

February 2011

Roaring Thunder

News for the Soldiers, Airmen, Civilians and Contractors of Task Force Thunder



Task Force Thunder **Command & Staff**

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Army Col. Chris Kemp

Deputy TF Commander

Army Lt. Col. Teri Hassell

Command Sergeant Major

Army Command Sgt. Maj.

Thomas Wilkerson

Personnel Officer

Army Lt. Col. Orville Jennings

Security Officer

Army Maj. Benjamin Stevens

Plans & Operations Officer/ JNCC-A Director

Army Lt. Col. John H. Phillips

Supply & Logistics Officer

Army Lt. Col. George Brady

Brigade Judge Advocate

Army Lt. Col. Robert Drummer

Chaplain

Army Lt. Col. Gary Williams

Public Affairs Officer

Army Capt. Michelle Lunato



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato

Task Force Thunder Commander: Col. Kemp

Signal Task Force,

As the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade and the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, prepare to redeploy, I want to express my gratitude for all you have done. Your efforts, sacrifices and contributions across the Combined Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan have been invaluable in providing critical communications support to our warfighters and coalition partners.

Whether you were part of the signaleers, maintenance team, supply effort, or support element, you played a vital part on this regimental team. No team can succeed without all of its players fully engaged. And from the results we were able to produce across this country, I would say without any reservations, each and every one of you stepped up your game and answered the call.

All that we have accomplished so far is now part of history – history that you helped write. Whether you are redeploying shortly or just starting your tour here, I ask you to hold your head high. Be proud of your contribution to the task force and service to your country.

Carry yourself with dignity, whether that is here or back in the United States. As a critical enabler in Operation Enduring Freedom, you will be looked at differently. Your comrades will know what you sacrificed, as you represent less than one percent of our Nation's population. Your families will be proud of your service. And the general public will look at you with gratitude for a service they did not have to perform.

Though the 359th TTSB and the 86th ESB are redeploying, the signal mission goes on. As the 228th TTSB takes the reins from the 359th TTSB, and the 422nd ESB swaps out with the 86th ESB, it is critical for those of you remaining in place to provide continuity to ensure the warfighters continue to receive their critical communications.

To the teams heading home, you have my deepest appreciation for a job well done. Your efforts have been well worth the sacrifices both you and your families made. As we developed this network, exponentially, please know, regardless of your job, you have made a difference that will have a lasting impact on our Afghan partners.

Proud to have the opportunity to serve you,

COL Chris Kemp

Commander, Task Force Thunder

Task Force Thunder

Command
Sergeant Major:

Command
Sgt. Maj.
Wilkerson



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato

Dear Task Force Thunder,

Soldiers, after a long deployment and constant struggles towards remaining watchful against enemy attacks, it will soon be time to depart our mission and return home. In these final hours, it is important to remember the mission set forth by our Commander in Chief.

We have to remain steadfast in our support of the mission. Keeping our soil safe and fighting the terrorist threats to our nation is always the paramount mission.

Our mission is not complete until we have put our boots on United States soil and join our friends and family in victory. It is a time of great distress in the world and the world is looking to us for guidance and strength.

Soldiers, keep setting the example and creating a positive image to the sometimes gruesome details the average person does not get to see. You do the hard work day in and day out. You work long, extended hours to support your families and homes. The gratitude from our families and friends will always be on our minds as we keep the threat far from their watchful, worried eyes.

In these days before redeployment, keep your minds sharp for there are still serious threats to our livelihood brewing in the midst.

As always, thank you for your continued support of the mission and the vast sacrifices you make daily for our great country.

Thomas D. Wilkerson
Command Sergeant Major
Task Force Thunder

Task Force Thunder Elements

Task Force Headquarters

HHC , 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade
Bagram, Afghanistan

Regional Command - East/Capital

25th Signal Battalion
HHD, 25th SB
C Company 63rd ESB
550th Signal Company
580th Signal Company
820th Tactical Installation Network
278th Signal Company

Regional Command - South/ Southwest

86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion
HHC, 86th ESB
A Company 86th ESB
B Company 51st ESB
B Company 307th ESB
C Company 86th ESB
550th Signal Company

Regional Command - North

307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion
HHC, 307th ESB
A Company 151st ESB
B Company 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion

Volunteer Service While Deployed

Task Force Thunder Serves Locals and Comrades Through Operation

By Army Capt. Michelle Lunato
359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Being deployed to Afghanistan certainly does not invoke images of comfort. Servicemembers and civilians work long hard hours. They eat in over-crowded cafeterias. They live in plywood huts or tents on bunk beds or cots. They bundle up from the cold mountain air. They are cautious of the ever-present threat of incoming rockets. To most Americans, this is sacrifice. However, to many Afghan people, this is luxury.

How can there be such a disparity? Well, it is all a matter of perspective when one considers that what Americans call war, has been daily life for the Afghan people for years.

When there are limited job options, long hours equal money and the opportunity to provide for a family. A cafeteria means an abundance of food, which is rare. The mere fact of beds and

no dirt floors speaks for itself. Being able to bundle up from the cold is a wonderful feeling for someone who has suffered a never-ending chill. And worrying about a falling rocket within an area protected by a fence and armed guards is immensely less stressful than an area with no protection at all.

With these things in mind, a number of servicemembers and contractors assigned to Task Force Thunder decided to use some of their non-working hours volunteering to make a difference in the lives of the Afghan people.

This effort, known as Operation Care, is comprised of military and civilians who are deployed to Bagram Airfield. They come from different services, a number of units and a variety of countries. Some people help regularly, some periodically. The faces change as units rotate in and out of the base, year after year, but the all-volunteer organization has maintained its presence since 2003.

What started as a few care packages and a

Below, an Afghan girl waits patiently in line to receive some humanitarian aid from Operation Care servicemembers.



Above, Army Master Sgt. Carolyn Suazo, information assurance/computer assurance network defense noncommissioned officer in charge, walks with some Afghan boys while on a patrol through a village with Special Forces Soldiers. Some of the female Soldiers were asked to wear their hair down to make it easier to engage with local Afghan women.

handful of humanitarian aid missions has turned into a regular operation, said Army Lt. Col. Robin Hossfeld, a logistics liaison for National Guard Affairs, and a former president for Operation Care. "It all started because people just wanted to help."

And that is exactly what the volunteers enjoy still, years later, said Operation Care's outgoing vice president Army Sgt. Natanisha Hershberger, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade's Joint NetOps Control Center supply sergeant. "We just like giving, seeing the smiles, and knowing that we are able to make a small difference in the community."

However, to get those smiles, the volunteers put in a lot of hours. Each week, hundreds of boxes, full of donations from across the world, are mailed to Operation Care volunteers. Those boxes must then be emptied, sorted and prepped for future events. Events, which range from a patrol through a village to donations handed out at a base hospital,

See CARE, page 12



Photos by Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Above, Army Sgt. Natanisha Hershberger, Joint NetOps Control Center supply sergeant, meets a village leader while on patrol with Special Forces Soldiers. The SF servicemembers assist operation care volunteers by giving them an avenue to distribute their donations directly to the Afghan people.

Below, an Afghan boy waits for his family after receiving some clothes and shoes from Operation Care after visiting the Egyptian Field Hospital.



25th Signal Battalion Feature:

Small Roles Play a Large Part in the War



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

By Heather Menzies
The Bay City Tribune

Army Spc. Robert Nemo Comfort has been serving his country and taking advantage of the opportunities that the United States Military has to offer since he graduated from Bay City High School in 2004.

With only one month left to serve in a nine-month tour, Comfort took some time to talk about his life and some of his experiences from his service in the Army.

Comfort, who is the son of Estella Lewis of Bay City, is currently stationed at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan working as an information systems operator with the 580th Signal Company.

This is Comfort's third tour of duty during wartime, his first two tours were spent in Iraq as a field artillery ballistic crew member.

He said he likes the challenge of the new job as an information specialist.

"We deal with all the communication on the entire base," said Comfort.

"We make sure everyone has the correct communication they need to carry out their duty within the network."

He described a typical day in his life at Bagram — he goes to work from 4 p.m.-12 a.m.; shortly after work he runs three miles and does 80 sit-ups and 80 push-ups; during the day he attends his speech class for college credit and works on assignments— somewhere in there he grabs as much sleep as he can and takes as many opportunities as arise to make calls home.

Comfort said making time to complete college coursework while working full time in an unstable area requires dedication but is worth it to him.

"It's a sacrifice of your rest, but if you really want it you'll cut out maybe two hours of sleep until you achieve your goal," he said.

He's studying to earn a degree in computer information systems and hopes to make that line of work his lifetime career, whether it be in the military or as a civilian.

He said his day off—every Sunday—are generally spent catching up on sleep.

"Flexibility is what you have to learn while you're out here and you take advantage of your time off," he said.

Comfort interacts with Afghan locals on a daily basis.

"On a daily basis they support us as well as we support and encourage them," said Comfort.

"Everyone wants to be treated fairly; everybody's trying to make it home and everybody's trying to have a good day."

While the work is intense and the lifestyle on the base is very regimented, he said his work now requires more personal responsibility.

"I've never played a role in any of my deployments where the small amount of my work plays

See COMFORT, page 13



Courtesy Photo, International Security Assistance Forces

The Combined Joint Communications Team at International Security Assistance Forces' Headquarters in Kabul.

Saying Thanks Can Go a Long Way

Man, I stomped on my brain, I threw it up against the wall, I stretched it like silly putty and after an hour I finally came up with something to write my comrades in arms! You are away from home and many of you have someone back home who has done a yeoman's job taking care of things back home for you. For many of you that is your spouse.

One of the greatest things you can do to make your transition back home smoother (Like a vanilla milk shake!) is to **WRITE A LETTER OF THANKS**, outlining as many accomplishment and gifts of

love as comes to your mind. (I am using 'her' but realize it could very well be 'him' as well.)

Tell her thank you for caring for sick children or pets. Tell her thank you for waiting by the phone to ensure she received your call. Tell her thank you for filling up the vehicles gas tank and checking oil. Tell her thank you for hugging your children in your absence. Tell her thanks for putting up with the loneliness and yet continuing to accomplish all she does. Tell her thanks for cooking everything. Tell her thanks for doing the entire health care, to include docs, dentists, thera-

pists, and veterinarians completely by herself.

There is a gazillion more reasons to say thanks. Just write, thanks for being you! By doing this, your spouse/mom/dad/best friend will find their hearts lifted with joy and encouragement.

They will realize that you spent precious time away from your computer games and football to put them first. This in turn will probably bring a reciprocated thank you response! Blessings as you graciously give thanks. Oh, the joy of blessing others!

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Gary Williams

86TH ESB SOLDIERS AWARDED PURPLE HEARTS

On the evening of Jan. 19, 2011, multiple rockets struck Kandahar Airfield within minutes of each other.

One impacted the roof of a dining facility, crashing through the roof and injuring Soldiers inside.

One Soldier was killed, and 18 others were injured during the attack.

Those injured from the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion were: Army Sgt. 1st Class Juvenciano Soto who sustained shrapnel injuries to his right arm; Army Sgt. 1st Class Jose Zarate who sustained shrapnel injuries to his leg; Army Spc. Juan Jose Calderon who sustained burns; and Army Sgt. Maxanette Rose-Mendoza who was injured by the force of the explosion and sustained several lacerations.

Army Maj. Gen. Timothy P. McHale, deputy commanding general-support, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, awarded the Soldiers their Purple Hearts Feb. 27.



Courtesy Photo, 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion

Above, McAllen, Texas resident Sgt. 1st Class Jose Zarate, Dateland, Ariz. resident Army Sgt. 1st Class Juvenciano Soto, Houston, Texas native Army Sgt. Maxanette Rose-Mendoza and Phoenix, Ariz. native Army Spc. Juan Jose Calderon take a moment together after receiving their awards.

307th Soldiers Win Board



Photos by Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Above, Army Sgt. Brandon J. Smith, Bravo Company, 44th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, which falls under the command of the 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, accepts the title of Task Force Thunder's Noncommissioned Officer of the Quarter from Army Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Wilkerson, task force command sergeant major, after winning the board. Below, Army Pfc. Richard Wyce, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, accepts the title of Task Force Thunder's Soldier of the Quarter from Army Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Wilkerson, task force command sergeant major, after winning the board.



86TH EXPEDITIONARY SIGNAL BATTALION FEATURE:

God Led Me to the Army, It Put Me on the Right Path

By Army Capt. Michelle Lunato
359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

No one asks for stress and hard times in their life, but for one Soldier, he is deeply thankful for the darkest moments of his life. Without those bleak, hopeless days, he would not be on the path he is today.

About five years ago, Detroit, Mich. native Army Spc. Kendall Jackson, a chaplain's assistant with the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, said he was struggling with just about everything. He was in and out of jobs and health, fighting with his wife, having bad dreams and on the edge of a breakdown until he prayed to be cursed – “cursed with blessings.”

The blessings came, but Jackson didn't quite recognize them at first, he said. After Hurricane Ike, Jackson was laid off and out of work yet again. Desperate, Jackson said he started reading his Bible, looking for answers, but everything he read talked about fighting in the Army. While he was out looking for work “with everyone else,” a stranger approached him, touched his shoulder, and said, “Do what God has told you to do.” Jackson shook off this odd encounter. Then, after a loud, verbal fight with his wife, which was interrupted by investigating police, Jackson said the officer talked to him about the Army. The Army was coming at me from everywhere, said Jackson. “It was like He closed doors to squeeze me into this direction. I started to feel like I didn't have to go out and find the answer; it kept coming to me.”

Even at the recruiter's office, Jackson felt like he was pointed to a direction he had not considered. The recruiter and I discussed a lot of jobs with bonuses, and then he mentioned the chaplain's assistant job since I had mentioned God, said Jackson. It didn't offer a bonus, but, according to the recruiter, it had not been open for a couple of years, he said. “I kept thinking that I can't serve God AND money, so I chose the chaplain's assistant job.”

However, during his first year on duty,



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Army Spc. Kendall Jackson (then a Pfc.), a chaplain's assistant with the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, is stationed in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Jackson still wasn't sure he had made the right decision. “I kept thinking...I can't believe I am in the Army. I don't even like weapons.” And life was still difficult for him, his wife and their four children, who were about to be evicted out of their apartment. Before that happened though, the Army was his answer again, said Jackson. “The next thing I knew, I am getting blessed with all this stuff.” His unit and other military people heard about his crisis and helped his family with money, furniture and a vehicle. “They practically furnished my entire house. I couldn't believe this

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NETCOM Commander Visits Task Force Thunder



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Above, Army Lt. Col. Ivan Montanez, commander of the 25th Signal Battalion, discusses his team's accomplishments and challenges to the NETCOM commander and command sergeant major, Army Maj. Gen. Jennifer L. Napper and Command Sgt. Maj. Gerald W. Williams, during their visit to Bagram Airfield in February.



Above, CGI Federal contractor Mr. Frank Brown, Jr., a Defense Information Systems Agency service engineer at the 25th Signal Battalion, explains his team's mission to Army Maj. Gen. Jennifer L. Napper, NETCOM commander. Right, the NETCOM commander speaks to Army Sgt. 1st Class Hogan, a 25th Signal Battalion Soldier, about her team's role in the mission.





Left, Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brad Schafer, a Blue Coat engineer at the Joint NetOps Control Center, accepts a coin from the NETCOM commander, Army Maj. Gen. Jennifer L. Napper, for his contribution to the mission. Below, Army Capt. Dolores Bryant, commander of the 580th Signal Company, explains the building set up and company's role in the 25th Signal Battalion mission to the NETCOM commander and command sergeant major.

Right, Army Spc. James Crooks, mechanic for the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade, is acknowledged by the NETCOM command sergeant major.



Left, Army Spc. Longshore, a Soldier with the 820th Tactical Installation Network Signal Company, meets the NETCOM commander while working at the 25th Signal Battalion in Bagram.





Above right, Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Cynthia Thomas, enterprise system administrator, hands out clothes and hygiene items to an Afghan man at Bagram who was seeking day labor. Right, Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, task force public affairs officer, stops photographing and takes a moment to get a picture with a village elder during a mission with Special Forces troops.



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade



Special Operations Task Force Courtesy Photo

Left, Army Spc. Michael Cannon, task force chaplain's assistant, enjoys a conversation with some Afghan teens while visiting a local school with Special Forces Troops.



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

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must all be coordinated with another agency. Since Operation Care is NOT an official mission at Bagram, all of their actions must be in conjunction with another function, said another former Operation Care president Air Force Maj. Susan Kennedy, deputy commander for the 577th Expeditionary Prime Beef Squadron.

Volunteering to make a difference via Operation Care may not be an official mission, but it is what I will remember most about my deployment, said the organization's outgoing president Army Master Sgt. Carolyn A. Suazo, information assurance and computer network defense noncommissioned officer in charge at the 359th TTSB's JNCC. "It makes me feel like I'm contributing more to the [counter insurgency] operation, and the smiles and gratitude are just so heartwarming and humbling."

The impact that our servicemembers are making by volunteering is substantial, and that is why I support them in doing it, said Task Force Thunder commander, Army Col. Chris Kemp, 359th TTSB. "The desire to help is a weapon the Taliban doesn't have."

Fearing the Taliban doesn't stop the Afghan people from accepting the aid they need nonetheless, said an Afghan man who regularly seeks day labor at Bagram. "They will kill us no matter what... It is better to get the help, come get the stuff – so we can help

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COMFORT, continued from page 7

such an important role in the entire network,” said Comfort.

“I’ve never had a position like this where my hand was so important—if the smallest thing is not right then everything crumbles.”

Comfort never gets off the base but he said he can wake up every morning and see the snow-capped mountains that surround them.

“The scenery is beautiful on the outside of the base,” he said.

“Looking at the mountains when I wake up is enough for me.”

While he loves his work, he said he can’t wait to get home to Texas.

“There’s a lot of pollution here and living on base is very noisy,” he said.

“There are a lot of jets going by and it feels like they’re right over your head,” he said.

“You’re whole living environment rattles when they fly over.”

When he heads back to Texas on March 18, Comfort said he is looking forward to seeing his wife Tameka and six-year-old daughter Jakaya, who live in Killeen.

Comfort said he receives care packages from his family and friends in Bay City and loves to receive them.

“I deeply enjoy them on my late nights at work,” he said.

“I’ve definitely made them disappear.”

Redeployment Sometimes Leads to Isolation...

After deployment, you may find that you want to spend time alone. You might keep to yourself because it allows you to avoid situations that bring up painful feelings or memories.

It’s also natural to want some time to yourself. If you had an intense combat experience (like being injured or witnessing a death of a friend), it may be difficult to get close to other people right now. Or you may prefer to spend time only with “battle buddies,” avoiding friends who don’t share your deployment experiences. These are all normal and common feelings held by many servicemembers returning from deployment.

There’s nothing wrong with spending some time alone, but isolating yourself from others can become a bad habit.

If you continue to cut

yourself off from your friends, you won’t get the support you need and deserve. Avoiding people can actually increase those upsetting thoughts and feelings.

Strengthening Your Network

Returning servicemembers often think they have little in common with their family and friends back home. After such an intense, life-changing experience, you may think no one understands you. But connecting with others helps you:

- Improve mood.
- Find solutions to problems.
- Decrease boredom.
- Avoid harmful coping methods (like heavy drinking).
- Deal with painful thoughts and feelings.
- REALIZE you are not alone.
- Increase your network.

Tips For Beating Isolation

You may have to push yourself to spend time with others.

Remember that being around others is important for your well-being.

Be intentional. Plan to socialize with others.

Stick to your plan even when you’d rather be alone.

Spend time with people you trust, in places where you are comfortable.

Start with short outings, staying a little longer each time.

For more information, go to afterdeployment.org or www.seamlesstransition.va.gov.

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our families.”

Having this kind of impact on society, is exactly why other units team up with the Operation Care volunteers, said Army Lt. Col. Dan Godbee, surgeon for the Special Operations Task Force. “One of the biggest reasons you go out in an insurgency is to build good relations.”

On a number of Special Forces’ missions, Operation Care volunteers accompanied the SF troops to help distribute the donated clothes, shoes and food to Afghan people right in their villages. This kind of act does more than show the Afghan people that the United States wants to help, said Godbee. “It shows them that we are not just some country that is far away. We are real people, and we care.”

Yet, Afghanistan’s harsh terrain, combined with the volunteer status of the organization, makes it hard for Operation Care donations to make it to remote villages. This is where other units and countries help is critical, said Suazo. They go out to places that many of us have never even heard of, she said.

Unlike official humanitarian aid, there are not layers of paperwork to get Operation Care’s support, said Hossfeld. “We don’t care who (or where) you are. If you are in need, you can have

our stuff.”

This outreach is not only for the Afghan people though. Many of the collected donations are sent out as care packages to deployed servicemembers at remote bases. Some of our comrades are in pretty austere places, and we need to support them, said Operation Care volunteer Air Force Master Sgt. Lori Noble, a heavy equipment operator with the 577th EPBS. “We need to take care of our own folks who are out there on their own, and let them know we’re here to help them too.”

Between mailing off care packages, sorting shoes/clothes by sizes/sex, and organizing the actual events to distribute the generously donated supplies, this still doesn’t count as work, said volunteer Army Warrant Officer Wanda Washington, a network engineer at the 359th TTSB’s JNCC. “This is a stress reliever at the end of the day because you know you are doing something good for someone else.”

So whether the volunteers donate their time, effort and skills to relax, help other Nato forces or aid an Afghan family, it is all part of the war here, said volunteer Army Sgt. 1st Class John Hembree, a project manager with the Future Operations section of the 359th TTSB’s JNCC. “It’s not all about fighting. Operation Care shows others that there is another side to this war.”



Left, Afghan girls supervise their smaller siblings while their mothers are treated inside the Egyptian Field Hospital. Once the patients leave the hospital and base, Operation Care volunteers are able to give them humanitarian aid packages of clothes, shoes, food and hygiene items. Young Afghan girls are typically allowed to show their faces. Once they are older, most are typically covered.

Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

How to get involved:

Operation Care is always in need of volunteers, and you don't need to be in Bagram or in the military to do many of the tasks.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Market Operation Care by seeking donations
- Updating/maintaining organization web sites
- Mailing thank you notes to donors
- Designing the Operation Care newsletter
- Distributing donations (at your location/mission)
- Translating letters or at events
- Donating supplies
- Starting an Operation Care at your base
- Maintaining the volunteer and donor contact list
- Building/maintaining the operation care facility
- Organizing donation events
- Writing articles about volunteers and/or events
- Opening mail & sorting donations into prepped packages for specific events

If you are interested in helping, please contact: the incoming Operation Care public affairs officer, Army Spc. Jared Benes, a chaplain's assistant with the 25th Signal Battalion, at jared.a.benes@afghan.swa.army.mil, or the incoming Operation Care president, Army Staff Sgt. Robert Green with the 54th Engineers, at robert.green2@us.army.mil.



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Above, an Afghan girl waits patiently while Operation Care volunteers and Special Forces Troops hand out supplies of paper, pencils, glue and markers, all which were donations from the United States. Below, Army Lt. Col. Dan Godbee, surgeon for the Special Operations Task Force, patches up an Afghan girl's cut hand, which is covered in henna ink, during a visit to the school to distribute school supplies that came from Operation Care donors in the United States.



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

February 2011

Soldier's Deployment Brings Him Closer to Family

By Adam Folk
Augusta Chronicle

The electronic maintenance chief of the 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion spoke to a reporter February 17 via satellite from Kandahar, where he has been working for the past 10 months, repairing and maintaining communications equipment at the air base. The interview was organized by Operation Tribute to Freedom, an Army program that connects Soldiers with their local communities.

Trained at Fort Gordon and a student of Troy University, Zarate, a 16-year Army veteran who hails from Texas, described his tour of duty in Afghanistan as "fast-paced" and "busy."

"I'm responsible for the repair and maintenance of electronic equipment for the warfighter information network on the tactical side," he said. That network allows battlefield commanders to have Internet and phones so they can share information.

"It's very important that those assets are repaired in a timely manner, and that's where I come in," he said.

Zarate said he has been in little danger since he arrived. When his unit leaves the heavily protected Kandahar air base to work on equipment at a forward operating base somewhere else, they are under heavy guard, Zarate said.

He is proud of the work his unit has done -- fixing several hundred pieces of equipment -- and constructing a regional signal maintenance building. When he arrived in Afghanistan, there was



Courtesy Photo, 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion
Army Sgt. 1st Class Jose Zarate, was recently awarded the Purple Heart for injuries from a rocket attack.

nowhere for his unit to work out of, Zarate said.

"That's been one of the most rewarding experiences -- learning how to do construction work," he said. "Most of us are just electronic technicians."

Aside from work, Zarate said he has stayed in touch with family -- including his ex-wife and her 8-year-old son in Augusta.

His family has a history of military service. His grandfather served in World War II, and his father served in Vietnam. Zarate said he stays in contact with his father regularly.

"I try to call him as often as I can to just put his mind at ease," he said. "I know he worries a lot about me. Especially with the stuff he experienced with the Vietnam War."

REDEPLOYMENT ISSUES TO BE AWARE OF:

Just because you survived deployment, doesn't mean it is safe to:

High risk activity/behavior

- cut corners, be over confident or act like you are invincible

Transfer of habits (on/off duty)

- disregard speed limits and safety precautions with personal weapons and activities

Recreational safety of Soldiers & family members

- ignore hunting, fishing or camping guidelines
- seek out hazards and high-risk entertainment (locations, events/activities or establishments)

307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion Feature: Father, Son Deploy to Afghanistan Together

By Army Capt. Michelle Lunato
*359th Theater Tactical
Signal Brigade*

As thousands of Soldiers deploy to Afghanistan, thousands of family members are left in the states to bear the burden of that freedom.

Whether their deploying Soldier is a spouse, child or sibling, the demand on the family can be stressful. When both the husband and the son deploy together, the weight on that family is a lot higher, and more personal.

However, for the father and son who are deploying together, it is a completely opposite feeling of excitement and relief, said Coleman, Fla. resident Army Staff Sgt. Steven Kemper, a multi-channel transmission systems operator-maintainer with Alpha Company, 151st Expeditionary Signal Battalion, which falls under the 307th ESB's command in northern Afghanistan. "Knowing where [my son] is at is better than hearing things on the news."

For the Orlando, Fla. resident son, Army Spc. James Kemper, a parachute rigger with the 3rd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group, which is located at Bagram Airfield in central Afghanistan, having his dad around on deployment is a huge plus. "It is a great time to spend with just dad," said James. "It will make for good stories to tell the kids, and I kind of get to keep an eye on him."



Courtesy Photo, 307th Expeditionary Signal Battalion

Army Staff Sgt. Steven Kemper and Spc. James Kemper, father and son, hold up the flag that will be sent home to their wives when they were able to visit with each other in Afghanistan in January.

Though Steven and James, who are both part of the Florida National Guard, are not located at the same base in Afghanistan, they have found time to visit with each other when passing through each other's location on missions. In those short visits they got to know each other's jobs and comrades more, said Steven. "I like seeing where he is at, and most of the guys he is with."

When the deployment first appeared on the radar for the family, the father and son tried to deploy with the same unit. "I wanted him to come with us so I could protect him," said the Special Forces son. And, with a big smile and glance over at dad, he added, "You can always learn something from the old guys too."

Age doesn't stop a good Soldier from serving, said Ste-

ven. "I am as old as my equipment, and we are both going out." However, he admitted that he was ready to hang up the boots, but wanted to deploy with his son James. He's the reason I am still here, he said. "I would have retired already."

Knowing that her husband, Steven, could have been home enjoying retirement instead of living in the rough terrain of northern Afghanistan, has given Kimberly Kemper mixed feelings, she said. "I worry a bit... but, it's always nicer when my husband is with one of the boys. I feel that way, they are not so alone."

Kimberly's calm comes from experience. This is not the first time she has been through this situation. In 2008, Steven's first deployment crossed paths

See KEMPER, page 20

Video Valentines - *from your Soldier*

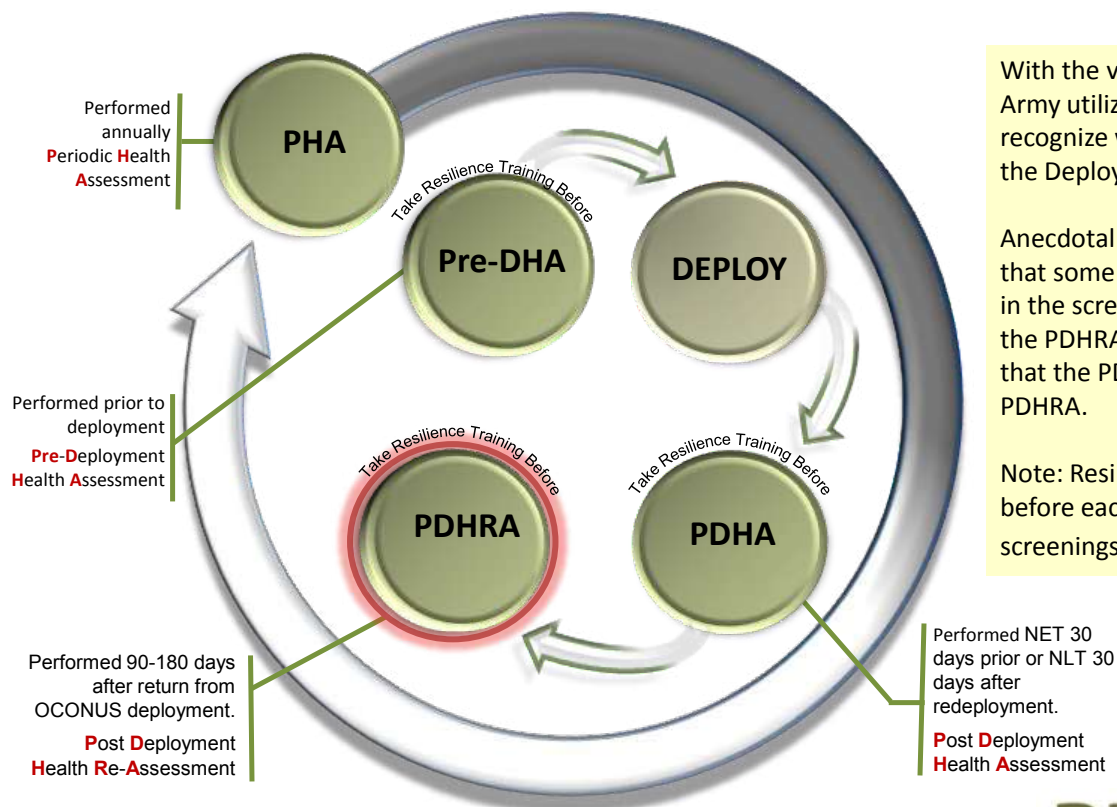


Left, Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 David Mauriello records a video Valentine's message for his wife, courtesy of Army Sgt. 1st Class Stephanie Widemond who is part of the Combined Joint Task Force 101 Public Affairs Team.

Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

LIFE
FAMILY
CAREER
FUTURE

Where Does PDHRA Fit in the Deployment Cycle?



With the various screenings the Army utilizes, it's important to recognize where the PDHRA fits in the Deployment Cycle.

Anecdotal information indicates that some fail to see the differences in the screenings, so they don't take the PDHRA under the assumption that the PDHA is the same as the PDHRA.

Note: Resilience training is taken before each of the health screenings.

Have you done your assessment? Go to AKO...

PDHRA
POST-DEPLOYMENT HEALTH REASSESSMENT

JACKSON, continued from page 9

was happening. No one gives people furniture and trucks, except Oprah,” laughed Jackson.

Now after only two years in the Army, the 31-year-old Fort Huachuca, Ariz. resident is serving on his first deployment in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and giving inspiration to other Soldiers. We all get overwhelmed by our problems at times, so I try to help others realize that there is hope, said Jackson. “I tell them to not get blinded by their struggles. It is only a season, and it will pass.” Of course, this is all easier said than done, but since Jackson has lived hard times, he said it allows him to speak with more conviction, letting other Soldiers know they can survive too. “Every experience, whether good or bad, builds character. And those experiences will either make you better or bitter.”

Nevertheless, all this experience overcoming adversity did not make leaving his family to come to a heavily-rocketed combat zone easy. But after a few months in country, Jackson said he realized there was not much point to worrying. “I don’t fear as much anymore, because I don’t feel like the Lord has brought me this far just to take me out in the desert. I feel like I am here to be a rock and foundation to other Soldiers.” And regardless of what your job and experiences

are, you just have to have faith sometimes, said Jackson. “We can be trained and ready, but how much can you fight against a mortar?”

Through all his experiences and military service, Jackson said there is still a lot to learn. “Wisdom doesn’t come with age. It comes from doing what is right.” He says this not only because of his history, but also because he sees a lot of connection between the Army values and the Old Testament. “Everybody can preach the values, but not everybody can live them.”

By trying to learn and live those values, Jackson said he has learned a lot about leadership. “Everything is a transition. Everyone is a follower and a leader, just at different times.”

By following God’s signs to join the Army, Jackson feels he is leading his family by serving time away from them. “It’s a sacrifice of time, because you are away from your loved ones and what you are used to. But, outside of that, it is NOT a sacrifice. We volunteered to serve. So, it is more like an offering.”

And through his gift of time and service, Jackson thinks the path that brought him to a combat zone will be the same path that gives him serenity.

“A lot of people see the Army as a door to war, but for me, it was a door to peace.”



Army Sgt. Maj. John Schiffli, the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade’s plans and operations sergeant major, engages in a little briefing banter with Army Maj. Gen. Timothy P. McHale, deputy commanding general-support, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, during his visit to Task Force Thunder in February.

Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

KEMPER, continued from page 17

with his other son's deployment as well. It may have been a different scene, Iraq, and a different son, Randy, but the benefits were all the same for the men.

Nevertheless, experience does not make the fact that both husband and son are both in a combat zone. "I really believe that the hardest job is truly the wife at home, but it goes by quickly and soon everyone will be home safely," said Kimberly.

James' wife, Kameron Kemper, agrees that being at home, on the waiting end, is not an easy task. "It gets really hard being both mom and dad, and being responsible for every choice made, but I know that he'd give anything to be home and help, so that's what keeps me going." With both husband and father-in-law's absence taking a toll on the family, there are still some good outcomes, said Kameron. "Even though I know they are not near each other, I feel like James having his father there, keeps him safe." The comfort the men are able to provide for each other makes having them both gone a bit easier to handle, said Kameron. "It makes it a little easier on him to be able to have someone so close to him who is going through the same things."

And with both of their husbands gone, the two women have had to rely on each other for support as well, said Kameron. "Kim is the one person close to me who actually gets what I'm going through."

With two completely different roles in the war, the father and son have had a chance to learn a little more about what the other does, and just how it all fits into the progress in Afghanistan. "I don't know too much about signal," said James, the parachute rigger. "But, our guys are sure glad they can talk to us. So, I'm sure glad I have my dad. He knows what he is doing."

As part of the signal task force that provides communication networks across the entire country, Steven knows how critical his mission is. "Without signal, no one goes anywhere."

Of course, the Special Forces Soldier has to give his dad a hard time once and a while, said Steven. "He still calls me a leg."

As a rigger, James is actually at the base more now than in his 2006 deployment; and he said he is okay with that. "I wanted to be a Fobbit



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Army Staff Sgt. Steven Kemper and Spc. James Kemper, father and son, visit with each other at Bagram Airfield.

(Forward Operating Base resident) now. I did all my cool guy stuff in Iraq."

Embracing his new-found Fobbit role is just fine for the Special Forces Soldier since he knows his job of rigging shipments of everything from food to tanks, is keeping his comrades in the fight. "If they are asking for it, then they NEED it," said James.

His experienced father nodded and agreed, "If you can't get the stuff, you can't fight."

And if there were no communication assets, we wouldn't even know what our Soldiers out there need, said James. "All and all, we are all in the same fight."

Kameron only hopes that the fight her family is so much a part of will not carry over to her and James' 4-year-old son, Tate, who they describe as a "future Soldier." "Having my husband gone is nearly unbearable. I couldn't imagine my baby being deployed... but if it happens, I think I would feel better about his father being deployed with him," just like Steven is there for James.



Army Capt. Michelle Lunato, 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade

Task Force Thunder's Brigade Judge Advocate Speaks at African American Heritage Ceremony
 ~ Army Lt. Col. Robert Drummer of the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade is interviewed by Combined Joint Task Force 101 Soldier journalists after his speech on some of the lesser-known contributors to the Civil Rights Movement and a variety of smaller historic battles.

Right, Alpha Company, 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, won the commander's cup in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The cup included a number of events over a few weeks.



Courtesy Photo, 86th Expeditionary Signal Battalion

Engineering & Installation ~ On the Job

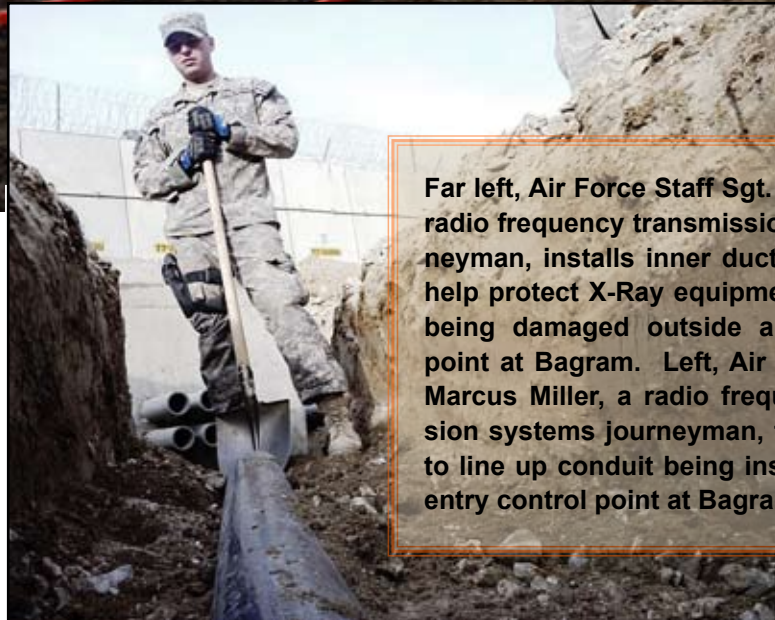


Right, Air Force Senior Airmen Bryant Laris and Derek Sams, both cable/antenna journeyman, pull off enough inner-duct for installation into an underground communication system. The inner-duct is used to protect Fiber Optic Cable from being damaged during installation.

Photos by Air Force Staff Sgt. Wendell Carpenter, 220th Engineering Installation Squadron



Far left, Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus Miller, a radio frequency transmission systems journeyman, installs inner duct into conduit to help protect X-Ray equipment cabling from being damaged outside an entry control point at Bagram. Left, Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus Miller, a radio frequency transmission systems journeyman, takes a moment to line up conduit being installed inside an entry control point at Bagram Airfield.



The Engineering & Installation team, which falls under the command of Task Force Thunder's Fusion Cell, is a critical part of the signal mission in Afghanistan.

While in country, the Airmen are commanded by the 359th Theater Tactical Signal Brigade. The original unit, the 220th Engineering Installation Squadron, is located in Zanesville, Ohio.

Look for an in-depth article on the E&I team's mission in a future issue...

Right, Air Force Senior Airman Bryant Laris, a cable/antenna journeyman, operates a trencher to dig up the ground and road outside an entry point for conduit to be installed.



Air Force Staff Sgt. Wendell Carpenter, 220th Engineering Installation Squadron




Air Force Staff Sgt. Wendell Carpenter, 220th Engineering Installation Squadron

Middle right, Air Force Tech. Sgt. Shawn Miskovich, an engineering installation team chief, uses his Gerber multitool to cut through 4-inch conduit while working on a project near Camp Warrior. Bottom right, Air Force Staff Sgt. Wendell Carpenter, engineering installation team chief, operates a front end loader/backhoe to dig a trench for an upcoming conduit installation.



Courtesy Photo, 220th Engineering Installation Squadron

A young girl with dark, wavy hair and a green shawl with gold sequins is holding a small white object. She is standing against a light-colored, textured wall. The image is used as a background for a quote.

“Kindness
is the
golden chain
by which
our world
is bond
together.”

~ Johann Wolfgang
von Goethe ~