's hand, for that I'm lucky to have the opportunity. By him taking the time to be at the ceremony, that alone showed an utmost respect and his personal interest towards us."




Spc. Sparton Thompson of Auburn, Wash., A Co., 181st BSB, originally from the Marshall Islands, poses with Vice President Joe Biden and escort Sgt. 1st Class Fenton after becoming a U.S. Citizen. (Photo courtesy of Spc. Thompson)

"I am very happy to be an American Soldier, serving our wonderful country... I found freedom, liberty and, at the same time, I have the same opportunities that the natural born have."

Of those taking the oath, 50 are from Mexico, 18 from the Philippines and 12 from Iraq.

David Martinez of 1-185th Armor (Combined Arms Battalion), 81st BCT is driving a HUMVEE in Iraq. His family lives near Fresno, Calif. He didn't join the military to get his citizenship; he just sees it as a great fringe benefit. He's happy to finally have the official document.

"It means everything now. Defending the constitution, I've been to Iraq, I'm an American," says the Soldier who may one day go into the corrections field. 



Top SUPERFOODS for all-star heart health

By Shari Lopatin

TriWest Healthcare Alliance

These top five "superfoods" from The American Dietetic Association (ADA) and the "Nutrition Action Health Letter" will not only make you feel good, but will help protect you against heart disease, the top killer of adults in the U.S.

1. **Beans.** The ADA says beans are truly a superfood because each tiny bean has a powerful combination of protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Researchers have also found that diets including beans may reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers.


2. **Wild salmon.** The omega-3 fats in salmon can help reduce the risk of sudden-death heart attacks. Plus, salmon caught in the wild has less PCB contaminants than salmon raised on a farm.

3. **Mushrooms.** Stocked full of antioxidants that help protect cells from free radicals, which can lead to cancer and sometimes heart disease, mushrooms are a great source of potassium, copper and certain B-vitamins.

4. **Garlic and onions.** For greatest benefit, use the whole vegetable and stay away from onion and garlic powders. The ADA reports that research shows these two foods may help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol, control blood pressure, prevent life-threatening blood clotting, act as antioxidants to reduce cancer risk, and even promote immunity. You may need to eat one garlic clove daily to make a difference.

5. **Blueberries.** These fun little berries are bursting with antioxidants, more so than many larger berries. In addition to fighting off heart disease and cancer, blueberries can also fight aging. They're loaded with dietary fiber and vitamins A and C.

Surprise superfood: dark chocolate - Eating heart-healthy can be a special treat, too. The ADA reports that recent research shows components of the cocoa bean and dark chocolate could positively impact the cardiovascular system, kidney function, brain health, immune system, diabetes and blood pressure. In fact, dark chocolate may help limit the build-up of plaque in arteries by lowering LDL (bad) cholesterol, raising levels of HDL (good) cholesterol and reducing blood pressure.

For more healthy tips and TRICARE-related information, visit TriWest's Healthy Living Portal at www.triwest.com/beneficiary/healthy_living. 



81ST BRIGADE'S DYNAMIC DUO

By Col. Ronald Kapral
81st BCT Commander

Just like Batman and Robin and the Lone Ranger and Tonto, the 81st has its version of the dynamic duo. They are Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr and Sgt. Amanda Gauthier. They are solely responsible for the publication of the Desert Raven. They compile stories and photographs and write the majority of the articles. They arrange all the articles and publish the Raven on a monthly schedule.



Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr and Sgt. Amanda Gauthier review photos in their office on Camp Ramadi, Iraq, July 5, 2009. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Lima)

This July '09 edition marks the 16th and final edition of the Raven. It did not start out as the magnificent document that is printed today. It began in July '08 at the Yakima Training Center as an idea to publicize the great stories of Soldiers within the brigade and let family and friends get an understanding of what life is like for their loved ones. The first Raven was about six black and white pages. In the following months, the word of the Raven spread to the battalions, and families started to read and look forward to the next month's edition. The results were astounding. Soldiers from all across Iraq began sending stories and pictures to get them published. Articles and pictures from the Raven have been published in newspapers all across the U.S. Photographs have been published on the Army web page.

It takes a great deal of work to produce the Raven. Staff Sgt. Suhr and Sgt. Gauthier have traveled to every base that 81st Brigade Soldiers are assigned. They have taken over 100,000 photographs, covering everything from professional football player visits to softball games at Q-West. They also produce two other publications, The Ramadi Star, which covers stories on Soldiers and Marines on Camp Ramadi, and the weekly commander's newsletter. This is truly remarkable when you consider what conditions they work with and the equipment.



Sgt. Amanda Gauthier and Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr take a moment while photographing an early morning run Nov. 22, 2008 on Camp Ramadi, Iraq. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Derrick Grasty)

When this first began they were using their own personal cameras and after what seemed like a lifetime, the Army cameras finally arrived. The new Nikon D300s were like opening that very special Christmas gift that you have always wanted. The cameras are always at their side. With basic computers and special software, they can turn out publications that not only tell the story, but graphically portray the life of 81st Brigade Soldiers in Iraq. From the Adjutant General and the Governor down to the parents of our youngest Soldiers, they are able to get a glimpse of what their Soldier experiences and remain connected. They have told the story of the 81st Brigade.

We owe a great deal to our Dynamic Duo. The pictures and the stories will be remembered for months to come. 📷



81st BCT Commander Col. Ronald Kapral and 81st BCT Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney stand beside Sgt. Amanda Gauthier and Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr after awarding them deployment medals July 5, 2009. (Photo by Capt. Buddy Francisco)



Free education for military spouses



Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) available now

Courtesy of Washington National Guard J-9

Program Sponsor: Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community & Family Policy (DUSD/MC&FP)

Program Description: The Department of Defense's expanded Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) program is now offering up to \$6,000 to military spouses who are interested in pursuing degree programs, licenses or credentials leading to careers in high growth, high demand portable career fields.

What Does MyCAA Pay For? MyCAA financial assistance pays for expenses such as post-secondary education and training, tuition, licensing, and credentialing fees. This includes degree programs (e.g. associates, bachelors, masters, doctoral and post doctoral), continuing education classes (including those offered through professional associations at conferences), Bar, CPA and other similar exams, state certifications for teachers, medical professionals and similar licensed professionals, and services required to become employed in portable career fields (e.g. finger printing, security checks, drug tests, etc.). MyCAA does not pay for computers, school application fees, graduation fees, student activity cards, child care, parking, transportation, medical services or testing fees. NOTE: If the cost of a course includes books, supplies or other necessary equipment, MyCAA will cover that cost. Schools use MyCAA's AI Portal to bill DoD electronically.

Who Is Eligible? Spouses of active duty members and activated members of the National Guard and Reserve Components.

The period of eligibility for spouses of Guard and Reserve members is from the date of the Alert or Warning Order for Military Recall or Mobilization, through activation and deployment until 180 days following De-Mobilization.

Military spouses who are military members themselves are not eligible. Military members have education benefits provided through the Military Voluntary Education Tuition Assistance (TA) Program.

How Does A Spouse Get Started? Eligible spouses who are ready to explore portable careers options and develop a career goal and plan should establish a MyCAA Account by visiting the MyCAA website ~ <https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa>. This is an easy, self-help process. Once spouse profile information is provided, DoD will verify MyCAA eligibility through DEERS. The spouse will be notified of his/her eligibility status through the MyCAA messaging system.

Who Can Help Spouses Move Through the MyCAA Program?

Spouses are encouraged to work with their School Academic Advisor or call a Military One-Source Career/Education Consultant at 1-800-342-9647 if they need help in:

Establishing a MyCAA Account and signing the MyCAA Statement of Understanding (SOU)

- Establishing a MyCAA Account and signing the MyCAA Statement of Understanding (SOU)
- Choosing a portable career and establishing a career goal
- Developing a career plan (selecting courses, exams, other needed services)
- Looking up school(s) of choice in the MyCAA AI Portal
- Requesting that a new school be added if the school of choice is not already listed
- Requesting up to \$6,000 of financial assistance to pay for courses of study or related licensing and credentialing services provided by other agencies (e.g. Bar or CPA exams, state certification exams for teachers and nurses, finger printing, drug testing, security checks, etc.)

For spouses who experience technical difficulties using the MyCAA website or have forgotten their password, please contact MyCAA@InvernessTechnologies.com.

Who Can Help Schools Become A MyCAA Partner?

For schools that need MyCAA program information or want to participate in the MyCAA AI Portal electronic billing process, please request assistance from MyCAASchools@MOSCenter.us.

Is MyCAA Training Available for Program Participants?

YES. Webinars are periodically scheduled to assist individuals in learning how to participate in the MyCAA program. Schedule information will be posted on the MyCAA AI Portal website (<https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa>) when it is available. 📅

NOTE: This is NOT the same as the Department of Labor's initial pilot CAA Program which is currently only available in California, North Carolina and Georgia.

Spouses who are currently participating in DoL's CAA program may also participate in DoD's new worldwide MyCAA Program.



Letter from the Editor

By Staff Sgt. Emily Suhr
81st BCT Public Affairs

For the past year I have been honored to be a part of the 81st BCT. Just a year ago, I was still fairly new to the Washington Army National Guard and had just barely settled in to a full time job with the 96th Troop Command out of Tacoma, Wash., when my office began calling up troops to join the 81st BCT, who had just started their annual training in Yakima, Wash., in preparation for their deployment. I had been in the military for nine years and still hadn't had the chance to deploy to Iraq, so I volunteered to go with the 81st. It turned out to be one of the better decisions I have made with my life.

As an Army journalist I have been blessed with amazing opportunities out here, such as meeting the Washington governor and traveling all across Iraq to see the 3,200 Soldiers of the 81st BCT. Sgt. Amanda Gauthier and I have tried to bring those experiences to you through The Desert Raven. Words and photos can only show a small glimpse of the incredible things the Soldiers of the 81st BCT do every day, but I hope everyone at home gained a little bit better under-

standing of what life is like in Iraq. their units from across the brigade with little more than a photo, and Sgt. Timothy Kettlewell, who provided the festive Raven images each month, such as this month's "Welcome home" image seen here. Sgt. Kettlewell also stepped in to help put the April and June Desert Ravens together while Sgt. Gauthier and I each went on leave.

~ Our regular contributors from home who reminded us each month that we weren't forgotten in the States and ensured we knew our benefits: Everyone from the TriWest Office, the J-9 office in Washington, Washington ESGR, Maj. Julie Spencer-Howard from recruiting, Korina Huddleston from the Washington Family Readiness Support and the Washington State Public Affairs Office.

~ Col. Ronald Kapral and Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Sweeney who supported us from day one and encouraged us every day after.

~ The civilian reporters back home who kept telling the stories of the 81st Brigade. Scott Fontaine from The News Tribune in Tacoma especially, who came out to



Welcome Home Citizen Soldier



standing of what life is like in Iraq.

Sgt. Gauthier and I are only part of the equation though.

Our efforts would be fruitless if it weren't for all the wonderful people who contributed to The Desert Raven and helped us out over the past year. We would like to thank those people now.

~ Our unit public affairs representatives from each battalion who continually wrote articles and took photos for The Desert Raven every month. For most of them, this was an extra duty, something they did on their own time in between their normal duties.

~ Our regular staff contributors from brigade headquarters who faithfully wrote our monthly columns, such as the Chaplain's Corner, Health Corner, SARC, Equal Opportunity and retention.

~ Our behind the scenes guys like Sgt. Casey Holbrook who dug up all the crazy laws, odd facts and church bulletin bloopers, and 1st Lt. Joseph Cluever who created our Sudoku puzzles; The 81st BCT S-1 office who regularly helped us identify Soldiers and

Iraq and spent six dusty weeks getting to know the Soldiers of the 81st.

~ The readers back home who sent us words of thanks and support and reminded us why we do what we do.

~ Most importantly though, we want to thank the Soldiers of the 81st Brigade. Their sacrifice and dedication to service are what make this country great and made our job easy. We simply told their stories.

Thank you.

As the 81st BCT heads home, there will be no more Desert Ravens until December. Look for one last issue covering the Demob, Freedom Salutes and Yellow Ribbon programs. Please send any submissions you have for that time to Sgt. Gauthier at amanda.r.gauthier@us.army.mil, as I will be staying in Iraq with our follow-on unit. Here's hoping the Seahawks beat the Cowboys in the Superbowl this year!

Take care 81st BCT. 



SPC. SAMUEL STONE

JUNE 10, 1988 -

MAY 31, 2009

1-303RD CAVALRY, 81ST
BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Randall Wong

YOU WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN

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question. I will never know why they do this, but I thank God every day we have young Soldiers who volunteer and step up to serve."

The brigade suffered one casualty during its tour in Iraq. Spc. Samuel Stone, 20, of Port Orchard, Wash., was killed in a non-combat related incident May 30, 2009.

"The loss of a Soldier is a commander's worst nightmare," said Kapral. "I and the Soldiers of the 81st HBCT deeply regret the loss of Spc. Stone. My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends. Spc. Stone was a fine Soldier who proudly served his country and state. He upheld the finest traditions of being a Soldier."

This month, the six battalions and one headquarters company who make up the 81st BCT will start returning to Fort McCoy for demobilization, a five-day process that includes medical screenings as well as briefings covering Soldier benefits and care. After arriving in their home state, most Soldiers will have a few weeks to spend with their families and friends before returning to service.

"I would like to thank [the Soldiers] for the work and sacrifices they have made," said Kapral. "They have done everything that they were asked to do and then some. They have left their mark in history as a unit that helped win the war in Iraq. I want them to thank their families for me, for the support they have given our Soldiers. I want them to be proud of their accomplishments and prepare themselves for the journey home. I am proud of them and honored to be a part of this great unit."

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THIS WILL BE THE FINAL EDITION OF THE DESERT RAVEN FROM IRAQ. ONE MORE ISSUE IS DUE TO COME OUT IN DECEMBER. IF YOU HAVE ANY PHOTOS OR STORIES TO SUBMIT, PLEASE SEND THEM TO AMANDA.R.GAUTHIER@US.ARMY.MIL.