

Making a Difference

Signal unit sends a message of hope to Iraqi schoolchildren.



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Supporting Troops

Birmingham church adopts aviation unit for the holidays.



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Well Being

New program collects feedback on Army programs.

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ALABAMA GUARDSMAN

Vol. 3, No. 4

A publication for the citizen-soldiers of Alabama

Fall 2004



**Alabama Guard
responds in time
of need**

Pgs. 10, 12 & 13

Air Guardsman deploys again and again and again....

**Story Contributed By:
187th Fighter Wing**

With contingency operations ongoing around the world, National Guard units are being mobilized and deployed at a never before seen rate. Both Army and Air Guard units are faced with the prospect of deploying overseas and the length and frequency of these deployments are completely different.

Typically, Army National Guard units are mobilized and deployed for 12 months at a time. Once they have completed the deployment they can expect to remain at home for two to three years. Air Guard units on the other hand deploy on the Air Force Aerospace Expeditionary Forces (AEF) rotation.

On the AEF rotation units deploy for approximately 50 days at a time every 20 months. This ensures that the Air Force has the appropriate forces to fulfill mission requirements around the world.

Master Sgt. Al Russell knows about the AEF process. In fact, he has logged a lot of active duty time in the last several years. His skills as a special purpose mechanic with the 187th Fighter Wing in Montgomery, have allowed him the opportunity to travel to various spots in the Middle East and contribute a great deal to the AEF process and the Global

War on Terrorism.

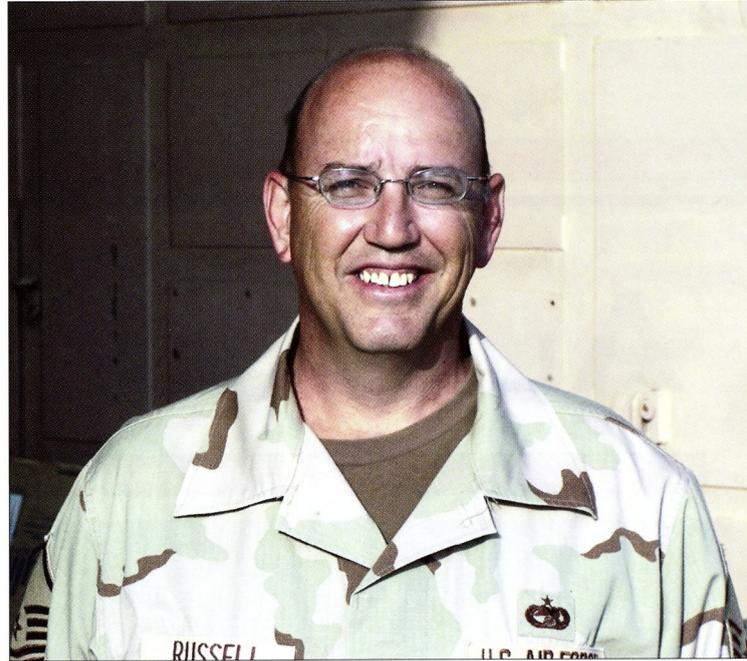
His first trip overseas was a deployment to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia for a 6-month rotation in 2001, where he worked on numerous Special Purpose vehicles. He was activated and mobilized to a classified location in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, before being moved forward to the United Arab Emirates where he served an additional 5 months working on a variety of vehicles.

Earlier this year, he volunteered for a 90 day tour at Balad, Air Base in Iraq where he served as the NCOIC of Vehicle Maintenance. In total, Russell has been deployed for 16 of the last 36 months.

According to Russell, sometimes but not always, he has to prove his worth to the active duty Air Force personnel, but when they learn of the capabilities of Guardsmen, they soon appreciate the variety of skills that they have.

These skills were evident on Russell's last deployment, when he was recognized as Senior NCO of the month for his squadron in July.

Russell displays the best of the best of the volunteer spirit in the Air National Guard. His experience also pays big dividends back home at Dannelly Field. Chief Master Sgt. Dot Roberts, Russell's supervisor, likes the experience and know



Contributed Photo

Master Sgt. Al Russell, a member of the 187th Fighter Wing in Montgomery, has spent nearly half of the past three years deployed overseas.

ledge he brings back when he returns home. "His skill set always improves when he completes another trip," Roberts said. "And his work just gets better and better."

Since Russell works as a full time technician at the 187th Maintenance shop, it sometimes presents challenges when he deploys but it also creates opportunities.

When he's deployed, the shop can bring in other individuals who can then learn new skills as a result of working full time as opposed to working part-time.

His volunteer spirit also helps lightens the load on the active force. Whenever a Guardsman takes an AEF tour, it frees up an active duty airman from being sent for a long tour.

His experience ends up being a win-win situation for his unit and the active duty Air Force.

ALABAMA GUARDSMAN

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On the Cover

An Alabama Guardsman helps distribute tarps at a shopping center in Mobile. Guardsman performed numerous missions after Hurricane Ivan including security, relief supply distribution and clean-up details. (Photo by Mike McCord)

ADJUTANT GENERAL



Cynthia Bachus/Photo

Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen, meets with members of the 167th Infantry Regiment, during operations following Hurricane Ivan. More than 1,800 Guardsmen from across the state were called to duty in the storms aftermath.

Thank you for a job well done



Maj. Gen. C.
Mark Bowen

First, I want to extend season's greetings to the entire Alabama National Guard family at this special time of the year. There is only one thing I would change and that would be that the brave

Alabama National Guard has been a relevant and viable partner in our nation's response to terrorist attacks. We have responded, nearly 9,000 strong, to our nation's call to arms.

There is another group of people who have done yeomen's work since 9-11. These are the people in our Family Readiness Groups across the state. To the spouses, children, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers and to countless volunteers, thank you for a great job. Our families have stuck together during some pretty trying times. Family members have worked tirelessly and supported each other when times got tough. To everyone active in Family Readiness circles, thank you for all you have done and continue to do.

Another group deserves a pat on the back for a great job — the nearly 1,800 Army and Air Guard members who responded to the call to state duty

after Hurricane Ivan. Each one responded quickly and professionally and did a job that was beyond reproach. I am still getting favorable comments from across the state on the performance of the Alabama Guard in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan. There were some delays in getting all our troops paid in a prompt manner, but we know where the problem was. Each individual payroll had to be figured manually and this took an extremely long time. To those who experienced delays, I apologize for the inconvenience. We are now working to streamline the process and convert from manual to automated payrolls in future state emergencies.

Finally, I want to say thank you to our Army Guard recruiters for their work in enlisting good, smart and ambitious young men and women. But, because of our inability to keep our members and the expertise they have accrued, we have continued to lose strength.

I am calling on everyone to take care of our soldiers and work through problems so we do not lose them. Because we have continued to lose strength, we are about to take a cut in authorized strength in the Alabama Army Guard during CY-2005. Some units will go out of our troop structure. We will still have a slot for everyone in the units that leave our troop structure and will keep them as close to home as possible.

I ask you to join with me as we work through this next challenge we face.

Our prime objective in these upcoming changes is that we always do what is best for the Alabama National Guard and its members. I am proud and honored to serve with each of you as a member of the best National Guard organization in the nation. Thank you for your service!

men and women who are currently deployed could be here for the holidays.

We live in a great country where we are free to do many things. Deployed Alabama Guard members are preserving those freedoms and I salute them. Since Sept. 11, 2001, the Ala-

State initiative supports Guardsmen and their families in time of need

Alabama Governor Bob Riley has launched a new initiative aimed at supporting military personnel and their families.

Operation Grateful Heart, the first program of its kind in the nation, aims to provide the highest level of assistance possible to military families during a deployment, as well as assisting in the transition back to a civilian role.

In addition, it will help organize citizens across the state to show their gratitude to the men and women serving overseas.

If you need to request assistance or would like to support deployed troops, contact the Grateful Heart hotline at 1-866-452-4944 or e-mail ogh@governor.state.al.us.

AAFES offers new ways to support our troops during the holidays

With the holiday season in full-swing, many people are looking for ways to support our troops.

Instead of clogging the military mail system with care packages, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) offers another option. "Gifts from the Homefront" allows anyone to make a direct contribution to the troops overseas.

Individuals, businesses and civic organizations can purchase gift certificates that allow troops to purchase items at any PX location worldwide. The certificates may also be personalized with a message to the troops and can be sent to "any service member" or to specific military members. Those wishing to send "Gifts from the Homefront" can log onto the AAFES website at www.aafes.com or call 1-877-

770-4438.

TRICARE benefits increased for Guardsmen

The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2005 improves significantly the overall health benefits available to Guardsmen and their families. It also makes permanent several TRICARE benefits that were previously listed as temporary.

For Guardsmen with delayed effective date orders to serve on active duty in support of a contingency operation for more than 30 days, the new legislation permanently authorizes TRICARE eligibility for up to 90 days prior to soldier's activation date.

It also makes permanent a 180-day transitional TRICARE health benefit after deactivation for transitional assistance management program (TAMP) eligible members.

Additional information on the new legislation, including start dates, benefits and requirements can be found at the TRICARE website <http://www.tricare.osd.mil> or the reserve affairs website <http://www.defenselink.mil/ra>.

Corporation offers business training to Alabama veterans

The Veterans Corporation, a non-profit organization, announced a new program that will help Alabama's 450,000 veterans and current Guardsmen gain access to the tools and skills needed to start their own business or expand a current one.

The VET program offers two specialized FastTrac courses developed by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Additionally graduates of the VET Program will receive a credit voucher that can

be redeemed at Gateway.

For more information call (256) 656-3930 or visit their website at www.VeteransCorp.org.

Chaplain's Closet Program needs support during winter months

When wounded and sick soldiers are air-lifted from Iraq and Afghanistan to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, they often arrive with only the uniform they have on or a hospital gown.

The Chaplain's Closet Program provides an initial issue of warm clothing to these soldiers. With the arrival of the winter months, clothing stocks have been depleted.

Lt. Col. (Ch) Bob Hicks, a chaplain with the 187th Fighter Wing assigned to LRMC, is seeking monetary donations to help restock their supply of clothing. To make a donation, please send checks to

USAEUR Chaplain's Fund
US Hospital
CMR 402
APO AE 09180

For more information on the program please contact Lt. Phillip Bailey (334) 714-2720 or Sharon Hubbert (334) 394-7119.

-Editor's Note: "News to Use" is compiled from various on-line reports. The appearance of this information does not constitute endorsement by the Alabama National Guard of the linked websites, or the information, products or services contained therein. The Alabama National Guard does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Civil Relief Act protects families during deployments

Contributed by: Family Readiness Program Office

MONTGOMERY - When a National Guardsman is called to active duty, his family is eligible for a myriad of new benefits, ranging from Tricare health benefits to federal and state tax relief. One of the more important benefits available that helps families and brings peace-of-mind to soldiers is the newly updated Service members Civil Relief Act (SCRA).

The Civil Relief act dates back to the Civil War, when Congress enacted an absolute moratorium on civil actions brought against Federal Soldiers and Sailors, various southern states also passed similar legislation. In subsequent years, what came to be known as the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act (SSCRA) was amended to best protect the financial obligations and legal rights of soldiers serving on active duty. Most recently, in November 2002, it was amended to better meet the demands of today's life-styles, in turn allowing service members to better concentrate on their missions without worrying about family members back home.

A key provision of the SCRA is it protects families from being evicted by a landlord while the soldier is activated. If you rent a house or an apartment and pay less than \$2,400 a month in rent, the landlord must obtain a court order authorizing eviction. This provision does not allow families to avoid paying the rent, but it does protect them when they cannot pay, because military service has affected their ability to do so. The SCRA also allows a service member who is leasing property to terminate the lease without incurring any penalties. This only applies to leases that were signed before the soldier is activated.

If you are a mortgage holder, or have other loans, including credit cards, prior to being activated, and the activation affects the families ability to make timely payments



Martin Dyson/photo

Under the new provisions of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, the maximum interest rate that companies can charge on store and credit cards is six percent.

on these loans, the SCRA can lower the maximum amount of interest charged on these loans to 6 percent for the duration of the service member's activation. It also reduces the monthly payment by the amount saved on the interest reduction. It also prevents the repayment of the excess interest once the soldier comes off orders.

This only applies to loans incurred prior to entering military service, it does not cover any loans or purchases made after a soldier is activated, and does not cover federally guaranteed student loans.

Automobiles or other items purchased on an installment plan are also protected under the SCRA. As with the loans, the items must be purchased prior to the soldier being activated and the military obligation affects their ability to make payment. In that case, the creditor is prohibited from terminating the contract or repossessing the property.

A service member who is either the plaintiff or the defendant in a civil lawsuit

can request a stay or postponement of a court proceeding in which they are involved, if their military duty prevents them from appearing in court. This applies only to civil lawsuits, paternity suits, child custody suits and bankruptcy hearings.

To get a complete rundown on the provisions of the SCRA visit <http://www.jagcnet.army.mil/legal> and click on Service members' Civil Relief Act. If you think that you have rights under the SCRA that may have been violated, or that you are entitled to be shielded from a legal proceeding or financial obligation by the SCRA protections, you should discuss the matter with a legal assistance attorney or a civilian lawyer as soon as possible.

If you have a question or concern for the Family Readiness Program Office, contact Sgt. Maj. Hubert Chance or Staff Sgt. Billie Ivey at 1-800-231-2846 or on the web at www.alguard.state.al.us

Alabama selected as test state for new initiative

by Taylor Barbaree
Staff Writer

MONTGOMERY - Alabama Guardsman and their families now have a program in place to aid them when a problem arises.

Alabama is one of three states chosen as a test state for the program entitled "Army National Guard Well-Being Initiative."

"This program is about taking care of soldiers and their families. This directly contributes to their readiness to perform our dual (state and federal) missions," explained Lt. Col. Chris Morgan, deputy of the Alabama Guard's Military Personnel Office. "Our soldiers and their families are our greatest resource."

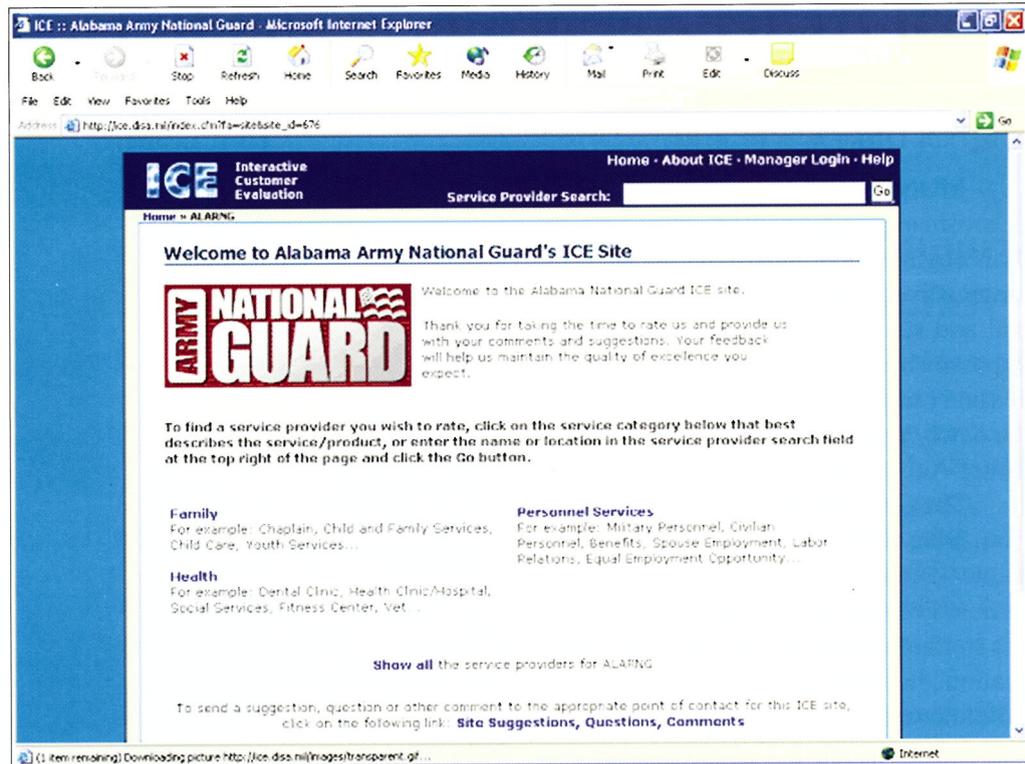
The Army Guard Well-Being Initiative closely mirrors the program started earlier by the Active-Duty Army. The two programs differ, with the available services to leave feedback about, each version is tailored to each component.

"The Well-Being Initiative, if you look at it from a business approach, is about customer service," he said. "The program allows our soldiers and their families to give feedback when they have job related or healthcare issues."

Morgan said the best way to do that is by logging on to a website known as ICE (Interactive Customer Evaluation System) through the following address: <<<http://alguard.state.al.us/wellbeing.htm>>>.

Once at the website, users can find these well being strategic functions: family readiness and family care plan; Health (Tricare/Tricare Dental); Personnel (ESGR, AAFES and Defense Commissary Agency).

While feedback via accessing the web site is key in recognizing and finding solutions to problems that Alabama Guardsmen are facing, the Well-Being Initiative is not a replacement for face-



The Interactive Customer Evaluation Site is the gateway for soldiers and family members to leave feedback on the different services that they have used. This gateway can be accessed via the Alabama National Guard website www.alguard.state.al.us and clicking on the "Community Well Being" link.

to-face interaction between a soldier and their first line supervisor.

"Communication is paramount to the success of this program," he said. "Soldiers need to understand that this initiative is centered around their well being. At the same time, first line supervisors need to continue doing those things to insure that their soldiers needs are met."

Morgan noted that the test phase of the Well Being Program Initiative would be in effect in Alabama until September 2005.

At that time the program will be evaluated to see if it has accomplished the four goals of the well being initiative:

(To Grow) Provide an environment of personal enrichment that allows soldiers, civilians, and their families to achieve their individual aspirations.

"This program is about taking care of soldiers and most importantly their families this directly contributes to their readiness to perform our dual (state and federal) missions,"

-Lt. Col. Chris Morgan

(To Connect) provide a unique culture, sense of community, and a record of accomplishment that engenders intense pride and sense of belonging among soldiers, civilians and their families.

(To Live) provide a competitive standard of living for all soldiers, civilians and their families.

(To Serve) provide an opportunity for service and a meaningful personal development in a disciplined environment.

Signal unit making good things happen in Iraq

Editor's Note- This story is a first person account of the 711th Signal Battalion's local school adoption program

by **DANA COX**
HHC, 711 Signal Bn

CAMP ALPHA, IRAQ - When you think of an elementary school classroom you imagine brightly painted walls, motivational bulletin boards and colorful book bags hanging on hooks. Hallways are decorated with pictures of flowers in the spring, Christmas trees during the Holidays and self portraits painted with watercolors. That isn't even close to the schools in Iraq. There are no construction paper creations on the walls and most children don't even have book bags. But "Team 711" is trying to change that for a couple of schools in the villages outside Camp Alpha.

We began our "Adopt a School Project" by writing and calling home to family members, coworkers at our civilian jobs, and friends requesting school supplies for these schools. Soon supplies began arriving from all over Alabama. Big boxes of crayons, markers, scissors, paper, pencils and glue were sent from family members, National Guard Family Support Groups, colleges, churches and businesses. The thought and care that had been put into the boxes were obvious when we opened them and began to sort the supplies. Team 711 then contacted a translator in the area and asked him to escort us to the nearby schools. The school were contacted, a convoy put together and Team 711 headed out. When we pulled up to the front gate of the school with two trailers full of supplies, the children and teachers were anxiously waiting.

The first school we visited had a big gate in front of the school which was the only entrance/exit to the school and the gate was locked. A little girl in a pink dress with a small boy at her side was looking through the bars of the gate. She had been put there as a look out for us. When she saw us she ran to tell the head mistress of this school that we were there. We



Contributed/photo

Sgt Cheryl Williams, a member of HHC 711th Signal Battalion, hands out school supplies and candy during one of the "Team 711" schoolhouse visits.

pulled in and began to unload the trailers while the head mistress opened the gate for us. When all the supplies were brought in, we began sorting the supplies and heading to the classrooms. Each class consisted of approximately 15 to 25 girls. The thing that hit us first was that these classrooms had no heating or cooling. In fact, the classrooms are no more than four bare cement walls with a window to open for an occasional breeze. The teachers didn't even have a desk in the rooms. Some rooms had one small piece of chalk at the chalkboard and a little rag that served as an eraser.

The first school was for girls only. These girls were very quiet and reserved but a few giggles and the look in their eyes when they received the supplies we were giving out let us know that they not only appreciated our gifts but that they were very excited. Things that our children take for granted are treasures to the children here. A box of 64 Crayola Crayons, a pair of scissors and a bottle of glue are more than most of these children have ever owned. Each girl was given a new backpack to put her supplies in along with some

candy, and hygiene items such as combs, toothpaste, and a toothbrush. Some of these girls couldn't speak English but the "Thank you" was obvious by the nod of their head or smile on their faces. One of the classrooms at this school was taught by a teacher that speaks fluent English and she welcomed us into her classroom with a warm smile and asked if her class could question us while we gave out supplies. Before we finished in this class we had pulled out pictures of our children and were telling them about our families and taking pictures with the students. The teacher thanked us many times for the two boxes of chalk and chalkboard eraser we gave her.

The second school we went to that day was full of young boys that were also excited about our arrival. This group was very different from the girls. The boys were far more vocal and expressed their excitement by reaching into the aisle as we gave out

supplies with their hands out often asking for one more pencil or a piece of candy. The headmaster of this school was a white haired elderly Iraqi man with a cane. He sat outside the classrooms in a straight back chair while we gave out supplies. Beside him were boxes of the school supplies that we had brought in. As a couple of soldiers walked by he stopped them to question them about a large cardboard box full of glue and glue sticks. He was not quiet sure what the glue was for and how the children should use it. The soldiers explained glue and glue sticks to him and he quickly ask if he could have two bottles of glue for himself.

After seeing the reaction to the supplies, HHC decided to organize the school supplies and put together backpacks full of supplies, candy, toys and hygiene items for the next trip. For the teachers, we put together backpacks full of staplers, scissors, chalk, erasers, pencils, pens and hygiene items along with hand lotion and soap. After four days of putting these bags (Please see *Team 711*, page 11)

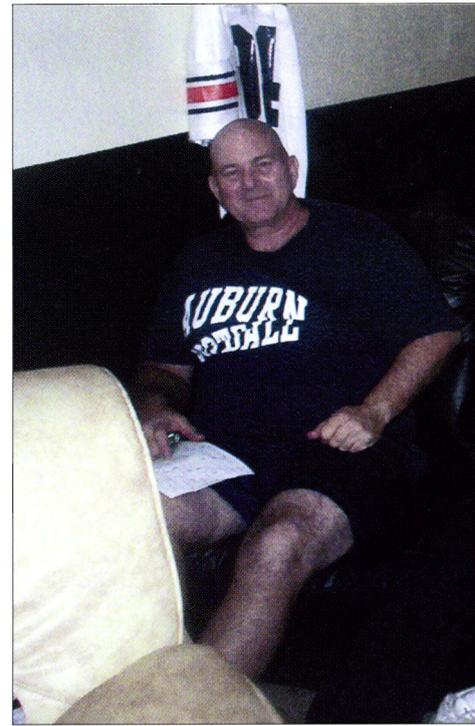
Snapshots

A look back at some of the recent highlights in the Alabama National Guard.



Britt Smith/photo

Members of the Alabama National Guard unfurl a giant American flag during pre-race ceremonies for the EA Sports 500 NASCAR race at the Talladega SuperSpeedway. More than 300 Guardsmen were honored before the race for their contributions to America's Global War on Terrorism.

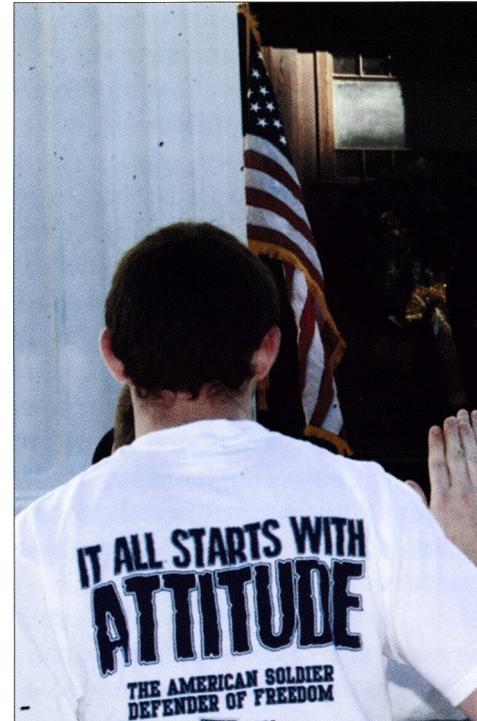


Despite an early morning kickoff, the die-1 Battalion made sure they didn't miss a second. Maj. Billy Lee, Spc. Jennifer Dennis (middle) enjoy the action at Forward Operating Base.



Les Walters/photo

Lt. Col. Randall Martin (center facing) prepares to pass command of the 877th Engineer Battalion to Lt. Col. Marcus Hughes, during a December ceremony in Hamilton. The unit returned home earlier this year, from a deployment to Iraq.



The newest members of the Alabama National Guard are welcomed during a ceremony on the steps of the White House honoring the 368th Birthday of the Nation.



Coylene Reed/photo

burn and Alabama fans of the 231st M.P. the action. Sgt. Randy Byrd (left), Command Sgt. Cpt. James Lake (rear left) and Spc. Jeff Buck, son in Baghdad, Iraq.



Martin Dyson/photo

Col. James (Greg) Champion has his new rank of Brigadier General pinned on his uniform by his wife Gale and Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen, adjutant general of Alabama. With his promotion Champion will leave the Alabama Guard and serve on active duty as the deputy commanding general for operations and intelligence with the Combined Joint Task Force-76 at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. Champion previously served as the deputy chief of staff for information management at the Joint Force Headquarters, Alabama National Guard, in Montgomery.



Martin Dyson/photo

Guard are ceremoniously sworn by Governor Bob Capital. The ceremony was part of a celebration rd.



Martin Dyson/photo

Governor Bob Riley (right) presents the Alabama Special Service Award to Col. Jeffrey Kinard, Commander, 226th Area Support Group, for service during Hurricane Ivan, during a ceremony at the State Capital. Kinard represented the more than 1,800 Guardsmen who were called to state duty in the storm's aftermath.

Guard answers state call after Hurricane Ivan

by Taylor Barbaree
Staff Writer

MOBILE- Alabamians affected by Hurricane Ivan got a shot in the arm almost immediately after the monstrous natural disaster left town when more than a thousand citizen-soldiers responded to help.

“As a Guardsman, I just feel like it is my duty to be here to assist in any way that I can,” said Master Sgt. David Swann, summing up his feelings of volunteering for state active duty to assist during the aftermath of the hurricane, that hit Alabama and the Florida Gulf Coast communities in mid September. Swann, of Birmingham is a member of the Mobile based 226th Area Support Group (ASG) which served as the Task Force Headquarters for the area. The Task Force was part of a 1,800 Guard contingent during a three-week period in the months of September-October. The recently refurbished Fort Whiting Armory, home of the 226th ASG and located adjacent to Mobile Bay, served as the Joint Task Force Command Headquarters during the Guard’s involvement in assisting FEMA and local emergency management agencies.

“The work that our soldiers are doing is tireless, critical and vital,” noted 226th ASG commander, Col. Jeff Kinard, who along with Birmingham’s 167th Theater Support Command’s Col. Joe Harkey, su-



Cynthia Bachus/photo

Members of B company, 167th (Mech) Infantry from Pelham, conduct dismounted security patrols in the Gulf Shores area. The unit conducted patrols continuously for two weeks after Hurricane Ivan hit Alabama.

pervised the Guard’s effort in the storm’s aftermath.

“This is (day number two) and we are operating 40 distribution sites in Baldwin, Clark, Conecuh, Escambia, Mobile, Monroe, Washington and Wilcox counties,” Harkey said.

“At those distribution sites we are providing water, ice and MRE’s to those hit hardest by the storm.”

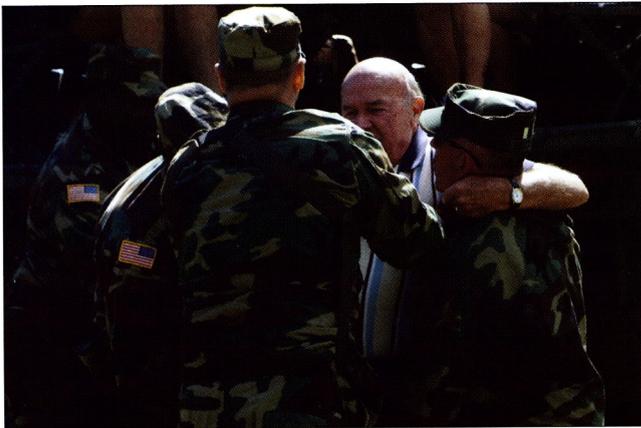
Foley, a municipality with an estimated population of 6,000 residents, was an example of Ivan’s punch. Numerous Guardsmen worked side-by-side with city and county police at major intersections directing traffic because of power outages. Additionally, Guardsmen along with other volunteers worked feverishly in 80-plus degree temperatures at a distribution site located at the well-known Tanger Retail Outlet Mall.

“It’s a great feeling to know that you are helping out people who really need it,” said Pfc. Eric Broxson, a member of Ozark’s HHC, 1st Battalion, 131st Armor who loaded ice into motorists’ vehicles. “I bet we have (disbursed) about 1,000 pounds of ice this morning to residents and that makes being away from my normal everyday life worth being here.”

Foley Volunteer Fire/Rescue member Stacy Lay said having the Guard presence in Baldwin County is essential.

“This distribution site wouldn’t function as well if the Alabama Guard were not here,” Lay said. “These men and women are working hard and I just want them to know that I appreciate their sacrifices for being here.”

Lena Dade, also a Baldwin County resident, was also complimentary with the Guard’s involvement as she piloted her family’s SUV through the drive-in distribution point in Gulf Shores. “My family appreciates them being here. It is a comfort to know that they are here to help.”



Cynthia Bachus/photo

A resident of Gulf Shores is helped out of a five-ton truck, after viewing storm damaged areas.

Taking the mystery out of enlisted promotions

by Taylor Barbaree
Staff Writer

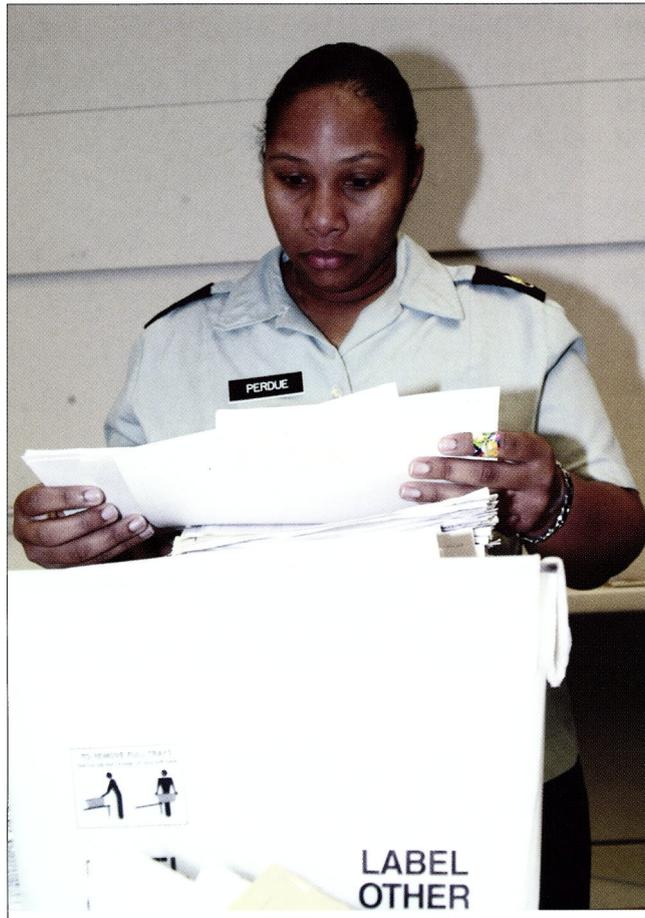
Many of Alabama's enlisted Guard soldiers may not realize the bearing that one military acronym commonly referred to as EPPS may have on their military career life. It is something that the Military Personnel Office is working hard to change.

"Most soldiers in the Alabama Guard don't realize the impact that EPPS (Enlisted Personnel Promotion System) has in regards to a (enlisted) promotion for that individual," explained Master Sgt. Ronnie Seay, EPPS Coordinator in the Alabama National Guard's Military Personnel Office.

"We, especially unit administrators down thru the chain of command, need to better inform and communicate to our soldiers about EPPS." According to Seay, EPPS is the National Guard's way of keeping track of the most up-to-date information about a soldier, while at the same time insuring that promotions are done fairly.

While EPPS may seem complicated to understand, the system in place is basically as easy as disassembling and assembling an M-16 A2 rifle.

The process begins each year as Alabama Guardsmen, usually during drill, are presented with a promotion point worksheet. Seay said it is critical that a soldier carefully review, the information listed on the document. Once the soldier has examined the worksheet and has indeed found a mistake, then it is the



Taylor Barbaree/photo

Staff Sgt. Lisa Purdue an administrative NCO in the enlisted personnel promotions section, sorts through promotion packets. Every packet is double-checked for accuracy before going to the promotion board.

individual's responsibility, with assistance from unit personnel NCOs, to attach documentation to support the necessary changes.

"A promotion point worksheet is in essence the responsibility of the soldier," he said. "Once the worksheet is complete and the soldier signs

and dates the document, the individual's name goes into the EPPS database and is pooled with other Guardsmen from across the state."

Seay noted that once a vacancy slot in a unit occurs, then the unit must file a notice of request to fill (the vacancy). Once a request to fill has been completed MILPO then looks at the EPPS list.

"From that point, the soldier that is ranked highest on the list if not flagged for any reason is selected for promotion."

Seay again noticed that there are many steps involved in reviewing a promotion worksheet, but again reiterated that most mistakes found on the document deal with outdated information such as a soldier's civilian and military education, APFT Score, military decorations and awards, and administrative data.

"It is important that a soldier examines personnel system, awards and training and education data on the worksheet," he said. "Once that is completed the soldier must choose or choose not to be considered for military education and promotion.

The unit must then consolidate all worksheets and submit to the EPPS office before the published suspense date," Seay said. "Really, the process is not designed to be difficult for the soldier. The problem that MILPO has been finding, is that soldiers don't really understand just how important the EPPS process can be to their career. Hopefully, unit leaders and the chain-of-command can better communicate the importance of EPPS."

(TEAM 711, continued from page 7)

we left out at midday to another girl's school. When we arrived and began giving out the supplies, it seemed the teachers were as excited as the children about their bags. By organizing the supplies, we were able to give each child the same supplies and they each received a backpack as well. In addition to giving the teacher supplies for herself, we gave her more supplies for the children.

These trips serve a dual purpose. They

not only help the schools and children, but they also help keep the morale of the troops up.

I know that it is an amazing feeling to help others that are in such need and are so appreciative. It makes us realize how fortunate we are as well as reminding us that as American Soldiers, we are making a difference in Iraq. Although we were the ones to give out these much needed supplies, the family and friends back home that sent these supplies made it pos-

sible. One of the many benefits of being a National Guard soldier is the fact that we have such a tight tie into the civilian community back home. And this tie was a very valuable asset for our "Adopt a School Project". The civilian community of Alabama made it possible for Team 711 to show the everyday citizen of the Iraqi Community that we are more than soldiers occupying their country, we are sincerely here to help them live a better life in a free society.

SF soldiers tackle unique mission after Hurricane Ivan

-Editors Note: Due to security concerns, members of the 20th Special Forces Group, will be referred to by rank and first name only.

by Master Sgt. Gary
20th Special Forces Group

ORANGE BEACH - Utilizing night vision goggles and other high-tech equipment, Army Special Forces soldiers conducted nighttime security patrols in Zodiac inflatable boats along the interior coastal areas of Orange Beach to deter looting and theft after Hurricane Ivan.

The soldiers formed a special bond with the residents of Ono Island where they set up a temporary base to launch their patrols. The island, a private residential community along the Alabama-Florida border, provided housing for the troops at its community center. This arrangement worked well for the soldiers because adequate housing was scarce in the area after the storm and the community center was less than a block away from a boat ramp where they launched their Zodiacs daily.

Armed with M4 carbines and outfitted in long-sleeved camouflage uniforms and life vests, the soldiers patrolled the backwaters of Ono Island as well as Cotton Bayou, Bay La Launch, the entrance to Perdido Pass and other areas around Perdido Bay. All are members of the 20th Special Forces Group of the Alabama National Guard, and many are veterans of the war in Afghanistan.

The 27-member contingent spent a week in Orange Beach to provide post-disaster assistance. All of the men had volunteered for hurricane duty, and finally received the call to report to Orange Beach on Sept. 23, a week after the storm hit. Orange Beach Mayor Steve Russo and Police Chief Robert Vinson requested help with marine patrols of the area, and the 20th Special Forces Group had the capability to handle the mission.

Because of the Special Forces frontline involvement in the war on terror-



Steve Perry /photos

(Above) Sgt. 1st Class Jeff pilots a Zodiac inflatable boat on patrol in the coastal Alabama area. The soldiers of the 20th Special Forces Group conducted these patrols in the weeks after Hurricane Ivan to deter looting and theft in storm damaged areas.



(Left) A Zodiac boat crew pulls ashore after practicing capsizing drills in preparation for maritime patrols after the hurricane.

ism and the sensitive nature of their work, the soldiers are customarily only identified by first name in the press. The group of soldiers who came to help identified themselves as Task Force Alpha because they were drawn from several different units with the 20th Special Forces Group.

"I think the mission went very well," said Sgt. 1st Class Rich, the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge. "We met with [Chief Vinson] about the community's needs and he said they really needed security coverage at night on the water, which is one of our specialties."

Each Special Forces soldier is parachute qualified, and many have addi-

tional specialties such as combat diver and military free-fall. Boat operations is another skill familiar to every SF soldier.

On their first day on the coast, the soldiers practiced capsizing drills by overturning the boats and then righting them. This exercise prepares them for surviving an accident and continuing the mission.

"We did mostly night operations from 1800-0600, but we also pulled daytime patrols as well," said Sgt. 1st Class Rob. "We probably had the boats in the water at least 18 hours a day."

The soldiers' stealthy marine patrols probably kept several would-be criminals from taking advantage of the situation.

“We reported some people we saw on shore who looked suspicious, but mainly I think we acted as a deterrent,” said SFC Rich. In working closely with the Alabama Marine Police and the Orange Beach Police marine unit, “we helped identify hazards and catalogued the type and location of boats stranded, unattended or submerged,” he added.

One of the Special Forces-qualified soldiers who was trained in demolition got a chance to put his skills to the test. He was called to a waterfront area where a small aerial bomb had been uncovered by the storm.

Staff Sgt. Chris said he carefully examined the bomb and found it to be a practice bomb. He found out that Navy aircraft used to drop the dummy bombs on then-uninhabited Ono Island for practice during World War II.

During the war in Afghanistan, the 20th Special Forces soldiers who served on “A Teams” worked with local militia leaders and the populace to track down remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

One of the unique qualities of SF soldiers is their ability to build rapport with the local populace and operate virtually independently.

Building rapport with the residents of Ono Island proved a simple task. Many of the houses on the island suffered significant damage from the hurricane and faced a monumental cleanup tasks.

Despite their hardship and losses, residents of the island welcomed the soldiers with open arms.

“It was just amazing that in their time of need, how well they responded to our presence,” said Maj. Steve, the Officer in Charge (OIC). “We didn’t lack for anything.”

He said so many Ono residents came by to bring food and ask if they needed anything, they ended up organizing the effort. Ono Island Men’s Club President Randy Smith and Women’s Club President Norma Hoots set up schedules for evening meals cooked for the soldiers by Ono residents.

The meals earned high marks from

the men who would have ordinarily subsisted mainly on prepackaged MREs (Meals Ready to Eat).

“These guys have been exceptional and the food has been great,” commented Spc. Brian as he munched on a plate of Mexican food. He ran the unit’s fuel truck and also served on one of the boat teams.

“After all they have been through, they have responded with incredible warmth,” said Sgt. 1st Class Rich. “It just drives us, motivates us and makes us want to do more.”

Ben Pellegrini, a member of the Ono Island Property Owners Association and a retired Army general, said the residents were grateful to the troopers not only for their hurricane assistance but also for their military and wartime service. He spoke to a gathering of soldiers and residents at a farewell dinner for the group.

“Our nation’s very survival depends on people like you who are willing to wear the uniform and go into harm’s way,” Pellegrini said. “We salute you.”

As the waterways were opened back up and the need for the maritime patrols decreased, the soldiers returned to 20th Special Forces Group headquarters in Bir-

mingham to conduct post-mission maintenance. After a few days of recovery, they returned to their homes in such places as Madison, Gordo, Decatur and Auburn, even as far away as Augusta, Georgia.

And the commander’s After-Action Report?

“I feel that we got an incredible amount of training out of it,” said Maj. Steve. “We actually got to use the boats in a live environment, a dangerous environment, and did it safely.”

We conducted 21 different missions and 21 mission briefs. The younger soldiers got a lot of training in mission planning and even presented some mission briefs themselves with senior NCO guidance.

“We had fantastic support all around: from the Marine Police, Orange Beach Police, all of the residents. I’m pleased 100 percent all-around.”

The Ono residents echoed mutual admiration.

“They were a great bunch of guys. They made us feel safer,” said Beth Gordon. “They spent some time showing my kids some of their equipment and the boats. Of course, they were thrilled.”



Steve Perry /photos

Staff Sgt. Chris examines unexploded ordinance found on Ono Island after Hurricane Ivan. The UXO turned out to be a dummy bomb left over from World War Two.

Church adopts aviation company in Afghanistan



Contributed/photo

Sgt. Anthony Brown, a member of Company F, 131st Aviation, picks up his care packages from the numerous packages sent to the unit by the Trussville Baptist Church.

by Norman Arnold
Contributing Editor

BIRMINGHAM - "It started out small, began to snowball and then just exploded." These were the words of Dr. Gary Hollingsworth, Senior Pastor of 1st Baptist Church in Trussville, while referring to a project that was part of a summer reading initiative for boys and girls at his church.

To encourage the children to read during the past summer, church librarian Connie Horsely came up with a plan whereby the youngsters got pledges for each book they read. Horsely said the money raised would then be used to prepare goodie bags for deployed Alabama service members.

"Something kept nagging me that we needed to do something as a church for these men and women," Horsely said. "We do not have any church members deployed, but I still wanted us to do something." An Alabama Army Guard unit from Birmingham, Company F, 131st Aviation, was selected as the recipient of the first shipment of goodies.

She said after the reading initiative

started, other church members came to her and wanted to be a part of the program. "We decided to give the whole church a chance to participate and it went on from there and spread into the community," Horsely said.

Horsely said support came for all walks of life and noted that one stood out in her mind. Jessie's Place, a home for battered and abused women in the Birmingham area, helped with the project.

The end result of the initial effort was 211 boxes, one for each member of Company F. The boxes contained toiletry items for both males and females along with blank CDs for photos and other items. The boxes also contained small toys that the soldiers could give to the children in an orphanage near their base.

Church members assisted in packing and preparing boxes for shipping. A program was held to celebrate completion of the reading initiative. Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen, adjutant general of Alabama, spoke to those at the program and watched as final preparations were made to ship the

(Please see Church, page 15)

Support for soldiers a statewide effort

by Norman Arnold
Contributing Editor

Alabamians across the state have responded in many ways to support deployed soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines. Below are a few more examples of a citizenry helping to take care of its own.

In Birmingham, the Church at Brook Hill continues its M2M project. Missions to the Military is a group of church members who take part in the long-term ministry to deployed service members and their families.

M2M has provided support to Company F on several occasions. They have also supported Marines from the Bessemer area who are in the 4th Battalion, 14th Marines. Maj. Johnny Bass, F Company commander, is a member of the Church at Brook Hill and his wife, Cyndi, has been active in the M2M ministry.

In Anniston, Theresa Shadrix works with the Calhoun County Baptist Association. Almost single handedly, she got nearly 2,000 deployed Alabama Army Guard members "adopted" by individuals from the area. She even got on the Rick and Bubba Show to help her cause.

Jewel Bearden runs a Family Readiness Center in Homewood. He told of a young deployed Alabama Army Guard soldier with a wife and three kids, who lost their home in a fire.

Within hours after the disaster, Bearden has arranged for a large Birmingham law firm to adopt the family. Bearden also has worked extensively with deployed Marines and their families.

In Huntsville, the AUSA has contributed phone cards for soldiers and tickets to plays and other activities for family members.

The Huntsville Symphony and Ballet presented The Nutcracker for military family members, while the Veteran's Coalition of North Alabama gave out more than *(Please see Support, page 15)*

(DEPLOYMENT, continued from page 16)

overseas in the Global War on Terrorism.

The 1993rd Personnel Services Detachment in Hope Hull, no stranger to the deployment process, after being mobilized but not deployed in 2003, was alerted and mobilized in October.

Once in country the unit will process personnel information for incoming and outgoing soldiers, as well as providing personnel support to unit commanders.

Also getting the call in October was the 128th Medical Company in Ashland. A ground evacuation unit, the 128th uses the high-mobility multipur-

pose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) ambulance to move patients within the theater of operations. The 128th joins the 161st Area Support Medical Battalion as the only medical units from Alabama to be deployed to Iraq.

The latest unit to be called up is 1st Battalion, 167th Infantry (Mech) Regiment. A group of approximately 135 soldiers from all units of the battalion will be designated as Company A, 131st Infantry of Valley. The unit will provide support to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

For many of these soldiers it will be their second extended tour of duty

in the past three years. Most members of the battalion spent a year on active duty in 2002-03 supporting Operation Noble Eagle.

Since President Bush declared a national emergency following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, some 9,000 Alabama Army and Air National Guardsmen have been called to active duty in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle.

This represents one of the largest commitments to the GWOT of any National Guard force in the country.

(CHURCH, continued from page 14)

boxes.

Ironically, some two weeks later, Bowen was in Afghanistan visiting with Company F when the boxes arrived. "It was gratifying to me to see the packages leaving Alabama and then to be in Afghanistan when they arrived there. I'll never forget the smiles on their faces."

The success of the program encouraged Horsely and her library associates. In the fall, they launched another effort for the soldiers.

"This time our goal was to get 5,000 Christmas cards and divide those cards up in individual goodie boxes for each soldier," Horsely said. "Some of the soldiers had responded to us and we wanted to keep them in our thoughts and prayers."

"We got first names of all unit members and gave them out for personalizing the cards. We also ran out

of empty goodie boxes to pass out on the first day and had to get more. Instead of 5,000 cards or about 25 cards per soldier, we ended up with 14,000 signed Christmas cards or about 70 cards per soldier. We shipped 435 boxes, so each soldier ended up getting two boxes instead of one."

Each decorated box contained non-perishable food items and a disposable camera, along with other items.

One large box of handmade Christmas decorations was forwarded to the unit. Horsely said the two shipments of boxes to Afghanistan have cost some \$5,200, but the full amount had been donated by members of the church.

"What we are looking forward to now is when they come home and we can have a Welcome Home Celebration for the unit," Horsely concluded.

(SUPPORT, continued from page 14)

1,000 Blue Star Service Banners to those who had a family member deployed.

Moms on a Mission, led by Karen Koenders, in Athens has provided care packages for soldiers and assisted in numerous other projects. In the Mobile area, Volunteers of America worked with Family Groups to support deployed service members and their families. In an ongoing project, the Montgomery Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America provides international calling cards for shipment to Alabama Guard members.

These are just a sampling of thousands of actions that support Alabama members of the military. "I am very thankful for the aid that caring citizens of our state provide for our service members and their families. It means a lot to the service members when they know they are being remembered and that their family members are being care for," said Maj. Gen. Mark Bowen, the adjutant general of Alabama.

Call for Submissions

The 131st Mobile Public Affairs Detachment invites all citizen-soldiers to submit their articles and photographs for possible publication in the Alabama Guardsman. We're looking for interesting stories from throughout the state and from around the world, involving training, historical milestones, accomplishments and compelling features on our soldiers. Stories should be formatted in Microsoft Word. All photographs should be high resolution and include complete outline information. Articles should be no longer than three pages double-spaced and are subject to editorial control.

Mail your submissions to Alabama Guardsman, Attention Editor, PO Box 3711, Montgomery, AL 36109 or e-mail them to jamie.brown@al.ngb.army.mil

Alabama leads the way in the War on Terrorism

by Martin Dyson
Editor

"We're very proud of you men and women, we're proud that you serve in our armed forces and the Alabama National Guard." Words similar to these, spoken by Dallas County Probate Judge Johnny Jones Jr. during the deployment ceremony for the 122nd Corps Support Group in Selma, were repeated at armories across Alabama during the final months of 2004, as units prepared for rotations in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

The 120 soldiers that make up the 122nd will play a vital role in the support chain for units in Iraq. "As a headquarters unit, we will manage the units that provide life support, base security and convoy security," Lt. Col. John Cresswell, deputy commander of the 122nd said. "Once we're setup and in place, we'll be responsible for an area that covers a quarter to a third of Iraq."

Unlike units that deployed during the early stages of Iraqi Freedom and had less than a couple of weeks to prepare, the 122nd was alerted for deployment nearly six months ago. This lead time enabled the unit to complete a lot of the certification training at home, that otherwise would have been done at their mobilization station, which will shorten the time it spends there. But after so much time spent waiting, the feelings of the 122nd can be summed



Robert Horton/phot

Three years into the United States Global War on Terrorism, the Alabama National Guard continues to supply soldiers and units for the fight. To date nearly 10,000 Alabama Guardsmen, including the 3/117 FA Fwd 1, pictured above have been deployed.

up by Sgt. James Owens, "It's time to go, its time to do it."

Like the 122nd, members of 3rd Battalion, 117th Field Artillery in Troy are also getting ready to go to Iraq. But unlike the 122nd, they won't be going as a complete unit and they'll be taking on a mission that is different from their traditional one. Nearly 120 of the battalions 400 plus soldiers will make up 3rd Battalion, 117th Field Artillery, Forward One and will take on a security mission in Iraq. According to Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Charlie Smith, "the unit will receive mission

specific training at Camp Shelby, before deploying overseas."

Three units from the 31st Chemical Brigade will have similar mission to the 3/117th. The 278th Chemical Battalion from Oneonta, the 440th Chemical Company from Vincent and Clanto and the 258th Chemical Company from Springville and Gadsden, will all trade in their chemical missions for security missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. This call-up marks the first time that chemical units from Alabama will deploy

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