

Redstone Rocket

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Garrison senior NCO ready to serve Team Redstone

By KARI HAWKINS
Assistant editor
kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

It doesn't matter whether you are in uniform or not, Command Sgt. Maj. Bob Lehtonen is your command sergeant major.

If you work, live or play on Redstone Arsenal, he is your "Soldier at the tip of the spear" for checking into issues, getting things done, answering questions and speaking about concerns with Team Redstone senior leaders.

And he's ready to make that happen right now.

Fresh off of a deployment to Kuwait and the Middle East as the brigade command sergeant major for the 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, Lehtonen doesn't see his assignment to Redstone Garrison as a chance for downtime from combat. Rather, it's a new assignment with just as many challenges with a bit of change in the leadership dynamic – switching out 4,000 Soldiers for 37,000 civilian employees.

"This is absolutely a new challenge for me," Lehtonen said. "Everyone who

comes through the gate at Redstone, I'm their command sergeant major. And, I know, as a command sergeant major, I can have a positive impact immediately."

Only a few weeks into his new job, Lehtonen has been quick to notice the Southern hospitality from the Team Redstone family and the community outside the gates.

"Everyone is so nice and welcoming. This is my first time in the South and this Southern hospitality is absolutely real," said Lehtonen, who spoke at his first public event at the Oct. 26 Day of the Deployed ceremony at the Veterans Memorial in downtown Huntsville.

"It's amazing. Everybody is so nice and welcoming and supportive of the military, and not just Soldiers, but the

See Lehtonen on page 4

Photo by Kari Hawkins

Command Sgt. Maj. Bob Lehtonen is enjoying his first experiences with Southern hospitality. His new job as the Garrison command sergeant major is his first assignment in the South during his 29-year Army career.



World War II veteran honored as Soldier for Life

By Lt. Col. KEVIN CLINE
For the Rocket

Once a Soldier, always a Soldier.

Brig. Gen. Neil Thurgood, program executive officer for missiles and space, presented Pfc. Philip Alterizio, a WWII veteran who served in the 113th Infantry and the 103rd Division Military Police, with a Soldier for Life insignia at his Madison home Oct. 29. The Soldier for Life insignia acknowledges service and sacrifice, as well as contributions beyond the battlefield, for veterans who strengthen our communities and the nation.

Alterizio is a recipient of the French Legion of Honor, France's highest honor presented to him by France's Counsel General on behalf of the French president Nicolas Sarkozy. At the Legion of Honor ceremony, the Counsel General reflected, "For years we felt hopeless but you Soldiers never quit. You brought us hope."

See Veteran on page 43



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Brig. Gen. Neil Thurgood, program executive officer for missiles and space, presents WWII veteran Philip Alterizio with a Soldier for Life insignia at his Madison home Oct. 29.



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Redstone engineer finishes Marine Corps Marathon.
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Longtime Redstone senior health physicist dies

Steven Howard, of the Test Measurement and Diagnostic Equipment Activity, died Oct. 25 at Athens-Limestone Hospital. He was 61.

The Athens resident served as an Army senior health physicist since 1982. His most recent position was chief of the Radiation Standards Laboratory of the Army Primary Standards Laboratory. He was also the principal radiation safety officer of the parent organization, the TMDE Activity at Redstone Arsenal, and managed its Broad Scope Nuclear Regulatory Commission License for radiation sources.

As lab chief he managed a group of professional, technical and support personnel engaged in the development, calibration and repair of state-of-the-art optical and ionizing radiation measurement standards in support of Army laboratories and test ranges worldwide. He also provided health physics support for the Army Radioactive Waste Disposal Program.

Howard was born at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, on May 12, 1953, and lived in Lexington, Kentucky, before moving to the Redstone Arsenal area in 1995.

His previous assignments included serving as the team leader of the Army's Nuclear Counting Program in which he had responsibility for organizing and managing all aspects of the centralized Army leak test analysis program and for providing an overall quality assurance program for nuclear counting throughout the Army. He also served as the special projects team leader with the mission



Steven Howard

of providing health physics support to key government agencies for programs related to radiation monitoring, nuclear detonation detection and radiological safety.

Howard was a longtime member of the National Health Physics Society and the Alabama Chapter of the Health Physics Society in which he served as the chapter president. In 2004 he was certified by the American Board of Health Physics in the Comprehensive Practice of Health Physics, and he retained the title of Certified Health Physicist ever since.

He received a bachelor's in biology in January 1976 at Union College in Barbourville, Kentucky, and a master's in business administration in August 2010 from Grantham University. He retired from the Army Reserves in May 2010 as a lieutenant colonel with 27 years of service.

Survivors include his wife of 36 years, Lavon Howard; a daughter, Tonya Burnett, and grandsons Jacob and Noah Houk of Elkmont; a brother, Joseph Howard of Louisville, Kentucky; and a sister, Pam Howard of Stuttgart, Germany.

Editor's note: This information was provided by the Aviation and Missile Command's TMDE Activity.



Take 5 Commissary

- 1** Commissaries do not make a profit like the Army & Air Force Exchange Service. Commissaries' 5 percent surcharge tax is used to build and renovate/remodel stores.
- 2** The popular case lot sales are back with the next one to be held in May.
- 3** When holidays fall on a Monday – the Commissary's normal day of closure – the Commissary opens the next day. Many years ago, the Commissary closed the Tuesday after the holiday, but now opens on that day.
- 4** In addition to the wide variety of items for sale, the Commissary also sells Meals Ready to Eat, or MRE.
- 5** Customers can save more than 30 percent on their overall purchases in the Commissary versus civilian stores.

Quote of the week

'My father had many, many veterans over to the house, and the older I got the more I appreciated their sacrifice.'

— Steven Spielberg

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Rocket Staff

Editor-in-chief: Col. Bill Marks, Garrison commander

Director of Public Affairs: Sharee Miller

Editor: Skip Vaughn

Assistant Editor: Kari Hawkins

Reporters: Amy Tolson, Katie Davis Skelley

Photographer: Ellen Hudson

Copy Editor/Design: Kelley Lane Sivley

General Manager: French Salter

Advertising Sales: French Salter, 256-340-2463, or French.Salter@theredstonerocket.com

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 Email classified ads to rocketads@theredstonerocket.com

On this date in history: Nov. 5

By SKIP VAUGHN
Rocket editor
skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com

- In 1492:** Christopher Columbus learns of maize (corn) from Indians of Cuba.
- In 1639:** The first post office in the colonies is set up in Massachusetts.
- In 1773:** John Hancock is elected as moderator at a Boston town meeting that resolves that anyone who supports the Tea Act is an "Enemy to America."
- In 1946:** John F. Kennedy, D-Mass, is elected to the House of Representatives.
- In 1956:** Britain and France land forces in Egypt in reaction to seizure of the Suez Canal.
- In 2007:** China's first lunar satellite, Chang'e 1, goes into orbit around the moon.
- In 2012:** Widespread flooding in Nigeria kills 363 people and displaces 2.1 million.

Getting to know you

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY
Staff writer
katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

Names: Jason and Tina Kendrick

Positions: *Jason:* Redstone Test Center supply technician; *Tina:* RTC financial analyst

Where do you call home?
Owens Cross Roads, Alabama

What do you like about your job?

Jason: The variety of things that are thrown at me and tasks that I have to do. No two days are alike.

Tina: I love knowing that I support a test center that is working every day to creatively arm and protect our troops, and therefore, our country. Every part, from the testing to the finances, works toward accomplishing that main goal. I've also made lasting friendships in the 10 years I've been here.

What are your goals – personal, professional or both?

Jason: To obtain a business degree.

Tina: I'd like to get my degree and volunteer – be more involved in our community.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Jason: Hunt, fish and watch football. Roll Tide!

Tina: With two little ones, spare time is scarce! In my downtime, I relax by reading. I love hiking, walking and bik-



ing. But most of my free time is spent with my family and playing with the kids.

What is on your bucket list?

Jason: To visit all of the Major League (Baseball) ballparks and to travel to Ireland.

Tina: I'd love to travel – mostly Europe – but an Alaskan cruise sounds nice, too. I'd also love to try scuba diving, take a culinary class in Tuscany, reunite with a high school foreign exchange student from Germany and fly in a hot air balloon. Those are just a few!

Comment: The parking at the Express on the corner of Martin and Mills roads is dangerous. Due to the lack of parking spaces, visitors have started parking in the middle of the parking lot, making it dangerous for pedestrians and personnel using the gas pumps. Please address this before someone is injured.



Response: We appreciate your comment and a work order has been submitted by AAFES requesting the Garrison evaluate traffic flow and parking at the Express.



Tell us about your experience. Put it on ICE at ice.disa.mil. For more information or questions about the Garrison ICE Program, call Donna Johnson at 876-2924.

Garrison Command Sgt. Maj. Bob Lehtonen

Crimes, accidents & other occurrences

The Directorate of Emergency Services, Law Enforcement Division, provided the following list of reported incidents from Oct. 19-25:

- Oct. 21: Police received a report of a dump truck striking low-hanging power lines near Almond Road.

- Oct. 21: An NCIC (National Crime Information Center) check of a contractor requesting access at the Visitors Center revealed an outstanding warrant from Madison. He was detained and released to a Madison police officer.

- Oct. 22: A random inspection at a gate revealed a loaded handgun in a vehicle. The gun was confiscated and the driver cited for possession of a prohibited weapon.

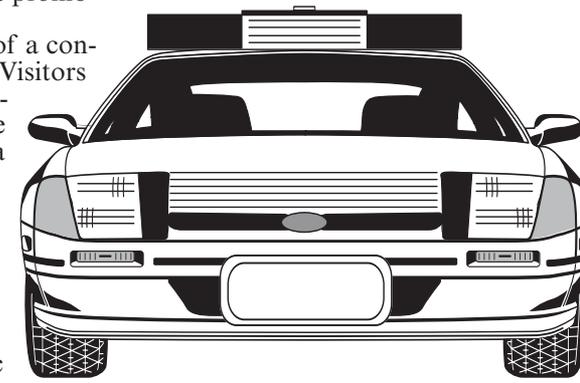
- Oct. 22: An NCIC check of a contractor requesting access at the Visitors Center revealed two outstanding warrants from Decatur. He was detained and released to a Decatur police officer.

- Oct. 22: Police investigated a traffic accident at Patton and Redstone roads when a driver failed to yield while making a left turn. There were no injuries.
- Oct. 24: A minor traffic

accident occurred in the parking lot of building 5400 when a driver backed into another vehicle.

- Oct. 25: Police stopped a driver known to have a revoked license. An NCIC check revealed two outstanding warrants from Huntsville. The driver was cited for driving with a revoked license and released to Huntsville police. The vehicle was removed by a licensed driver.

- Citations issued included 31 for speeding, 4 traffic control device violations, 2 for failure to yield, 1 revoked license, 1 prohibited weapon and 4 parking violations.



Lehtonen

Continued from page 1

whole realm of Soldiers and their families and the Redstone community. It's the whole deal here."

But it's not his first time working as a Soldier with the Installation Management Command, which oversees the management of Army installations through its Garrison organization. He served as the installation command sergeant major at Brussels, Belgium in 2010-12 between wartime deployments, where the Garrison included three embassies, a NATO headquarters and a unit of 25 Soldiers.

"This is different than what I've been exposed to because of all the different federal agencies here. When I look out my office window, I have International Space Station operations right across the road from where I'm sitting. There is also a four-star headquarters here," he said.

"It's different, but in some ways it's familiar. As much as I like to be in a division organization that's familiar, this is a broadening assignment for me with IMCOM. This is an enterprise where I can learn basically how the Army installations are run and managed versus how a unit trains and prepares for combat or whatever their mission is."

As the Garrison command sergeant major, Lehtonen is charged with assisting Garrison leadership with providing services for the Arsenal's 70-plus tenants and their employees. Those services range from gate security and fire protection to providing family support programs to the recreational offerings at the gyms, golf course and bowling center.

"I want to be available, and I want to make sure everybody knows I'm available to them," he said. "The Army is about relationships. I want to develop good relationships with everybody across the Garrison and all Team Redstone organizations so that I am able to help this organization as much as I can."

As the newcomer at Garrison, Lehtonen hopes to help, first, by bringing a fresh look at the Garrison's operations.

"The civilian workforce is the continuity that you can always rely on to keep you on track. The civilian workforce knows the background and the history of an organization. They can give you the full understanding of what's going on. They are the foundation, the glue that keeps everything together," he said. "Military rotating into an organization like this can give a fresh set of eyes to a situation or a concern."

Lehtonen's 29-year Army career has included leadership positions with light infantry and armor units as well as with Garrison.

"I've been blessed with the Army managing my career. I couldn't ask for it to be any better," he said.

"The Army is about new people, new experiences and new places, and I want to get the full experience. I am experiencing the different sides of IMCOM. I have experience with the Training and Doctrine Command, and in leading thousands of Soldiers in armored brigade combat teams."

Typical of many young people who came of age during the 1980s when the nation's economy was in a depression, Lehtonen joined the Army in 1985 because he was in need of a job. A native of northeastern Ohio, he entered the workforce at a time when heavy industry and manufacturing jobs were disappearing, and factories were closing.

"I was thankful to have a job. I joined the Army for two years. I had no plans of staying in," he said. "But those plans

"This is absolutely a new challenge for me. Everyone who comes through the gate at Redstone, I'm their command sergeant major. And, I know, as a command sergeant major, I can have a positive impact immediately."

Command Sgt. Maj. Bob Lehtonen

changed because of the great leaders I served with. I learned there was nowhere else I'd rather be. The Army had me hook, line and sinker."

Lehtonen was a field artillery cannon crewman, with his first assignments giving him plenty of experience in all cannoner duty positions for light and mechanized artillery. As he went through the ranks, the young Soldier learned about leadership from the noncommissioned officers who set good examples for him.

"I remember a time when my mother had come to visit me and I rented a roll-away bed for her. Before I could turn it back in, I was out in the field training and I was worried about this bed rental and how I was going to get it back and how I was going to pay the late fee," he said.

"My NCO, Sgt. Andre Jones, heard my concern. When we got back from field training, while I was washing the vehicles and putting everything away like privates are supposed to, Sgt. Jones went to my apartment, got the rental bed, turned it in and paid the late fee. That's when I realized that being an NCO was about more than training Soldiers. It was also about taking care of Soldiers. It was about a sergeant taking care of me, the Soldier.

Because of Sgt. Jones, I'm still here 29 years later."

Lehtonen served in all the traditional roles – instructor, drill sergeant, gunnery sergeant, platoon sergeant and first sergeant, to name a few – and has served at the Field Artillery Training Center, the 75th and 214th Fires Brigades, the 1st Armored Division, and the 2nd, 4th, 8th and 10th Infantry Divisions with overseas assignments in Saudi Arabia, Korea, Qatar and Jordan, among others.

Among his favorite assignments was with Charlie Battery, 229th Field Artillery in Germany in 1988-92, during which he deployed to Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield.

"That's when I literally knew that the Army was going to be my career," he said. "That's when I made sergeant. I went from being a worker to being responsible for Soldiers."

Another was with Bravo Battery, 1st of the 15th Field Artillery at Camp Casey, Korea, where he served as a platoon sergeant.

"That's where I learned to be a senior NCO. In Korea, you are there with your Soldiers. There's a lot of opportunity for Soldiers to get in trouble but through your leadership you can mitigate a lot of that," he said.

"Of my 55-man platoon, not one Soldier got in trouble because I was a very engaged platoon sergeant and we enforced the battle buddy system. Our sergeants were trained to take care of their Soldiers and to make sure they were doing the right thing at all times. Soldiers were able to have a good time, but they also had to be safe and responsible. It was an assignment where I learned how to manage systems and personnel."

His deployments to theater have also been among his most meaningful assignments.

In 2007-10, Lehtonen took on the responsibility of a battalion command sergeant major with the 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York, from 2007-10. During that time, the unit deployed to Afghanistan.

Following that deployment, Lehtonen served at the Garrison in Belgium, and then went on to deploy a second time, this time to Kuwait and the Middle East, as the brigade

command sergeant major for the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colorado, from 2012-14.

"When you have decentralized operations like you do in a war zone, you have to have leadership of competence and character," he said. "You have to have Soldiers and leaders who know how to do the job and Soldiers of unquestionable character. It wasn't like in Korea where the platoon sergeant could be there with his Soldiers at all times."

"To prepare for decentralized operations, you have to train and train a lot. Training is where you hone your skills in both your military occupational specialty and as a leader. Training is where you are tested for the real thing."

Along the way in his career, Lehtonen earned an associate degree in General Studies from the University of Maryland and a bachelor's in management and administration from Excelsior College. His military decorations include a Legion of Merit and Bronze Star, and he is an 8th Infantry Division/1st Armored Division Distinguished Leader, a member of the Sgt. Morales and Audie Murphy Clubs, and a recipient of the St. Barbara Medalion.

Now, with the Army drawing down and many troops returning from theater, Lehtonen sees plenty of opportunity to provide even more opportunities for Soldiers to be better, stronger and even more competent.

"We have not seen how good our Army can be compared to the Army of the future. We are getting better every single day," he said. "It's incredible how our sergeants, lieutenants, captains and all our Soldiers with multiple deployment experience will now have all this training. We are getting back to the Army as a profession. There's never been an Army as experienced and as professional as the Army of today and in the future."

Lehtonen has learned a lot from the Soldiers he has led and served with. The lessons he has learned are all found in the Army values, Soldiers creed, NCO creed, and Army standards and discipline.

"Most Soldiers are extremely patriotic and want to do the best they can possibly do for their country," he said.

"The Army is a bonding experience like no other. It's an Army family built on trust and shared experiences. Soldiers won't ever let you down. I was raised in a formation by my platoon sergeant and my first sergeant, and every situation was an example of right and wrong. Those examples are still with me as I work to be the best command sergeant major I can be every day."

Helping save lives one heartbeat at a time

Leadership team's project promotes CPR training

By KARI HAWKINS

Assistant editor

kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

It all started with the heartbeat of an idea.

While searching for a project that would benefit their fellow employees, a group of LIFT team members kept coming back to the same question: "What's better than trying to save a life?"

They had other ideas for projects that would improve the working environment for the Aviation and Missile Command's employees, but doing something that could potentially help save the life of a co-worker won out every time.

And that's how the program Project Heartbeat began. During the past few months, LIFT team members – Robert Hearon of the Army Contracting Command-Redstone, Shannon Marion of AMCOM Logistics Center, Torri Johnson of the Space and Missile Defense Command's G-6, Beth Blankenship of AMCOM's G-6 and Dennis Granger of the Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center – have worked with the AMCOM Safety Office to coordinate CPR/AED classes offered to AMCOM employees and taught by the Madison County Chapter of the American Red Cross. They will present their project to AMCOM leadership Nov. 17.

LIFT refers to AMCOM's Leader Investment for Tomorrow program. During the 11-month training program, participants are divided into teams charged with developing a project that will benefit Team Redstone, AMCOM and its employees.

"The project is a leadership development opportunity," Hearon said. "Members of our group had to brainstorm to come up with ideas, and then we had to choose an idea and develop our project around it."

During their brainstorming sessions, Blankenship brought up the idea of CPR/AED (cardiopulmonary resuscitation/automated external defibrillator) certification training and the placement of more AED stations on the Arsenal.

"I am a former volunteer firefighter and EMT in Limestone County," Blankenship said. "I started asking around where I work in building 5301 at the Sparkman Center to see who had been certified in CPR. I didn't get a lot of positive response, and that worried me. I saw an opportunity to use LIFT

to get people certified."

Although the team thought of some other project opportunities, Blankenship's idea was something they all could support wholeheartedly.

"We had three ideas," Johnson said. "But we were all excited about this one. It just really connected with our passion to help people."

The LIFT team's goal with Project Heartbeat was to train and certify AMCOM employees to be ready, willing and able to perform lifesaving measures in an emergency situation using CPR and AED. The team gained sponsorship for Project Heartbeat from Pat Vittitow, chief of the AMCOM Safety Office, and they worked with Mike Davis of the AMCOM Safety Office, who coordinates the organization's CPR/AED program.

Some AEDs were installed at Redstone, including at the Sparkman Center, in 2009. The last time CPR/AED training has been offered on-post by AMCOM was 2011.

"The certifications last for two years, so those who had them from the 2011 training were expiring," Marion said.

The team focused their project on the employees at the Sparkman Center, where AMCOM is headquartered. The AMCOM Safety Office did have some funds available to pay for employee CPR/AED training and to install AEDs at Toftoy Hall.

"There's been a ripple effect to our program," Hearon said. "Now we also have two defibrillators at Toftoy Hall (where AMCOM's training center is co-located with the Garrison's Education Center). So, those are benefiting both AMCOM employees and other employees who use the Education Center."

To launch their CPR/AED certification training program the LIFT team developed and posted signage at the Sparkman Center promoting the training program. They also manned an information booth outside the Sparkman cafeteria Aug. 5-7.

The four-hour AED/CPR certification training course was offered during the week of Sept. 8-12 and Sept. 22-26. During that time, 88 employees were certified through the AMCOM program. Also, as part of the Project Heartbeat, 14 SMDC employees were certified in a separate class held at Fox Army Health Center during the summer. Combining those two numbers put the LIFT team above their goal of training 100 employees through Project Heartbeat.

"This is such an important program for our employees," Hearon said. "Since November 2013, there have been four cardiac arrests on Redstone. They happened in No-



Photo by Kari Hawkins

The installation of two Automated External Defibrillators at the Education Center at Toftoy Hall is the result of Project Heartbeat, a CPR/AER training certification program for Aviation and Missile Command employees initiated by AMCOM LIFT team members including from left, Beth Blankenship, Torri Johnson (in front), Shannon Marion and Robert Hearon. The team coordinated with the AMCOM Safety Office to offer the training in September.

vember, December, March and September. As our workforce ages, there will probably be more cardiac arrests in the workplace at Redstone."

The LIFT team got a lot of support from AMCOM employees. One employee signed up for the CPR/AED class because her husband was actually saved from a cardiac arrest from someone who knew CPR/AED. Another employee with a pacemaker convinced his friends to attend the class so that they would all know how to help a co-worker with a pacemaker if they happened to go into cardiac arrest.

While the project was focused on AMCOM employees, ACC-Redstone and other tenant organizations are looking at ways to provide the training to their employees.

"We hope this spreads across the Arsenal, and hopefully it will go Armywide and not just stay at Redstone," Blankenship said.

The classes offered by AMCOM were filled with employees from several different organizations. "We would like to see all the tenant organizations offer this training for their employees," Hearon said.

Even on the LIFT team, the experiences

with CPR/AED training varied. While Hearon and Blankenship are certified, teammates Johnson and Marion chose to take the class so they, too, could be certified.

"I was nervous to do the class, but I had my buddy there to help me," Johnson said of teammate Marion. "Our team member Beth got us excited about this and brought the enthusiasm for this project to our team."

Knowing that Project Heartbeat project could help save a life means a lot to the LIFT team. But it is even more meaningful because coordinating the program taught them a lot about what it takes to gain support from fellow employees, and how to work together as a team toward a goal.

"We learned everyone's strengths and weaknesses on the team," Johnson said. "We learned who was good at PowerPoint and who was good at public speaking. We learned to rely on each other."

The group learned about Alabama's Good Samaritan Law and developed a draft standard operating procedure on which to base a continuing CPR/AED certification program for AMCOM.

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WOUNDED WARRIOR SHARES JOURNEY OF FAITH

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Wounded warrior shares journey of faith

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY

Staff writer

katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

Let your conscience – and the Bible – be your guide.

A slightly different spin on the classic “Pinocchio” adage, but one that Vietnam veteran and wounded warrior Allen Clark lives by. Clark, now an author and speaker, spoke Sunday at Bicentennial Chapel and shared his journey from the central highlands of South Vietnam where in 1968, he was gravely injured in a mortar attack at Dak To Special Forces Camp and as a result, had both legs amputated below the knees.

“When you are wounded in combat, you yell out either for momma or God,” he told the crowd. “I decided to go straight to the top of the chain of command.”

Clark, a West Point graduate and member of the Fifth Special Forces group, commonly known as the Green Berets, attributed his survival to medic Jimmy Hill who himself was injured in the attack, ignoring the shrapnel in his shoulder to tend to Clark. The events of that day forged a lifelong bond between the two men, with Hill traveling from his home in Florida to Texas for a book signing for Clark.

“Jimmy Hill in fact saved my life and I woke up the next night in a brand new world where my left leg was gone below the knee and my right one broken in five places was in a cast from my hip to where five black toes were protruding out from the white sheet,” Clark said. “The right leg was amputated ten days after the wounding.”

Clark spoke of the grueling 15 months of recovery from his injuries and how in the darkest of his days, the only thing that brought him back to the light was a renewed faith in God.

“I actually became bitter towards God and cried out, ‘Why me?’” he said. “We do that when bad things happen to us, don’t we?”

While in those bleak days, Clark experienced a spiritual transformation that helped him to heal those emotional wounds and has since guided him through his life.

“At a church service in the 1970’s, my church pastor began to preach about the great longtime struggle and conflict between good and evil between God and Satan for over 6,000 years of recorded history. At that service I realized that I had shed my blood for which I wear my Purple Heart for freedom in Caesar’s world, but my savior shed his blood on the cross at Calvary 2,000 years ago so we could all have freedom from oppression and from our own souls so often caused by the attacks on our minds, emotions and will by Satan’s soldiers or our own un-wise decisions – our ‘stupid’ as I call them.

“I teared as I looked at this flag of the great United States of America and I changed that day. I realized that I almost died for what the flag represented ... That day I went to a new plateau – a new world to where Jesus became not only savior of whom I had head knowledge at that point, but relationally with the soul-filling of he becoming Lord of my life.”

Clark would later go on to a successful career in the public sector as the assistant secretary for veterans liaison and program coordination and later the director of the National Cemetery Administration for the Department of Veterans Affairs. In addition to these roles, he is also a published author of an autobiography, “Wounded



Photo by Katie Davis Skelley

Vietnam veteran Allen Clark speaks Sunday during the Protestant service at Bicentennial Chapel.

“When you are wounded in combat, you yell out either for momma or God. I decided to go straight to the top of the chain of command.”

Allen Clark

Soldier, Healing Warrior” and “Valor in Vietnam: Chronicles of Honor, Courage, and Sacrifice.” Through his lay ministry, “Combat Faith,” he counsels other veterans suffering from combat related stress by sharing his experiences and the spiritual faith that has guided him.

“I know that healing is possible, because it happened for me,” he said.

Spiritual living at Redstone

*Serving in uniform
puts faith to the test*

By Chaplain (Lt. Col.) GARY PAYNE
Garrison chaplain

During Heroes Week, we honor our veterans. This is appropriate. The Bible instructs us to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). And the reference in Romans states this in the context of those who serve within the government. That includes our military.

I am an Army chaplain. I serve as a Christian leader to Soldiers. And I am an American Soldier. So, I know Soldiers.

I know their tough exteriors. A highlight in my career was being with paratroopers before airborne operations. On one occasion, the battalion commander was giving his Soldiers a "pep talk." He said something like, "You train hard so you will fight hard. I am proud to serve with you – a bunch of flat-bellied, steely-eyed warriors."

Because they are tough, Soldiers sense weakness. Sometimes they will chide each other: "If you're scared, you're scared." Soldiers are a tough bunch.

Although they have tough exteriors, Soldiers face fear. I know their fears. When jumping out of airplanes, they always like having the chaplain around. Airborne chaplains have a custom called the airborne prayer. We get the jumpers together to pray for safety. Many come up to me later: "Chaplain, thanks for praying. I wouldn't want to jump without it."

During Operation Desert Storm and during Operation Iraqi Freedom, I lost count of how many times we had Scud

missiles coming in. Some intercepted over us. And because of the potential threat of chemical weapons, the explosions were not the only thing we had to react to. We put on our full chemical suits and started using the chemical detection equipment. Those were times for high adrenaline.

Stories like these are countless. Flying aircraft into combat. Ambushes. Our military men and women face fear. It's part of the job. But courage is the ability to face your fear. I know their courage.

Our military understands sacrifice. Reservists and National Guardsmen put their civilian careers on hold. All of us in the military must put our families on hold. And we must fight in spite of the ultimate sacrifice. Our sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and spouses continue to do their mission. They understand their mission. They understand the sacrifice.

In my calling as a chaplain, I met, prayed and counseled with thousands of Soldiers. While in Kuwait during Iraqi Freedom, I went to the field hospital every day to visit wounded Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division. One Soldier stands out. He had his body armor on. However, a bullet went into his side between the plates on the body armor. The bullet barely missed his heart, went through both his lungs and lodged just under his right lung.

I saw him in intensive care. He could hardly speak. So, he whispered. "There are two things that keep me going: one, God; and, two, being an 82nd Airborne paratrooper."

In his own way this paratrooper was saying something profound. There are two things that keep me going, chaplain: faith; and, loyalty to something bigger than me.

Consider the apostle Paul. He wrote, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison for living the gospel. Yet, he said, "I press on." That's faith. That's loyalty to something bigger than himself.

We honor our veterans because they have been loyal to something bigger than themselves. In this community, some here are veterans of prior times. Some in war, some in peace. Some veterans are still in the service. National Guard. Reserve. Active Duty. Army. Air Force. Navy. Marines. Coast Guard.

Our men and women in the military are not any different from most anyone. They are just put into a position where their sense of duty, honor, country stands out. Their faith is put to the test. Their loyalty is indescribable. For this, they are all worthy of honor. God bless our veterans. God bless our country. God bless us all.

Protestant women's ministry

Protestant Women of the Chapel meets on Thursdays at Bicentennial Chapel. The group gathers at 9:30 a.m. for fun fellowship, refreshments, Bible studies, free child care and home-school programs. For more information about the Bible study and upcoming fellowship opportunities, check out the PWOC Facebook page

Bicentennial Chapel Sunday Schedule

Catholic Mass 9 a.m.

Catholic Religious Education
10:35 a.m.

Protestant
Sunday School
9:30 a.m.

Protestant Worship
Service
11 a.m.



at facebook.com/PWOCRSA. Questions can be emailed to pwocrsa@gmail.com.

Women's Bible study

Every Wednesday morning, beginning at 9:30, a nondenominational women's Bible study is held at Bicentennial Chapel. The Bible study, taught by Barbara Neidermeyer, begins with fellowship and prayer time followed by the Bible study and concluding with sharing time.

Men's ministry

Men's Ministry, "addressing the needs of men and planting seeds for spiritual growth in Christ Jesus," meets on a Saturday each month – for exact date, call Harry Hobbs at 425-5307 – at 9 a.m. at the Links.

Weekly Mass

The weekday Mass at Bicentennial Chapel is at noon every Tuesday through Friday, and on Holy Days of Obligation at 6 p.m. (or as announced). Vigil Mass is on Saturdays at 5 p.m.

Editor's note: For more information about what goes on at Bicentennial Chapel, call 876-6874 or email james.c.stratton5.civ@mail.mil.

Army's Prevent, Shape, Win drives security assistance

By USASAC Public Affairs

Maj. Gen. Mark McDonald, USASAC commander, hosted his first Army Materiel Command Security Assistance Senior Leader Huddle Oct. 23-24. The theme of the event, "Changing the Way Ahead ... Fiscal Year 2015 and Beyond," set the stage for McDonald to explain his vision for the AMC security assistance enterprise and discuss other issues such as FY15 priorities and resourcing, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's Vision 2020, and AMC life cycle management commands' Security Assistance Management Directorates and Foreign Military Sales stakeholder initiatives and issues.

"We have great leaders around this room that need to see each other on occasion and they need to talk to each other," McDonald began. "They need to hear what everyone else is doing."

In addition to USASAC leadership, attendees included representatives from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Defense Exports and Cooperation, Department of the Army G3/5/7, Training and Doctrine Command's Security Assistance Training Field Activity, Army Corps of Engineers, Army Medical Command, AMC LCMC SAMDs, Army Contracting Command and the 900th Contingency Contracting Battalion, and the Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation.

Much of the focus of the meeting was on The Army Plan FY '15-20 and its strategic context. The discus-

sion, led by DASA-DEC representatives, noted that within the scope of "Prevent, Shape, Win," the emphasis for security assistance is to "shape" the environment.

Another top-level initiative reviewed at the meeting, Presidential Policy Directive 23, Security Assistance Sector, provided the framework that will be used by the Army's security assistance program. The directive states, "Security sector assistance must be practiced as shared responsibility across all U.S. government departments and agencies." Guidance provided included departments and agencies incorporating the security assistance sector guidance into internal regional and functional strategies, and aligning resources to priorities.

The important role security assistance plays in the Army's Regionally Aligned Forces, and new DSCA standards for meeting anticipated offer dates in response to international partners' FMS requests were also hot topics.

John Neil, director of USASAC's Performance Management Office, brought good news to the Huddle participants.

"In every key area we analyzed we have seen an increase in performance," Neil said. The creation of a Common Operating Picture, or COP, was a driving force behind the improvements in efficiency, according to Neil. "Contracting data visibility improves the timeliness in all areas, including supply deficiency reports, delivering materiel, etc.," he explained.

The increase in performance also comes at a time when all AMC security assistance organizations are

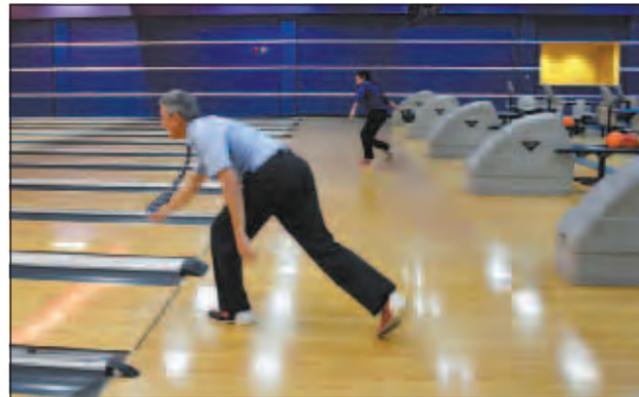


Photo by Kim Gillespie

Bert Liptak, director of TACOM's Security Assistance Management Directorate, participates in a 7 a.m. team building exercise at the Redstone Bowling Center. The team building exercise was part of the Army Materiel Command Security Assistance Senior Leader Huddle held Oct. 23-24.

seeing an increase in FMS work. During the ACC presentation, data showed that during FY '14, ACC had 212 funded work years from FMS.

McDonald's goals for FY '15 include developing a methodology to improve the accuracy of FMS forecasts and increasing leader development opportunities. And his advice for all the Huddle participants: "Integrate the Army's Prevent, Shape, Win in all we do!"

Inspection checklist helps potential renters

By **MINNIE RHODEN**

Housing Services Office

Attention, Soldiers: When renting a home or apartment, you should let someone know where you are going and the time you expect to be back. Inspect the specific apartment/home you want to rent, and ask lots of questions.

Conduct the inspection with the landlord, owner, property manager or agent to document the condition of the property prior to signing the lease/rental agreement and assuming possession of the property.

Your inspection should include the following:

- Run the water and flush the toilets to make sure the water drains properly.
- Check inside and outside to see if there are any loose wires and make sure that all outlets are covered.
- Check for holes in the floor, walls, doors, windows, ceilings and roof.
- Look for water stains as these may be a sign of possible leaks.
- Check that the air conditioner, heater, water heater and appliances all work properly.
- Check to see if common areas and the laundry room are kept clean.
- Be sure to document the condition and cleanliness of the apartment/home.

For your own protection you may want to take photos of the property to validate your findings. Your Army Housing Service Office stands ready to assist you with your move-in/move-out inspection. Call Minnie Rhoden at the Housing Services Office at 876-6666, email minnie.s.rhoden.civ@mail.mil, or stop by and see her at 302 Hughes Road in the Redstone Communities Welcome Center and pick up a copy of the rental inspection checklist.

Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation events

The Garrison's Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation provided the following list of upcoming events:

Hunter safety

The Redstone Hunter Safety Orientation is scheduled Nov. 18 at 4:30 p.m. at Outdoor Recreation, building 5139 on Sportsman Drive. This is a mandatory free class for people who want to hunt on Redstone Arsenal. For more information, call 876-4868.

Free movie Friday

A free movie is shown every other Friday at Heiser Hall, building 3712 on Patton and Aerobee roads. Friday's movie is "Sabotage," rated R. The doors open at 5 p.m. for refreshments with the movie starting at 6. Remember, this is a free movie with snacks all sold for a nominal fee. For more information call Staff Sgt. Peta-gaye Lakharam, president of Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers, at 955-8220.

Home schooled support

CYSS' Home School Support Services is held Thursdays from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., where students have the opportunity to expand their skills in computer technology, arts and crafts, and physical education while interacting with other home schooled children. Anyone who is federally connected with access to the installation is eligible to utilize the free program. For more information, call Barbara Williams at 842-9642. To register, call Central Enrollment at 876-3704.

Arts and crafts

Explore your creative side at the June M. Hughes Arts & Crafts Center, building 3615 on Vincent Drive. Try your hand at something new or increase your skills. The center offers a variety of classes each month. For more information, call the center at 876-7951 or email artscrafts@sp.redstone.army.mil or nancy.l.green31.naf@mail.mil.

AroundTown

Girls get glimpse of science and engineering

By LISA SIMUNACI
AMC Public Affairs

A day after Halloween, more than 400 third- through fifth-graders attending Girls Science and Engineering Day at the University of Alabama in Huntsville had an opportunity to top the sweet-laden Friday.

“Today is about mind candy,” said Redstone Arsenal senior commander Lt. Gen. Patricia McQuiston, who helped kick off the event. “You’re going to get a lot of treats and learn a little bit about the tricks of science.”

McQuiston, who also is the deputy commander of the Army Materiel Command, urged the participants to “feed their minds.”

As a surprise to the girls, a competitive parachute team from the Army’s Golden Knights jumped onto the lawn of the university’s Shelby Center to help kick off the event. The four female and two male Soldiers took questions from the girls before the hands-on portion of the program.

Girls wanted to know what it felt like to jump out of a plane.

“Have you ever stuck your hand out of car window when the car was going really fast? That’s what it’s like, but over your entire body,” a team member told them. Team members, most with thousands of jumps under their belts, admitted that parachuting was a little scary, but also a lot of fun.

“Everyone loved the Golden Knights. They are spectacular role models for the girls and shows them it’s cool to be smart and that they can do anything,” said Emily Vandiver, UAH’s Women’s Leadership Council chair and the event’s chair. “All of the Army’s involvement and the community’s involvement is such an inspiration.”

Corporate sponsors and Redstone Arsenal-based Army commands presented a total of 50 different presentations and experiments for Saturday’s event, now in its sixth year. Girls had the opportunity to attend four 40-minute programs during the half-day event.

Lemon juice missiles and strawberry DNA extractions were on the menu, alongside investigations into the intricacies of catapults, flight, robotics and chemistry.

Mill Creek Elementary School fourth-grader Rylie Rivera, 9, said the Carnegie Science Center’s demonstration by Ion Jones and the Lost Castle of Chemistry was among her favorite parts of the day. “I got to learn about carbon dioxide, oxygen, water and fuel and how they go together and how they can explode,” Rivera said. She also was excited about the focus on girls and the chance for this exposure to subjects



Photo by Master Sgt. James Eagleman

Students interview members of the Army’s Golden Knights parachute team.



Photo by Master Sgt. James Eagleman

Redstone senior commander Lt. Gen. Patricia McQuiston talks with students about the ongoing experiments at Saturday’s event.

that she finds interesting. “Sometimes I like math, but I really like science.”

University of Alabama in Huntsville’s assistant vice president of university events April Harris said the purpose of the event was to pique the girls’ interest of the “so-called” hard subjects. “They have a chance to see real-life applications and to see good role models.”

In a room full of girls testing model airplanes and conducting other experiments, Darnell Whitney, a strategic analyst for the Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center, said he was glad to be among the team of volunteers who took time to impart their knowledge and offer a glimpse into science and engineering opportunities.

“We’re investing our time and resources into the future of these young ladies and exposing them to the day-to-day things we do in support of the war fighter,” Whitney said. “Our hope is they may go on to be engineers or possibly work for us in some capacity. It’s an investment in their future and in ours.”

McQuiston, who has participated in three of the six Girls Science and Engineering Days, said the event is one that is close to her heart. “I attend about 250 events a year,” she told the girls. “This one is my favorite!”

“They have a chance to see real-life applications and to see good role models.”

April Harris

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Magnet programs pique students' interests

By **AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON**

Staff writer

amy.tolson@thered-stonerocket.com

No matter what a child's interest may be, there's a little something for everyone within Huntsville City Schools' magnet programs.

The school system celebrated Magnet Awareness Week Oct. 27-31, a time for the Office of Magnet Programs to highlight the programs offered at seven schools within the district. Those programs reach students of all ages.

"You do have choices, and we want to let you know what your choices are," said Dr. Tammy Summerville, director of magnet programs for Huntsville City Schools. "It's our mission to let people know about what's going on with our magnet programs, because believe it or not, a lot of people have been here for many, many years and they don't know that we have magnet programs, they don't know what magnet programs are."

So what is a magnet program exactly? "A magnet school has a specialized curriculum of learning that has a focused theme," Summerville said. "The mission is to attract a diverse group of students, and usually those students have the same interests. Part of their school day is spent not just studying the basic math, science, social studies, what every other student does in our district and our state, across the nation, with our college and career standards, but in addition to our standards, the students who attend magnet schools have an opportunity to study something that they love."

Magnet programs are offered at the following Huntsville schools:

- K-8: Academy for Academics and Arts – Students have the opportunity to study the performing arts, which includes dance, theater and orchestra.

- K-8: Academy for Science and Foreign Language – Students have the opportunity to study foreign language and science, which includes rocketry and robotics, in addition to the school's international baccalaureate program. Students in K-5 study French; middle schoolers have the option of choosing between Spanish, German and French.

- 6-8: Williams Technology Middle School – Partnered with NASA to offer the NASA's BEST (Beginning Engineering, Science and Technology) curriculum, students learn about the engineering design process.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Sue Aida gives a presentation about Columbia High School's International Baccalaureate program to interested parents during Magnet Awareness Week Oct. 27-31.

Eye on Education

- 9-12: Columbia High School – An international baccalaureate program is offered. IB students from the Academy for Science and Foreign Language may matriculate to Columbia to complete the program.

- 9-12: Creative and Performing Arts at Lee High School – With an emphasis on the fine arts, students have the opportunity to pursue areas such as theater, music, dance, photography and video broadcast.

- 9-12: J.O. Johnson Law Academy – Students have the opportunity to pursue the areas of law and public safety.

- 9-12: New Century Technology High School – Areas of study include biomedical science, computer science, engineering and game and app development.

"Out of all those programs, I believe that we have something that could pique the interest of all of our students in Huntsville," Summerville said.

Interested families should stay tuned to the Huntsville City Schools website, at www.huntsvillecityschools.org/magnet, as to when applications for the magnet programs will be available. For more information about magnet programs, call 428-6864.

"We want to make learning fun and school really fun," Summerville said. "By having these different programs available for the kids it makes them excited about going to school and excited about learning, that they can have an opportunity to spend part of their school day learning about something they have a passion for."

Vietnam series returns with veteran speaker

By AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON

Staff writer

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

It's been decades since North Alabama's Vietnam veterans returned from war, but the message they received at the second annual 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Lecture Series Nov. 3 from retired Lt. Gen. Frank Libutti was an important one they will never tire of hearing – thank you for your selfless service. Your nation is proud of you.

“Thank you. Welcome home. You are the best of the best. God bless you,” said Libutti, guest speaker for the event.

The Commemorative Partner Program event provided a venue for the community to gather to give thanks for the Tennessee Valley's Vietnam veterans. The Commemorative Partner Program, of which several North Alabama organizations are a part of, aims to remember, honor and show gratitude for Vietnam veterans and their families through events and activities planned across the country for a time period of 11 years, the length of the war. More than 25 local organizations supported Monday's event.

“The purpose of this event is to not only recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by North Alabama veterans, but to also help educate our young people about the Vietnam War,” said organizer John Perry.

Libutti, who served in the Marine Corps from 1966 to 2001, not only shared a candid history of the war,

but his personal experiences as well. While some showcased his misadventures as a second lieutenant serving as an Infantry Platoon Commander with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines in 1967, others demonstrated the cost of the war, as he recounted seeing his comrades fall to the enemy time and time again.

When he was wounded and sent to Okinawa, Japan, Libutti had an important message for his fellow Marines who were headed to war.

“I can still remember I hugged them and said, ‘Please be careful. Take care of yourself,’” Libutti said. “I was serious. I was not so much against the war, but the trauma and death of friends, not one or two, but hundreds of guys who you didn't know, but you fell in love with day to day, was really traumatic for me.”

Understanding that he was not the only Vietnam veteran in the room with a story to share, Libutti opened up the floor to invite other veterans to share their experiences.

“I would not change that experience for anything in the world,” said fellow Marine Joe Bongiovanni. “That experience has been the guiding light in my life and I'm so damn proud to be a Vietnam veteran.”

In addition to Libutti's remarks, guests were also treated to Vietnam era memorabilia, including a Huey helicopter, reenactors in Vietnam era dress and a retro 1960s lunch. The event was sponsored by Boeing.

“It's part of a sharing of a brotherhood, that only we know what it's like to have been there, to be on the lines, to share in the hardships, the selfless service, as all of



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Retired Lt. Gen. Frank Libutti discusses the Vietnam War and his experiences as a young second lieutenant in the Marine Corps at the second annual 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Lecture Series Monday.

you have done,” said retired Lt. Gen. Tony Jones, vice president for Huntsville for Boeing. “My thank you to each one of you for your service.”

Therapy horses help keep kids happy

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY

Staff writer

katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

“Happy trails to you until we meet again.”

As a child, Kathi Paul was enamored with Western star Roy Rogers, his famous theme song and the equestrian world. She has since taken her lifelong love and turned it into a mission of using horses to improve the lives of children.

“There is something magical about horses and ponies,” said Paul, creator of Happy Trails Therapeutic Riding Center.

Happy Trails, located in New Market, has helped more than 60 local youngsters with disabilities grow and develop. Happy Trails utilizes a research-based curriculum developed by SpiritHorse Therapeutic Riding Center in Corinth, Texas. Originally developed for riders with autism, the program has been modified for students with other conditions.

“We help a lot of students who are diagnosed with autism, selective mutism ... we have students with cerebral palsy, (students who have suffered from) strokes or had brain damage at birth,” Paul said. “The rhythmic motion (of horse riding) and warmth stimulates muscles.

“(The students) help brush the pony, saddle the pony and at the farm, they play games with the pony.”

The Happy Trails program is interactive, with parents playing a role in therapy.

“We need parents to participate because they are the world’s best expert on their child,” Paul said.

One such family has nothing but praise for Happy Trails and their equestrian assistants.

“We became involved with Happy Trails to provide a new way of introducing therapy to my sons,” parent Anna Ball said. “One of my children had a stroke at birth and has mild right hemispheric cerebral palsy. My other son has a rare genetic disorder with autism and cognitive delays as byproducts from the disorder.

“Happy Trails works on strengthening their core muscles, improving cognitive delays, exposing them to sensory and emotional challenges and helping them to overcome them in a loving and supportive atmosphere. I could not ask for more patient and kind individuals to work with my sons. They are top-notch.”

Most of Happy Trails’ horses are donated to the organization. But not just



Photo by Katie Davis Skelley

Don and Kathi Paul stand with Boomer, an Arabian horse that was donated to Happy Trails Therapeutic Riding Center.

Building Our Community

any horse can be a therapy horse. A calm temperament is a must and since the rider is usually pint-sized, smaller, compact horses are preferred.

“We use a lot of senior horses – classics,” Paul said with a laugh. “We want a horse who has been there and done that. A retired show horse is ideal.”

The horses at Happy Trails have riders of all ages – the young, and the young at heart. Paul’s husband Don, a retired Army veteran, proves it is never too late to learn how to ride a horse. He now spends his days with his wife, caring for their eight to 10 horses and assisting their small students.

“I was 70 the first time I got on a horse,” Don said.

Happy Trails is always looking for teachers and helpers. All instructors at Happy Trails are volunteers. And while not paid employees, they are instead rewarded with the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children with disabilities.

“It is like watching a miracle happen every week,” Paul said with a smile.

Happy Trails Therapeutic Riding Center Inc. is a 5013c nonprofit and member of the Combined Federal Campaign. For more information about Happy Trails, including volunteer and donation information, visit www.happytrailstrc.org.

Editor’s note: This is part of a series related to volunteers who are making the Tennessee Valley a better place to live and work.

Tell us about

■ ■ ■

By **SKIP VAUGHN**

Rocket editor

skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com

Your message for Veterans Day.

“I’m just so thankful that we’ve had veterans to protect our freedoms we enjoy so much in this country,” Terry Hazle, chief of the Environmental Management Division in the Garrison’s Directorate of Public Works, said.

Brendan Bennick, a civil engineer in DPW’s Base Operations Division and a veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, had this message: “Thank you.”



Terry Hazle



Photo by William Scott Farrow/Huntsville Center Public Affairs

Benefit car wash

Chris Harvel, second from right, an Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville acquisition support specialist, ensured Huntsville Center leadership did a thorough job washing his 1985 Dodge Power Ram truck Oct. 24 at the center. Harvel was one of four winners in a Combined Federal Campaign contest which provided the center’s leadership to hand-wash the winners’ vehicles. From left are Bill Sargent, Ordnance and Explosives Directorate chief; Coleen O’Keefe, Contracting Directorate chief; Pat Haas, Chemical Demilitarization Directorate chief; Lt. Col. Kendall Bergmann, deputy commander; Valerie Shippers, Installation Support and Programs Management chief and Col. Robert Ruch, commander. They rolled up their sleeves and washed three cars, and Harvel’s muddy truck, for an hour. The contest raised more than \$200 for Huntsville Center’s CFC campaign.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Distinguished guest

Former Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice pays a visit to Huntsville Oct. 28 as the keynote speaker for the “Invest in a Girl Celebration” fundraiser for nonprofit Girls Inc.

Courtesy photo

Congressional visit

Garrison commander Col. Bill Marks and U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama speak Thursday outside the U.S. Space & Rocket Center after Shelby addressed a University of Alabama in Huntsville luncheon. Shelby talked about UAH’s accomplishments and its importance to the local community and state.



Research center fosters innovative solutions

By RYAN KEITH

AMRDEC Public Affairs

The Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center is taking a novel approach to workforce development and far-term problem solving through a think tank called the Daedalus Project.

The group takes its name from Daedalus, the great architect, inventor and craftsman in Greek mythology responsible for designing the Labyrinth and for fashioning wings for himself and his ill-fated son Icarus. In Greek, daedalus means skillfully wrought. Dr. Michael Richman, director for missile development at AMRDEC, said the name reflects the group's charter to explore the art of the possible and to push thought beyond traditional paradigms.

"We approached this as an opportunity to bring together the best and brightest ideas that address the hardest Army problems related to maneuver attack and defense," Richman said. "Our primary objective is to foster innovation, to create an environment where engineers and scientists, unencumbered by legacy solutions, may exercise creativity and innovation to address hard problems."

Every Monday and Tuesday for four months a select group of individuals from across AMRDEC participated in the first Daedalus installment, which served as a pilot for future efforts. Dr. Stephanie Brown Reitmeier, who helped architect and guide the effort, said it was built upon three elements – creative people, a hard problem/future challenge, and a process designed to promote ideation and innovation.

The participants consisted of a chief engineer and a team of eight engineers, scientists and program analysts from across the center. They volunteered for the assignment, and were approved by their management team to participate. The technical backgrounds within the group were varied in order to limit biases and give voice to unique, nontraditional perspectives.

"This was intentional, as we wanted the team to start with a clean slate when attacking the topic," Reitmeier said. "Mentors and subject matter experts supported the team as needed."

The problem addressed by the 2014 Daedalus team, air defense in the year 2040, was intentionally broad in scope. The team was required to work through a pro-



Dr. Stephanie Brown Reitmeier, second from left, and participants in the first AMRDEC Daedalus Project gather following presentations to AMRDEC and PEO Missiles and Space leadership. Daedalus is a think tank aimed at fostering innovation and ideation to address far-term Army challenges.

Photo by Ryan Keith



Photo by Ryan Keith

Shane Thompson, Daedalus Project chief engineer, addresses leaders from AMRDEC and PEO Missiles and Space following team presentations.

cess of topic refinement, background research on air defense, specific research on existing solutions, concept ideation and finally concept design. Concept designs underwent feasibility analysis, requirements analysis and course of action analysis for technology insertion.

"The rules of engagement of Daedalus were be creative, but don't violate physics," Reitmeier said. "The team was expected to complete a first order analysis on the concepts that they identified. The products of Daedalus teams are feasible concepts; the result of rigorous analysis."

The Daedalus team produced several potential concepts, and presented these in August to leaders from AMRDEC and the Program Executive Office for Missiles and Space. Richman and AMRDEC director James Lackey praised the team's dedication and ingenuity.

"This goes to the core of who we are; the innovation and the critical core competencies that we have to retain," Lackey said. "This is what it's all about: the ideation, the innovation, thinking out-of-the-box. The challenges that we are going to have in the future will require creative thinking, and that entails all of your talents put together."

Lackey challenged AMRDEC leadership to embrace the Daedalus model, and encouraged each of the directorates to participate in Daedalus 2015 to address multiple topics.

"This was an exceptional group of engineers and scientists who took a vague question and turned out some quite insightful concepts in a very short amount of time," Reitmeier said. "The team set a high bar for future Daedalus teams. From a research perspective, we gained a great deal of insight into refining best practices of the team as well as how to reach out to mentors in future activities."

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Photo by Carrie E. David, SMDC/ARSTRAT

Security achiever

Steve Eldridge, deputy G-2, Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, presents Michael Leech the Security Monitor of the Year award Oct. 23 at the command's Redstone Arsenal headquarters. Staff Sgt. Marcus Griffin, paralegal noncommissioned officer, received the Security Monitor Award for the command's Colorado Springs, Colo., headquarters.

Optimal batteries can make difference on battlefield

By DAVID VERGUN

Army News Service

WASHINGTON – Something as seemingly insignificant as a battery could change a battlefield outcome. Staff Sgt. José R. Salcedo III learned this one night in Afghanistan.

It was 2012, and Salcedo was on a mounted patrol deep inside Ghazni Province. Suddenly, one of the vehicles hit an IED.

While others came to the assistance of the Soldiers in the vehicle, Salcedo grabbed his weapon and peered through his thermal weapon sight, scanning for the trigger man, who may have activated the IED with a wire or a remote device. After just a few seconds, his sight went black, he said.

Alkaline batteries were to blame for his sight shutting down during a critical moment.

Just 10 minutes before the IED exploded, Salcedo had checked his battery indicator and it showed a 50 percent charge remaining, he said. This meant the thermal sight should be operable for at least a couple of hours more.

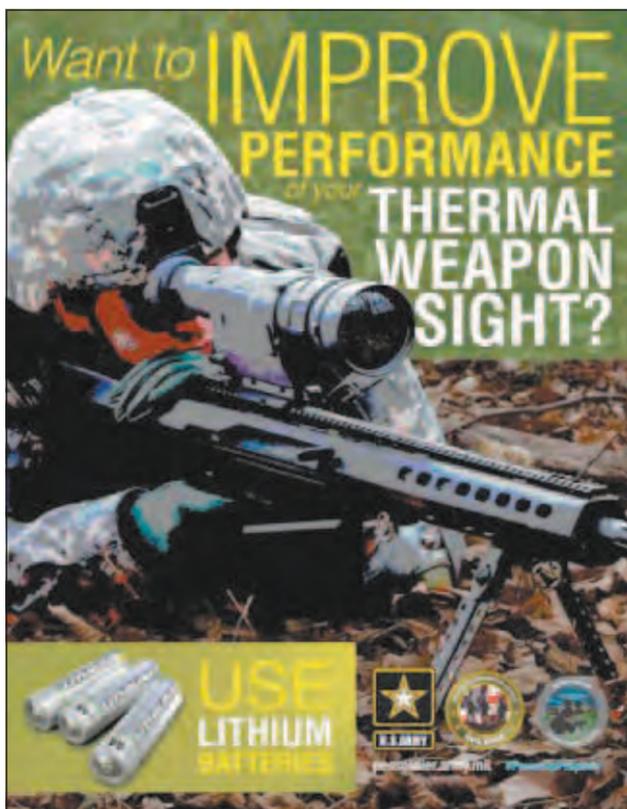
Salcedo then had to change out his battery pack as precious seconds ticked away. Those few seconds could have been long enough for the trigger man to escape, he said. “I’ll never know.”

Deconstructing what went wrong, Salcedo said he’d been using alkaline batteries. Unfortunately, the battery indicator in devices like the thermal weapon sight are calibrated for lithium batteries, so while he thought he had a couple of hours of charge left he only had a couple of minutes.

“I’ve noticed that with alkaline batteries, the battery indicator isn’t as reliable,” he said.

With lithium batteries, he noticed a difference. Salcedo said he could get away with the indicator reading 25 percent charge remaining and “feel comfortable letting it get that low before I have to change the battery pack out.”

Salcedo is the S-3 training noncommissioned officer with 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.



PEO Soldier graphic

Lithium batteries have several advantages over alkaline.

Besides the charge indicator, there are several other good reasons to choose lithium batteries over alkaline.

In good weather conditions, lithium batteries last about three times longer than alkaline, Salcedo said. In extremely hot or cold environments, lithium batteries could last up to 10 times as long.

That means Soldiers don’t have to change battery packs as often. It also means that’s less weight – more than one-third less – to carry around, he said.

He also explained how important it is to reduce the Soldier’s load during dismounted movement. It’s not just one-third fewer batteries, he added. Each lithium battery weighs just two-thirds that of an alkaline.

Cost savings is another factor favoring lithium. Alkaline batteries are typically twice as inexpensive as lithium, he said. But when compared to the much longer lifespan, lithium batteries are the better choice in the long run.

Joe Pearson, logistics management director for Project Manager Soldier Sensors and Lasers at Program Executive Office Soldier, known as PEO Soldier, added lithium batteries have been tested and shown to work in extremes from minus-40

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Batteries

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to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. And the more extreme the temperature, the longer the lithium batteries will work compared to the alkaline.

Pearson added that besides thermal weapon sights, there are many other devices where Soldiers should use lithium including sensors, lasers and precision targeting devices. His office equips Soldiers with those items so they can “dominate the battlefield in all weather and visibility conditions.”

Why not just require Soldiers to use lithium?

Master Sgt. Reiko Carter, PM SSL NCOIC/fielding operations NCO, said the Army is reminding Soldiers to review their technical manuals. If the TM recommends using lithium, make the switch. He added that PEO Soldier is seeking to educate the force on optimal battery solutions, not make it a requirement.

There could come a time, he said, when nothing else is available, but that should be the exception and not the rule. And devices do work with alkaline, albeit with the disadvantages already cited.

What to use is at the “commander’s discretion,” he added.

Incidentally, Carter said batteries used in operating environments are non-rechargeable, as recharging stations would add to the requirements. Rechargeable batteries should only be used at home stations and during training.

Carter, Pearson and Salcedo encouraged Soldiers to spread the word that lithium can make a difference on the battlefield.

Something as simple as a battery making the difference harks back hundreds of years to the bard who penned the poem, “For Want of a Nail.”

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.

For want of a shoe the horse was lost.

For want of a horse the rider was lost.

For want of a rider the message was lost.

For want of a message the battle was lost.

For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.

And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Armed Scout Helicopters photo

Aviation excellence

Sam Huffstetler, Armed Scout Helicopter business management officer and business branch division chief, receives a coin Oct. 21 from Brig. Gen. Bob Marion, program executive officer for aviation. Marion praised Huffstetler for efficiently managing the complex process of amending, closing and terminating contracts as a result of the OH-58F Kiowa Warrior Cockpit and Sensor Upgrade and Wartime Replacement Aircraft programs, relative to the Army’s Aviation Restructure Initiative. Huffstetler’s work led to coordinated mission changes and cost savings for the Army.



Huntsville Center team gains secretary of Army award

By **DEBRA VALINE**

Huntsville Center Public Affairs

The Corps of Engineers, Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville's Energy Savings Performance Contracting team received a 2014 Secretary of the Army Energy and Water Management Award for Renewable/Alternatives Small Group in a ceremony Oct. 29 at the Pentagon.

The award, presented by Katherine Hammack, assistant secretary of the Army for installations, energy and environment, recognizes fiscal 2013 accomplishments.

In FY '13, the Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville's ESPC program awarded 16 projects with a capital investment of \$188.6 million for Army and Navy customers that will save 385,843 million BTUs annually, or enough energy saved equivalent to the energy consumed by 4,287 homes. These Army projects, coupled with projects awarded in 2012, make up 85 percent, or \$424 million, of the Army's \$498 million commitment to the 2011 \$2 billion President's Performance Contracting Challenge.

"I couldn't be more proud of the ESPC team at Huntsville Center," Will Irby, Huntsville Center's ESPC program manager, said. "It takes a team of dedicated professionals from multiple disciplines to execute these complex projects. Our team will continue to work hard to serve our customers and the Army in pursuit of their ESPC initiatives."

According to Michael Norton, the chief of the Energy Implementation Branch, the Energy Division ESPCs are performance-based contracts and are a partnership between the Army and an Energy Service Contractor.

"ESPCs require no upfront capital investment from the customer, and improvements are paid back from the savings they generate over time," Norton said. "In consultation with the Army Garrison, the ESCO provides capital



Photo by Greg Jones, AMVID

At the Pentagon ceremony Oct. 29 are, from left, Katherine Hammack, assistant secretary of the Army for installations, energy and environment; Huntsville Center ESPC team members Michael Norton, chief of the Energy Implementation Branch; Will Irby, program manager for the Energy Savings Performance Contracting Program; Bruce Forsberg, a mechanical engineer for the ESPC team; Margaret Simmons, command counsel; Paul Robinson, Energy Division chief; Lt. Gen. David Halverson, assistant chief of staff for installation management; and Richard Kidd, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for energy and sustainability.

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Award

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and expertise to make comprehensive energy and water efficiency improvements on facilities or implements new renewable energy capability and maintains them in exchange for a portion of the generated savings.”

With an ESPC task order: (a) savings guarantees are mandatory; (b) savings must exceed payments each year; (c) measurement and verification is mandatory; and (d) contract term cannot exceed 25 years. An ESPC task order is one of the acquisition vehicles in Huntsville Center’s energy toolbox an installation can use to meet the Army’s energy and water reduction goals without upfront capital costs. With decreasing budgets, the Army, Department of Defense and other federal agencies struggle to meet mandated energy reduction goals. These performance-based contracts allow agencies to make needed improvements despite these budget reductions.

The ESPC projects awarded by Huntsville Center were critical to

Army success in meeting presidential goals as well as assisting garrisons in meeting their energy reduction goals and critical infrastructure improvement needs. The Energy Policy Act of 2005, Executive Order 13423, Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 and the National Defense Authorization Act 2010 are federal mandates that require a 30 percent energy consumption reduction by 2015, 20 percent water consumption reduction by 2020, use of renewable energy and solid waste diversion.

The Huntsville Center’s ESPC program is recognized by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Installations, Energy and Environment, Office of the Secretary of Defense and the White House Council on Environmental Quality for its expertise in third-party acquisition, acquisition processes, project execution and quality. The ESPC team is uniquely positioned to continue the success of the Army as we move forward into the next presidential challenge. Through a centralized program and project management and acquisition team, streamlined processes and high execution rate, Huntsville Cen-

ter will continue to lead the Army, DoD and other federal agencies in ESPC and Utility Energy Service Contract execution.

Two projects completed using a Huntsville Center ESPC also received awards. A project at Fort Carson, Colorado, received an award for water conservation on an installation, and White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico, received a small group award for renewable/alternatives.

At Fort Carson, the installation made significant strides in reducing water consumption to meet Net Zero water reduction goals and to comply with Stage II water restrictions implemented by Colorado Springs Utilities. In FY ‘13, Fort Carson replaced thousands of water fixtures in 77 buildings, improved and expanded the reclaimed water system and installed weather smart irrigation controllers. The \$2 million initiative focused on toilets, aerators, urinals and shower heads that were audited and found to be using excessive amounts of water. The result of the project was that Fort Carson reduced its water intensity by more than 41 percent from FY ‘07, far exceeding the goal of 2 percent reduction per year or 26

percent by FY ‘20.

The 4.465 megawatt White Sands Missile Range solar photovoltaic system will generate approximately 10 million kilowatt-hours of clean electricity annually, and provide an estimated annual savings of \$700,000. Complemented by a 350 kW solar carport, the solar array deployed at White Sands will supply approximately 10 percent of the total power used at the installation and reduce carbon emissions by 74,000 tons per year. The project expects to save \$35,251,533 over 25 years.

The White Sands ESPC used an Energy Services Agreement, which was a first of its kind for the Army. There are two main reasons to use an ESA structure within an ESPC. First, an ESPC structure allows one to bundle various technologies allowing lower payback technologies to be subsidized by higher payback ones. Second, and perhaps the overwhelming reason to use an ESA structure within an ESPC, is to reduce the cost of higher payback technologies (solar, wind and other renewable energy technologies) that would not otherwise be economical in an ESPC project.

Photo by Lauren LeMasters

Packages for troops

Kiley Henry, left, director of A Smile For Troops, and Crickett LeMasters help pack boxes Oct. 29 destined for troops on Navy ships and in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Kuwait. The boxes contain sauce from Buffalo Wild Wings. This was part of the franchise's national campaign which sold more than 2,300 bottles of sauce within two months. A portion of the proceeds from each bottle sold goes to the Boys and Girls Club of North America. The next packages for A Smile For Troops are scheduled for shipment Dec. 3. For information on helping this program, visit www.asmilefortroops.com.



Courtesy photo

Training partnership

Representatives of the Defense Acquisition University and the Leadership Huntsville/Madison County sign a memorandum of understanding Oct. 24 at DAU's Huntsville campus. Seated are Sarah Savage, CEO/president of Leadership of Huntsville/Madison County, and Mark Lumb, dean of DAU-South Region. Standing, from left, are U'Meeka Smith of Leadership Huntsville/Madison County, Mark Unger of DAU-South Region and Diane Whitmore of DAU-South Region.

The Defense Acquisition University-South Region and Leadership Huntsville/Madison County announced a partnership to support each other's efforts to provide world-class training that leverages the expertise of both the public and private sectors.





Photo by Collin Magonigal, RTC

Think pink

Whether out at Redstone Test Center's Aviation Flight Test Directorate posing in front of aircraft or enjoying a bagel in the shape of a breast cancer awareness ribbon at Test Area 1, employees show their support for "Wear it Pink" day Oct. 24. This annual event has continued to grow with RTC employees donning pink wigs, pink beards and even appearances by the infamous checkered pink pants.

Marshall expo showcases space technology

By **AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON**

Staff writer

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

The journey to deep space is only beginning – and it will take more than NASA to get there.

NASA and Marshall Space Flight Center invited industry and academia to join them on their journey to deep space Oct. 27 at the Marshall Technology Exposition. The expo was an opportunity for Marshall to open the doors to the work they're doing on a daily basis, in an effort to find areas of partnership with those outside the gates.

“We are in a competitive world,” said Dr. Michael Gazarik, associate administrator for NASA's Space Technology Mission Directorate, NASA headquarters, and keynote speaker for the expo. “I'm on the hill competing for dollars, the scarce federal R&D (research and development) dollars. We're all in competition, whether we acknowledge it, like it or not, we are. This is not the time to sit back on our laurels and do what we've been doing for years. This is the time to get after it. This is the time to engage with universities and partner, which I know is a big theme of the expo, and I'm right with you. We've got to get out there with industry and academia, partner and go do some great work. We've got to act as if we're in a competitive arena, because you know what? We are.”

With their sights set on deep space and the unique challenges that accom-



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Dr. Michael Gazarik, associate administrator for NASA's Space Technology Mission Directorate, NASA headquarters, delivers the keynote address at the Oct. 27 Marshall Technology Exposition.

pany sending man to Mars, alignment with not just industry, but also academia, is vital.

“We want to stay cutting edge,” Gazarik said. “The best and brightest in this nation are in our universities. Let's get them focused on the problems that we have. Let's work together. And oh, by the way, also, in the long-term we get a workforce for the entire nation, not just NASA, that is relevant, that is skilled, that is experienced in the types of problems and challenges that we face in industry.”

In addition to hearing from speakers and panels, attendees of the expo also got a firsthand glimpse of the technologies being discussed, as well as an op-



Photo by Ellen Hudson

From left, Anthony Mastalski, Morgan Abney, and Mononita Nur of Marshall Space Flight Center, talk about their work with Bosch Technology for Space and Earth Applications.

portunity to talk to the scientists and engineers developing those technologies.

“We are building the capability to explore deep space and we're just getting started,” Gazarik said.

Gazarik pointed out that Marshall plays and will continue to play a crucial role in that journey.

“Technology drives exploration.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Doyce Mitchell, left, and Richard Fischer, right, of Marshall Space Flight Center, talk with Gary Norland and Kyle Daniel with Safety and Mission Assurance at their exhibit about propulsion technology at the Marshall Technology Exposition.

That exploration and that technology in Huntsville is going to lead the way. You'll see all the work that is being done in materials and composites, in manufacturing and propulsion, all the necessary things that we're going to need to go and do and thrive in deep space,” he said.

Huntsville Center helps fireproof aircraft hangars

By JO ANITA MILEY

Huntsville Center Public Affairs

A project to install a High Expansive Foam System and fire alarm system into all the maintenance hangars at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, presented a unique challenge for Installation Support and Program Management Directorate's Facilities Repair and Renewal Program at the Engineering and Support Center, Huntsville.

"This is the first time Huntsville Center's FRR team has done this type of work. We finished the work on hangar 13 and awarded hangar 14 last year. This year, we awarded the work on hangar 12 – the final hangar on this task order. The dollar value on these projects total \$5.4 million," Mike Murphy, FRR program manager at Huntsville Center, said.

Aircraft hangar safety involves a wide range of issues depending on the work that is being accomplished on the aircraft parked in the hangar. Issues that may come into play are hazardous fluids, slippery surfaces or falling objects and fire safety. Xavier Thigpen, the FRR project manager who provides oversight for the hangar projects at Joint Base Andrews, said the most catastrophic safety issue in an aircraft hangar is an uncontrolled fire.

According to Thigpen, there are many



Courtesy photo

A foam test is conducted at Joint Base Andrews, Md.

ways a fire could be ignited during aircraft maintenance. Any flammable liquid being employed by maintenance personnel can catch fire, causing death or serious physical damage. High Expansive Foam Systems – generally used in contained areas, such as aircraft hangars, mines and ships, where volume fire control is required – are highly important to the safety of individuals performing aircraft maintenance in the hangars in the event of a fire. The high expansion foam concentrates extinguishes fires involving both Class A fuels and flammable liquids.

Since 2012, Thigpen has worked closely with private contractors and project engineers at the Corps of Engineers' Middle East District to complete the upgrades on schedule.

The Middle East District is the Technical Center of Expertise for Aircraft Hangar Fire Protection in the corps, providing fire protection engineering assistance to corps offices involved in the design and construction of fire protection systems for aircraft hangars. Their goal is to assure hangar fire protection systems are designed and constructed to be as cost effective, reliable and maintainable as possible.

Contractors have to perform several extensive tests of the hangar's fire sprinkler system and fire alarm system; mass notification systems have to be performed prior to actually making the 2 percent low level High Expansion Foam System's foam drop. The Far East District provides the final decision on test success.

Thigpen said fire suppression foam comprises three parts: foam concentrate, water and air. When mixed correctly, these parts form a homogeneous foam blanket that extinguishes flames by the combined mechanisms of cooling, separating the flame source from the product surface, suppressing vapors and smothering. In addition, the hangar's sil-

houette has to be covered to a minimum of 1 meter within four minutes. The FRR team accomplished this test within approximately two minutes, 30 seconds in hangar 13.

Murphy said the hangar projects at Joint Base Andrews are very important to his program and the center because they are representative of the work Huntsville Center is capable of providing to customers.

Thigpen said successfully completing the tests means hangar occupants now have a safer work environment.

"In the past, occupants had to rely on dry pipe sprinkler systems, with limited capability to effectively control fires. Using this type of fire suppressant is favored because high-expansion foam concentrates form vapor barriers on hazardous material spills and fuel leaks," Thigpen said. "For 13 years now, high expansion foam has grown in the protection of aircraft hangars utilizing nonhazardous foam concentrate. The largest single reason is that it will generally have a lower water requirement over other protection methods."

With the final hangar project nearly complete, Murphy said he and his team are looking to the future.

"These projects have been very successful – we're looking forward to getting more work of this type for our program," he said.

PeopleProfile

SMDC says farewell to senior civilian leader

By JASON CUTSHAW

SMDC/ARSTRAT Public Affairs

Members of the Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command said goodbye to a leader who served as an Army civilian for 32 years during a retirement ceremony Monday.

Ronnie Chronister, deputy commander of SMDC/ARSTRAT, came to the command in August 2012 as its senior civilian leader. He was appointed to the Senior Executive Service in October 2005.

“What I am most proud of during my time at SMDC is having had the opportunity to be a part of this organization,” Chronister said. “I have been on the Arsenal 30 years prior to coming over here and I didn’t have a really detailed knowledge of what SMDC did, especially their operational mission, and I am just proud of the fact that I could just come in and participate in this organization and get to spend time with the Soldiers and civilians and help them carry out their missions.”

Chronister came to SMDC from his former position as the deputy commander of the Aviation and Missile Command, where he was from 2008-12. There he managed an organization with an annual budget of more than \$4 billion and a global workforce of more than 11,000 military and civilian employees and was responsible for the readiness of all Army aviation and missile programs.

From 1983 to 2008, Chronister served in a variety of positions including Aviation and Missile Command Integrated Materiel Management Center executive director; Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center’s Engineering Directorate acting director; AMRDEC ED deputy director; AMRDEC ED Manufacturing, Science and Technology Division chief; AMRDEC ED Production Engineering Division chief; and AMRDEC ED PED general engineer.

While at SMDC, Chronister has provided leadership for the Army’s space and missile defense programs, acquisition support, personnel and resource management and for the command’s mission to provide trained and ready space and missile defense capabilities, build future space and missile defense forces and research, test, and integrate space, missile defense, directed energy and related technologies.

“The thing I will remember most about SMDC is the fact that the two years I have been here have been two pretty tough years with reductions and furloughs and other issues,” he said. “Those are all negatives, but what I will remember most is turning that negative situation into a positive. When we went through the sequester and we started looking at our resources, both our funding and our people, it forced us to look at ourselves and our priorities, and also forced the Army to look at its priorities. And as we went through that process, what I saw occur was the Army start to really recognize the magnitude and the significance and relevance of this command and its importance to our nation’s defense.”

Chronister took time to talk about the SMDC workforce he has worked with and how they will never be forgotten.

“The SMDC workforce across the board, whether you are talking about the operational element, the Future Warfare Center, the Technical Center or the staff, is one of the most technically competent workforces that I have ever seen,” he said. “We have some really big-brained civilians who do what they do phenomenally well. When you start thinking about civilians who are doing planning for the global missile defense mission or for space missions, they are just exceptional. When you start thinking about the folks in the FWC who are doing the training of all of the Soldiers and civilians for missile defense and space, they are exceptional at what they do. And then in the Tech Center where you have all of the scientists and you start talking about things like hypersonics, nano-satellites and high-energy lasers, they are just phenomenally technically qualified.

“I also think about how resilient the workforce is,” he continued. “Going back to the time we had with sequester and furlough, and despite all the negatives and morale issues, this civilian workforce never, not once, didn’t meet their mission requirements. Our mission never failed here. Our civilians stepped up



Photo by Carrie E. David, SMDC/ARSTRAT

Lt. Gen. David Mann, commander of the Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, presents deputy commander Ronnie Chronister a retirement pin as his wife, Susan, looks on at Chronister’s retirement ceremony Monday. Chronister retired after 32 years of civilian service to the Army.

during that morass of issues and did what they were supposed to do and our country never suffered and our mission never deteriorated. I am very proud of them for that.

“I would like to thank the workforce for putting our Soldiers and our country first and not themselves and helping this command to execute its mission in the midst of all the turmoil,” Chronister added. “Our mission is much more relevant and we are getting more visibility. So aside from thanking them for what they have done, I would like to encourage them to work better together across the board.”

He also gave advice to new Department of the Army civilians who are just beginning their journey as civil servants.

“When coming into a job as a DA civilian I think what is key is to embrace the public service mentality,” Chronister said. “Recognize that it is not about you, but about others and something more important than you.

“Then they have to find something and become technically credible,” he continued “And what I mean by that is that they have to be good at something. Sometimes I see people coming in and they move around and they don’t get really knowledgeable in one area, they are a mile wide and an inch deep. My belief is they need to establish their technical credibility and through that they establish their reputation as a civilian.

“Another thing is to abide by a few principles and one of them is to build relationships and have a good attitude,” he added. “Learn how to work your way through adversity in your career. Everybody gets hosed over – I have – and how you deal with adversity in your career and your work is exceptionally

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OFFICE’S NEW DIRECTOR LIKES ALABAMA HOME
‘BABY LADY’ HAPPY TO WELCOME NEW ARRIVALS

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Farewell

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important. If you embrace the civil service mentality, if you establish yourself and your reputation through the kind of work that you do, and if you have a good attitude and learn to build relationships, I think those are a good map for a successful DA civilian career.”

Chronister spoke about his decision to retire and how it will allow him to have more balance in his personal and professional life.

“I am not going far,” he said. “This retirement decision was done relatively quickly and I would describe that as a divine convergence of events. Some positive things happened that were a little unexpected and so my decision to retire was based on a multitude of factors. I will get the opportunity to do some things that are important to me.”

As Chronister and his wife, Susan, prepare to take the next step in their journey, he said how a supportive family made his career more enjoyable and that he could not have accomplished what he did without his entire family.

“I would not be here if it were not for my family,” he said. “I am talking about my whole family. I am an Army brat, I was born at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and from my parents to my sister and to my wife and children, they have all played a huge part in supporting me in my career in various and different ways.

“This has always been a family business,” he added. “I never interviewed for a job, I never applied for a job and I never did anything career wise without first sitting down and discussing it with my wife. She knows me better than I know myself. I am a product of a huge support structure from my family and it has never been about me, it has always been about we and my family.”

Chronister talked about what he will miss most about working with the Army and those charged with the nation’s defense.

“I have enjoyed the public service aspect of what I do,” he said. “I have enjoyed being part of a team and part of something that is bigger than me. There are very few places where you can operate in that kind of environment and it is very satisfying. It is hard to quantify and very hard to describe, but I will miss

the camaraderie and working together to ensure the Soldiers have what they need to defend our country.

Chronister earned a bachelor’s in civil engineering from the University of Alabama and a master’s in program management from the Naval Post Graduate School, where he graduated with distinction.

His awards and honors include: Army’s Greatest Invention Award for Blue Force Tracker presented by the commander of the Army Materiel Command; Alabama A&M University Leadership Award; Army Acquisition Corps Award for Scholastic Achievement from the Naval Post Graduate School; University of Alabama Distinguished Engineering Fellow; Secretary of the Army Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Award; Secretary of the Army Diversity and Leadership Award; Presidential Distinguished Rank Award; Alabama Engineering Hall of Fame inductee; and Department of the Army Decoration for Exceptional Civilian Service.

Chronister is a member of the Army Acquisition Corps, American Helicopter Society, Association of the U.S. Army, Army Aviation Association of America, the National Defense Industrial Association and the Air, Space and Missile Defense Association.

As he prepared to close the chapter on his Army career, Chronister spoke about the future and how he hopes his time serving with Soldiers and DA civilians was as beneficial for the Army as it was for him.

“I have a problem with legacy questions, somebody else will have to figure that out,” he said. “I will tell you what I have tried to do, and this is not just here but in any position I have been in is, I have tried to be a good example of positive leadership. I think being a positive, credible leader is the thing that I hope, when people reflect back on my time here or any other place, is something that comes up. You can’t be a positive leader unless you have credibility with the people you work with, and I don’t think you can gain credibility with people unless you care about them. And I hope that looking back that people realize that I do care about them genuinely and that maybe I created a positive example of what good leadership is.

“I am very happy and I have been very fortunate in my 32-year career with some great Soldiers, civilians and contractors. I have been very blessed and it is time to go do something else. I am being led somewhere else and I am very comfortable with that and I wish everyone the best.”

Office's new director likes Alabama home

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY

Staff writer

katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

While many members of Team Redstone hail from outside the Tennessee Valley, you will be hard pressed to find anyone who has traveled as far as Kenneth Edland.

Edland, who took over as chief of the Garrison's Plans, Analysis and Integration Office on Oct. 5, is settling into his new position after a year of big changes. With a new job, new home and a new baby, Edland looks forward to putting down roots.

"I feel like I have completed a triad," he said. "I was born in New York, raised in California and by all indications I would like to end up here in Alabama."

Raised in the Silicon Valley in the days before the technology boom when there were still fields and farms, Edland as a child longed to get out and see the world. Figuring that the Army would take him beyond the confines of California, Edland enlisted and would spend a majority of his military career in the Signal Corps, traveling between assignments at Fort Hood, Texas, Germany and Korea.

"While I was raised, I was ignorant to foreign language and customs, but when the military sent me to Korea, it was a revelation to me," he said. "When

I got there, I really dove into the culture – I learned the history of Korea and of the war, and I learned to read and write the language. It was a fascinating journey to learn another culture outside of my own."

After retiring from 20-years in the Army, Edland would spend the next decade as a civilian at USAG Daegu, first working in the Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security and later moving to the PAIO.

"It made sense for me to start my civilian career in Korea, where I gained so much familiarity from 3 military tours," Edland said.

After almost a decade in Korea, Edland started looking to the future and thinking about putting down permanent roots. Never quite considering New York or California home, he recognized in North Alabama all of the qualities that he was looking for to raise a family. He met his wife Kyonga, a concert flutist, in Daegu, and this year, they welcomed a little girl, Hannah. Hannah factored greatly into the Edlands' decision to settle in Madison, with the city's top ranked schools, ongoing growth, and close-knit community a big selling point.

In addition to new changes at home, Edland is excited about his new role at PAIO and the opportunity to be a part of Team Redstone.

"I am looking forward to becoming a productive Garrison team member but it takes time," he said. "I am looking forward to solidifying my role in support of each PAIO team member, my peer directors, and the Garrison Command Team. This will come in time as I settle into Alabama and the new job."

The Edlands plan to move into their new home in November and with a new baby, the holidays will be especially merry this year.

"In the Army and through the years, people would often ask where was home and I would not be quick to say California," Edland said. "In a sense, I just passed



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Kenneth Edland is the chief of the Garrison's Plans, Analysis and Integration Office.

through California and I have always been looking for a home. That is why my arrival here is so exciting. This place facilitates my definition of what home should be."

**Military Personnel Office
will be closed Nov. 28,
Dec. 26 and Jan. 2.
For emergencies, please
call 509-5068.**



Photo by Carrie E. David, SMDC/ARSTRAT

Space overview

Lt. Gen. David Mann, commander of the Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command, left, tells Gen. John Hyten, commander of the Air Force Space Command, about SMDC's Army astronauts during Hyten's visit Friday.



Courtesy photo

Historic tour

Members of the Greater Huntsville Section of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics traveled to Dayton, Ohio, to attend the 100th Anniversary of World War I Dawn Patrol Flying Rendezvous, visit the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force and tour sites on the historic Aviation Trail.

'Baby lady' happy to welcome new arrivals

Providing support to military parents

By KARI HAWKINS

Assistant editor

kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

Donna Harris doesn't mind being called the "baby lady."

She enjoys all things "baby." She likes the "Baby Bundle," a free basket of supplies that she provides for newborns, and their moms and dads compliments of the New Parent Support Program, located at Army Community Service. She is happy to provide information on child issues and available resources to new military parents. And she is always willing to visit the homes of expectant parents and parents with babies to see how she can support them as they experience the challenges – and rewards – of parenthood.

The "baby lady" label fits Harris well, except that she also helps parents with those terrible 2s and trying 3s, also known as toddlers.

"Babies and toddlers don't come with an owner's manual," Harris said. "Just about everything else in the world comes with an owner's manual, and kids don't. So, I want to be there to serve and help our military parents as they take care of these little people called babies and toddlers."

With the warmth of a well-seasoned mommy or auntie, and the experience of a professionally licensed social worker, Harris comes across as someone who moms and dads can talk to about problems with their babies, as someone who dispenses as much care and concern as she does information and resources, and as someone who listens and encourages rather than judges, and who offers advice – not a demand – when asked.

"I have always just loved babies and toddlers. I'm really passionate about

those first three years. They are critical to seeing a child thrive and maximize their potential," she said. "Children are our heart and our future. And they come attached to families, so I want to help the families and be there to support the parents."

Harris joined the Army Community Service staff in midsummer, taking on the responsibilities of coordinating its New Parent Support Program. She has most recently worked at the National Children's Advocacy Center and taught at Alabama A&M University.

"I've worked with kids and families since I was in college," she said. "I specialized in childhood and family welfare, and I've worked at the master's level with kids and families for 20 years in health, mental health and educational settings.

"My job is not to judge, but to help. It's not looking for what's wrong, but building on what's right in terms of parent's strengths. Parents tell me what they need and what they are concerned about with their children. I listen and help meet those needs. Parents have to be able to trust me and I work hard to earn their trust."

ACS' New Parent Support Program is a voluntary prevention and education program designed to promote healthy family living through private home visits, classes, support groups, play mornings and community referrals. The goal of its programs are to enhance parent and infant attachments, increase knowledge of child development, and provide connections to support services that assist parents in healthy caregiving. Military families expecting a child or who have children ages birth to 3 are eligible for the program.

The New Parent Support Program activities include the delivery of a Baby Bundle when a baby is born, home visits where Harris provides support and information concerning the everyday demands of parenthood, Childwise Play



Photo by Kari Hawkins

Army Community Service New Parent Support Program coordinator Donna Harris holds a "Baby Bundle," a basket of goodies and items given to newborns and their parents. Other items shown are parenting books made available to new parents and infant baby dolls that simulate real babies. Harris provides such items to new parents in military families to help them manage the challenges of parenthood while fulfilling the demands of military service.

Mornings that provide a parent-child interactive play group on Tuesdays and Thursdays beginning at 9:30 a.m. at 1413 Nike St., and various parenting classes with child care provided.

"Support and resources are critical not because parents aren't smart and resourceful already but because life throws you curveballs that can be stressful," Harris said. "And those curveballs can come very fast when you are talking about military families.

"The military has really been smart to provide a model of services that offers parents resources, safety information, stress management skills and child devel-

opment knowledge; these are the kind of supports military families need."

Often, Harris' job takes her into the homes where new parents are learning how to care for their baby or toddler.

"The program we offer is based on building in people's strengths. You can't be in the world, and especially in military life, without strength and resiliency," she said. "When I come into the home, I bring with me resources, help with problem solving and a listening ear. Parents, however, bring their own strengths, including being the main expert on their own child."

See Baby on page 44

Veteran

Continued from page **1**

In WWII and today, hope is provided by the Soldier on the ground. Alterizio reflected on the poor state of readiness of the military at the onset of WWII.

“We still had propeller planes for reconnaissance and horse drawn artillery, not many people remember the beginning of the war,” Alterizio said. The Soldiers on the ground fought with what they had, coupled with determination and a refusal for defeat.

Alterizio, 92, still embraces the Army values of today. He gets up every morning at 5:30 for physical training, and walks one mile every day, except Sunday. He makes time to raise the American flag every morning and lowers it daily at dusk. He is happily married to his wife Maria of 68 years, with whom he had two children, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Alterizio is proud of his service and of all those that have served. He is a great example of a Soldier for Life.

To learn more about the Soldier for Life program, visit soldierforlife.army.mil.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Brig. Gen. Neil Thurgood, program executive officer for missiles and space, talks with Philip Alterizio and his wife, Maria, while visiting their home.

Baby

Continued from page 42

She also asks questions about a baby like: How is the baby sleeping? How is nursing going? How is the baby doing with other children in the house? Are the parents getting enough sleep? How often are diapers changed? How is bath time going?

With toddlers, she will ask questions like: How is toilet training going? How do you handle temper tantrums and other aggressive behavior? How is verbal communication developing?

“But my most important question to every parent I meet with or I visit with in their home is, ‘What do you need?’ I want to help them in any way I can to be as healthy a family as they can be, and to have a healthy baby or toddler. They are our future,” Harris said.

During home visits, Harris offers development screenings with babies as young as 2 months old. She can repeat screenings every two months.

“I check to see if the baby is on track enough, and what the baby’s strengths are physically, emotionally and socially,” she said.

And when there is a development

problem that is taking the baby off track – such as a speech or cognitive issue – Harris can refer families to physical therapists and other specialists who can intervene early to address a problem.

“If needed, I address development issues. If we are concerned about something like autism, the earlier it’s discovered and treated, the better,” she said. “I really believe parents are the experts who are aware of things before anyone else is. They are aware of their kids’ strengths, and I’m there to help them build on those strengths.

“But mostly what I do is just provide resources and information that allows parents to add to what’s working, to add to their effective parenting tool box.”

Harris has a bachelor’s in psychology from the University of South Alabama, a master’s in sociology from the University of Michigan, 1987; and a master’s in social work from the University of Southern Mississippi, 1995. She grew up in Huntsville as the daughter of a Redstone Arsenal employee. She is married, and has a teenage son and an adult stepdaughter.

While working at the National Children’s Advocacy Center, Harris often counseled children from as young as 2 and into their teenage years after they had been abused.

“Anything we can do to help prevent those kinds of problems is so very need-

ed. It is so wonderful to get in a relationship with parents before things like that happen,” she said.

“Part of the reason the military has programs like this is to prevent abuse and neglect within military families. The stress of having a child combined with the stresses of being part of the military makes it especially tough for these families. When you have a new baby, you often feel like you don’t have enough time, energy and money, and you’re not doing anything wrong when you feel this way. It can be the most wonderful time, but it can also be the most stressful time.”

Although she didn’t come from a military family, Harris was far from home when her son was born. So, she is familiar with the feelings of isolation, concerns and lack of support that comes with being separated from family members at a time when a young family most needs them.

“I remember wanting my family there. I didn’t always know who to ask for help. I didn’t know all the answers to a lot of the questions that come with being pregnant and having a newborn in the house – and I felt this way after professional training in child welfare. The deal is that a specific baby doesn’t come with specific instructions,” she said.

“I had the luxury to be able to move

back to be close to my family support network. But what do people do who can’t move back closer to home? Like our military families? I don’t replace family, but I am available to help families who are serving and sacrificing for our country. I can support families through all the deployments, separations and challenges of being in the military. No family is perfect, and most need some resources and support during the tough times.”

All services provided by the New Parent Support Program remain confidential. And although most of those services are accessed after a baby is born, Harris also works with pregnant parents in helping them plan for their baby and in having a healthy pregnancy.

Harris said being around babies and new parents is energizing.

“It’s wonderful to be able to work with families who care enough about themselves and their kids to get the resources, information and support they need to be a happy and healthy family,” she said. “We want them to be the happiest family they can be.”

For more information on the New Parent Support Program, call Harris at 876-5397 or 975-1083, or email her at donna.m.harris67.ctr@us.army.mil or visit the Army Community Service office at the Pershing Welcome Center, building 3443, Room 126.

Engineer conquers Marine Corps Marathon challenge

By SKIP VAUGHN

Rocket editor

skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com

Wearing his 2014 Marine Corps Marathon finisher medallion, the young engineer rocked his 6-week-old daughter to sleep and continued his conversation.

Multi-tasking isn't much of an obstacle to Courtney Guasti, considering he ran a marathon in under five hours after training only three miles per week. And he just started running in May 2013.

"It's just another challenge," said Guasti, a materials engineer at the Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center who supports the AMCOM Corrosion Program Office. He works for AMRDEC's Weapons Development and Integration Directorate.

He finished the Marine Corps Marathon in 4:52:42 on Oct. 26 in Washington, D.C. This was his third 26.2 mile race. He finished Huntsville's 2013 Rocket City Marathon in December in 5:10 and the 2014 Mercedes Marathon in Birmingham in April in 4:17. Next up is the 2014 Rocket City Marathon on Dec. 13.

With work and a newborn, Guasti doesn't have time to train. He tries to do a short run each week and averages about 15 miles per month. At the Marine Corps Marathon, he ran most of the way but had to walk a little when his legs started cramping about mile 20. He maintained a 10:30 minutes-per-mile pace which became 11 minutes at the end.

"It was great," Guasti said. "I mean the support that they had, the number of runners. From the opening ceremony to the very end, there were people cheering you on, giving you high-fives. It was probably the best one that I've ran so far."

He started running in spring 2013 while on a more than yearlong rotational leadership development assignment in the command group at the Aviation and Missile Command. AMCOM's Steve Fisher and Capt. Pete Thomas coaxed him into training for the Rocket City Marathon.

"I've always wanted to run a marathon just to see if I can do it," Guasti said. "So when Steve and Pete were egging me on to get into Rocket City, I said, 'What the heck, now's as good a time as ever' so I actually started training for that one."

"Once you get over that mental aspect of knowing you can finish, it just makes it easier, breaking that barrier."

He started training that May but ran out of time and stopped training in September. His daughter, Hadley, was born Sept. 15. Also he and his wife, Abby, director of community relations at Randolph School, have a 5-year-old son, Harper, 5.

"I think there was like an internal bet in the office if I was even going to finish," he said laughing.

Guasti, 35, is originally from Killen. After graduating from Brooks High School in 1997, he went to Auburn University and earned a bachelor's in polymer fiber engineering in 2001. He earned his master's from Auburn in 2006 in materials engineering. He started working at AMRDEC's Aviation Engineering Directorate in 2005 and arrived at his current directorate and position in January 2010. His hobbies include golf and Auburn football.

"Just to be able to complete the long distances, just to finish," he said of running marathons. "I really don't enjoy running, I take it on as a challenge. I actually think the Rocket City will be my last marathon. I'm going to move on to obstacle courses, do a 'Tough Mudder.' It's like a 12-13 mile run with obstacles and mud throughout the way. You're jumping in it, crawling through it or climbing out of it."

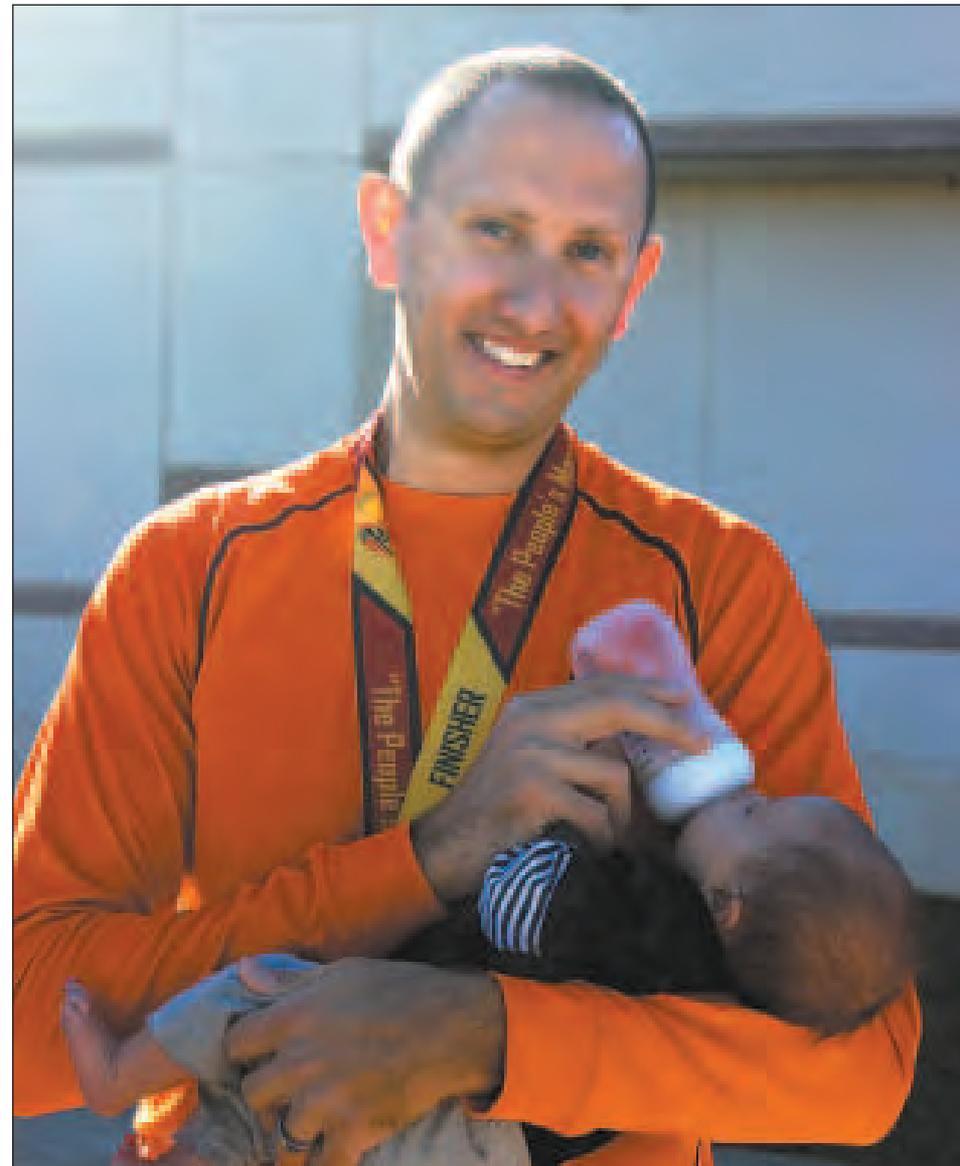


Photo by Skip Vaughn

Materials engineer Courtney Guasti, of the Aviation and Missile Research Development and Engineering Center, finished the Marine Corps Marathon on Oct. 26 in Washington, D.C. He's holding his 6-week-old daughter, Hadley.

That's just another challenge for this engineer family man.

Editor's note: Army runners excelled at the Marine Corps Marathon with Soldiers finishing in first and second place in the male division and first place in the female division. In the male division, Spc. Samuel Kosgei won in 2:22:11 and Spc. Laban Sialo clocked 2:23:48. Capt. Meghan Curran was the first female finisher in 2:51:46.

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"It's just another challenge."

Courtney Guasti

Ladies golf group ends year on frightfully fine day

By SKIP VAUGHN

Rocket editor

skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com

Oct. 29 delivered sunny weather for the 85-member Redstone Arsenal Ladies Golf Association's final event of the year.

In fact, the members couldn't have conjured a better day for their Witch Fight tournament at the Links. Twenty-eight golfers competed in four flights of seven.

The winners included Debbie Powell, first flight; Lindsay Coop, second flight; Sheila Hershey, third flight; and Kathy Newton, fourth flight.

Col. Chuck Salvo, president of the Redstone Arsenal Golf Advisory Council and commander of the Logistics Support Activity, made a surprise presentation to ladies association president Peggy Stanley during the luncheon after the tournament. Stanley received a Garrison certificate of appreciation for her exemplary volunteer service as president from October 2012 through October 2014.

"In that capacity you also served as a voting member of the Redstone Arsenal Golf Advisory Council," the certificate said. "You are a self-starter who always demonstrated tremendous initiative and leadership to the members and officers of the RSALGA. Under your stewardship, there were many successful events, tournaments, and socials, which benefited not only the RSALGA but also increased revenue to the Links at Redstone. Your efforts reflect great credit upon yourself, the Links at Redstone, fellow volunteers, the Redstone community and the United States Army."

"My goodness," Stanley said after the presentation. "Thank you all very much. That was quite welcome."

Here are the complete results from the tournament:

First Flight: 1. Debbie Powell, 2. Jean Summers, 3. Joanne Mason, 4. Jan Berry, 5. Marty Carter, 6. Kay Theodoss, 7. Linda DeJong.



Photo by Skip Vaughn

Linda Vergara won a prize for her costume hat at the Halloween-themed event. She also placed fourth in the tournament's second flight.

Second Flight: 1. Lindsay Coop, 2. Kathleen Stirling, 3. June Mann, 4. Linda Vergara, 5. Sally Deivert, 6. Judy Finch, 7. Phyllis Hopson.

Third Flight: 1. Sheila Hershey, 2. Sally Sheppard, 3. Elke Napier, 4. Pam Bucey, 5. Fran Shaner, 6. Kate Pokemire, 7. Connie Gerlach.

Fourth Flight: 1. Kathy Newton, 2. Pat White, 3. Sue Brown, 4. Kay Eyermaann, 5. Betty Yamashi-



Photo by Skip Vaughn

Fran Shaner was among the golfers in the Redstone Arsenal Ladies Golf Association's final event of the year, the Witch Fight tournament Oct. 29. She placed fifth in the third flight.

ta, 6. Gloria Cupples, 7. Fran Sullivan.

Hole winners: Kathy Newton on No. 3, Sue Brown on No. 6 and Kay Theodoss on No. 12.



Photo by Skip Vaughn

Donning a Halloween hat, Jon Samuelson addresses the members of the Redstone Arsenal Ladies Golf Association during their luncheon after the tournament. Samuelson, a PGA member, is the Links' head golf professional and activity manager.



Photo by Skip Vaughn

Col. Chuck Salvo, president of the Redstone Arsenal Golf Advisory Council, presents a certificate of appreciation to Peggy Stanley, president of the Redstone Arsenal Ladies Golf Association.

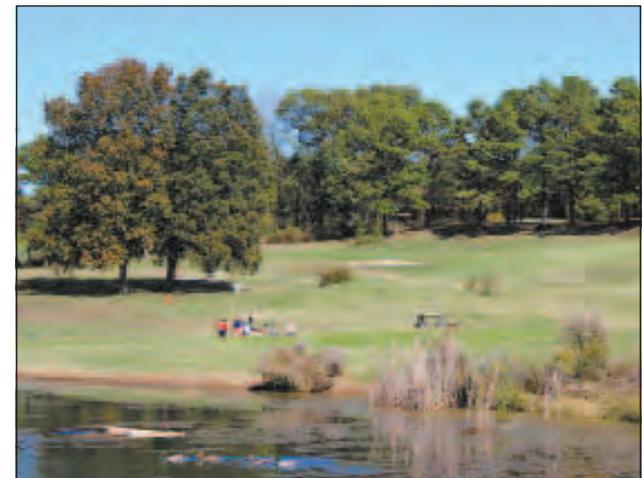


Photo by Skip Vaughn

Sunny weather graced the Witch Fight tournament Oct. 29 at the Links.

Crimson Tide should roll at Baton Rouge

By **SKIP VAUGHN**

Rocket editor

skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com

Skip's Picks were 328-109 for 77 percent after nine weeks. Here are my predictions for this week's games in college football:

Alabama at LSU – **Bama**
 Texas A&M at Auburn – **Auburn**
 Alcorn St. at Alabama A&M – **Alabama A&M**
 Florida at Vanderbilt – **Florida**
 Georgia at Kentucky – **Georgia**
 Presbyterian at Ole Miss – **Ole Miss**
 Clemson at Wake Forest – **Clemson**
 Memphis at Temple – **Memphis**
 Utah St. at Wyoming – **Utah St.**
 Baylor at Oklahoma – **Oklahoma**
 Wisconsin at Purdue – **Wisconsin**
 SMU at Tulsa – **SMU**
 Penn St. at Indiana – **Penn St.**
 Texas-San Antonio at Rice – **Rice**
 Iowa at Minnesota – **Iowa**
 Louisiana Tech at UAB – **Louisiana Tech**
 Georgia Tech at N. Carolina St. – **Georgia Tech**
 Duke at Syracuse – **Duke**
 Wofford at Chattanooga – **Wofford**
 Furman at The Citadel – **The Citadel**
 Montana at E. Washington – **E. Washington**
 Iowa St. at Kansas – **Iowa St.**
 Michigan at Northwestern – **Northwestern**



Tulane at Houston – **Houston**
 West Virginia at Texas – **West Virginia**
 Notre Dame at Arizona St. – **Notre Dame**
 Connecticut at Army – **Connecticut**
 UT Martin at Mississippi St. – **Mississippi St.**
 Washington St. at Oregon St. – **Oregon St.**
 Air Force at UNLV – **Air Force**
 Virginia at Florida St. – **Florida St.**

UCLA at Washington – **Washington**
 Hawaii at Colorado St. – **Colorado St.**
 Marshall at Southern Miss – **Marshall**
 Boise St. at New Mexico – **Boise St.**
 Louisville at Boston College – **Louisville**
 Colorado at Arizona – **Arizona**
 Ohio St. at Michigan St. – **Michigan St.**
 Oregon at Utah – **Oregon**

Redstone Rocket

A supplement to the November 5, 2014 issue

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Heroes in our midst: We salute you

By **AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON**
Special section editor
amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

It's a job that we will never tire of.

In the Tennessee Valley, Veterans Day may have turned into an entire week, but here at the Redstone Rocket, we've turned it into an entire month as we've worked to prepare this special insert you hold in your hands.

I've said it before, and I will say it again – it is our great privilege to share the stories of our veterans, stories that should be passed on and preserved for future generations, so that we may never forget the true meaning of the words courage, duty and sacrifice.

The stories within these pages, compared to the volume of veterans across North Alabama, are few, but we're honored to tell each of them, and will not rest until each veteran's story in our community is told.

These extraordinary men and women once bravely raised their hands and said, "Yes. Send me," knowing that the full cost of that service could very well be their lives. There is no possible way to thank you enough.

So to all the heroes in our midst, today and every day, but especially Veterans Day, we salute you.

Veterans guest of honor at Monday's dinner

*Everything you need to know
about the Veterans Dinner*

Who's invited? The event is open to the public, but tickets go fast. Reservations may be made at www.ausaredstone.org.

What is it? In addition to dinner, attendees will enjoy one of the largest patriotic events in the Huntsville/Madison County area, as Team Redstone, state and local leaders, as well as our nation's heroes, gather to celebrate Veterans Day. Highlights include:

- Hall of Heroes Induction Ceremony
- Military Order of the Purple Heart Induction Ceremony
- Huntsville/Madison County Veteran of the Year Presentation
- Presentation of the MacKay Trophy

Where is it? The Von Braun Center's North Hall

When is it? Monday, Nov. 10. Reception begins at 5:30 p.m., with dinner at 6.

How much does it cost? \$50 per person

What should I wear? Suit and tie; evening attire for women.

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Rocket Staff

Editor-in-chief: Col. Bill Marks, Garrison commander

Director of Public Affairs: Sharee Miller

Editor: Skip Vaughn

Assistant Editor: Kari Hawkins

Special Section Editor: Amy Tolson

Reporter: Katie Davis Skelley

Photographer: Ellen Hudson

Copy Editor/Design: Kelley Lane Sivley

General Manager: French Salter

Advertising Sales: French Salter, 256-340-2463, or French.Salter@theredstonerocket.com

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Veteran heroes receive weeklong salute

By AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON

Special section editor

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

The experience lasted only a week, but it was enough to change Mark Whitaker's life.

When the wounded Soldier was "voluntold" last year that he would be attending the Semper Fi Community Task Force's annual Heroes Week, Whitaker was less than enthused. But the moment he was shown a hero's welcome, not only by organizers, but the entire community, Whitaker's life began to change.

"It was encouraging to see," said Whitaker's wife of more than six years, Danielle. "It was really good for Mark just to be around other people in the military again, who did go through a lot of the same stuff. It took away a lot of the bitterness. When he got home, there was a lot of negativity towards people in the military. Just being around people who appreciated what he did helped him a lot to get over it."

Together with the Semper Fi Community Task Force and their army of volunteers, the Whitakers will ensure another group of wounded warriors receive that same life changing experience at the 2014 Heroes Week, Nov. 6-12. Seventy guests,

representing all service branches, will arrive in the Tennessee Valley on Thursday for a week of relaxation and recognition. The wounded warriors, together with their spouses and caregivers, will not only be recognized at the Veterans Dinner, Veterans Day breakfast and parade, but will participate in a variety of activities, including a boat cruise on Lake Guntersville, the Marine Corps Ball, a fishing tournament and aerial tour of North Alabama, as well as lunches and dinners where they will be the esteemed guests of honor.

On this year's invite list is a group of Vietnam Purple Heart recipients. Whitaker is especially looking forward to being there for their homecoming at the airport, the highlight of his Heroes Week last year. All are invited to welcome the wounded heroes when they arrive at the airport and The Westin on Thursday. Airport welcomes will be held at 1:15 and 3:15 p.m., and at The Westin at 1:45 and 3:45. Due to possible weather and flight delays, times may change. Well-wishers are asked to arrive early to line up for the welcome.

For Whitaker, who never received a welcome home from Afghanistan, being greeted at the airport by waving American flags, signs and cheers, left him in awe.



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

Mark Whitaker takes the helm of the "Outrageous" from skipper Al Herbert during last year's Parade of Boats on Lake Guntersville as part of Heroes Week.

"When I got there it was just mind-blowing," Whitaker said. "It was over-

whelming. It really did bring tears to my

See Week on page 6

Week

Continued from page 4

eyes. I never thought I'd get anything like that. I really didn't. I don't even know how to describe it."

Other highlights from Whitaker's Heroes Week experience include receiving an Auburn football signed by Gus Malzahn, tossing pizza dough with Madison mayor Troy Trulock, catching a fish so small during the fishing tournament he named it "Bubbles," and coming home with a small Statue of Liberty, which contains a piece of the real Lady Liberty. Danielle also had the opportunity to partake in her own spa day.

"It wasn't about all the things they gave us or the things we got to go and do," Danielle said. "The whole organization was there 24/7, and they would just literally give you the shirt off their back if it would help you out. The main leaders in the organization were there to hold the door for you and to ask, 'Do you need coffee? What can we do for you?' They're amazing. They went completely out of their way to give us a good week."

For Whitaker, the chance to unwind with other men and women who knew exactly what he was going through, some of whom he still keeps in contact with, was a priceless part of the week that not only gave him his camaraderie back, but also left him with a new outlook on his own injuries.

"Sometimes I would get down and depressed about myself and think, 'Oh man, I'm a cripple. I can't do this,'" Whitaker



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

Mark and Danielle Whitaker look off into the distance as they cruise on Lake Guntersville as part of last year's Heroes Week, organized by the Semper Fi Community Task Force. The experience was such a positive one they will return as volunteers this year.

said. "And then I'd meet someone else who has had something much worse happen to them, and they're succeeding in life. Then I'd think, 'I don't have an excuse. If they can do it, why can't I?'"

With such a positive experience, it only makes sense to the Whitakers to be there for this year's Heroes Week, only in a different capacity – as volunteers.

"We want to give what we received," Whitaker said. "I've never experienced anything like that, and I don't want them to stop. I want to be able to give back. If all they want me to do is sit at a desk, then I'm going to sit at a desk."

For more information about Heroes Week, visit semperperfectf.org.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

American flags greet wounded warriors as they arrive at The Westin last year for Heroes Week.

Heroes Week schedule of events

Event details are subject to change.

Thursday, Nov. 6

Heroes Week begins. Join the Semper Fi Community Task Force in welcoming wounded veterans and their spouses and caregivers from across the country to Huntsville for Heroes Week 2014. The public is invited to welcome them at the airport or at The Westin, 6800 Governors West NW, Huntsville. The first group is scheduled to arrive at the airport at 1:15 p.m., and at The Westin at 1:45. The second arrival is scheduled for 3:15 at the airport, with arrival at the hotel at 3:45. Times may change due to weather and flight delays. Well-wishers are asked to please arrive early. Heroes Week activities continue through Nov. 12.

Friday, Nov. 7

YMCA Veterans Prayer Breakfast, Craig and Steven Hogan Family YMCA, 130 Park Square Lane, Madison, doors open at 7 a.m., program begins at 7:30. Tickets are \$20 for an individual, \$225 for a table of eight. Reservations are requested. Veterans, Active Duty and Military RSVP to: events@ymcahuntsville.org or call 256.428.YMCA ext. 3008. For information, www.ymcahuntsville.org/veterans.

8th annual Army Aviation Association of America Tennessee Valley Chapter Aviation Ball, The Westin, 6800 Governors West NW, Huntsville. Social hour begins at 6 p.m., with dinner at 7, followed by music and dancing at 8. Black tie/military uniform suggested.

Saturday, Nov. 8

Marine Corps Birthday Ball, The Westin, 6800 Governors West NW, Huntsville. Reception begins at 5 p.m. with dinner at 6. Cost is \$85 for an individual; \$850 for a table of 10. For tickets contact Staff Sgt. Delgado at 213-9683 ext. 105, or stop by Kilo Battery, 3506 Memorial Parkway SW.

Sunday, Nov. 9

Veterans Steak and Baked Potato Dinner, Madison Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1400 Hughes Road, Madison, 6 to 9 p.m. Free for veterans and children under 8. Donations will be accepted.

Monday, Nov. 10

Veterans Day Dinner, Von Braun Center North Hall, 5:30 p.m. The evening will the Hall of Heroes Induction, Military Order of the Purple Heart Induction, announcement of the North Alabama Veterans and Fraternal Organizations Coalition's Veteran of the Year and recognition of Maj. Vincent Powell with the Mackay Trophy. Reservations are required. Tickets are \$50 for an individual, table sponsorship is available. For reservations, visit www.ausaredstone.org.

Tuesday, Nov. 11

Breakfast, Von Braun Center North Hall. Doors open at 8:15 a.m. with reception at 8:30 and breakfast at 9. Program includes recognition of Gold and Blue Star families and Heroes Week participants and the City of Madison's Veteran of the Year. Cost is \$20 for an individual, reservations are required. For tickets, visit www.ausaredstone.org.

Veterans Day Parade, beginning in front of the Von Braun Center's Propst Arena. Opening ceremony begins at 11 a.m., cannon fires at 11:11. Pre-parade program begins at 10 a.m. at Veterans Memorial Park, and will include a Tribute to Veterans and musical selections from the Huntsville Concert Band.

Flag retirement ceremony, following the parade, Veterans Park. The Boy Scouts will properly dispose of damaged flags from around the Tennessee Valley in a solemn ceremony.

Unveiling of the Early Works Patriot's Mosaic, at the Historic Huntsville Depot, 320 Church Street NW, Huntsville, 1:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public, weather permitting. The depot will hold an open house following the event.

Open house, U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum, 2060A Airport Road, Huntsville, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. including refreshments and a tour of the museum. RSVP to Randy Withrow, randy@memorialmuseum.org.

Home dedication, for Cpl. Brandon Johnson and his family, 148 Autumn Cove, Madison, in the Legacy Cove community, 3 to 5 p.m. The Johnson family will receive the keys to their new home given to them through Operation FINALLY HOME and Jeff

Prayer breakfast opens Veterans Week

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY

Staff writer

katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

It is an opportunity break bread and say thank you to those who have served. Local leaders, veterans, representatives from Team Redstone and citizens will gather Friday at Madison's Craig and Steven Hogan Family YMCA to honor and pray for the nation's military at the ninth annual Heart of the Valley YMCA Veterans Prayer Breakfast.

"The purpose of the YMCA Veterans Prayer Breakfast is to recognize our military heroes – both veterans and active duty service members – for the sacrifices they have made and continue to make every day to keep our country free," said North Alabama Veterans and Fraternal Organizations Coalition president Richard Reyes, whose organization co-sponsors the event with the YMCA. "Supporting the YMCA Prayer Breakfast helps to bring unity to our service members, veterans and our patriotic citizens in the North Alabama community."

Doors will open at 7 a.m. and breakfast will begin at 7:30.

This year's keynote speaker will be Lt. Gen. Patricia McQuiston, senior commander of Redstone and deputy commander for the Army Materiel Command.

The prayer breakfast each year honors local military members and their service and sacrifice. The event is free for all veterans, Soldiers and spouses of deployed service members.

"People ask how they can support our military and this is how they can through the Y," said Heart of the Valley YMCA director of communications Mary Anne Swanstrom. "Purchasing a ticket (for the breakfast) will also buy a seat for a veteran."

As part of the morning's events, Medal of Honor recipient and retired Col. Leo Thorsness will be recognized. The AMC Band and Huntsville Police Department's Blue Notes 5 singing group will also be on hand to provide musical entertainment. Chaplain Odri Hastings from VFW 5162 will deliver the invocation and Reyes will serve as the master of ceremonies.

A labor of love since the beginning for both the YMCA and NAVFOC, the breakfast is traditionally the kickoff to Veterans Week in Madison County.

"The coalition has been involved since the first YMCA prayer breakfast. The forefathers to this event, Army retired Brig. Gen. Robert A. Drolet, past NAVFOC president David Carney and former YMCA Heart of the Valley CEO Scott Mounts collaborated to bring this honored prayer breakfast together nine years ago," Reyes said. Swanstrom encourages the community to come out Friday for food, fellowship and



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Bob Jones High School Air Force JROTC presents the flags at last year's breakfast.

faith.

"We are very excited to be the first official event of the Veterans Week," Swanstrom said. "It is a very fitting – and lively – way to start out the week."

Although tickets are free for veterans, active duty military and the spouses of deployed service members, Swanstrom asks that everyone preregister as seating is limited. Individual tickets are \$20. A table for eight can be purchased for \$225.

Tickets can be purchased and seats reserved by visiting www.ymcahuntsville.org/veterans or by calling 428-9622, ext. 3008, or by email to events@ymcahuntsville.org.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Attendees enjoy last year's buffet breakfast at the Hogan YMCA in Madison, which will again host the breakfast Friday.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

World War II veterans Arthur Wolde and Sherwin Callander share greetings at the 2013 breakfast.

Survey: What do we owe our veterans?

By **SKIP VAUGHN**

Rocket editor

skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com



Staff Sgt. Rafael Nevarez-Ponce

Army Materiel Command

“For me I’m a veteran, I don’t think I deserve anything. Just recognition, that’s about it.”



Erich Snoke

SMDC/ARSTRAT

“We owe them our thanks and our gratitude for the freedoms that we enjoy.”



Angela Keaton-Simpson

Army Contracting Command-Redstone

“We owe them everything. We should be the best that we can be when we are here on our jobs. They lay it on the line for us every day. My dad, Samuel Keaton Sr., and my brother Benjamin D. Keaton are veterans.”

Veteran meteorologist ready for annual parade

By AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON

Special section editor

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

When Brad Travis comes to work on Veterans Day, it won't just be as a TV personality for WAFF 48, it'll be as a veteran.

For years the broadcast meteorologist has covered the Veterans Day parade in the Tennessee Valley, and this year is to be no different as he does the live feed from the Veterans Memorial. But what few people may know is that he's not just a weatherman – he's a veteran as well.

"It allows me to thank the military we have now," Travis said of his role with the parade.

Growing up in Kansas, Travis' sights turned to the Army Reserve while working at McDonald's when his buddy mentioned he was going to join. Not an athlete or a straight A student, Travis saw the military as means of opening the door to education.

"The big draw eventually became college – the GI Bill – because my parents didn't have a lot of money," Travis said. "My dad was a teacher and my mom was studying to be a nurse, so she was working at Kmart and places like that. We always struggled with money."

With big plans of going off to basic together, Travis found himself all alone when his friend, who had flat feet, couldn't get in. Joining in January 1988, when Travis headed to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for basic training, it was the first time he had ever been on a plane. The airport in Newark was a far cry from his hometown of about 12,000 people.

"All of a sudden this responsibility is pushed upon you," Travis said. "We had never taken a family trip on a plane or anything, so it was all a brand new experience. You walk in and you see these hustlers who ask you, 'You wanna buy a watch?' I had never ran into that. It was a real eye-opening experience. It was kind of neat at the same time."

Travis spent eight years total in the Reserve, six active, two inactive, rising to the rank of sergeant before he turned 21.

"I picked to be a cook because it was in my hometown," Travis said. "It was a bonus unit in my hometown. We didn't have a reliable car, so I knew I didn't want to be driving 50 or 60 miles to another town to go to that unit, plus I picked being a cook because you could gain rank faster and you could earn more money."

His service to his country includes one year spent in Saudi Arabia. His awards include the National Defense Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal Army Achievement Medal, Liberation of Kuwait Medal, Army Service Ribbon Noncommissioned Officer Training Ribbon and Army Reserve Overseas Training Ribbon. Travis cites the experience as one of the hardest in his life.

"The thing about Saudi Arabia was, you're in a desert for one," he said. "It was like being in a landfill and bringing in your breakfast, lunch and dinner and pitching a tent. The days just dragged on and on. It was only a year, but it felt like I had been there all my life. That was how bizarre it was. I can't imagine some of those troops that are over there two to three years, because one year felt like forever."

"All the time you're over there, all this other stuff is happening over here. All these people's lives just keep going on, but yours is kind of stuck. It's almost like you're in a time warp."

What it taught him, however, is that he can do anything, a lesson he learned throughout his time in the Reserve – the importance of personal challenges.

"When you pass those challenges, everything else that you do in life doesn't seem that hard," Travis said. "I think that being over in Saudi Arabia definitely did that."

That includes his education to become a meteorologist, which required him to take accelerated math classes.

"I thought, 'If I'm going to spend a year here in this desert, I can spend however long it takes to get my education,'" said Travis, who graduated from the University of Kansas in 1995.

Upon his return from Saudi Arabia, he knew he had reached a crossroads in terms of what direction his life would take.

"I figured I've done everything I can for my country, except give my life for my country," Travis said. "I was going to have to focus on my career, which was going to be somewhere in meteorology, and I wasn't sure if it was going to be in television."

Travis had two decisions before him – either become an officer in the Air Force



Photo by Ellen Hudson

WAFF 48 meteorologist Brad Travis may be a familiar face on TV, but few people may know he's a veteran. Travis will be providing a live feed of the Veterans Parade festivities from the Veterans Memorial Tuesday.

Veterans Day Parade

Begins in front of the Von Braun Center's in front of the Propst Arena. Opening ceremony begins at 11 a.m., cannon fires at 11:11.

or try television. When he went to take the officer test at Whiteman Air Force Base and never heard back on the results, he knew the decision had been made for him.

"It was almost like that was a sign," Travis said. "I didn't hear either way. I almost didn't want to know because I was so stressed at that time in my life."

Roofing houses at the time, when he got a call from a TV station offering him a 16 hour a week position, he accepted. Leaving his military career behind him, Travis today still carries the lessons his time in uniform taught him.

"The big thing about the military is it made me a lot more responsible. It made me a lot more confident, too," Travis said. "That's been the big step. I don't know if I would have ever ended up in television if I didn't have the confidence. I was a little guy. I grew probably six inches the summer I went to basic training, and I lost probably 20 pounds. I came back and my dad didn't even recognize me when I got off the plane. There were tears in his eyes. That was pretty emotional."

If you can't make it in person to this year's parade, tune in to WAFF 48 or visit www.waff.com for live coverage.

Warrant officers group helps start parade

By **AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON**

Special section editor

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

If you are one of the many Tennessee Valley residents whose heart swells with pride at the Veterans Day Parade each year, thank a warrant officer.

For more than a decade, the Redstone Arsenal Chapter of the U.S. Army Warrant Officers Association has been the mastermind and marshals of the patri-

otic parade, making sure all goes to plan for the ultimate tribute to the nation's veterans.

So what goes in to the planning of a parade that last year had more than 150 entries? A lot of hard work.

The parade itself may only take a few hours, but the planning that goes into it takes months, usually starting around August. Working hand-in-hand with television station WAFF 48, the marshaling role of the warrant officers

kicks off when registration for parade entries goes live in mid-September. As registrations come in, the warrant officers organize each entry's information, and as Veterans Day draws closer, begin putting the entries in some sort of order. Typically the first 45 entries are locked in in terms of leadership and other honored guests; the warrant officers determine order beyond that, to ensure the parade is both diverse and entertaining.

The morning of the parade, the warrant officers and fellow volunteers gather in Lot K in downtown Huntsville around 8 a.m., to begin the sign in process and show people to their places. Once the parade begins, they also do route monitoring, to ensure everything runs smoothly and is timed well.

"It takes a lot to get it going and make sure that it happens, but the minute it's over you look back and say, 'Another fun one in the bag,'" Johnie Keeter said.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

New Century Technology High School JROTC cadets salute during the 2013 Veterans Day parade.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

Canvas Inc. of Huntsville shows its support for veterans as they wave flags on their float.



Photo by Ellen Hudson

The Army Materiel Command Band marches in the 2013 Veterans Day parade.

Downtown mosaic paints portrait of patriotism

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY

Staff writer

katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

It is a relatively new addition to the annual Veterans Week celebration but one of the most anticipated.

The 2014 Patriot's Mosaic will be unveiled at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Historic Huntsville Downtown Depot. An interactive project spearheaded by EarlyWorks Family of Museums executive director Bart Williams, the 15-by-15-foot mosaic consists of around 1,300 5-by-5-inch tiles. Each tile bears the image of a service member.

"It is amazing how families' stories center around these veterans and it is an honor to hear their stories and be a part of their stories," Williams said.

The Patriot's Mosaic, which serves as a beacon for the Patriot's Gateway entrance to the Huntsville/Madison County Veterans Memorial, was unveiled last year on Veterans Day as part of an expansion of the Veterans Memorial, which now includes the gateway and the Patriot's Pathway, a passageway lined with educational kiosks that leads to the memorial.

The 2013 mosaic spent the year as an in-

structional centerpiece for EarlyWorks and their mission to educate the children who visit their facilities in downtown Huntsville. With the success of the first mosaic, Williams' original idea for it to become an annual part of Veterans Week thrives. A total of 10 are planned with the main mosaic always remaining in the same area guiding visitors to the gateway and pathway, while previous years' mosaics will be displayed across the community. This year, Williams said, several local businesses collected photos of their employees who are veterans as a way to pay tribute to their service.

Immediately following the unveiling Tuesday, the depot will hold an open house for the public.

For more on the Patriot's Mosaic, visit www.visionsofvets.com. Anyone who wishes to own a permanent copy of the mosaic can order a poster of the finished art for \$14. Posters will be available for pick up on the day of the unveiling at the depot.

Photo by Ellen Hudson

Last year's Patriot's Mosaic will be moved to another wall adjacent to the main mosaic at the Historic Huntsville Downtown Depot to make way for the 2014 version.



No place like home for wounded warriors



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

The Johnson family breaks ground on their new Jeff Benton Home in June, given to them mortgage-free, through Operation FINALLY HOME. From left to right, Amy, Rebecca, Michael, Tiffany and Cpl. Brandon Johnson, with home builder Jeff Benton.

By AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON
Special section editor
amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

The house at 148 Autumn Cove in Madison is more than just four walls and a roof – for Cpl. Brandon Johnson and his wife Tiffany, it will be home.

The deserving wounded warrior and his family, which includes daughters Amy and Rebecca, and son Michael, will receive the keys to their new house for the first time come Veterans Day, in a Home Dedication ceremony from 3 to 5 p.m. All are invited to welcome the Johnsons as they unlock the door to the newest chapter in their lives, made possible by Operation FINALLY HOME and Jeff Benton Homes.

“We’re excited about having a home,

just having a place of our own that we can make memories and raise our kids,” Tiffany said.

The Johnsons received word June 27 in a surprise groundbreaking ceremony, that they would be the recipients of a mortgage-free home, located in Legacy Cove off Zierdt Road in Madison. The family thought they were one of two families being considered for the new home. When they arrived at their new address to hear the words, “Welcome to your new homesite,” they were left speechless.

“It was just shock from there on out,” Johnson said.

Johnson was only 17 when he enlisted in the Marine Corps, having heard that they were the “best and hardest.” Serving in the Marines for just under four years, his plan to become a “lifer” was cut short



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

Cpl. Brandon Johnson and his wife Tiffany read letters from students at J.E. Williams Elementary welcoming them to their new home and letting them know how excited they are to meet their children, Amy, Rebecca and Michael.

by an IED blast during his deployment to Iraq that left him with a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, degenerative disc disease, arthritis in his back and complex regional pain syndrome. With nerve damage in his left leg, Johnson is constantly in pain, no matter what the sensation – air, water, clothing – anything that moves the hairs on his leg hurts immensely.

His time in Iraq also left emotional scars.

“There’s a lot that has come from my time in the military, both good and bad,” said Johnson, who said he would’ve stayed in for 20 or 30 years had the Marines let him. “It has definitely skewed my view of people and being trusting. In Iraq you never knew what you were going to come across. I used to be able

to look at a person and decide, ‘That’s a good person,’ or ‘That’s a bad person, I’ve got to watch out for them.’ But after being in Iraq and being fired on by kids, elderly people – we had a four-year-old used against us as a bomb, an IED, their parents blew them up – it’s definitely given me a view of the worst humans can be.

“But then when I got back here and there’s so many people who care – it’s taken me a long time to get me back to where I am now, and I have come a long way.”

The Johnson’s new home is the ultimate symbol of that love and generosity that has helped change his opinion about the world, love that is encased in the walls of their new home. Members of the community were invited to write messages of

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Home

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encouragement and congratulations on the studs of the walls Aug. 21.

“They’ll always be in the home,” Tiffany said. “They don’t even know us, but it’s all good wishes for great things for our future.”

The 2,600 square foot home, complete with four bedrooms and three and a half baths, is a far cry from their 1,000 square foot rental in Gurdley, where the family is in tight quarters. Each child has their own bedroom with its own theme – camo and military for Michael, under the sea for Rebecca and safari for Amy. Johnson himself even gets his own space for a “man cave” within the home, where he can showcase his Crimson Tide and Marines gear. The move will enable the kids to ride their bikes freely, and the Johnsons to do something together they love, cook.

The house is also handicap accessible, if and when that day should come for Johnson, with zero entry doors, widened doorways, an intercom system, and cameras both inside and outside the home.

“We don’t think about it, but we don’t put it far away,” Tiffany said of the



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

The Johnson family reacts emotionally to the news they are receiving a mortgage-free home from Operation FINALLY HOME in June. They will receive the keys to their new home Veterans Day.

chance that her husband may one day be wheelchair bound.

In addition to the new home, the couple was also able to make a wish list, in the event there were resources left over. At the top of that list is a new kitchen table, where they can share in meals together as a family, as well as a couch large enough for them to snuggle and spend time with one another.

“The possibilities are endless, and ev-



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

A worker who played a role in building the home of Cpl. Brandon Johnson left this message for the family above their future fireplace.

ery door is open,” Tiffany said.

Operation FINALLY HOME provides wounded and disabled veterans, as well as survivors of the nation’s fallen heroes, with a place to call home. The

national non-profit brings together corporate sponsors, builder associations, builders and developers to build the homes. About 60 have been completed nationwide.

Boy Scouts to retire flags on Veterans Day

Troop 400 leaders continue tradition

By **KARI HAWKINS**
Assistant editor
kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

The crowds aren't that big and the ceremony is rather somber. But as the Veterans Day parade in downtown Huntsville comes to a close on Tuesday and the celebratory groups of parade revelers go on their way, a group of Boy Scouts will take on the honorable responsibility of retiring old, worn, faded and badly soiled U.S. flags in a ceremony at the Veterans Memorial.

Boy Scout Troop 400 has had the honor of conducting this public flag retirement ceremony at Veterans Park for longer than Maalik Moore and Daymond Billups, the troop's senior patrol leader and assistant senior patrol leader respectively, can remember. Both have been in the troop for eight years.

They were just elementary school kids during their first Boy Scout Flag Retirement Ceremony, and both remember being afraid of the flames springing out of a barrel as the flags were placed into the fire.

"It was kind of scary because it was around fire," Billups said.

Troop 400 will ceremoniously dispose of 50 or more flags during their ceremony. They collect the flags throughout the year from local citizens. Flags can also be dropped off at the ceremony itself.

"It has to be used for a while before we can retire the flag," Moore said.

The flags are folded into a triangle to be presented during the ceremony. It takes several Boy Scouts to fold and present the flags. Every Scout in Troop 400 has a job during the ceremony.

"In our ceremony, we say the Pledge of Allegiance and the Scout Law, and then we retire each flag in honor of a U.S. war. Sometimes we say the name of the war and sometimes we say how many were killed or injured in the war. Sometimes we will say the date of something that happened that was really important to our nation. Then, we put the flag in the fire and we ring a bell," Moore explained.

The ceremony is complete when the last flag is burned and there are only ashes remaining in the barrel. The ashes are later buried.

For Moore and Billups, the ceremony is a reminder of the sacrifices that have been made for the nation's freedoms.

"It's an honor to have this in Veterans Park," Moore said. "It's an important ceremony to remind all of us that we should all want to be involved in something as great as the history of our nation."

"This ceremony is a reminder of the people who died for us so we could be free. It sends a great message to families (of service members) that we care."

Conducting the flag retirement ceremony is one of several events that Moore and Billups are involved with as they develop their leadership skills. Both come from single parent homes where their fathers haven't been present as they've grown up.

"The role models and leaders I've learned from in Boy Scout Troop 400 have helped



Photo by Kari Hawkins

From left, Boy Scout Troop 400 senior leaders Daymond Billups and Maalik Moore are getting ready to retire U.S. flag ceremonies on Veterans Day. Scout leader Leroy Cole will assist them organizing the troop's members for the ceremony.

me with things that my mom couldn't help me with," Moore said.

Billups is a senior at Johnson High School and Moore is a sophomore. Both aspire to attend college. Both are working on their Eagle Scout project: Billups will organize an effort to build a flower bed at Millenium Nursing Home and Moore will organize an effort to build a wheelchair ramp at Tut Fann State Veterans Home.

Both hope to have a nice size crowd attend their flag retirement ceremony on Veterans Day.

"I hope the younger boys see all the veterans and realize the sacrifices they have made for us," Moore said. "They had the courage and bravery to fight for us so we can be free and go to school every day. I want the boys in the troop to recognize that."

World War II vet recalls 'whole country pitched in'



Courtesy photo

1st Lt. Bill Varnedoe, kneeling at far left, served with this nine-member crew of a B-17 dubbed "Possible Straight" because the last three numbers on its tail were 1, 2, 3.

By SKIP VAUGHN

Rocket editor

skip.vaughn@theredstonerocket.com

World War II veteran Bill Varnedoe donned his Army Air Force officer hat and his replica leather flight jacket for an afternoon mission.

But unlike the 26 combat missions he flew in 1945 as a navigator with the 8th Army Air Force 385th bomb group, based in England, this one was fun. He and another WWII B-17 veteran, William "Jack" Hunter of Athens, took a 20-minute media flight onboard the Boeing B-17F "Memphis Belle" on Oct. 20 at the Huntsville Executive Airport. Hunter, 88, was a tail gunner on 25 missions in 1945.

"It was a great flight, a lot of fun," Varnedoe, 91, of Huntsville, said afterward.

His first such postwar courtesy flight on a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress occurred in 2009. The most recent flight was part of the Liberty Foundation's 2014 Salute to Veterans tour with the B-17F that appeared in the 1990 Hollywood feature film, "Memphis Belle."

Varnedoe flew on a B-17G during the war. All nine members of his crew survived the war; and he and two others are still alive.



Courtesy photo

In 1945 1st Lt. Bill Varnedoe was a navigator with the 8th Army Air Force 385th bomb group, based in England.

"Good friendship with the others – my crew and the people that went through it," Varnedoe said of what he remembers from his service. "We trained as a crew, we went overseas as a crew and we flew our missions as a crew so we got to be close friends."

He was born in Savannah, Georgia, but mainly grew up in Montgomery. He went to high school in Mobile. As a member of the Reserves, he was called to active duty in 1942. The former first lieutenant stayed in the service until after the war in 1945. He opted to return to school and got a bachelor's in electrical engineering from Georgia Tech in 1947. He retired from NASA around 1980.

After World War II, Varnedoe didn't want to fly anymore. It was a year or two before he had to fly commercially, so he returned to the air.

"Once I went again, that was it. I was over it," Varnedoe said of former reluctance to fly.

He was smiling before and after the media flight Oct. 20. His wife of 59 years, Louise, 84, waited on the ground. "Just let him have a good time," she said. "This



Photo by Skip Vaughn

Bill Varnedoe, a navigator on 26 combat missions on a B-17 Flying Fortress in World War II, stands in front of the B-17F "Memphis Belle" which visited Huntsville Executive Airport the week of Oct. 20. The plane came out of the factory in May 1945, never saw combat and was used in the 1990 Hollywood feature film, "Memphis Belle."

is his time."

They have one daughter and three sons, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Varnedoe wrote a history of the 385th bomb group, and 2011 brought its ninth edition.

"The war I think was absolutely necessary," he said. "The thing I find amazing, most people are unaware that the whole country pitched in. It was a total war. There hasn't been a total war since."

Korea called veteran back for closure

By Kelley Lane Sivley

Special section contributor

kelley.sivley@theredstonerocket.com

Glenn Phares was 19 years old when a family friend on the draft board told his mother that Phares would be drafted on Monday. So that Friday, he joined the Navy instead.

The decision was partially because of the training that the service branch offered. He liked knowing that he would be employable after his time in was done.

The Navy sent him for training in Kansas City, Missouri and afterwards to the Naval Ordnance Training Center in Inyokern, California. It had been decided that he would serve as an air traffic controller.

"I was very fortunate to get into that field," Phares said.

Eventually, he shipped out aboard the USS Yorktown. But none of the young men he was with knew exactly where they were headed.

"About halfway there, we figured out that we were going to Korea," he said. But they still weren't quite sure what they would be doing once they arrived. Missions and aircraft were coordinated by radar and other offices, he explained. No one knew just what

an air traffic controller would do there. But they knew they were afraid.

"At first you feel fear," he said. "Then that fear becomes anxiety. That anxiety becomes adrenaline. Then you finally accept it."

His first job on board was on a platform in the back of the ship, landing planes on the straight runway of the CVA10. Without an angled runway, he explained, landing planes headed directly for those already parked on deck.

"I was scared to death," Phares said. "With an angled runway, they can bank around if they can't stop. Not with a straight runway. If the tail hook didn't catch the wire, it would've been terrible."

The new air traffic controllers on the ship were responsible for keeping track of what landed and left the vessel, a job high in stress and sometimes danger.

"We used weapons in Korea that we don't use now," he explained. "One of which was napalm."

He recalls an incident where a malfunction on another ship released napalm on its deck. He still remembers the fire it caused.

"So many good men were lost," he said. "There were 900 feet of flames."



Photo by Kelley Lane Sivley

See Korea on page 22 Glenn Phares stands proud as a Korean War veteran

The entire staff of the
RedstoneRocket

offers our
gratitude
to all
veterans,
past and
present.

*Thank you for
your service.*



'There are people who have to live with it forever'

Surviving family members cope with loss of Soldier

By **KARI HAWKINS**

Assistant editor

kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

The day the Army came looking for April Bowden, they couldn't find her. Estranged from her husband for about three years, April had moved a few times since Staff Sgt. Joshua Bowden had provided his personal contact information to the Army. They had looked for her at an old address in Tennessee, and then at another old address in Washington, D.C.

But when Army officials finally found her with her sister outside her south Huntsville home, she, at first, thought they were her new neighbor.

"I had just met my neighbor and he was in the National Guard," April recalled. "So, when I saw these two guys in Class A's walking up the street, I thought it was my neighbor, and I started to say, 'You can't be walking around the neighborhood like that.'

"And then I saw their faces."

April remembers screaming and feeling her sister grab her. Inside the house, April's nanny, also a military wife, quickly took April's son Kaden upstairs to his room.

"Then, they tell you what they tell you and that's how it goes," April said.

Staff Sgt. Joshua Bowden, 28, was killed Aug. 31, 2013, in Ghazni, Afghanistan, from injuries he sustained when enemy forces attacked his unit with small-arms fire while on patrol. A native of Douglasville, Georgia, Josh Bowden was assigned to the 242nd Ordnance Battalion (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), 71st Ordnance Group, Fort Carson, Colorado.

April and son Kaden will be among three Gold Star families who will be recognized at the Veterans Day Breakfast on Nov. 11 at the Huntsville Depot Roundhouse. Gold Star families are the families of fallen service members. Others who will be recognized at the breakfast include Brooke Parrish, sister of Spc. Charles "Dusty" Parrish who was killed in June 2009 in Iraq, and Bill Laxson, father of combat veteran Staff Sgt. Gary Laxson, who died in October 2011 of a cardiovascular event while assigned to Fort Stewart, Georgia.

Because it took some time to locate April, the Army had already notified his parents and they were halfway to Huntsville to be with their son's wife and child when she got the news. The following weeks were a blur as April made decisions, attended memorials, and arranged for Bowden's funeral in his hometown, and burial at Arlington National Cemetery.

"This was my last thing to do for him," she said.

April met her husband in Huntsville through a co-worker when he was attending the Ordnance Munitions and Electronic Maintenance School, then at Redstone Arsenal.

"I met Josh's friend David and I wouldn't go out with him at all," said April, who was working in a local store at the time. "But Josh came in the store one day and he was waiting to meet David. We talked about bands and music. I thought he was cute."

They started dating, and most of their time together was spent at Big Spring Park and on top of the nearby parking deck playing eye spy into the office buildings. But when it was time for Bowden to move on to Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, for more EOD training, April didn't think she'd see him again.

"He came up to see me every weekend," she said.

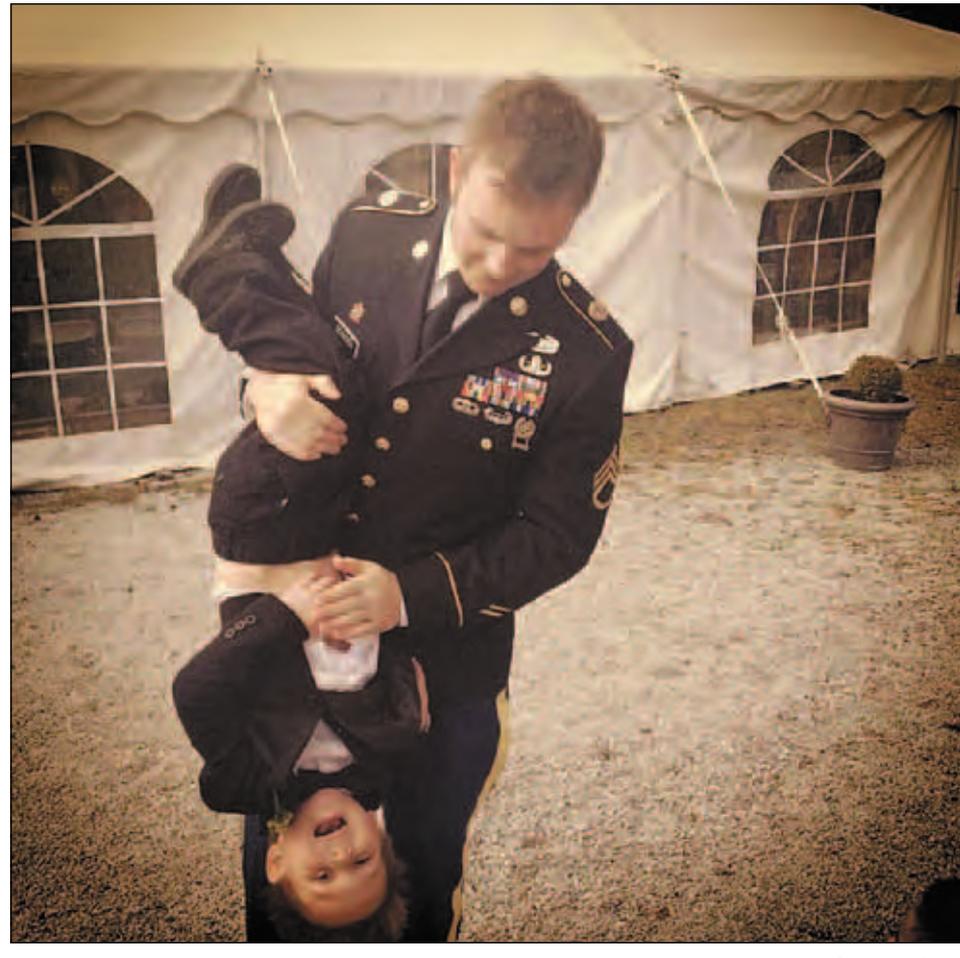
"We hit it off in our own way. He was really preppy and I was the freaking emo girl. But he liked metal and I was into metal music. Music was always our escape and on bad days when I want to pick up the phone and call him, you can find me in my car playing our favorite songs."

Military life

Bowden proposed to April in Big Spring Park. They married in June 2007 and moved to Alaska. She was 19 and he was 20.

"We were both excited about getting away together. We were close in Alabama, and we loved our family and friends, but we got closer in Alaska. The only people we had were each other, so it made us better together," she said.

Two months after arriving in Alaska, April found out she was pregnant. Their son was born on June 6, 2008. A few months later, in October, Bowden deployed



Courtesy photo

At his sister's wedding in Atlanta, Staff Sgt. Joshua Bowden has a little fun with his son Kaden. It was the last big family get-together before Bowden deployed for the second time to Afghanistan.

to Afghanistan.

"It wasn't that hard on me because I had a lot of strong Army support. We lived on post and I spent a lot of time with other Army wives. In the winter, we would be curled up in our robes running with our babies to each other's apartments," she said.

About nine months into his deployment, Bowden was hit by shrapnel in his left hand and thumb during a firefight. The injury became infected, and Bowden returned to Alaska for recovery.

"He doesn't have the pretty, perfect story, and our story isn't pretty and perfect either," April said.

"He never was into drinking or drugs. But he had post traumatic stress syndrome. He was depressed. It was a very hard time for him and myself. The only thing that made it better for Josh was being held. So, I was caring for him and our baby at the same time."

The couple got into rock climbing, hiking and traveling. Being outdoors and involved in physical activity helped Bowden with his PTSD, something that affected him and his marriage off and on.

About a year and half later, they moved to the Washington, D.C., area. They weren't living on base, so April was unable to connect with a supportive Army community. They had financial problems, and Bowden seemed to shut his wife and son out of his life. The couple split in 2011, and April and Kaden moved to be closer to family in Huntsville.

"There were times when we would get back together. We would call each other and find ways to see each other. We wouldn't sign the divorce papers," April said. "Josh was here for training in April 2011 when the tornadoes hit. The divorce papers were

See Family on page 24

Induction to the Military Order of the Purple Heart

Monday's Veterans Dinner will include adding the names of local veterans to the Purple Heart Honor Roll by the George A. Rauh Chapter 2201 Military Order of the Purple Heart.

According to the Department of Defense, "The Purple Heart may be award-

ed to any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who, while serving under competent authority in any capacity with one of the Armed Forces, has been wounded, killed, or who has died or may die of wounds received in armed combat or as a result of an act of inter-

national terrorism."

The origins of the medal date back to George Washington, who authorized the medal, then known as the Badge of Military Merit, in 1782 as a way of honoring Revolutionary War Soldiers for their meritorious service.



Photo by
Gerry J.
Gilmore/
American
Press
Service

Korea

Continued from page 20

Service members found they were under attack from another enemy as well, the Korean winter. Phares said the cold was unbelievable.

"We had some safety on a ship," he said. "The Army and Marines were out in the elements. They're showing signs of that now later in life."

Phares spent a year in Korea, trying to see flight crews off his ship and hoping to welcome them safely back again.

After he returned home, he continued with the courtship he began before shipping out. While on leave in Moundville, Alabama, Phares had made a trip to a Tuscaloosa bank. There he met a girl called Polly.

"She was a service representative in the bank," he laughed. "I was in there trying to cash a two-dollar check. Well, two dollars is an exaggeration, but not by much."

After the war, he married Polly the bank lady. The two have been married for 60 years and raised 4 children, 8 grandchildren, and are currently doting on their first great-grandson.

He got on with the business of civilian life, working 30 years as an air traffic controller before going back to college in his late 40s. Armed with a second bachelor's degree in education and business, Phares took a job with Calhoun Community College. It led to an administrative position managing Calhoun's program at the Redstone Arsenal Education Center from 1990-2000.

But Korea wasn't quite done with him yet. Phares feels very fortunate to have been able to visit the Korean War Memorial in

Washington, D.C. as part of Valor Flight. Then in 2012, he was one of nine veterans who boarded a plane to return to Korea.

"We were all a little reluctant," he said. "I got out of there alive the first time, so why go back? But it was the best thing that could have happened."

Phares said all the veterans were touched by how the cemeteries, museums and memorials are still honored by the South Korean people. The warmth and gratitude of everyone they met was amazing.

"One day in a museum, three classes of kids came through," he laughed. "We hugged every one of them."

He said he was perhaps most impressed by how far the nation has come since the war, economically and physically.

"I don't remember seeing a tree standing back then. But they've planted trees everywhere," he said. "They have a thriving econ-

omy. That's really something for people who didn't have anything 60 years ago."

He is eternally grateful to the people who not only made the trip happen, but went to such lengths to make the Korean veterans feel appreciated.

"People like KC and Sam Bertling, Faye and Roger McWhorter, and J.R. Williams made it possible," he explained. "And (ret.) Lt. Gen. (Richard) Formica. He was at every event, day and night, to support us."

That support has meant so much, Phares said. It has gone a long way to healing some of the old scars many veterans still carry on their hearts.

"Our veterans today are being recognized and taken care of. I'm glad for that," he added. "That didn't happen in those days. People like the Bertlings, McWhorters, Williams and Formica are making up for that."

Family

Continued from page 21

here ready to be signed. The last day he was here, we didn't sign them and he said, 'OK, I'll get counseling.'"

There for each other

They went back and forth with their relationship for two years, both taking turns in refusing to end their marriage.

"It was weird, but we were still always there for each other," April said. "During that time, we were best friends. We were there for each other when we needed to be."

On his way to a new assignment at Fort Carson, Bowden stopped to see April in Selmer, Tennessee, where she was living at the time.

"He told me during that visit, 'April, if I go on a deployment again I'm not coming home this time.' I didn't know what to think. I just said, 'Whatever ...,'" she recalled. "On the day he deployed for the second time, I was scared, recalling that remark. But, Josh quickly put my fears at ease.

"He promised to return."

With that deployment still a year off, Bowden began building a life for himself in Colorado. He enjoyed mountain biking and hiking. He met another girl, but he couldn't let go of April.

"He would call and say things like, 'Out of everybody in the world, I love you and Kaden. Maybe we can work on stuff,'" she said. "We met in Atlanta when his sister got married. We hadn't seen each other in a year and we didn't know how to act. I thought, 'I love this person, but do I treat him like my husband or what? We're still married.'"

And then the deployment was looming, so they decided to wait until Bowden's return from Afghanistan to decide on the future of their marriage.

"I don't think we would have ever been over if he hadn't died. Five, 10 years could have gone by and I don't think we'd have gotten divorced. We didn't want to be with anyone else, but we couldn't face yet what we had," she said.

The couple communicated regularly by email and some by phone during the deployment. April and Kaden moved back to Huntsville. April had a job that required traveling, so she hired a nanny to help with her son. The news of Bowden's death was a shock that April didn't see coming.

"I had just talked to him by phone before he was killed. We talked about his birthday and stuff, and he was talking about Colorado, and us going to Colorado," April said.

During her wait at the Huntsville International Airport for her flight to Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, to ceremoniously accept her Soldier's body, April thought a lot about the Soldier she had loved, their tumultuous relationship and life without him.

"When all that happens, you have to make a lot of decisions. And I didn't really know what to do," she said. "The life insurance, the funeral planning, the memorials, you have to decide.

"I remember being at the Huntsville airport waiting for my flight. I couldn't stop crying. I had shades on and I was in all black. I didn't want anyone to see me. There are so many military going through the Huntsville airport, and I just wanted to get in a corner and hide."

Her Delta flight was late, and April remembers breaking down and yelling about having to make an Atlanta flight to Dover. What she didn't know was that the USO (United Service Organizations) also wanted to make sure she made her flight.

"When I got to Atlanta, Delta officials ran me off the plane and into a car, and drove me across the flight line to my connecting flight. USO had called and because of that call, they made this happen, and the Delta pilot refused to take off until I was on that plane," she said.

Questions of loss

Dover, and the rest of the memorial and burial arrangements were difficult for April because of her questions about her husband and their relationship. He did have a girlfriend in Colorado, and she was part of Bowden's memorial ceremony in Colorado, and his funeral in Georgia and his burial at Arlington.

"I was told at Dover that I was the one who Josh decided



Courtesy photo

Staff Sgt. Joshua Bowden was killed in Afghanistan on Aug. 31, 2013, when enemy forces attacked his unit with small-arms fire. He is remembered by his son Kaden and his wife April as they participate in next week's Veterans Day activities. April and Kaden will be among three families recognized as Gold Star families at the Veterans Day Breakfast.

would make all the decisions if something happened to him," she said. "I talked to a chaplain for a long time. I was lost in my head. Why am I here? Why am I doing this? Why didn't he leave it to his mother and father to make these decisions? I sat in a garden, I think, the whole night. I listened to music. I tried to sift out what to do and what was best.

"I had to come to terms with this. There was a reason why Josh wanted me to do this, to make all the funeral arrangements, and I would have to deal with my own personal feelings later."

A few weeks lapsed between the ceremony at Dover and Bowden's actual funeral. It was during that time that April told Kaden, then 5, what had happened to his dad.

"I told him daddy had been fighting the bad guys, and that daddy had been killed by the bad guys and went to heaven. Kaden asked, 'When?' He was so angry that I didn't tell him sooner," she said.

"He was digging with a shovel and every five seconds he'd stop digging and ask me a question. I would answer him and he'd go back to digging."

Living new lives

Since then, April has included Kaden in everything that has to do with his dad. The two participated in last year's Veterans Day Parade with the Gold

Star families coordinated by Redstone Arsenal's Survivor Support Services. Kaden will once again this year participate in the parade, although he will probably be accompanied by his mom's boyfriend because April will be on the sidelines with a new baby in her arms.

"Life is not perfect. Things happen. People make up, they break up. Nothing's perfect," April said.

"I met my boyfriend, Thaar, in July before Josh was killed. He has pretty much been there for me the whole time. For the first time in Kaden's life, he has a normal family dynamic. We talk about Josh all the time. He tells Thaar he is his other dad because his daddy's in heaven. We are making this work together."

Although she and Kaden have attended Redstone SOS events, April often leans on her girlfriends for support during the trying times because it is they who know and understand the relationship she had with Bowden.

"It was not perfect. But I didn't love Josh any less because of that," she said.

"I don't want to sit in a room and cry. I don't ever want to call myself a widow. It's important for Kaden to be involved in things like SOS and the Veterans Day Parade because people need to remember these kids are here. Everybody forgets we are even fighting a war. And when a body comes home in a box, it's not over. There are people who have to live with it forever."



'I had some friends who didn't come back'

Vietnam veteran honored for actions in firefight

By **KARI HAWKINS**
Assistant editor
kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

When Jimmy Dean Wilson was drafted into the Army in April 1969, his parents worried that it might be a bad omen. Wilson's two brothers had already served in Vietnam and had returned home. As the youngest son, Wilson's parents were concerned they might not be lucky enough to have their third son return from a war that had taken so many other sons.

But Wilson didn't give it a second thought.

"You didn't think much about it because that's the way it was. Everyone had to go. Vietnam was in high gear for a few years and everyone went," Wilson said.

"My oldest brother Clyde enlisted as a Marine for four years. Just as he was coming back from Vietnam, my brother David, who had been drafted into the Army, went. David came home and that's when I was leaving. Dad was really worried. I had some friends I grew up with that didn't come back."

Raised in Scottsboro, Wilson was just what the Army was looking for. He was physically strong and fit, and just tough enough to meet the challenge presented to every infantry Soldier. He excelled at basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. What he lacked in worldly experience, he made up for in his ability to follow orders and max out physical training tests, and with his sense of humor.

"I remember Drill Sergeant Israel. He had teeth missing. He would stand us at parade rest at the mess hall. While we were eating, he would stand up and talk and make fun of us. If we giggled, he would make us do pushups or the low crawl or something like that," Wilson said.

"So, he was really a character. He did us good because he trained us well."

At Fort Polk, Louisiana, for advanced individual training, Wilson learned a little about guerilla warfare from a drill



Photo by Kari Hawkins

Jimmy Dean Wilson will be inducted into the Madison County Hall of Heroes during Veterans Week in recognition of the Army Commendation Medal with Valor Device and other military awards he received while serving in the Vietnam War.

sergeant who was committed to having the best unit at all costs.

"He was a little crazy. He would send us to latrines at night at different companies, where we could steal things. He would have us steal fixtures and anything else to make our latrines look great," he recalled.

It was known that any infantry Soldier who trained at Fort Polk was destined for Vietnam. But Wilson's path ended up taking a different turn, at least temporarily. Instead of Vietnam, he was assigned to 4th Armored Division in Germany, where he served in the motor pool.

Then, in June 1970, as a specialist, Wilson was sent to Vietnam. He came ashore at Cam Ranh Bay, one of three ports where U.S. military personnel entered South Vietnam for their 12-month tour of duty.

Wilson spent a week at Cam Ranh Bay on guard duty and then he was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry Regiment, 23rd Infantry Division.

"I got a rucksack that included one set of clothes. I got my weapon and ammo. I got some instructions on what was going to happen and what to expect, and then I was out to the bush," he said.

Wilson was sent to Firebase Mary Ann, which was located in Quang Tin Province, South Vietnam. It was situated to help stop the flow of enemy troops and material down the K-7 Corridor and Dak Rose Trail, which were branches of the Ho Chi Minh Trail running from Laos to the coast of South Vietnam.

Units assigned to Firebase Mary Ann went on missions throughout the province in search of enemy troops. As a newcomer, Wilson was on point, which meant he had to take the lead place when



Courtesy photo

This is Spc. Jimmy Dean Wilson in the bush of Vietnam in January 1971.

his unit went on patrol in the bush.

"You are the first guy that anybody is going to shoot at or that will hit booby traps. The life expectancy for the guy on point was usually two weeks. I stayed on point for seven or eight days," he said, referring to another newcomer who took over that role before Wilson hit that two-week limit.

"My company generally didn't walk on trails because that's where you are more likely to get hit with a booby trap," he continued. "I had to use a machete to cut through triple canopies of vines. That absolutely wears you out. The point guy also gets more leeches. There wasn't much protection against them. We would stick the leeches with our cigarette butts to get them off us."

Wilson's unit was successful in their missions near the borders of Cambodia and Thailand, catching a lot of North Viet Cong traffic trying to move south through the area.

"From June 1970 to April 1971, we saw a lot of action, a lot of ambushes, a lot of people getting killed," he said. "I remember times when we would get in a firefight that would last three days. The fighting was continuous."

As the new guy, Wilson at first was conflicted about how the suspected enemy or the "mountain yard," a phrase used to describe the locals of the mountainous region, were treated when they were captured.

"I felt really sorry for these folks because they probably didn't want war anymore than we did," he said.

"But that soon changes when you are in a firefight and your buddies – four, five, six of them – are all killed. And, if the enemy was male, it was pretty good odds, they were either supporting or part of the North Vietnamese army. We had no choice but to assume they were, and we had orders to capture them and send them back to the rear. They were trying to survive and we were trying to get out of harm's way."



There were many missions that would keep Wilson and his fellow Soldiers in the bush for up to 40 days.

"You change as a person out in the bush. You get to where you are relatively mean and you don't care because you are liable to die," he recalled.

"Many times we only had one pair of clothes in the bush. We would come back from the bush stinking, and nobody would trouble you until you were showered and had clean clothes. No one messed with you because they knew you were not going to take any crap."

Among Wilson's many combat awards, he received the Army Commendation Medal with a Valor Device for his actions during a firefight in the Hau Duc District. Despite coming under heavy fire, Wilson was able to accurately place destructive suppressive fire on well-observed enemy troops. He maneuvered across the battlefield, where he was able to help resupply his fellow Soldiers with ammunition and aid his fallen comrades.

"My company and another company came up on a big firefight. You could tell a lot of people were hurting," Wilson said.

"I took the liberty to get some M60 machine gun rounds (a weapon known as the 'pig' for its bulky size) and the pig man (slang for the M60 operator), and we moved up toward the front. We passed the commander, who was on the phone calling in support, as we went to the front a B40 rocket hit the ground a few feet to my left. I got knocked down. But we went further and I got the pig man set up and he started firing at the enemy."

Wilson was also firing at the enemy with his M16 machine gun.

"A guy got shot up near me. I'm hollering for a medic, but no one came. I bandaged him and tried to wrap up the bad bleeds while he was hollering for his mama. It didn't help and he died," he recalled, tears in his eyes.

The firefight continued, and another Soldier to Wilson's left got hit. Finally, the artillery came in and there was a

See Wilson on page 28

Hall of Heroes on display

The Madison County Military Hall of Heroes is located at the Madison County Courthouse lobby, 100 Northside Square, in Huntsville. It is free and open to the public, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Gulf War veteran followed stars to find his way

By **AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON**

Special section editor

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

Even as a little boy, Paul Narcisse knew that he would one day serve in Iraq.

He just didn't know then it would be Iraq. As he drifted off to sleep, his dreams growing up as a child in Beaumont, Texas, would often take him to a faraway land that he had never been to, but that he was determined to one day travel to. Thus his path to one day join the Army was set.

"I used to tell my mom, 'I've been somewhere in some country,'" Narcisse said. "I'm not sure where, but one day I'm going to go there.' When I got to the Middle East, that was it."

Little did Narcisse know at the time just how much of an impact that faraway country would have on his life.

Entering the Army in 1975 after spending time in the Navy in 1974, Narcisse spent 17 years on active duty, three inactive, 14 of those years spent in Europe. It was his service during the Gulf War, however, that is garnering him special recognition this Veterans Week.

On Feb. 27-28, 1991, while serving with the 229th Attack Helicopter Regiment, Narcisse established the Brigade Forward Arming and Refueling Point, just miles/yards away from the Iraqi Republican Guard Forces, despite crossing a battlefield filled with unexploded munitions. For his actions, he was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor. More than 20 years later, Narcisse is being honored for those actions once again, as he is inducted into the Madison County Military Hall of Heroes at the Huntsville/Madison County Veterans Day Dinner Nov. 10.

"It hasn't hit me yet," Narcisse said. "I was glad to be part of the military and serve."

Narcisse has fond memories of his time in the military, even of his time in Iraq. He remembers going inside Iraqi Republican Guard bunkers to find the best rations, pictures of Saddam Hussein, tons of money and AK-47s in crates, which Soldiers were instructed to pile up and burn. When the chill of the desert would get to him at night, he and his fellow comrades used cardboard boxes they had constructed into shelters to keep warm. Sleeping only during the day, Narcisse would use a compass at night, along with the stars, to determine where he would post his Soldiers for



Photo by Amy Guckeen Tolson

Gulf War veteran Paul Narcisse is one of six veterans who will be inducted into the Madison County Military Hall of Heroes at the Huntsville/Madison County Veterans Day Dinner Nov. 10. Narcisse received the Army Commendation Medal with Valor for his heroic actions in Iraq Feb. 27-28, 1991.

guard duty to hold the perimeter down.

"Everybody was getting lost in the desert, but my landmark was the stars," Narcisse said.

His landmark may have been the stars, but his trademark both then, and now, is his smile, which he carries with him everywhere.

"They used to tell me, 'Sarge, you're always smiling.' And I was always smiling. No matter how bad it was, I was always smiling," Narcisse said.



Afghanistan veteran honored for stateside heroism

By AMY GUCKEEN TOLSON

Special section editor

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

It doesn't take a battlefield for a heroic act to occur.

Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy Thompson was doing something many do every day — driving back to work at the Alabama National Guard Armory on Johnson Road in Huntsville on July 10, 2013, after picking up something for lunch — when a noise that sounded like an explosion caught his attention. Sitting at the red light at Airport Road and Balmoral Drive, he looked to his left to see a vehicle had hit a long line of cars, leaving behind a lot of heavy damage. Just as other drivers began to exit their vehicles, a Huntsville police officer pulled up.

"I thought, 'They've got it under control, they don't need me to get out and interfere,'" said Thompson, the liaison officer to the 142nd Battlefield Surveillance Brigade.

But something in his gut told his mind otherwise. Further surveying the damage to the car that had caused the impact, Thompson noticed that the whole front of the vehicle was impacted, and the police officer was reaching into the vehicle to pull something or someone out.

About that time, the engine compartment erupted into flames.

"I thought, 'I better go help him, because nobody else is,'" Thompson said.

Running across the railroad tracks, Thompson saw the driver of the vehicle, an unconscious male, stuck under the dash components, pinned beneath the steering wheel. The vehicle was so damaged Thompson and the police officer couldn't find any entry into the truck, except through the driver's side window. Thompson crawled into the window and tried to pull the man's lower extremities out from the steering wheel as the officer pulled at his clothing, but to no avail.

"We were making zero ground and the flames were coming up over the top of the cab at that point," Thompson said.

Fearing for Thompson's safety, the of-



Courtesy photo

Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy Thompson receives the Soldiers Medal from Maj. Gen. Perry Smith, adjutant general of the Alabama National Guard, earlier this year. The medal is awarded to individuals who perform a heroic act that puts their life at risk, but does not involve conflict with an enemy.

ficer encouraged Thompson to get out of the vehicle, but Thompson persisted, not wanting to walk away and let the man die. Using his knees for leverage, Thompson began to make headway in freeing the man, tiptoeing off the door an inch at a time.

"It got pretty intense. The flames started melting through the windshield and getting in on us," Thompson said.

About the time the smoke and heat got so bad in the car that Thompson almost couldn't tolerate it, the driver's lower extremities were dislodged, and Thompson and the officer were able to pull him to safety. As Thompson looked back at the scene, the vehicle was completely on fire.

The Velcro on his uniform singed from the flames, and his hands cut up from the broken glass, as soon as he was ban-

daged up, Thompson headed home, not wanting to call extra attention to himself. Upon his return home, the distinctive smell of smoke and local news gave away to Thompson's wife how he had spent his lunch break. While she questioned his sanity, it is an act of courage Thompson would have done again in a heartbeat.

"My dad died that way back in 1984," recalled Thompson, who was just a young boy, when his father, a truck driver, was driving home from Florida when he took the median as a result of construction, and hit a crane, trapping him in the cab of his truck. He was only 26. "That probably did have some impact, I guess. Probably even more than I know."

For his act of valor, Thompson was awarded the Soldiers Medal, which is



bestowed on individuals who perform a heroic act that puts their life at risk, but does not involve conflict with an enemy. He will be one of six men inducted into the Madison County Military Hall of Heroes at the Huntsville/Madison County Veterans Day Dinner.

"I never anticipated it," Thompson said of the medal.

Born in Huntsville and raised in Fayetteville, Tennessee, Thompson joined the Army National Guard Sept. 27, 2000, following in the boots of his grandfathers and uncles, who also served in the Army. Thompson also serves his community as a firefighter/EMT, reserve deputy sheriff and as the third vice president for the Madison County Military Heritage Commission, which presents the Hall of Heroes honors each year.

"It's important for the public to know the character of every branch of service, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines," he said. "We operate off a foundation of core values. If you're doing what you're supposed to do as a Soldier, sailor, airman or Marine, you execute those values, and they start on the first day. Each branch of service needs to be recognized in the community for what they do."

Ironically enough, the act of heroism Thompson is being honored for happened stateside, rather than during his 2002-03 deployment to Afghanistan.

"You enter the military in a recruiter's office, looking at the charts of what's available throughout a career, and different achievements, but you never anticipate a valor award of any kind," he said. "Nobody does. They're by chance."

Wilson

Continued from page 26

"splash down" of 155 mm artillery rounds and a 105 mm artillery round.

"As soon as you hear the splash, you've got to get back, get away from the point. And, when you count to five seconds, you better hit the ground," he said.

"The pig man right behind me caught fragments in one of his hands. They blew

that whole hill up that day. We had to go over the hill and search for the enemy. But we couldn't find any."

Wilson also has a Bronze Star, a Vietnam Gallantry Cross Medal with Palm, Vietnam Campaign Medal and bronze oak leaf cluster with Valor Device for his service in Vietnam, among others. But beyond those awards, Wilson is thankful he returned home, and was able to go to college on the G.I. Bill. He and his wife Virginia live in Madison County, where they raised their three sons, and Wilson worked

as a mechanical engineer for Onan Corp. in Huntsville and then Copeland Corp. in Hartselle. He retired in 2011.

Wilson wanted to be inducted in the Madison County Hall of Heroes as a legacy for his children and grandchildren. Getting that honor was difficult because Wilson's military records had to be reviewed and corrected to reflect all his awards before he qualified for induction.

As he recalled his Vietnam service, Wilson knows he has been fortunate to be able to leave behind the horrors of Vietnam to

lead a productive and successful civilian life.

"Individuals are all different," he said. "Some psychologically didn't fare so well. In Vietnam, you had a lot of opportunities to get drugs and other bad stuff, so some of that was going on and those guys were affected the worse. For whatever reason, a lot of people just didn't do well."

"I remember a lot of my buddies had a lot of hard feelings coming back home. But when I got back, I kissed the tarmac. I was so glad to be home. I had a new appreciation for life."

Afghanistan veteran survived ambush on convoy

By KATIE DAVIS SKELLEY

Staff writer

katie.skelley@theredstonerocket.com

It was just another Tuesday. As Alabama National Guard Lt. Col. Christopher Johnson relays what started out as a normal November day in 2006 near the Tagab Village in Afghanistan, his humble nature becomes evident. But that typical day would turn life and death with the ambush of his convoy by Taliban fighters. His resulting actions would lead to Johnson being awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor, and his upcoming induction into the Madison County Military Hall of Heroes as part of the 2014 Veterans Week celebration.

"I was an embedded training team chief and we were to advise, mentor and train the Afghan army," Johnson said. "We really thought that it was a training job but when we went over, we were embedded with Afghan infantry units and sent out to fight. Not quite what I expected."

Johnson is no stranger to deployments, having just returned from his last deployment in June. Over his 25-year career in the Alabama National Guard, he has deployed three times – to Afghanistan in 2006, Iraq in 2008 and his most recent 15-month deployment

to Kuwait. What started as an idea between two buddies has turned into a distinguished career of leadership and service.

"A friend had joined up and it looked like something interesting to do. So I signed up and 25 years later, here I am," Johnson said.

The affable understatement is typical of Johnson, who when not on Guard duty, is a logistics management specialist for the Army Materiel Command. He would rather talk about University of Alabama football than his achievements, on or off the battlefield. But he was far from Bryant-Denny Stadium on that November day and playing a game where the consequences were dire and losing was not an option.

"It was a day like any other," Johnson remembered. "We were out on a pretty big operation, cleaning Taliban out of a valley and we got hit. My Humvee was driving out from around a building and started taking a large amount of fire, so obviously we backed it up very fast. It is amazing how fast you can get in reverse. We backed up and got behind some cover."

During that day in 2006, Johnson exposed himself to small arms and rocket-propelled grenades while organizing his units' defense.

"I had units spread out on both sides of the road taking fire from an orchard. I was the team chief at the time – I was the commander. So I got out of my Humvee and I was going to different units, getting people on the radio and going to different elements, positioning and maneuvering people."

Johnson's actions that day helped his unit to gain tactical advantage while saving Soldiers' lives. He was later awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor for his heroism, and finished his tour with a Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during the Nov. 2 firefight.

Although it was "just part of the job" as he says, Johnson did come home from Afghanistan a changed man. He found himself positioning himself in restaurants where he had a clear view of the exits. And in a city filled with combat veterans, it can be difficult to find a seat with an unobstructed view of the door.

"I was scared," Johnson said. "Anyone who says that they



Photo by Ellen Hudson

AMC employee and Alabama National Guard Lt. Col. Christopher Johnson will be inducted into the Madison County Military Hall of Heroes.

were not scared is lying. You just turn it into focusing on keeping your head down. Don't do anything stupid. Get out there and do your job, be careful and do what you were trained to do.

"I came home hyper alert. When you are driving down the road for a five-hour convoy – you are tense the entire time waiting for something to blow up. Then you get on a plane and come home and drive to the grocery store and you are tense. That much stress for that long is hard. It wears you down."

What helps Johnson acclimate back into civilian life after each deployment is returning to his family – wife Christy, and daughters Joy, 17, and Madeline, 12. For the Johnsons, military service is a family affair with Joy leading the ROTC attachment at Huntsville High.

"They miss me but they understand," he said. "It has been hard on them at times. It has been hard on my wife. She has had to take care of everything while I am gone. She has done a great job but it puts a lot on her. People say, 'It must be hard for you to deploy.' It is hard on them to stay home."

With two jobs, two daughters and two houses – each with a to-do list

waiting after deployments – Johnson does not have much time to dwell on his battle experiences. But when he does, he has found that talking about it, physical exercise and maybe a little strumming on his guitar are all effective coping strategies.

"I think that my time was not all that traumatic because I was a combat arms officer," he said. "That is what I was expected to do. The Army fights and wins the nation's wars. So you have to expect someone shooting at you at some point."

When asked about the challenges of serving in the Guard, Johnson, a University of Alabama alumnus, only half-jokingly responds, "Missing three Alabama football games a year."

As much as he initially intended to keep his civilian work and Guard duties separate, Johnson said both careers have slowly crept into each other's worlds as it became evident that he had talents and abilities that could be used for both. Looking ahead, Johnson knows that as commander of the Alabama National Guard's 1169th Contracting Battalion, it is probable that he will deploy again.

"In the Guard, you have people from all different walks of life – people that I have learned ridiculous amounts from," he said. "I work at a desk during the week, but on the weekend, put me on a tank. In the Guard, we do it because we love it."

Johnson is humbled to be included in such august company as his fellow Hall of Heroes inductees, but true to his unpretentious nature, minimizes his own role.

The whole 'heroism' thing – I don't think much about it," Johnson said. "Everyone there was just doing their job. I was just doing my job."



Courtesy photo

During his 25 years in the Alabama National Guard, Lt. Col. Christopher Johnson has deployed three times – to Afghanistan in 2006, Iraq in 2008 and his most recent 15-month deployment to Kuwait.



Vietnam pilot honored for year of rescues

Hoerle recounts work as troops 'last hope'

By KARI HAWKINS

Assistant editor

kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

Retired Lt. Col. Arno Hoerle knew what it was like to fly in the back of an Army helicopter.

But, if he was going to war, he wanted to fly at the helm.

So, with a Vietnam tour inevitable for this career Soldier, Hoerle applied for helicopter pilot training. And after nearly seven years of service as an aircraft mechanic and flight engineer, he went to war as a UH-1 Huey helicopter pilot with special unit flight training in high altitude operations.

"When my unit at Fort Benning (Georgia) was getting for Vietnam, I decided that instead of flying in the back of an aircraft, I wanted to fly it," he recalled.

Hoerle enlisted in the Army straight out of high school in 1958. Schooled as an aircraft mechanic, he served four years in Germany, where he met and married his wife Renate. He then returned to the U.S., where he served with the 11th Air Assault Division at Fort Benning. After about two years, he applied for Officer Candidate School and then for flight school.

With pilot training at Camp Walters, Texas, and Fort Rucker, and unit training at Fort Carson, Colorado, he went to Vietnam in 1967 with the 195th Assault Helicopter Company. He was stationed at Long Ben and further attached to the 5th Special Forces.

"We did missions throughout the country in H-model Huey helicopters," Hoerle said.

"We were doing interdiction operations, putting teams on the ground in various places to determine how the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were moving troops and supplies into South Vietnam."

During such missions, Hoerle and the unit's other pilots were on standby alert.

"If we had troops on the ground, and they were in enemy contact we would go back in and get them," he said.

Hoerle was aware that back home, while his German-born wife was learning American traditions and raising their two young children, the attitude of the nation toward the war and its Soldiers was not supportive.

"It was different then than it is now, people are in support of operations where our Soldiers are," he said.

"Once you commit yourself to being a military person you understand there are

certain things you need to do, whether you agree or disagree with what the war is about. First and foremost, it was about duty, honor and country. We put the very best we had in that war."

That commitment went a long way when Hoerle served in Vietnam.

"There were no secure areas while supporting the Special Forces operations. The air crews and special operations personnel were at operating bases close to where the teams were on the ground," he said.

"All our aircraft were involved. We were the special operations team's only hope to be extracted from enemy contact. We all realized that. Our motto was once we put people on the ground we were not going to leave them on the ground. They were our guys and we were not going to leave anybody behind. We went to extreme effort to get everyone back to home base."

For his commitment to service, Hoerle received, among his other awards, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, which qualified him for the Madison County Hall of Heroes.

The first he earned on May 11, 1968. Hoerle, then a captain, was commanding a UH-1H unarmed helicopter in support of combat assault operations near Saigon when he received an urgent call for the medical evacuation of several wounded Soldiers.

Hoerle began a low-level approach in bad weather and encountered automatic weapons fire from the enemy. Once on the ground, the enemy continued to focus their fire on the defenseless aircraft. Hoerle and his co-pilot suppressed the enemy fire with their M-16 rifles and remained on the ground for 10 minutes as the crew chief and gunner made six trips to carry wounded Soldiers to the aircraft.

"We were out on a different mission and got called to make this a priority. I had a new crew chief and gunner who had to get out and get the wounded while we were sitting in a very vulnerable aircraft trying to suppress the enemy," Hoerle said.

After delivering the wounded to the Third Evacuation Hospital, Hoerle was called on to make an emergency resupply of four companies in need of ammunition. He maneuvered the Huey along the tree tops, avoiding enemy anti-aircraft fire. He tried to land in the hostile area twice, but a bullet in his engine forced him to make an emergency landing at a command post.

"We were able to make a temporary repair and then fly out under our own power," Hoerle said.

The second Distinguished Flying Cross was earned on May 26, 1968. Ho-



Photo by Kari Hawkins

Retired Lt. Col. Arno Hoerle and his wife, Renate, stand in front of a 1982 photo taken of them as Hoerle was completing his Army career at the Aviation Systems Command in St. Louis, Mo.

erle was serving as an air mission commander in support of Special Forces reconnaissance operations near Dau Tieng when his team encountered a thunderstorm. Hoerle positioned his unit of helicopters at different altitudes to prevent mid-air collisions during the extraction of an embattled reconnaissance team.

"It was zero visibility weather with our only aid to find the time on the ground being a locator beacon. You couldn't see a thing," he recalled.

"We stacked our aircraft one behind the other and I led them in. As I tried to draw fire from the area, the second and third helicopters went in to extract the guys on the ground," Hoerle said.

Using his homing device to locate the Soldiers on the ground, Hoerle directed the group of aircraft to fly at tree top level and then into the landing zone. While the rescue helicopters were extracting the troops, Hoerle instructed gunships to provide 360-degree suppressive fire and he flew his Huey dangerously low above the landing zone. Both actions helped to distract the enemy's fire and attention from the rescue helicopters.

"In mission after mission after mission it was the same thing," he said.

"These two missions are a snapshot of one day in the life of a Soldier. This is the kind of work we did the whole year we were in Vietnam."

When he returned from Vietnam, Hoerle spent two years in Germany with his family before returning to the U.S. and



additional flight training for single engine and multi-engine aircraft. In 1971-72, he returned to Vietnam to serve in an air transport battalion.

"It was a different kind of mission. We provided aircraft maintenance for units involved in the war. We transported units throughout central Vietnam," he said. "The first tour, I was an air mission commander in the bush. The second, I was a unit commander and a staff officer."

In all, he had about 2,500 flight hours during his two combat tours.

After 25 years of service and 17 different military addresses for his family, Hoerle retired and worked for Boeing, where he focused on aircraft customer support, and helped to develop the V-22 Osprey and the Comanche helicopter. After his second retirement, he and his wife traveled in a motor home, and they visited all 50 states before locating in Florida in 2003. But Florida's heat soon got the best of them and they moved to Madison County's Harvest area in 2005.

"I had flown in and out of Huntsville a few times, and we came through here a time or two while traveling in the motor home," Hoerle said. "This area was perfect for us because it's not too hot, and we're still in the South and away from the snow."

"But what is really great is how this community treats its veterans. This community seems to take more interest in veterans who have served our country. It takes more interest than anywhere else we've lived."

Hoerle, who suffers from health problems related to Agent Orange, is active in the local chapters of the Disabled American Veterans and Military Officers Association of America. He will be joined at the Hall of Heroes induction by his wife, two sons, granddaughter and a family friend.

He is thankful for his Army career and the chance to serve the nation.

"I think military service is something that everybody should experience," he said.

"It's not a glory kind of thing. It's a duty kind of thing and it builds character."

Combat helicopter pilot mentors future leaders

By KARI HAWKINS

Assistant editor

kari.j.hawkins2.civ@mail.mil

Duty. Service. Honor.

Those are the military principles that retired Air Force Maj. Joseph Viviano hopes to leave with the cadets of the Alabama wing of the Civil Air Patrol, Redstone Composite Squadron as one of their chapter mentors.

Along with those, he also hopes to leave with them a love of flying that is never outlived.

That's what drove Viviano to choose Air Force as his career. In the mid-1950s, he was a member of the Civil Air Patrol at his high school in Louisiana. He then went on to college at Louisiana State University, where he served as the Air Force ROTC cadet commander and then was named a distinguished Air Force ROTC graduate.

"I was always interested in the military," Viviano said. "And I always loved flying."

That love took him to Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas, where he learned to fly fixed wing aircraft, then on to helicopter training school at Stead Air Force Base, Reno, Nevada. He was then assigned to provide helicopter support flying the UH-1 Huey for the missile wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City, South Dakota.

And then Southeast Asia called.

"I expected to go over there. But not quite as quick as it happened," Viviano said. "Nearly everyone in my flight class served in the theater."

First, there was a three-month temporary assignment flying Hueys in Thailand and Vietnam as part of essentially the first Air Force special operations counterinsurgency and civic action mission. After only a couple weeks in Thailand, the unit was ordered to join the 20th Helicopter Squadron (later renamed the 20th Special Operations Squadron) at Nha Trang Air Base on the South China Sea coast.

Viviano returned to Vietnam to complete his one-year requirement from May 1968 to April 1969. His unit was assigned to fly Hueys on clandestine missions with the 20th in Cambodia. The UH-1 Huey helicopters, known as the Green Hornets, inserted and extracted Special Forces Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol teams, provided cover for such operations, conducted psychological warfare, and conducted other support roles for covert operations during the so-called Secret War in Laos and Cambodia.

"We flew missions from the western side of South Vietnam and lived with the Special Forces members we supported,"



Photo by Kari Hawkins

Retired Air Force Maj. Joseph Viviano continues to share his love for flying as a senior member and Aerospace Education officer for the Alabama wing of the Civil Air Patrol, Redstone Composite Squadron.

he said. "We ran missions into Cambodia to do intelligence gathering of the numbers of the North Vietnam army infiltrating South Vietnam. There was a lot of action going on to keep our teams on the trails.

"We would take six to eight man teams over the Cambodia border and drop them off, and then go back and get them out. The teams were made up of Special Forces and indigenous soldiers. We would take a slick (a Huey configured to carry troops) and two Huey gunships armed with mini-guns and rockets and drop them off, and then we would set at the closest Special Forces camp and wait until it was time to get them. I flew gunships. We could be in the air in a minute and be there to get them in five minutes."

The Hueys were known for their ability to dash in and out of firefights.

"Every time our slicks made a landing, there was a face-to-face shootout with the enemy. In the gunships, we could stay right on top of the trees and fire out both sides of the bird," Viviano said.

"The slicks could be put in some of the most difficult little openings. If we couldn't land, we had rope ladders and long ropes with loops for the team members to sit in while the helicopter lifted them out of the trees."

During his assignment with the Special Forces, Viviano earned, among other medals, two Distinguished Flying Crosses for heroism, which qualified him for his induction into the Madison

County Hall of Heroes.

The first one he earned on Aug. 23, 1968, when he flew as copilot on a gunship helping protect a Special Forces camp near the Cambodia border that was partially overrun by a large North Vietnamese Army force. The camp was located on two hills. The small hill was taken by the enemy.

"The North Vietnamese took the little hill the first night in a horrendous battle where we lost a couple Army helicopters," he said.

The next morning, Viviano and his crew, and a second gunship interdicted the enemy with mini-guns and rockets.

"There were so many of the enemy down there. They were entrenched in little tiny holes. Even at altitude, it sounded like a popcorn machine going off," he recalled.

"They were all around the camp. My bird ran out of ammo and bird number two only had only 500 rounds left. We were heading back when an F-100 pilot ejected over the camp. So, we turned back and hovered over the area where he was being rescued. We were pretty light because we didn't have any ammo. Then, all hell broke loose. People were running all over the place. There was gunfire everywhere.

"Special Forces members in an ambulance and jeep from the main camp had come to rescue the fighter pilot and we all met, along with the enemy, at the same spot."

Viviano was able to see the downed

pilot running with the group from the camp to the vehicles. At about that time, the second helicopter got hit, and both then exited the area.

"We helped by hovering and drawing a lot of the ground fire. But that's as close as we could get," he said.

His second medal was earned on Sept. 2, 1968, when he repeatedly flew his helicopter gunship through enemy ground fire deep within enemy territory to relieve a seven-man Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol team that was on the verge of being overrun. His attack disorganized the enemy forces enough to allow the rescue of the patrol.

There were many such scenarios that occurred during the 711 combat missions that Viviano completed.

"Fifty percent of the time we went in because our Special Forces friends would get compromised or seen, and they'd have to get out. The other 50 percent of the time it was a hot mission with our team surrounded by the enemy," he said. "We were the only resources that could be called in to protect the teams."

Viviano's unit was highly decorated for their year of service. It received two outstanding Air Force unit awards and two presidential unit citations. Members in the unit – made up of 65 pilots and 23 helicopters – received such individual awards as a Medal of Honor, Air Force Crosses and numerous Silver Stars.

"A lot of guys deserved more than they got," Viviano said. "For years, what we did there was classified. It was an exceptional unit, but it was not well known. It was the only Air Force unit flying combat helicopters in Vietnam, other than the rescue helicopters. It was a great honor to be a member of this unit."

Viviano will be accompanied by his wife Judy, their daughter Kathleen and her two children at the Hall of Heroes induction ceremony.

