

MEDICAL NEWS

A SOLDIER's CHRISTMAS

*The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,
I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.
My wife was asleep, her head on my chest,
my daughter beside me, angelic in rest.*

*Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,
Transforming the yard to a winter delight.
The sparkling lights in the tree, I believe,
Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.*

*My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,
Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep
in perfect contentment, or so it would seem.
So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.*

*The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,
But I opened my eye when it tickled my ear.
Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know,
Then the sure sound of footsteps outside in the
snow.*

*My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,
and I crept to the door just to see who was near.
Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,
A lone figure stood, his face weary and tight.*

*A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old
Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,
Standing watch over me, and my wife and my
child.*

*"What are you doing?" I asked without fear,
"Come in this moment, it's freezing out here!
Put down your pack, brush the snow from your
sleeve,
You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!"*

*For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,
away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts,
to the window that danced with a warm fire's
light.*

*Then he sighed and he said "It's really all right,
I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night."*

*"It's my duty to stand at the front of the line,
that separates you from the darkest of times.
No one had to ask or beg or implore me,
I'm proud to stand here like my fathers before
me."*

*"My Gramps died at 'Pearl on a day in December,'
then he sighed, "That's a Christmas 'Gram
always remembers.
My dad stood his watch in the jungles of 'Nam*

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U.S. Coast Guard photo

Members from the Coast Guard Cutter Resolute visit Rose Kerney at All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Fla., Oct. 30, 2015.

Coast Guard members visit Rose Kerney

By Petty Officer 1st Class Melissa Leake

Not every Coast Guard rescue mission involves a helicopter or small boat, a perilous rescue at sea amid storm-tossed seas, or a hardened crew braving the elements to save a life. Sometimes they can happen from a seemingly small act of compassion in a moment of connection. Instead of a heaved lifeline, all it can take for a successful rescue is an outreached hand.

Rose Kerney has been battling cancer since July. While undergoing chemotherapy treatments on the seventh floor of All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida, Rose needed a distraction from

the physical and mental stress of fighting the cancer.

"At the end of the hallway there's a sitting area with a large window that has a bird's eye view of the Coast Guard Cutter Resolute. It seems to be the favorite place for kids that are able to get around, as well as their families, to sit and look at the outside world. The Coast Guard is the topic of discussion," said Matthew Kerney, Rose's father.

He said Rose would spend hours watching the cutter, as it diverted her attention away from the cancer treatments. Her young mind would fill with questions

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And now it is my turn and so, here I am."

"I've not seen my own son in more than a while,

But my wife sends me pictures, he's sure got her smile."

Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,

The red white and blue... an American flag.

"I can live through the cold and the being alone,

Away from my family, my house and

my home,

I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,

I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat,

I can carry the weight of killing another

or lay down my life with my sisters and brothers

who stand at the front against any and all,

to insure for all time that this flag will not fall."

"So go back inside," he said, "harbor

no fright

Your family is waiting and I'll be all right."

"But isn't there something I can do, at the least,

Give you money," I asked, "or prepare you a feast?

It seems all too little for all that you've done,

For being away from your wife and your son."

Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret,

"Just tell us you love us, and never

forget

To fight for our rights back at home while we're gone.

To stand your own watch, no matter how long.

For when we come home, either standing or dead,

to know you remember we fought and we bled

is payment enough, and with that we will trust.

That we mattered to you as you mattered to us."



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A day in the life of warriors in transition

By Staff Sgt. Chris Hubenthal

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, Hawaii — The Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) demonstrated what Soldiers can expect when transitioning to the WTB during the “A Day in the Life of a Soldier in Transition” event as part of Warrior Care Month Nov. 24, 2015.

Members of the WTB walked military leadership and distinguished visitors through their inprocessing and transitioning procedures to give them a better understanding of what the WTB does to ensure that Soldiers recovering from injuries, illnesses and ailments are taken care of.

U.S. Army Lt. Col. Brian Peterson, WTB commander, explained what the battalion’s goal is when it comes to helping the military’s wounded.

“Here at the WTB, we have some access to care priorities that exceed the capability of other medical units out there which makes us a tremendous asset for Soldiers and their families as they go through the transition and healing process,” Peterson said. “Ultimately what we want to be able to do is we want to facilitate a successful transition from the uniform to either back to the force or in a lot of cases now of days we’re seeing more transition to veteran status. Our job is to make sure that transition goes smoothly.”

The WTB showcased that smooth transition by allowing guests to go through the process themselves during simulated in-processing appointments.

“We’re trying to explain the process

of what a Soldier goes through once they come to us,” said Staff Sgt. Luis Burgos, WTB squad leader. “We take them to the HHC (Headquarters and Headquarters Company) to in-process and we gather all the information that we need from the Soldier. From there we take the Soldier to meet the people that are going to be working closely with them such as the social workers, the nurse case managers, the occupational therapists, the transition coordinator, and we also give them the opportunity to meet the chain of command.”

Burgos added that getting to know the transitioning Soldier is a major part of finding out how to better support them.

“We also get an opportunity to talk to the Soldier to find out not only what their physical needs are but also their personal emotions so we can have a better understanding of what we need to do to better take care of that Soldier.” Burgos said.

He also feels a personal fulfillment when helping Soldiers during WTB events like this.

“The best part of it is the satisfaction that you get that you made a difference in the Soldier’s life and that you know they are going to be successful once they move on either to the fighting force or civilian life,” Burgos said. “Here the focus is that they are taken care of.”

The WTB continues its effort to provide mission command, primary care and case management for recovering Soldiers as the Army’s premier capability to set the conditions for healing and



(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Christopher Hubenthal)

U.S. Army Capt. Joahna Sandoval-Murchison, Bravo Company senior nurse care manager, Warrior Transition Battalion, demonstrates a portion of in processing that Soldiers are required to accomplish when transitioning to the WTB Nov. 24, 2015, at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. The demonstration was a part of the “A Day in the Life of a Transitioning Warrior” where leadership and distinguished visitors from Tripler Army Medical Facility and other agencies were able to learn first-hand what Soldiers recovering from injury, illness, and ailments go through when transitioning into the battalion. The event was one way that the WTB celebrated Warrior Care Month.

promote the timely return to the force or transition to civilian life.

The “A Day in the Life of a Soldier in Transition” event was one way that the WTB provided information on the services and assistance that they are able to provide.

Warrior Care Month was established on Nov. 5, 2008, by former Secretary of Defense Robert F. Gates to inform communities, service members and their families on how the Warrior Care system supports military members through programs and initiatives.

Reserve soldier aids wounded attack victims

By Capt. Addie Randolph



LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Staff Sgt. Katie Govoni was at a food truck on 4th and Liberty with friends, when at approximately 2 a.m., she heard two women screaming for help.

Govoni looked up to see one of the women running across the street narrowly avoiding an oncoming car. She realized that the woman was Melissa Snader whom she’d met briefly for the first time earlier at a popular hot spot called “Fourth Street Live.”

Melissa clutched her chest in pain as she screamed for help. She and her sister Sherrie were bleeding from stab wounds to their chests after they fought off an attacker who tried to rob them, Aug. 23, 2015. They were returning from Sherrie’s bachelorette party at “Fourth Street Live” when they encountered the attacker.

Govoni, who as a Reserve Soldier is a health care specialist instructor assigned to the 100th Training Division, Fort Knox, Ky., directed two of her friends, Staff Sgt. Josh Smith and Sgt. Micah Stoke, to help Sherrie. Smith and Stoke, at the time, were assigned to the Army

Recruiting School, Fort Knox.

Govoni was able to locate the wound on Melissa’s chest even though the injured woman was panicking.

“I asked her if she believed in miracles, and she nodded,” said Govoni, who in her civilian capacity is an Emergency Medical Technician in Boston. “I asked her to pray, because she had found ... a group of Soldiers, and one was a medic.”

Govoni got a Ziploc bag from the food truck and placed it on the wound. Plastic on a chest wound works as a one way valve that creates a seal, which causes the lungs to expand when the victim inhales.

Sherrie was on the verge of passing out, so Govoni took over from Smith and Stoke. She handed Stoke the Ziploc bag with a towel, and told him to apply direct pressure to Melissa’s wound.

Sherrie was able to talk, but she looked pale. Her pupils were dilated and her pulse was weak. Govoni was worried she’d go into shock. She grabbed another towel from the food truck and applied direct pressure to the wound.

“I kept telling Sherrie to talk to me, and asked about her future husband, but her answers were becoming less and less

coherent,” Govoni said.

Sherrie’s breathing got difficult, then she stopped talking. Govoni had a bystander apply pressure to the wound as she worked on getting air into Sherrie’s lungs. After nearly a minute Sherrie began to vomit.

By then Smith and Stoke had stabilized Melissa, so Smith helped Govoni fully open the airway and clear the vomit. Sherrie suddenly took a huge breath, sat up, and immediately asked about her sister.

Louisville EMS arrived and took over from the Soldiers before transporting them to a local hospital.

Dr. Jason Smith, a trauma doctor who treated the sisters, said, the Soldiers’ actions are consistent with the training first responders receive.

“They didn’t have the resources ... on the side of the road...to assess them [the victims] the way we do in the hospital,” Smith said. “So, you assume the worst case scenario and do exactly what the Soldiers did.”

Brig. Gen. Jason Walrath, commander 100th TD, awarded the Meritorious Service Medal to Govoni for her efforts in helping the sisters.

Staff Sgt. Katie Govoni, an Army Reserve combat medic who in her civilian capacity is an emergency medical technician, conducts a basic and advanced life saver interface course at an ambulance training center in Malden, Mass. Govoni used her combat medic skills to help two stabbing victims in Louisville, Ky., Aug. 23, 2015.

Tribal heritage meeting celebrates Navajo Code Talkers

By Senior Airman Joshua Kleinholz
99th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. — Members of the traditional Native American community joined senior leadership in gathering here Nov. 19 to reflect on their past, address concerns for their future and recognize the efforts of one of their most outstanding surviving members - a veteran of World War II and a national treasure.

After the day's pressing topics had all been addressed, the group concluded their annual conference by welcoming George Willie with a standing ovation that could be heard echoing out the door and through the halls of The Club at Nellis Air Force Base.

Dressed in gold silk under a brilliant red vest emblazoned with commemorative pins and ribbons of his era, Willie was assisted into the room accompanied by his wife and two of his daughters. He sat in his chair and acknowledged the group with a humble wave. He wouldn't be talking today.

The Japanese carried out the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor that finally forced the U.S. into global conflict on Dec. 7, 1941; when Willie was looking forward to his 16th birthday. His daughter, Anabelle Small Canyon, took to the podium on his behalf and explained how her father had joined the U.S. Marine Corps soon after his 17th birthday and became a part of the vitally-important Navajo Code Talker program.

"With my notepad and pencil I waited for dad," she said, explaining to listeners that her father only recently began



(U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Joshua Kleinholz)

Former U.S. Marine Corps Navajo Code Talker George Willie shakes hands with a grateful audience member during at the Native American Heritage Month Meeting at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Nov. 19, 2015. Willie was accompanied by his wife and two of his daughters who helped to tell the story of hi service in the Pacific theater during World War II.

telling bits and pieces of his WWII story.

His daughters were unaware that he had been anything other than a hard-working farmer and dad all of his life until they found documentation from his honorable discharge from service and started prying.

"Bits and pieces of various environments would set him off, sort of like triggers, and he would just start talk-

ing," she said.

Cooking outside on a fire, the sound of a helicopter overhead, war movies and Catholic priests are all examples of stimulus that would get him to spill the beans after all these years.

As a Navajo Code Talker, Willie was part of a top secret Marine Corps recruiting program that aimed to integrate bilingual Navajo radio operators into combat units using Native American

code words to guarantee communications security. The Japanese showed they were very adept at cracking U.S. codes and the Navajo solution became an integral driving force to victory in the Pacific.

After enlisting in 1943, Willie went on to graduate from the program and took part in direct conflict throughout the Pacific theater, the most notable event being the bloody invasion of Okinawa in 1945. There, Willie demonstrated great physical fortitude, demonstrating his mastery of more than 420 codes in one of the most hostile environments ever encountered by U.S. forces.

Prior to the detonation of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki, Willie served out an assignment there as well. He is one of very few Americans alive today to have witnessed the immediate aftermath.

Willie believed the program was classified for years after he returned home to live life as a family man and farmer. Always a faithful Marine, he said nothing of his involvement in the war and continues to say very little, even after the program was declassified and he began attending regular Navajo veterans reunions in New Mexico.

"The tribes are a very patriotic people," said Kish Lapierre, 99th Civil Engineer Squadron archaeologist and event organizer. "For this man to make the trip here and share his story with our people is a great honor for us all."

Of the 400 original Navajo Code Talkers recruited during the war, Willie is believed to be one of only 20 who are alive today.

Heat helps soldiers heal

By Pfc. Sarah Anwar
304th Public Affairs Detachment

TACOMA, Wash. — "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." These words of Douglas MacArthur embody the battle service members face in physical and emotional recovery, even after the conflict is forgotten by all others.

The quote can also be found in the Healing in Flames exhibition currently on display at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington. An opening ceremony on November, 8, 2015, recognized the exhibit as a two year culmination of the Hot Shop Heroes program, designed to teach veterans to use art — specifically glass blowing — as a therapeutic tool.

The collaboration between the Museum of Glass and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, started in 2013 when Lt. Gen. Robert Brown, then-commanding officer of JBLM, and Museum of Glass executive director,

Susan Warner spoke about the possibility of Hot Shop Heroes. They had hoped to promote healing from the devastating and traumatic events service members experience during deployment.

On Presidents Day in 2013 the Museum of Glass offered service members, veterans and their families free admission and an opportunity to work hands-on with hot glass. After seeing the success of that day, Brown then suggested that soldiers could positively grow from the art of glass blowing.

Since 2013 Hot Shop Heroes has shown to be particularly effective in helping participants who have traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder. The program has helped participants emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Hot Shop Heroes had their first class in October of 2013, with just 12 students. Proceeding the end of the two five-week pilot classes, the Museum of Glass and JBLM officials reviewed the courses and the decision was made to launch a long-term Hot Shop Heroes program. Since then, around 150 veter-

ans have participated.

Most of the veterans and service members in the program have been deployed, some on multiple tours. With deployment comes different forms of mental and physical injuries. Hot Shop Heroes is an opportunity for the process of healing.

Lt. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, commanding General of I Corps at JBLM added that the soldiers take part in Hot Shop Heroes to heal spiritually and express themselves.

"They [the participants] feel part of something that is extremely important to them ... this is about the spiritual being of these soldiers. This is something about them, something very personal to them that has come forward that they are showing you about them and it is allowing them to heal," said Lanza. "It's about our heroes healing."

Lt. Col. Terrell G. Morrow, commander of the Warrior Transition Battalion at JBLM couldn't help but agree when he explained the soldiers participating in Hot Shop Heroes have been positively affected by the therapeutic nature

of expressing themselves through the meeting of glass art. He went on to say that the relationship between the Museum of Glass and JBLM is a testament to the commitment of both entities and the goal they share to provide care and compassion for recovery of soldiers.

"[The] Hot Shop Heroes program is unique in our warrior transition command and a blueprint for current and future programs that leverage expertise outside the military medicine, it's a positive avenue towards recovery," said Morrow.

Sgt. 1st Class Peter Bazo is a Hot Shop Heroes participant and a cadre member at the Warrior Transition Battalion. After four deployments and 11 years of service, Bazo wanted to use his experiences to help other wounded warriors. In the process of giving back, he found a way to help himself heal as well.

"I learned how to destroy but now I know I can create," said Bazo. "It allows me to focus my energies. It gives

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• SOLDIERS

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me an outlet that I haven't had before, it allows me to be able to create something."

Among all the pieces on display, the most meaningful to Bazo is "The Taste of Blood and Tears". The idea was inspired from the Al-Shaheed monument in downtown Baghdad, which Bazo saw every day while deployed. The artistic rendition is a tear drop surrounding a drop of blood and resting on a bed of sand, salt, and iron.

"I wanted to display something that showed that even though blood has dried, there are still thousands of tears over top of that and those tears of blood have a very distinct taste," said Bazo. "Taste of salt and also iron from bitterness in the back of your throat, that's what I hope to try and convey in this piece."

Bazo said he feels he has become a more resilient soldier from taking part in Hot Shop Heroes and said he would recommend any soldier to try glass blowing, even if they think they don't have any artistic skill.

"It can help you," he said. "It can help you escape the bonds of this earth and transcend above what is happening right in front of you."

Patricia Davidson, lead instructor for the Hot Shop Heroes program, said she hopes to expand and be able to continue this program. She added it is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding programs she's been with in her 20-plus years of teaching art.

"By far, working with the soldiers and the veterans has challenged me more than any other group of people in that they are incredibly inquisitive, incredibly creative, and very eager," Davidson said. "If this was the very last teaching career of my life I would

be so completely fulfilled. I've pulled teaching tricks out of my hat I didn't even know I had, so it's challenged me a lot as an instructor. It's such a gift to work for this program."

As much as she's learned from teaching Hot Shop Heroes, the service members she's taught have been able to quickly adapt to the challenge.

"For most people there's nothing normal, comfortable or easy about standing in front of 2000 plus degrees of heat, but for the men and woman in Hot Shop Heroes the concentration, discipline and teamwork required to work with glass comes naturally," said Davidson. "These folks know what it means to be cool under pressure."

Healing in Flames will be on display at the Museum of Glass through March of 2016. More information on the Hot Shop Heroes program can be found at <https://museumofglass.org/hotshopheroes>.



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(U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Sarah K. Anwar)
Participants and instructors of the Hot Shop Heroes program work on the "Tree of Life," representing the growth of the class from the roots up, Nov. 8, 2015, at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Wash. The Hot Shop Heroes program teaches soldiers glass art as a way to heal from the trauma of war.

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Peace Ark wraps up San Diego visit

By Mass Communication Specialist
3rd Class Mayra A. Conde

The People's Republic of China medical ship Peace Ark (T-AH 866) arrived in San Diego to conduct a port visit and medical subject-matter-expert exchange with the staff of Navy Medicine West and the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) Nov. 2-7. Similar to the Mercy, the Peace Ark maintains operating capabilities, optometry and dental facilities, and hundreds of hospital beds.

"We are building a good relationship between our hospital ship crews," said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, commander of Navy Medicine West. "We are anxious to strengthen our relationship, and I believe we have much to learn from each other. The interaction will benefit both of our nations and those who we seek to work with."

During the visit, both People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and U.S. Navy hosted official receptions and conducted tours of the hospital ships. Chinese crew members also toured Naval Medical Center San Diego,

Naval Health Research Center, and the VA hospital in La Jolla.

"In the medical communities there's a bond between providers that are in charge of giving health to others, and that goes across different boundaries and nations," said U.S. Navy Capt. José Acosta, commanding officer of Naval Medical Center San Diego. "These meetings help show the world that we can share information, and, at the end of the day, we're all about providing safe, quality, patient care."

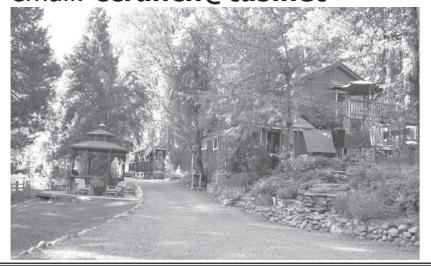
The Peace Ark visit demonstrated ability between two nations for mutual medical interaction and cooperation that offered benefits for both countries, according to U.S. Navy Capt. Melanie Merrick, commanding officer of the medical treatment facility aboard the Mercy.

"U.S. and China are both countries that have Pacific Ocean borders," Merrick said. "One of the primary missions of the Mercy is to support Pacific fleet and Pacific Partnership. To have this type of interaction and collaboration with the Chinese Navy and specifically a hospital ship, it continues to build friendships and collaborations."

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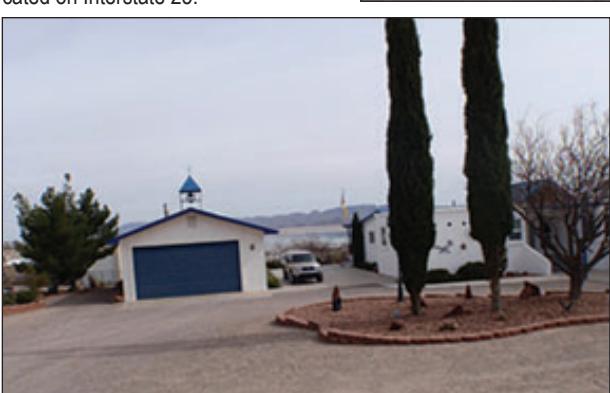


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Casualties inbound: Corpsmen participate in casualty evacuation course

By Cpl. Ryan Mains
III Marine Expeditionary Force / Marine Corps Installations Pacific

MCAS FUTENMA, Okinawa, Japan— Working on a patient in a medical clinic can be challenging, but when limited time and high risk are added to the situation the game changes drastically.

Marines and sailors with various units with III Marine Expeditionary Force participated in a casualty evacuation drill Dec. 7 on Marine Corps Air Station Futenma.

Starting off the day, the students attended CASEVACS classes. Following that, the hospital corpsmen took turns acting as casualties simulating multiple different injuries.

"This course enables a student to collect a patient from either "point of injuries" or just simply from another medical treatment facility and move them to a higher echelon of care," said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Hermin Acosta, an independent duty corpsman, CASEVAC instructor with 3rd Medical Battalion, 3rd Marine Logistics Group, III MEF. "In addition, they perform patient care from inside the helicopter."

During the drills, the corpsmen had to quickly triage and assess their casualties as well as practice loading and unloading the patients in and out of a static MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft.

"They have to be able to work under stress and under the supervision of physicians that are nearby and put on their thinking caps in order to work in the back of one of these birds [Osprey]," said Acosta, from San Antonio, Texas. "We give them

See COURSE, Page 9



Official DOD photo by Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Benjamin T. Liston

Role playing

A role player goes through the mass casualty decontamination line and is notionally decontaminated by Chemical Biological Incident Response Force personnel during Joint Task Force Civil Support's exercise Sudden Response 16-1, Dec. 8, 2015. JTF-CS anticipates, plans and prepares for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear response operations.

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• COURSE

Continued from page 8

as much information as we can and treat them as if they were independent physicians."

By actually getting out to the flight line and working on the Osprey, the corpsmen are able to be immersed in a more realistic scenario, adding higher stress levels and tension.

"With the scenarios that they gave us and the time allotted to us, I gained a deeper understanding about how to maintain a casualty and how to work under the stress of having a time crunch," said Hospitalman Joshua Young, a hospital corpsman with 3rd MLG, III MEF. "We had a good connection with our systems and became more proficient at what we do because the instructors told us what we need to do, how we need to do it and when we need to do it."

Now that the training is complete, the corpsmen have a better understanding of their job in the air or on the ground.

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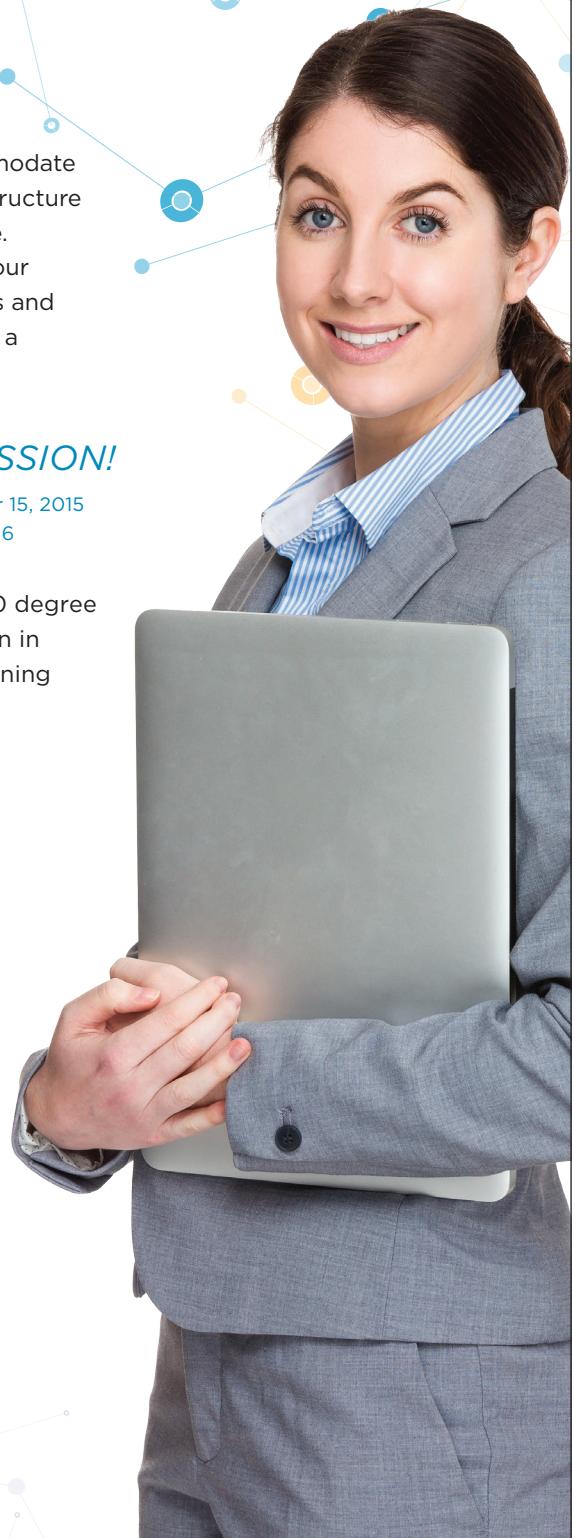
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with life-saving equipment

By Staff Sgt. Leah Kilpatrick
3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division

FORT HOOD, Texas — Three years ago, a man with a gunshot wound to the head walked into a hospital in Bagram, Afghanistan, clutching a helmet as if his life depended on it – because his life depended on it.

First Lt. Jeffrey R. Meek and the Advanced Combat Helmet that saved his life were reunited in a presentation at the Mission Command Training Center at Fort Hood, Texas, Nov. 13.

The Soldier

Meek is the assistant operations officer assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, but three years ago, he was a fire support officer with the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cav. Div.

The young, fresh-faced lieutenant, the son of an ordnance corps Soldier from the Vietnam era, Meek was thrilled to be a Soldier and excited about everything he got to experience.

"As early as I can remember, I wanted to be a Soldier," said the Wilmette, Illinois, native.

He graduated from St. John's Northwestern Military Academy, earned a four-year ROTC scholarship to the University of North Dakota, and was commissioned in 2011.

He reported to his first duty assignment, 1- 9 Cav., where he got the news he had seemingly been preparing for his whole life.

"I got to 1-9 Cav. in July of 2012 and was told to go the central issue facility and draw equipment," he said. "So I got my equipment, packed my bags and went to JRTC to train on this security force advise and assist team mission."

Spending a month at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana and hearing of the very real possibility of deployment, Meek remained as excited.

"I joined the military knowing that I could deploy, and I wanted to deploy," Meek said. "I saw that as what the Army does. As an active-duty Soldier, the only purpose you have in life is to go far away to another country to fight wars for the defense of this country. That's what I totally anticipated doing, and that's what I wanted to do."

Upon arriving in Afghanistan, Meek said the situation got real fairly quickly. On his 25th birthday, he and his team went on his first mission outside the security perimeter and took incoming indirect fire. He said he knew pretty quickly that this was going to be an eventful deployment.

A few months later while setting up a blocking position on a bridge in Tagab, his team was caught up in a complex ambush. While lying in the prone with two Taliban military age males in his sites, Meek said his head was jolted back as if he had whiplash.

"What was that? My head just moved. Did I just get hit," was kind of what I was thinking," he said.

Upon getting his wits about him enough to realize he needed to assess his condition, he pushed back from his position, low crawled to the nearby gun truck and began evaluating himself.

He said his commander told him to go get checked out by the doctor, so he moved further to the rear of the formation where the doctor conducted the Military Acute Concussion Evaluation on him.

The 7.62 mm round entered his helmet, skimmed the inside of the helmet and exited out the back. Meek got shot in the head and suffered only a superficial hematoma and a concussion, he said.

"I feel really out of it," he said he felt at the time. "I'm kind of seeing things. I'm not really present in the moment. It almost feels like at that point I was looking at myself from a third person perspective. I'm walking. I'm okay, but at the same time I'm not okay."

The awesomeness of the event was impressed upon many people around him.

When the helicopter arrived to medically evacuate him, he said he'll never forget the look on the medic's face.

"He was sitting on the other side of the Black Hawk the whole time, and here I am with this helmet that's got this bullet wound in the helmet, and I'm wearing it, because it was my helmet," Meek said. "I didn't have another helmet. I wore that one on the bird. He just had this look on his face like, 'Holy crap.' I was like, 'I'm the walking dead here right now.'"

The reaction he elicited during his reception at the hospital at Bagram was not much different.

"I remember going into the hospital," he said. "The entire staff was waiting at the door as I walked into the door at Bagram, because all they get is, 'GSW to the head,' on a little printout, and that's all they see, so they don't know whether to expect a guy on a gurney, incapacitated. And here I come walking in, and I'm just clutching onto this helmet, because I wouldn't be walking around if it weren't for this helmet. It was just very surreal."

After a night in the hospital in Bagram, he was transferred to the traumatic brain injury clinic, where he worked to regain all of his cognitive

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• CAVALRY

Continued from page 12

function and return to duty and complete the deployment with his team. He had his helmet in his possession for two or three days after the incident, but then it was taken and he hadn't seen it since.

The Helmet

The personal protective equipment that the Army issues to its Soldiers undergoes extensive testing to ensure that America's warriors are outfitted with the best equipment, said Col. Dean M. Hoffman IV, Program Executive Office Soldier program manager of Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment.

"Until I took this job, I had no idea what went in to making this equipment, and it's been eye-opening," Hoffman said. "Every helmet is tested probably 67 times. We take each lot that comes off the production line. We keep some, and we put them in extreme cold, hot and constantly every year, we're pulling them off the shelf and retesting them to make sure they're the best and brightest."

The engineers, testers and staff at PEO Soldier analyze the equipment that has been engaged in battle to gain knowledge and insight into any emerging enemy technologies and any vulnerabilities in our own equipment. These test help to determine what works, what doesn't and where improvements and modifications can be made.

"After detailed analysis, we return it back to the Soldier, and that's what we're doing here today," Hoffman said. "It's an honor. It's really been great that we get to take the equipment and present that back to the Soldier."

Tearfully, Mary Meek, Meek's mother said, "We're so proud of Jeff. The fact that he's here with us today is a testament to the dedication of the Armed Forces and the excellence of the equipment. It did its job."

"It would have been a different story if it wouldn't have," his father, Buddy Meek added. "We're glad that he's here to celebrate this moment. We wouldn't have missed this for the world."

"Since the war we've been blessed," said Hoffman. "We've never had a Soldier that's been shot [directly] in his protective gear and killed. And that just

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says a lot about what goes into that. That's not to be remiss, because we've all lost our brothers in arms."

With his ACH back in hand, Meek said he's still taking in how it feels to also be reunited with that day two years ago in Afghanistan. Although he was physically able to walk away after getting shot in the head, he was not totally unscathed.

"Nothing was noticeable while I was in Afghanistan, I don't think," Meek said. "When I got back, there was a lot noticeable. It was definitely apparent that I left a piece of me on that bridge on that day when I got shot. Entirely psychological as it may be, it still did affect me pretty greatly since then and still does today to a small degree. I just developed resiliency tactics to overcome this, and really continued service in the Army and leading Soldiers helps me through it an immense degree."

Meek has spent the past two years since the incident looking forward, so today's presentation of the ACH brought the incident back to the forefront of his mind.

"It's been so long [since I've seen it] and this is such a big event, I don't think it's fully processed yet," Meek said. "This will help me bring closure to this incident. There's unfinished business in Afghanistan I can definitely say, but resiliency is probably the cornerstone of what has allowed me to continue to serve, and my service has been a key pillar of that resiliency. Leading Soldiers, providing effective leadership, developing and mentoring Soldiers has been one of the best ways that I could keep going and continue the fight and the real tribute needs to go to those who are worse off than I am."



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• ROSE

Continued from page 1

of the life aboard the vessel, the missions it undertook, and the crew aboard. Instead of focusing on the seriousness of her battle, she sailed away with the crew of the Resolute every time she looked out the window.

That's when her father decided to reach out to the Coast Guard. Not knowing where to start, he went to the barbershop at Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg where he met Fireman Carlos Cartagena, a cutter crewmember. Within a few hours, four Coast Guard members were ready to visit Rose in her hospital room.

"From speaking to Rose's father I knew that a visit from us could provide her support. If we were able to brighten her day even a little, it was well worth it to us. We weren't acting just as local Coast Guard members, but as a local family," said Ensign Joe Kelly, the Resolute's weapons officer. "Our goal was to do everything possible to help Rose's situation. It was an opportunity for us to connect with her and send the message that she is not alone, and that she has support outside her immediate family."

During the visit, the Coast Guardsmen felt they made a personal connection with Rose.

"We talked about everything associated with Rose's life, from school to Taylor Swift to Halloween, to you name it. Our intention was not to focus on the cancer, which she undoubtedly hears about and physically experiences every day. We were there to lighten up the mood and make small talk while encouraging her to smile," said Kelly.

The sight of the four uniformed members of the Resolute's crew sharing smiles with his daughter had a poignant effect on Kerney, who is an Air Force veteran.

"My daughter had been going through an extremely tough chemotherapy treatment that had also created a great deal of depression for her. It had been weeks since she smiled, but when those four Coast Guard members walked into her room, she changed," said Kerney. "The sincerity and bearing of those sailors is beyond description, and they truly performed a successful rescue mission that day."

Ensign Joe Kelly, Ensign Elise Sako, Fireman Carlos Cartagena and Seaman Alexander Torres were part of a different type of rescue crew, but their dedication to improving one girl's life is an action that is familiar to the saltiest search and rescue operator.

"This is just one of the reasons why I love the Coast Guard. We have the ability to help and impact so many people when we make the effort. It is ultimately a reminder of who we protect and why we serve," said Kelly.

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