



TIS THE SEASON

Program spreads holiday cheer to Families

A4



HEALTHY LIVING

Post dietitian shares tips for staying Army Strong

B3

The MOUNTAINEER

Fort Drum, N.Y. • Dec. 15, 2011 • Vol. 4 • Issue 48

10th Mountain Division NCO receives Soldier's Medal for uncommon valor

Paul Steven Ghiringhelli
Staff Writer

A 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldier who pulled passengers to safety from a burning tour bus July 22 on Interstate 90 was awarded the prestigious Soldier's Medal on Tuesday in Fort Drum's Multipurpose Auditorium.

Sgt. Jacob J. Perkins, 28, a forward observer with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, stood tall before the loud cheers and applause of his fellow Soldiers, his squadron, brigade and division command groups, New York State Police officials and a Canadian family he helped save from the fire.

"This is a momentous occasion," said Maj. Gen. Mark A. Milley, Fort Drum and 10th Mountain Division (LI) commander. "If there were bullets flying and it was the Taliban, Sgt. Perkins would be getting the Medal of Honor.

"This medal is a big deal," he said. "It is only the second one in the last five years given out in the 10th Mountain Division and (the second in the history) of the 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry (Regiment).

"This is in fact uncommon. (Perkins) chose to do something that most other normal human beings would not do. He ran into the back of a burning bus and saved people even though he stood a 50-50 shot of dying himself," the general added.

Perkins was on leave after midnight July 21 when he began a 1,000 mile-plus trek to southern Missouri to celebrate his daughter Cadence's fifth birthday.

While westbound on I-90 around 1:30 a.m., Perkins ap-



ALYSSA HENNESSY

Maj. Gen. Mark A. Milley, Fort Drum and 10th Mountain Division (LI) commander, awards the Soldier's Medal to Sgt. Jacob J. Perkins, forward observer with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team. Perkins was presented the medal for his heroic act of saving passengers from a burning bus July 22.

proached a fireball on the opposite side of the thruway, where a tractor-trailer had rear-ended a Canadian tour bus and buried itself halfway in.

Without any thoughts for his safety, Perkins pulled over, hopped the median and ran across several lanes of traffic toward the blaze. He was one of the first witnesses

on the scene in the dark stretch of country between Syracuse and Buffalo.

Milley said Perkins' training and wisdom from wartime experiences immediately came to bear as the sergeant entered and re-entered the burning bus multiple times, braving the flames and intense heat as long as he could, checking

every seat for survivors by hand, while also staying low enough to minimize smoke inhalation.

By the time the flames had become overwhelming, Perkins had contributed to the survival of five civilians and the safety of 24 others.

The driver of the tractor-trailer was killed on impact, and of the 53 people on board the bus, dozens were injured. Both the rig and bus were torched in the accident and I-90 eastbound was shut down for hours.

Because not enough emergency vehicles were yet on hand to transport the injured passengers, Perkins offered to help.

A Canadian man, Willie Blair, whose severe injuries included a broken back, was the last survivor Perkins rescued from the bus. While he was airlifted from the scene, Perkins volunteered to take the man's stranded wife, Sandy, and daughter, Michelle, to a Rochester hospital some 45 miles away.

When the three arrived in Rochester, they were told Blair had been rerouted to a Syracuse hospital. Without hesitation, Perkins drove them the additional 90 miles and waited until other family members arrived later in the morning.

"I'm very grateful for what he did for me," Willie Blair said after the award ceremony. "I was very much out of it. Once he saved me, I was grateful for what he did for my family."

Sandy Blair said when her husband was taken away that night, she was very frightened and did not have the slightest idea where she was.

After arriving in Rochester and discovering her husband had been rerouted to Syracuse, she said

Perkins, waiting in his truck outside of the hospital, told her "no problem."

"He said, 'I'm not leaving you, ma'am. I will take you,'" she recalled. "And he did. He stayed with us until we all were reunited. He wouldn't leave (my husband's) bedside until our family arrived."

"Sgt. Perkins was our hero that day," Michelle Blair said. "He treated us like family. He refused to leave our side. And even when (our family arrived), he tried to sneak away without even saying goodbye."

"I said, 'Don't you dare leave until you at least say goodbye to us,'" she said. "He just wanted to do his duty and leave."

The Soldier's Medal is awarded to any person of the U.S. armed forces who, while serving in any capacity with the Army, distinguishes himself or herself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy, according to Army Regulation 600-8-22.

The same degree of heroism is required for the award of the Soldier's Medal as is required for the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross. The performance must have involved personal hazard or danger and the voluntary risk of life under conditions not involving conflict with an armed enemy.

The Soldier's Medal ranks just below the Distinguished Flying Cross and just above the Bronze Star Medal.

Receiving the award was a good experience, but Perkins said he does not feel any different from the next Soldier.

"It was a real honor, but I still feel the same way I felt when I woke up this morning," Perkins said. "I don't feel like a hero. I was

See MEDAL, Page A3

Odierno discusses Iraq drawdown, transition

Heather Graham-Ashley
III Corps and Fort Hood Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas – As American forces are scheduled to be out of Iraq by the end of this month, they are leaving the nation in a position to sustain the long-fought peace that has been established over the past nine years, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno explained Dec. 6 at Fort Hood.

Odierno was at Fort Hood to meet with commanders and community leaders and to provide an update about the current state of the Army as well as the way ahead.

Looking back on the height of sectarian violence and potential civil war in Iraq in 2006, Odierno said it would be difficult to believe the country is where it is today.

"I always tell everybody we have to put it in perspective, and I think the military has made incredible strides working with the Iraqi military and the Iraqi government to provide a level of security that will be sustainable by the Iraqi Security Forces as we leave," Odierno said.

"There's still violence in Iraq, but the level of violence is significantly less than it has been for a long time," he added. "We believe they have the capacity to sustain peace within Iraq."

The Army chief said it is time to allow Iraq to recognize their sover-

eignty and allow them to move forward as a nation. Odierno said the Iraqis "still have many difficult challenges ahead of them, both political and economic," but the U.S. will maintain relationships forged over the last nine years.

"Just because we left doesn't mean we ... will not sustain a long-term military relationship with Iraq," he explained. "Whatever size of the Army we have has got to be ready, modernized and capable of meeting whatever tasks they're asked to do."

As operations in Iraq come to a close and the defense budget remains in question, the Army is facing potential cuts to the force. Odierno said those cuts would require a re-look at how the Army provides national security, since reduction in troop levels across the services could reduce the military's capability to respond to real and potential threats.

"We're going to have to determine, depending on what level we end up at, what we can and can't do," he said. "It's up to me, as well as the other joint chiefs as we talk about the joint force, to ensure we communicate what we'll be able to do and what we can't do."

Policy and national strategy will have to be adjusted to meet the available force, which could be the smallest Army since the 1940s, the smallest Air Force ever in this nation's history and the lowest num-



DANIEL CERNERO

Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, chief of staff of the Army, talks about the Iraq troop withdrawal among other topics during a press conference Dec. 6 at Fort Hood, Texas. Odierno visited Fort Hood to meet with commanders and community leaders, and to provide an update about the current state of the Army.

ber of ships the military has had in a long time, Odierno said.

With those cuts, more Soldiers will be transitioning out of the Army into a shaky civilian job market and economy. Many of them could potentially join the more than 20 percent of veterans receiving unemployment compensation – a number Odierno said is much higher than their civilian counterparts.

"It's significantly higher than the normal unemployment rate, so it's

incumbent on us to ensure that we have processes in place that allow them to properly transition into civilian society and getting the jobs that we believe they are more than qualified for," he said.

Citing Soldiers' dedication, discipline, training and skills development, Odierno said they, as a whole, are more than capable of garnering civilian positions.

"I'm more than comfortable with them taking on a variety of jobs," he said.

Recent tax break legislation to encourage companies to hire veterans has been a good start, Odierno said, but more work can be done to help Soldiers find work outside the military. Compounding their difficulty in finding civilian careers, he said many veterans leaving the military and entering civilian society are doing so battling the effects of traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress.

The Army is pouring in resources to help Soldiers and will continue to do so, Odierno said, but there is no black-and-white answer to post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries, known as PTSD or TBI.

"It's a complex, difficult issue that we'll continue to work through," he said.

Army officials continue to work with governmental veterans' agencies, doctors and behavioral health specialists to ease Soldiers' transitions and provide the best care available, Odierno said, noting that the commitment to providing support and care to Soldiers and their Families is one Army officials work every day.

"Our priority remains with our Soldiers and Families, and we will ensure that the programs remain in place. We will continue to fund those programs," Odierno said. "That's our priority, and we'll never walk away from that priority." □



SGT. MELISSA STEWART

Maj. Arieyeh Austin, 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment executive officer, teaches soldiers in 3rd Kandak, 205th Afghan National Army Corp how to plan operations for their unit. He shows staff officers how to make a coordinated operation on a map using the information received from the battalion's military intelligence.

2-87 Infantry Soldiers train ANA staff

Sgt. Melissa Stewart

3rd Brigade Combat Team Journalist

KANDAHAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Throughout the past 10 years, Soldiers have understood that the key to success in Afghanistan is partnership. Soldiers in 3rd Brigade Combat Team, have been deployed to Kandahar Province since April and have partnered with Afghan security forces in every operation.

Soldiers in 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, are partnered with their Afghan counterparts in the 3rd Kandak of 3rd Brigade, 205th Afghan Army Corps in all missions over the past eight months.

All of their combat operations and humanitarian aid missions are partnered.

Recently, Afghan soldiers in 3rd Kandak and 2-87 Infantry Soldiers worked together to synchronize nonlethal operations.

They learned how to run a brigade staff effectively through weekly classes taught by 2-87 Infantry Soldiers.

"The intent with the (Afghan National Army) partnership (is to) enable them to conduct operations unilaterally without U.S. presence," said Maj. Arieyeh Austin, 2-87 Infantry executive officer.

Even though brigade staff officers work behind the scenes, they play a vital role in success on the battlefield.

Various staff sections are responsible for planning and organizing combat operations. Without a well-coordinated and well-informed plan, a mission will not function, which could cost Soldiers their lives.

Brigade and battalion staffs are responsible for coordinating information to ensure effective missions.

The staff classes help ANA soldiers become better at their jobs as staff officers, which in turn improves the operations across the entire kandak.

"Our job is to get their (tactical operations center) up and running with minimal U.S. presence," said Sgt. 1st Class Johnny Rowell, 2-87 Infantry operations noncommissioned officer, of classes he and Maj. Austin taught to ANA staff officers.

Staff sections gather information on the enemy and the local people.

Then they organize that infor-

mation and plan out the most effective methods of destroying the enemy and protecting the people. From there, they task company-level leadership with future operations, and Soldiers on the ground execute the mission.

Since it is often confusing at first to plan operations over the entire battle space, the staff section classes are designed to teach individual elements of operational planning.

"They have had a class on battle rhythm, they have had classes on patrol trackers, and they have had classes on the purpose of brigade staff," Rowell said.

Soldiers in 3rd Kandak have had great success so far in partnering with 2-87 Infantry Soldiers, and they become continually more self-reliant.

"The more that we teach their staff how to operate, the less we have to be involved with partnered operations," Austin said. "We have already (transferred authority of) one of our pieces of tactical infrastructure to be run completely by (Afghan National Security Forces)."

The continued partnership and training of Afghan soldiers has allowed them to become more independent; however, they still have a long way to go until they are a completely stable, self-sufficient fighting force.

"(We want to get) the staff to the point where they can task and purpose the individual companies to execute operations on their own," Austin said.

In the most recent class, about 15 Afghan staff officers crowded into the kandak's conference room to learn how military intelligence works with the plans section of a battalion.

Austin taught them how to plan operations using a map and the information gathered that week by the military intelligence officer. Afghan soldiers worked with him to plan operations, while coordinating how to get them accomplished that week.

Aside from work partnerships, Afghan National Army and 2-87 Infantry Soldiers have built a friendship and enjoy working together.

The two units often have meals together and regularly schedule time to relax and have fun together.

"I love our partners. We have the best kandak. God bless Afghanistan," Austin said. □

Fort Drum on track to meet Army's manpower shaping goals

The work being done at Fort Drum since late last spring to meet manpower shaping goals set by the Army has the installation well-postured to potentially avoid involuntary separations in the future.

In July, Army officials announced a planned reduction of approximately 8,700 positions by Sept. 30, 2012.

These cuts are based on Department of Defense resource decisions as reflected in the president's fiscal 2012 budget and require a reduction of Army civilian employees to comply with decreased funding levels.

Fort Drum Garrison was given an end-strength goal of 1,076 authorized positions.

Since that time, on-board

strength of permanent status employees has been reduced to 1,080 through the implementation of Voluntary Early Retirement Authority and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment programs, constructive personnel management strategies, limiting hiring to health and safety positions, and normal attrition.

Temporary and term positions were not to be extended.

While this looks like Fort Drum Garrison is very close to the goal, the number is slightly deceiving. Of the current 1,080 permanent status employees encumbering positions, 85 positions exceed the authorized end strength when currently vacant positions are taken into consideration.

"We know this is where the really

hard work begins," said Michael McKinnon, deputy to the garrison commander, Fort Drum.

"We continue to look for efficiencies and redundant services," McKinnon said. "Also, we're looking for employees who may be in an 'overhire' job series, who have the skills to fill a vacant authorized position.

"We've made great strides to this point because of the consistent cooperation from our incredible workforce," he added. "I don't see that changing as we continue to reshape. We will set the standard for the Army in taking care of Soldiers and Families as we evolve with the fundamentally different fiscal reality." □

FORT DRUM PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Summit Soldiers represent 1st BCT at Army Best Medic Competition

Sgt. Blair Neelands

1st Brigade Combat Team Journalist

Two medics from 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, finished in sixth place in the demanding 72-hour Army Best Medic Competition last month at Camp Bullis, Texas.

Cpl. Erick Morales and Spc. Jacob Foster made up one of the 31 teams of top medics from across the Army who participated in the inaugural Command Sgt. Maj. Jack L. Clark Jr. Best Medic Competition. As one of the youngest and least experienced teams, Morales and Foster bested multiple Soldiers who were more senior in rank.

"We were one of the youngest groups out there," Morales said. "It felt good to see who we beat; it also felt good to see who beat us."

Most of the teams that placed ahead of the Summit medics represented Ranger battalions and special operations units. This encouraged Morales and Foster, especially after they realized the top six teams were separated by a minimal number of points.

"Once we saw the score sheets, we knew we were right up there with the top five," Morales said.

The competition started quickly with nonstop events testing the medics physically and mentally. First was a physical fitness challenge, which consisted of pulling a tire weighing several hundred pounds, in addition to a three-mile run. Immediately following was a complex obstacle course, which was then followed by M-9 pistol and M-4 carbine stress shoots designed to simulate a combat situation with casualties.

Overall, the stress shoot was well liked by the competitors while the night land navigation course was considered to be the hardest event.

"The night land nav was the most difficult event throughout the entire competition," Foster said.

Beginning at 11 p.m., teams were dropped off by a Black Hawk helicopter in the middle of Camp Bullis' rough terrain. After determining their starting location, each team had to locate 12 points in less than six hours.

"It's not like a traditional land navigation course," Morales said. "We were flown by helicopter to a given point; from there we had to figure out what our starting location was. So the whole time, we kind of second-guessed ourselves, because if we messed up the starting location we would be messed

up for the whole course."

With roughly three hours of sleep, teams continued the competition early the next morning with an urban assault lane. Armed with simulation rounds, candidates had to tactically move to treat casualties while simultaneously engaging the enemy.

"Every obstacle had at least two casualties, so a lot of it involved us dragging a patient to a location, returning fire, and then picking them up and taking them to a different location and returning fire again," Morales said of the stress shoots.

The day and night combat medic lanes tested the Soldiers' casualty care and evacuation abilities in close quarters as well as in the cover of darkness.

"We were dead on with our medical knowledge and we work in such unison; I think that's why we scored as high as we did," Morales said. "We knew when we arrived at each casualty what each of us was doing."

The final event for day two tested their skills in an ambulance while traveling to a medical facility.



SGT. BLAIR NEELANDS

Lt. Col. Daniel Morgan, commander of 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, presents an Army Commendation Medal to Spc. Jacob Foster, a combat medic, Dec. 5, for recently placing sixth in the Army's Best Medic Competition.

Once the obstacle course was complete, the Soldiers only had to complete a timed 2.7-mile buddy run carrying a 180-pound casualty with a litter.

Shortly after the final event, teams waited in line to hear the results of the testing.

"We were standing in line, and a lieutenant colonel came down with the list and asked who wanted to know what place they got," Morales recalled.

When the Morales and Foster heard the places a few teams in line had received they became nervous about their own standings. Reluctantly, they agreed to hear the results.

"When he said we got sixth place, I felt like screaming," Morales said. "I tried to keep my composure, but on the inside I was so excited."

"I was very excited about getting sixth place," Foster said. "Especially because when we first got there and saw our competition, we were expecting a 10th place finish at best, so to get sixth was really cool."

Upon their return to Fort Drum, the two Summit medics were awarded Army Commendation Medals for their excellence while representing the brigade at the Best Medic Competition.

Both Morales and Foster have brought back a wealth of knowledge from the competition as well as from the other competitors to share with their fellow 1-87 Infantry medics. With this knowledge, they have begun to train even harder with the goal of returning for next year's competition to take home the title of the Army's Best Medic. □

The last day of testing began the following morning at 5 a.m. with a written exam to test the teams' tactical and technical proficiency. Immediately after the exam, the medics participated in a virtual convoy simulator that specifically tested their soldiering skills in a combat scenario.

Nearing the end of the competition, the teams competed in the eight-obstacle leadership reaction course that forced the Soldiers to think on their feet and work as a team.

MEDAL, from Page A1

just doing what anyone else would've done in the same situation."

Originally from Mountain Grove, Mo., Perkins enlisted in the Army in February 2008. He deployed with 1-89 Cavalry to Iraq a year later and returned to Fort Drum in 2010.

Earlier this year, he was named to the Commandant's List upon graduating from the Warrior Leaders Course at Fort Drum.

Perkins has been hailed as a hero by federal, state and local officials. But the soft-spoken fire support NCO is described by

many as a humble and unassuming man.

Milley pointed out that Gen. Martin Dempsey, then chief of staff of the Army, called Perkins the morning of the incident to congratulate him for a job well done.

"Sgt. Perkins makes us so proud; he didn't answer it," Milley said to laughter from the packed room of Soldiers. "He was tired. He needed to take a knee at that time of the morning. So he let it ring and he took a voice mail from the chief of staff of the Army."

"He's now the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," the general said, turning to Perkins, "just in

case you were wondering.

"But Sgt. Perkins is a humble guy," Milley added. "It's not about Gen. Dempsey calling him or about Gen. Milley pinning a medal on him. ... Humility, very self-effacing and very humble, is one of the trademarks and characteristics of a true hero."

The senior NCO at 1-89 Cavalry agreed.

"Sgt. Perkins embodies what all Soldiers should be," said Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Deblois, command sergeant major of 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment. "He embodies the Army values of personal courage. And I am (very) proud of him." □



PAUL STEVEN GHIRINGHELLI

Sgt. Jacob J. Perkins, center, stands with his mother, Muriel, as Maj. Gen. Mark A. Milley, Fort Drum and 10th Mountain Division (LI) commander, takes part in congratulating him Tuesday for receiving the Soldier's Medal.