

MEDICAL NEWS

News in Brief

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KABUL KIDS GET MORE CARE IN MEMORY OF AMERICANS BURKHOLDER AND SOUTHWORTH

By Gerald Scott Flint

Volunteer Medics Worldwide teams up with KAMAIR of Afghanistan to accomplish a humanitarian memorial mission to Gandhi Institute of Child Health.

Mission objectives

1. Honor the memory of two fine Americans.
2. Stop the spread of terrorism in Afghanistan by bringing medical assistance to children who have no where to turn for help once sick, wounded or injured
3. Encourage all those with resources and means available to them to volunteer their skills, donate materials and place the needs others above their own on a more frequent basis anywhere and anytime in the world.

Cause for action:

When two of my neighbors were killed in action whilst securing the freedom for Afghanistan, I knew I had to offer something more to their loved ones than just saying "I am sorry for your loss". I had worked in Afghanistan before and I knew that there were plenty of Afghans who were very thankful that Americans and other coalition troops and freed them from the Taliban! I also knew that the memory of Jason Burkholder and Jared Southworth must continue to mean hope for those in the nation where both men paid the highest price for liberty and freedom. We brought Jared and Jason home, we honored them and did our best to console the families but I still felt moved to do more to honor each man's ultimate sacrifice made in Afghanistan.

There is so much to do when planning an international mission like this one and even much more when it is to a War Zone such as Afghanistan. After getting the green lights from The Afghan Ministry Of Public Health, KAMAIR OF AFGHANISTAN, UNITED AIRLINES we began to put the mission team together and collect the needed equipment and supplies to make the difference to those kids once we were on the ground in Afghanistan. With the help of our Lord God it would all come together!

We were able to bring in such items as surgical scrub, all types of suture material, bandages, crutches, surgical gloves, exam gloves, syringes, iv sets and medication pumps. All these items mean that hundreds of children will get the opera-

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Marine steps outside job, assists in successful Afghanistan arrival

By Cpl. Aaron Rooks

CAMP BARBER, Helmand Province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Toward the end of 2008, Gunnery Sgt. Carl Thorpe was fluent in the testing and maintaining of communication and navigation systems in all Marine Corps aircraft, just as he had for most of the prior 12 years.

Everything changed in January 2009 when he became responsible for ensuring that equipment, supplies and personnel reached Afghanistan later in the spring to support the operational deployment of Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan to the International Security Assistance Force's Regional Command (South).

"I knew I would have an impact, but not one this significant," said the Savannah, Ga., native, of his role in the brigade's journey from North Carolina to southern Afghanistan. "We're currently setting the foundation for the Marines in Afghanistan and all those who will follow us in the future."

Thorpe, who's now working with the brigade's Deployment Distribution Operations Center, submitted for a special duty assignment near the end of 2008, hoping to "get out in the dirt" and develop a different perspective of how non-aviation Marines operate in a deployed environment.

Thorpe said he had no idea what job he would eventually be assigned, but maintained the mentality to take on anything the Marine Corps would throw his way.

Before joining MEB-A, he worked at Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron-31, Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, S.C., where he supervised the maintenance and testing of communication and navigation systems on about 84 fighter jets.

Thorpe said he knew his future job wouldn't be easy when he later learned he would be dealing with every piece of equipment the Corps had to offer. Because



of this, he dedicated much of his time in the months prior to the brigade's departure to learning the systems associated with logistics and becoming familiar with equipment such as humvees, 7-ton trucks and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles.

The task kicked into motion in March as Thorpe and his fellow Marines with the MEB-A logistics advance party departed for Afghanistan, two months before the brigade's main force.

Before boarding a bus March 27, Capt. Perry Smith, the brigade's strategic mobility officer, said the toughest part of their mission would be making sure that the right people get the right gear when they arrive at their destination. He said it would be a "tough, time-consuming task," but when they accomplished that task, it would make a difference.

Thorpe said he feels he and his team have made a difference, stating that they have tracked more than 5,500 brigade members, as well as hundreds of thousands of pounds of gear, from the time they left their place of origin to when they arrived in Afghanistan.

"I've learned a lot, but I couldn't have done it with-

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Seabees work around harsh climate conditions

By Cpl. Aaron Rooks

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand Province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan –Some construction sites here have recently become ghost towns. Various wooden structures throughout the camp sit almost abandoned as each day goes by.

It's unusual though, how these projects seem to grow larger and nearer to completion every morning.

At one time, these sites were a beehive of activity throughout the day. The sailors of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion-5 were everywhere; on top of the buildings, inside them, walking around them, all looking for their next task. This was the case every day, from sun up to sun down.

"Construction projects would go smoothly during the day until the afternoon," said Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Beigmann, crane mechanic and lifter, NMCB-5, "but then the wind and sandstorms would pick up, not to mention the extreme temperatures, causing work to slow or stop completely."

The Seabees' primary focus since March has been the completion of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan, Regimental Combat Team-3 and Camp Leatherneck Garrison Combat Operations Centers.

Their first project, the MEB-Afghanistan COC, was a project of record proportions completed in record

time. The construction plan for the building was estimated to take at least five months to complete, said Petty Officer 1st Class Thomas Damron, builder, NMCB-5. The Seabees did it in three.

"Personal pride and dedication helped us get through the first project," said Petty Officer 1st Class Christopher Britner, builder and crew leader, NMCB-5. "We would've liked to go back to our racks and stop, but we had a personal commitment to get the job done."

Their successes in the first project did not come without hardships. The Seabees worked from around 6 a.m., to 6 p.m., each day. But with the temperature rising to an average high of 125 degrees every afternoon, and the constant sandstorms and high winds flowing across the camp, work efforts were often stalled.

"The sun itself took a toll on people," said Britner. "Even if you weren't doing any hard labor, you were still exhausted from the heat beating down on you. The wind and sandstorms would make things more difficult and cause progress to really slow because of it."

The Seabees determined from their lessons learned on the first project that changes needed to be made to increase productivity and safety. Instead of working constantly during the day, they decided to do it all under the night sky.

★ Kabul

Continued from page 1

tions and attention that they need to save life and limb. As one enters the compound at Gandhi hospital the front courtyard is full of parents with children who have no money or means to pay for even the most basic of medical care. Children die of infected wounds, common and minor disease that less than one US dollar could cure. Please see CNN's report "Families find little comfort at Afghan Children's hospital". The report will erase all doubt from anyone's mind why the Burkholder-Southworth memorial mission was so vital to the survival of scores of little ones in Kabul. Yes, before anyone says it ..we know that this sort of thing goes on in many other parts of the world. How do we know? Because we have been there too. Today, we are going to do what we can for "KABUL KIDS".

The Gandhi Institute of Child Health (as it is known) is the largest in all of Kabul. They see more than 1000 patients a day, admit 60-100 of them and see another 200 cases in emergency. They do all of this on a monthly budget of just 1,200 US Dollars. We have checked this with the President of INDCH, Dr. Yousufzai he told us face to face these figures are correct. During our days spent in and around the hospital we had seen plenty of good reasons to take him at his word. Most parents need to show up with child and cures or there just in not anything for them. Any provider knows that one cannot give what one doesn't have!

On April 17th a 5.5 magnitude earthquake struck our area just 50 miles to the east of Kabul towards the border with Pakistan. We halted our efforts in Kabul and rushed to the effected area to assist with rescue and recovery operations. The death toll and destruction was bad enough but we were happy to see that it was not as severe as we had first thought it to be. We were not able to reach one of the smaller villages that had been damaged as Taliban commanders had advantage of the situation and blocked certain roads from Jalalabad. After doing what we could the team safely returned to Kabul and continued with our mission the evening of the 18th of April. We were also able to assist with the set up of the first Ophthalmic (eye) examination room at the Gandhi Polyclinic and fully stocked Dr. Miriam (the female ophthalmologist there) with plenty of ophthalmic (eye) medications to get her started. She had no proper ophthalmoscope, vision chart or exam equipment and so it was my honor and privilege to donate my own scopes and equipment also in the names of our two fallen Americans, Jason and Jared. Dr. Miriam and I worked together and we fixed her exam room to her liking

on April 22nd. We only regret not having more to give. God was good and allowed us to accomplish much in this place where real horror takes place 24/7 without taking even so much as a 20 minute nap! In addition to our work at Gandhi hospital we were able to continue with our scheduled prevention of blindness and disease screening clinics at our temporary clinic at Hotel Mustafa in Kabul. We saw about 50 people every three hours and with God's help we touched the lives of some very needy people with some very serious but fixable problems. We give God all the glory for that happened there!

We would like to thank KAMAIR AIRLINES OF AFGHANISTAN and MR. NAVEED WARDAK who made complimentary tickets for us from Dubai, United Arab Emirates to Kabul, Afghanistan. Mr. Wardak even worked after hours to assist Volunteer Medics Worldwide with getting extra allowance for our excess baggage and equipment into Afghanistan. It is such cooperation that makes it possible to carry out such a difficult and challenging event.

We thank The United Airlines Staff at Dayton International Airport for their gallant efforts with our team's gear and baggage upon departure for Afghanistan. Our security teams, guards and The Afghan Ministries of Health and Interior who really demonstrated that Afghans do care about other Afghans and the future of the country!

We also wish to thank, Brigitte, Chad, Michele, Sari, Jim, Abdula, Abraham, Nicoletta and all those who prayed for our safety and kept us in their thoughts whilst we were on mission.

May God bless the families and loved ones of Jason Burkholder and Jared Southworth. We pray that the memory of their lives here on earth will spark caring, concern and the volunteer spirit in all of us!

"Humanitarians 14 points, Taliban 0"

"When the Taliban are ready to take a course in what it really means to care for people in their society we remain available to assist with instructions. Just put down your weapons and pick up tools to build a caring environment" GSF VMW

"We know that we cannot do everything therefore we must not refuse to do that which we know we can do"

"In the pond of life's effort even the smallest of stones cast will create a ripple so cast your stones today and now" GSF VMW

"Nothing beats stronger than the heart of the volunteer" FDR 1941

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Marine 'respects the grunts' who fight for our country

By Margaret Downing
Reporter

When Brad Stoddard graduated from Harlem High School in Machesney Park, IL in 2005, he recalls how he was gung-ho to go and fight for his country. That attitude may very well have been inspired in him by his two grandfathers who fought in the Second World War - one with the Navy and one with the Army.

"As a kid, me and four or five of my buddies all felt the same way," he said recently.

Brad enlisted with the Marines in August of 2005 and was sent to Boot Camp in San Diego, California, for several weeks that September.

"I then came home on leave for a few weeks before entering SOI (School of Infantry Training) at Camp Pendleton."

Next came two months of infantry machine gunner training at which time Stoddard was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Division based at Twenty Nine Palms, Cal. At that time the unit had just returned from Fallujah, Iraq.

"I trained for a year getting ready to go to Iraq," he recalls, "and also got to come home on leave a couple of times during that year."

On Jan. 16, 2007, Stoddard's unit was deployed. From California they traveled to Germany, then to Kuwait before moving on to "Camp Fallujah" in Iraq. He remembers how he was impressed with the big bases, "They had all the niceties, even McDonald's."

Stoddard continued, "When we got to Iraq we were told to pack our bags as we were going on 'dwelling ops' (operations) for a week or two, which entailed us taking over an Iraqi house to use as a patrol base from which we went out on patrol. Occasionally we got to go back to a base though. We were out in the field seven months."

He remembers patrol duty as being mostly "an unpleasant experience," and notes it



Margaret Downing photo

Harlem High grad and ex-Marine Brad Stoddard today.

wasn't unusual for temperatures to reach the high 120s or low 130s.

"I saw more unpleasant things than pleasant while I was there," he says. "A patrol consisted of 10 Marines. While at a house we would each sleep on a bag of dates and it was very buggy."

The Marines were a close-knit cohesive unit and many of them continue to stay close today. Stoddard recalls only seeing one reporter while in Iraq.

Then came July 23, 2007. "I remember talking that day with one of my buddies about fishing," he said. "Our platoon was sent out from the base on a foot patrol to do a census, which didn't make a lot of sense to us as one had just been done earlier that day."

"There was no reason really to send us out, they just wanted to give us something to do," he says. "We walked along and

hoped we wouldn't get shot at."

The 10 Marines, marching in a staggered column, stuck together in a group, and when they were about a mile from the base, they turned on to another road.

"As half the group got past a certain point with the others right behind, an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) was set off remotely."

Friend, buddy, and radioman, Corporal Garrett Jones from the state of Oregon, lost a leg.

"Our squad leader, Corporal Nathan Handville from Clearwater, Fla., was hit with shrapnel all along the right side of his body, cutting his jugular vein," but with quick help from others in the group, he didn't die.

Stoddard recalls, "I got the wind knocked out of me, there was dirt and debris all over and I saw two of our guys were badly hurt, so a buddy and I



Photo courtesy of Brad Stoddard

Marine Brad Stoddard said the Iraqi children love American chocolate. Stoddard is pictured in Iraq with one such child.

went to work.

"We put a tourniquet on Jones, posted security and began taking fire from the Iraqis who had set off the IED. They were standing by a fence about 150 yards away. We got off rounds from two AK-47s and shot back at them with automatic weapons. We killed two of the Iraqis."

The Marines later found out that the Iraqis had video taped the whole incident and posted it on the Internet for propaganda use.

When the explosion happened it was heard back at the base and a helicopter was called in, plus other Marines came running immediately to the site. The badly wounded were Air Medevac'd out.

Stoddard thought he was okay at first, even though he knew his legs had been hit with the concussion of the explosion. He got to go home for a couple of weeks on leave but the second day after returning to his unit while on a hike, "I found out I couldn't make it. My legs were swollen."

He left the Marines in October of 2008. His unit has since been relocated to Afghanistan.

Because of having what is called "compartment syndrome" in both legs, he has undergone two surgeries with a third to follow soon to help relieve the pressure in his legs.

"Circulation is bad in both legs, it's not curable and I will have this for the rest of my life," (along with the pain that goes with it).

Stoddard attends counseling sessions and averages two trips a week to the V.A. "The Veterans Administration is great - both in Madison and the clinic in Rockford. The care is amazing."

Due to the problems with his legs, he has not been able to find work and is currently on disability. There are also some hearing problems that are a result of the explosion.

Today Stoddard has this to say about the various branches of service. "I highly respect the grunts - those who have to go out there and fight."





Shown here, the Purple Heart Medal, commendation, and other medals sent to Marlow by the United States government.

Vietnam vet receives Purple Heart, medals 40 years late

By **Melanie Bradley**
Staff Editor

MACHESNEY PARK, IL — Former Machesney Park, IL resident David L. Marlow, 59, was deployed to Vietnam when he was 19 years old, and he fought there for nine months, until he was injured in 1969 and was sent home.

He and three other Army soldiers sustained injuries when fired upon while traveling down a river in Vietnam. His body filled with shrapnel, he was taken to a hospital and never saw his fellow soldiers again.

In the years that followed, he never knew what became of them, his personal possessions, and the medals he should have received but didn't.

"I was mad up until recently, because I could never find out about my unit in Vietnam," Marlow said. "It's pretty bad when you have to more or less beg for your medals."

His physical wounds healed with time, but the emotional scars never went away. He suffers from memories that haunt him in his sleep, an emotional pain that is commonly referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS).

He recalls the hostility upon arriving back in the states, where people screamed "baby killers," rather than honoring them. He said he knew of a soldier who survived Vietnam, only to be shot at an airport in California upon returning home.

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Donald Hutchins



Marlow's 15-year-old stepdaughter Lisa Koerner is now his hero. She knew how he suffered from the past and had heard the stories many times, so she decided to do some research into the matter.

She was able to find information on his unit and found contact information about another veteran from the unit who's currently living in Maine.

He had been trying to connect with Marlow for years. Last year they finally saw each other for the first time since 1969. Marlow went to Maine to visit. From there, they were able to find out about getting the medals that were long past due. On Jan. 2 of this year, Marlow received notice that he would get his Purple Heart medal, for injuries sustained in battle, as well as other service medals.

Marlow and Koerner met with Machesney Park Mayor Tom Strickland recently at the Village Hall to be recognized and honored.

Melanie Bradley photos
Machesney Park Mayor Tom Strickland congratulates Vietnam veteran David Marlow (center) on receiving his Purple Heart and other medals recently at Machesney Park Village Hall. At right is Marlow's stepdaughter Lisa Koerner, who helped Marlow reconnect with his unit and helped secure the medals he never received after the war.

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★ **Marine**

Continued from page 1

out my team. They made it relatively easy," Thorpe said, crediting the team's success to Staff Sergeants Timothy Morquecho and Jason Sherwood, strategic mobility chief and mobility control center chief, respectively, as well as Corporals Courtney Quinn, Christopher Burnett and Timothy Fletcher. "Their knowledge of their military occupational specialties and their job skills has helped me get up to speed. So without them, I wouldn't have been able to lead them."

Morquecho, who has dealt with logistics throughout his career, said his responsibility in the early months of preparation was to ensure Thorpe was at the same knowledge and performance level as himself. By doing so, he said, the team was able to develop a smooth working relationship in no time

and accomplish the missions they've had so far.

"It's all about in-transit visibility," Morquecho said. "If a unit leaves the states, we have to maintain in-transit visibility. We always have to know where the gear and personnel are."

Morquecho said personnel and gear are still coming. He said they expect another several thousand brigade members and more gear to arrive.

Thorpe said he is satisfied with the results his team has achieved so far, noting that the team is maintaining the confidence that helped them achieve their success so far.

From here, he said, they will oversee the departure and arrival of units from both Afghanistan and the U.S. until the brigade eventually leaves after completing its tour.

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MEB-Afghanistan assumes control of Marine battle space

By Cpl. Aaron Rooks

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CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand Province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force-Afghanistan transferred control of Marine battle space in southern Afghanistan to Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan during a transfer of authority ceremony here May 29.

The event, in which Brig. Gen. Larry Nicholson, commanding general of MEB-Afghanistan, assumed authority of Marine battle space and forces in Helmand Province from Col. Duffy White, commanding officer of SPMAGTF-Afghanistan, began with an invocation from Navy Cmdr. Phil Pelikan, brigade chaplain, that echoed hope for the future, as representatives from the United States, United Kingdom and Afghanistan gathered in support of the brigade.

"Use us now," Pelikan said during his prayer, "to partner with and help the people of Afghanistan and preserve justice and freedom in their land."

That partnership has been built upon by SPMAGTF-Afghanistan. The unit deployed in late 2008 as a bridging force, White said, to maintain a strong Marine Corps presence in southern Afghanistan, following the efforts of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and Task Force 2/7, composed of 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. MEB-Afghanistan, he said, was the force they were waiting for.

"Our goal, in what was different from between the 24th MEU and 2/7, was that we knew a larger MAGTF was coming," White said. "That was part of our design, to be able to facilitate, coordinate and enable the larger Marine growth here in southern Afghanistan."

White labeled SPMAGTF-Afghanistan as the "little MAGTF that could," stating that the unit was, "globally sourced and aggregated," so that Marines could come to the fight.

The SPMAGTF has now been absorbed by MEB-Afghanistan and today became Regimental Combat Team 3, the brigade's ground combat element. White, who assumed command of RCT-3 during the ceremony, said his former command's mission was accom-



plished, and now they're moving on to accomplish a new one as an RCT.

"My deployment is halfway done," White said, "and as I see it, the best part is about to come. It will

be a game changer for this part of the country."

Nicholson then took the floor and brought attention to Forward Operating Base Delaram, where 11 Marines from 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. David Odom, made the ultimate sacrifice to bring security and stability to the south.

The general identified Delaram and the area around it, where Marines have developed a positive relationship with the local people, the police force and the mayor, as an example of the stability and success that can be achieved here.

He also made note of Lashkar-Gah, an area southeast of Camp Leatherneck, stating successes can be found there as well.

"We have one hell of a team here in Helmand Province," said Nicholson, motioning toward the American, British and Afghan forces in the audience. "I think we can change the dynamic here."

Brigadier Tim Radford, commander of Task Force Helmand, the British unit that operates adjacent to Task Force Leatherneck, agreed with Nicholson, stating that he believes coalition forces here can make a difference and make the country better.

Nicholson said the Marines will never forget that the focus of their mission is the Afghan people.

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Army program for electronic medical records to be expanded

By Justin M. Palk
News-Post Staff

The Army's program for electronic battlefield medical records is preparing to expand to cover sites in the United States. That step comes as the Medical Communications for Combat Casualty Care program, based at Fort Detrick, marks its 10th anniversary.

"It's really just gone through its adolescence phase," said Lt. Col. William Geesey, the program's product manager. "That summer where you've had huge explosive growth and you're maybe a little bit awkward now. We're in the college phase now."

The government chartered the program in 1999, partially in response to investigations into Gulf War syndrome.

At the time, lacking electronic records, investigators couldn't track service members' vaccinations, environmental exposures and other possible factors, Geesey said.

Researchers couldn't rule anything out as a cause, because there wasn't any information available, he said.

The Army first deployed the program to Kuwait, Iraq and

Qatar in 2003.

Now supported by about 240 people, it operates in 14 countries at Army, Air Force and Navy medical facilities.

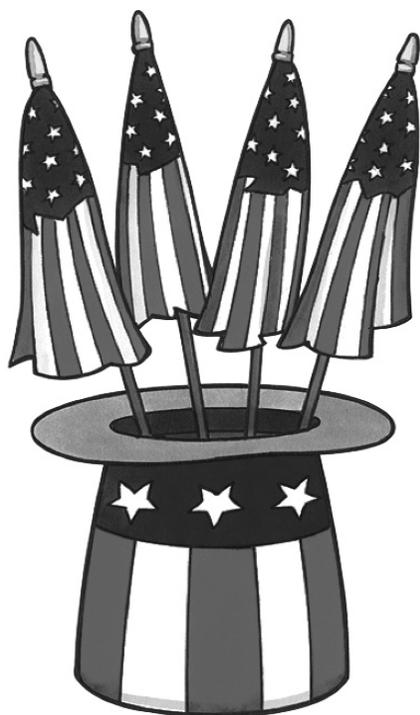
This year, officials plan to roll out the next version of the program's system, which will require fewer servers on the back end, and also allow for remote administration, Geesey said.

The program's managers also want to expand and institutionalize it to the point where it's being used anywhere the Army provides health care.

Troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan are finding that their medical records at their battalion aid stations are on paper, Geesey said.

The program is working with the 3rd Infantry Division, at Fort Stewart, Ga., and hopes to have electronic medical records at the division's battalion aid stations within six months.

Medical records Army-wide could be electronic within 18 months, Geesey said. All the units have the equipment already, but it's a matter of figuring out best practices and educating people in using it.



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A veteran's story... Virlyn Walter, WWII veteran

By Linda Grisolia

Virlyn Walter was born in Coloma, Michigan, and as an infant moved with his family to Illinois where he grew up in Berwyn. After graduating from Morton High School in February 1943, Walter was drafted into the U.S. Army in September of that year. He completed basic training at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri and was assigned into the Cadet program in the Air Force.

He studied for one semester at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale until the Cadet program was cut and he was transferred to Midland, Texas, for eight weeks.

Walter went on to radio school in South Dakota and upon completion of the course, was transferred to Lincoln, Nebraska where he was assigned to a crew, which then trained together out of Fairmont, Nebraska.

They flew simulated bombing missions out of Fairmont. When the weather grew too cold to start the engines, they flew to Puerto Rico. Walter and his crew flew 12-hour sorties over the Caribbean area to practice long-range missions. The B29s were designed to fly missions from Guam to Japan and back in 12 hours.

"The best part of that," he said, "was being able to fly on a plane."

One of an 11-man crew on a B29, Walter was the radio operator and was positioned in the front of the plane along with the flight engineer. He flew out of Wichita, Kansas, in June 1945 and "island hopped" to Guam where he was stationed.

Walter's plane was built to the latest specifications for bombing missions to Japan. The sorties were all

planned for night bombing and the automatic fire control systems were replaced with bombs. The plane was capable of carrying 20 bombs, ten in the front and ten in the back. The only armament remaining was in the tailgun position.

When he left Wichita, Walter knew only that "we were flying a secret airplane to a secret location."

Part of the 20th Air Force, attached to 315th Bomb Wing and once on Guam, Walter and his crew practiced dropping bombs on previously destroyed areas that had been held by the Japanese.

Walter flew 13 night missions to Japan from June 1945 until August 15, 1945. His plane was normally positioned in the middle of the squadron formation, with about 30 planes ahead and 30 planes behind. It took about six hours to reach the target, about 30 minutes to prepare and actually drop the bombs, and then the formation returned back to base.

Missions were flown about every fourth day. Before a flight, the crewmen were briefed and told of their targets, mostly oil refineries and storage depots. The men all bathed, wore clean clothing and prepared themselves mentally and made sure their personal affairs were in order.

"You didn't know if you would return," Walter said.

For most flights, take-off time was 4 p.m. and the planes returned at 8 o'clock the next morning. A pastor was always present at take-off, Walter remembered.

"As our plane took off, we got the signature sign-off from the pastor, a sign of the cross or just a wave," he said. "It was nice to know that the Lord was looking after us."

After a mission, the crew was debriefed and later, given a shot of whiskey. Walter recalled that most of the men then returned to the barracks and went right to sleep.

As radio operator, Walter received and sent coded messages. After a bomb drop, he checked the bomb bay to look for any "hang-ups" and sent a message to back to the base, "mission accomplished."

"I felt like I was doing my job," Walter said, recalling the bomb runs. "I had no specific feeling that I was in danger. We trained so much...I only worried about a mechanical failure."

Walter's plane lost an engine during one mission, left the formation and dropped the bomb on an alternate target which was a fishing village. Walter recalled it was a "sleepy little town along the coast." At the time, he wondered what the village residents thought and how they would react. He hoped there were not a lot of casualties.

The last mission on August 14-15, 1945, was the longest in Walter's career, 18 hours from Guam to Japan and back. The target was an oil refinery.

"As far as I could tell, we destroyed the damn thing!" he said. "We were flying at 15,000 feet and we had to dodge the flames from the planes ahead of us that started the bombing."

Returning from that bomb run, Walter suddenly received a clear message: "The Japs surrendered!" The men shouted with excitement; there was not much else they could do at 15,000 feet.

On September 2, 1945, the Japanese formally surrendered by signing papers on the USS Missouri in Tokyo Harbor. Walter took part in a major flyover from Guam to Tokyo – up and down the coast.



Off to the Washington, DC Memorial

Honor Flight Chicago is an organization whose mission is to bring Chicago area veterans to Washington, DC, to see the World War II Memorial, opened to the public in 2004, to honor the 16 million who served in the Armed Forces of the U.S. Elmhurst resident Virlyn Walter was among those who made the trip on April 15.

"That's when I saw what we would have been up against if the Japs had not surrendered," Walter said. "Fortifications were built all along the coast in preparation to defend the island. It would have been a slaughter to get into the area."

Walter was discharged as a Staff Sgt in March 1946 and received the Air Medal with two Bronze Stars. He returned home to Berwyn, attended IIT and graduated with a BSEE. Now a retired electrical engineer, Walter and his wife are long time residents of Elmhurst. Their three sons are York High School graduates. They have four grandchildren and are expecting their fifth great grandchild.

His hobbies include gardening and collecting miniature houses. Walter is a member of the Elmhurst American Legion and still has his uniform.

"We saved one million American lives by dropping the atomic bomb," Walter reflected. "The taking of the Japanese mainland would have been a disaster as far as our people are concerned."



Off to duty...

Drafted into the Army just after high school, Virlyn Walter went to radio school in South Dakota, then was assigned to a crew, which trained together out of Fairmont, Nebraska where they flew simulated bombing missions. When the weather grew too cold to start the engines, they flew to Puerto Rico.



Welcome home!

The last mission on August 14-15, 1945, was the longest in Walter's career, 18 hours from Guam to Japan and back to target an oil refinery. Returning from that bomb run, the men shouted with excitement when a message was received: "The Japs surrendered!"

The History Of Flag Day

The Fourth of July was traditionally celebrated as America's birthday, but the idea of an annual day specifically celebrating the Flag is believed to have first originated in 1885. BJ Cigrand, a schoolteacher, arranged for the pupils in the Fredonia, Wisconsin Public School, District 6, to observe June 14 (the 108th anniversary of the official adoption of The Stars and Stripes) as 'Flag Birthday'. In numerous magazines and newspaper articles and public addresses over the following years, Cigrand continued to enthusiastically advocate the observance of June 14 as 'Flag Birthday', or 'Flag Day'.

On June 14, 1889, George Balch, a kindergarten teacher in New York City, planned appropriate ceremonies for the children of his school, and his idea of observing Flag Day was later adopted by the State Board of Education of New York. On June 14, 1891, the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia held a Flag Day celebration, and on June 14 of the following year, the New York Society of the Sons of the Revolution, celebrated Flag Day.

Following the suggestion of Colonel J Granville Leach (at the time historian of the Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the Revolution), the Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames of America on April 25, 1893 adopted a resolution requesting the mayor of Philadelphia and all others in authority and all private citizens to display the Flag on June 14th. Leach went on to

recommend that thereafter the day be known as 'Flag Day', and on that day, school children be assembled for appropriate exercises, with each child being given a small Flag.

Two weeks later on May

8th, the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution unanimously endorsed the action of the Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames. As a result of the resolution, Dr. Edward Brooks, then Superintendent of Public

Schools of Philadelphia, directed that Flag Day exercises be held on June 14, 1893 in Independence Square. School children were assembled, each carrying a small Flag, and patriotic songs were sung and addresses delivered.

In 1894, the governor of New York directed that on June 14 the Flag be displayed on all public buildings. With BJ Cigrand and Leroy Van Horn as the moving spirits, the Illinois organization, known as the American Flag Day Association, was organized for the purpose of promoting the holding of Flag Day exercises. On June 14th, 1894, under the auspices of this association, the first general public school children's celebration of Flag Day in Chicago was held in Douglas, Garfield, Humboldt, Lincoln, and Washington Parks, with more than 300,000 children participating.

Adults, too, participated in patriotic programs. Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, delivered a 1914 Flag Day address in which he repeated words he said the flag had spoken to him that morning: "I am what you make me; nothing more. I swing before your eyes as a bright gleam of color, a symbol of yourself."

Inspired by these three decades of state and local celebrations, Flag Day - the anniversary of the Flag Resolution of 1777 - was officially established by the Proclamation of President Woodrow Wilson on May 30th, 1916. While Flag Day was celebrated in various communities for years after Wilson's proclamation, it was not until August 3rd, 1949, that President Truman signed an Act of Congress designating June 14th of each year as National Flag Day.

