

Artillery platoon leader has no caps

By Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord
5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

YAKIMA TRAINING CENTER — When 2nd Lt. Shannon McDonnell assumed her new position as a platoon leader and fire direction officer with 5th Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, nothing was official. It wasn't until she'd had four of her patrol caps taped to the backs of rockets and blown to pieces that she was certifiably a member of the team.

Then, McDonnell, who is still new to the artillery career field, could truly say she's been welcomed.

Although it might appear a cruel and undeserved hail to the outside eye, Shannon sees it as more of an honor. After all, it's tradition.

"It was kind of like my initiation into the platoon," said the new leader — both authoritatively and officially — of 2nd Platoon, B Battery, 5-3 FA Bn., and also the only female fire direction officer for the battalion, a Joint Base Lewis-McChord asset that falls under 17th Fires Brigade.

Her patrol caps were destroyed by her fire direction control section May 23 during a field exercise at Yakima Training Center that tasked them with providing artillery support for 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, in the brigade's three-week YTC rotation.

Now, she has a collection of torn, tattered caps, but what's more is the intangible memory she has of a custom literally decades in the making — the rite of passage that accompanies a fire direction officer's first live shoot with the High



Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord

Mobility Artillery Rocket system, the unit's signature big gun.

"You get a new lieutenant, and it's only tradition to shoot their patrol cap," said Sgt. 1st Class Terry Biddle, platoon sergeant for 2nd Platoon, B Battery, 5-3 FA Bn.

Biddle said that on a new second lieutenant's first fire with the rocket system, his or her patrol cap is stolen and taped to the back plate of one of the rockets to be fired. As the rocket leaves, the back blast destroys the cap. Finally, after the shoot is finished, someone from the lieutenant's crew retrieves the headgear, has it signed by each member of the team and returns it to the lieutenant.

He said it's a practice unique to the community of Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, like the HIMARS, where something can actually be

attached to the backs of rounds.

"It's fun for the officers, and it's kind of a welcoming to the team," said Biddle, who's been an artilleryman for 17 years and has never been with a unit that didn't uphold the tradition.

Still, he said, he has no idea where it came from. He just remembers his first exposure to it as a private.

He was in the field, he said, when he saw a truck pass by with a patrol cap taped to the back of one of the rockets.

"Someone had written on it, 'Sir, here goes your headgear,'" he said. "Later that day, the commander had the (destroyed) hat on his head, and he was happy and smoking a cigar."

Now, 16 years later, Biddle has led the assaults in swiping and

blowing up the headgear of nearly 20 different officers.

It might seem hard to grasp why anyone would be so thrilled to have their personal property pilfered and then obliterated, but Capt. Adam Antonino, Biddle's battery commander, understands it fully.

"It builds unit cohesion. It's not like someone's stealing and destroying your property against your own will," he said. "Every MLRS unit in the Army does it, so you can't really complain about tradition."

Antonino just arrived to the battery in August. That's also when he officially entered the world of Multiple Launch Rocket Systems like the HIMARS.

The tradition struck him just three days before it found its way to McDonnell.

"My patrol cap went missing May 20 and was returned to me in poor condition May 22," he said with a smirk across his face about the custom that also follows officers through their careers.

Antonino said that as an officer makes it to the next rank, his or her new patrol cap, still basking in its "newly-promoted" luster, is blasted into the ground.

Even after assuming command of the battery, some members of one of Antonino's FDC teams took it upon themselves to properly welcome him nine months later.

His reaction to the assault on his head attire is anything but spiteful.

"It's flattering," he said. "I would be more concerned if on my first shoot my hat wasn't stolen and destroyed."

"I can always afford a new patrol cap," he added.

446th Airlift Wing passes compliance inspection

By 2nd Lt. Denise Hauser
446th Airlift Wing Public Affairs

The Reservists of the 446th Airlift Wing are in the fight every day. They deploy to the Middle East and train at Joint Base Lewis-McChord McChord Field. Despite their rigorous schedule, Reservists in the wing were still able to prepare and pass a major inspection focusing on processes and documentation.

The 446th Airlift Wing's Compliance Inspection was May 20 to 23 at JBLM McChord Field. Representing a variety of functional areas, a team of 43 inspectors from Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, Robins Air Force Base, Ga., came to McChord to ensure the 446th AW is mission ready, which people of the unit proved beyond question.

The purpose of a compliance inspection is to standardize the way the Air Force conducts operations across the board, including active duty, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard. The inspection was based on Air Force Instructions, local, state, federal, and Department of Defense requirements.

"The competition lies within our own performance, and the 446th AW did better than itself three years ago," said Col. Lane Seaholm, vice commander of the 446th AW. "Add this to the constant high operations tempo our teams deal with, and we can see that we are blessed with the best Airmen this country has to offer."

In addition to a resounding passing grade, individuals and teams were singled out for notable contributions. An aircraft maintainer from the 446th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron received an outstanding performer award in his capacity as a civilian employee with the 62nd Airlift Wing, which was undergoing its own inspections. Eight Reservists were named superior performers in the 446th AW's unit compliance inspection, and the military pay section was recognized as a superior team. Six Reservists received military bearing awards.

DA housing chief sees vision realized at JBLM

By Marisa Petrich
Northwest Guardian

When U.S. Army Chief of Public-Private Initiatives Ivan Bolden came to Joint Base Lewis-McChord nine years ago, he had a vision.

"Our vision was to have not just housing, but communities," he said.

On his first visit back since breaking ground for the first RCI homes at JBLM on May 23, he is seeing that idea realized. Bolden came to JBLM to check on public-private

housing projects on base — and so far things are going well.

"I am very impressed with what I've seen," he said.

On a tour of the installation, Bolden didn't just see houses. He saw people using paths, and kids playing on playgrounds.

This is only part of the positive changes he's seeing in Army housing. A retired Army colonel, Bolden spent 27 years in "matchbox houses" on base.

Now homes are being built to

silver LEED standards, and privatization efforts are improving service, maintenance and response times in base housing. More than that, the Army is consciously attempting to develop communities like those outside the base gates, rather than just building wherever there's land available.

That community feel is still being developed. Now four installations, forts Bragg, Irwin, Drum and Stewart, have "garden style" apartments for unaccompanied junior

officers and enlisted Soldiers E-7 and above.

The apartments offer free Wi-Fi, events and even a concierge service.

There are some things that can't be replicated anywhere, though — like the views of Mount Rainier on base.

"This has got to be one of the prettiest installations I have ever visited," Bolden said.

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White House Lawn Photograph by Daniel Schwen

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1-37th FA Soldiers fire on all cylinders

By Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord
5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

YAKIMA TRAINING CENTER — It might be the perception from the outside that field artillerymen don't exactly get close to the battle, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

To meet the unconventional requirements of two simultaneous overseas conflicts during the last 10 years, artillery Soldiers all across the Army have traded in one gun for another, accepting once unexpected infantry-like roles as members of maneuver teams in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently engaged in an expansive exercise with 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division that moved from Joint Base Lewis-McChord to Yakima Training Center in Central Washington state, Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 37th Field Artillery Regiment, are now taking back what they traded in, but still training on all levels of soldiering.

Immersed in what the Army is calling full-spectrum operations, they're preparing for whatever comes next.

"Generally, we train for Iraq or Afghanistan, where we've been on the ground for quite some time, but now they're training us for a full-spectrum fight that hasn't been done before," said Capt. Kevin Hansen, 1-37 FA intelligence officer.

Hansen said full-spectrum operations include lessons learned from past deployment and peacetime experiences and encompass all forms of warfare, whether it's

conventional fighting, insurgency threats, or dealing with civilians on the battlefield.

"It's not just Desert Storm, and it's not just counterinsurgency," he said. "It blends all of them together."

This widespread approach to training, which comes in the midst of significant force drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, is focusing on returning the battalion to its basic field artillery roots while at the same time allowing it to maintain the "non-standard" skills it's developed from years of involvement in the two countries.

The intention is to produce a fine-tuned, flexible unit able to meet the demands of any future conflict that might arise.

"This is something that will allow the Army to be a contingency force able to go anywhere in the world," Hansen said. "We can't really name an enemy, but we can train for what the enemy might do."

"We have to provide very tough, realistic training for our guys so they're prepared for the absolute toughest enemy," he said.

Captain Matthew Kuhlman, commander of B Battery, 1-37 FA, said this visit to YTC, which began May 17 and ended June 7, prepared the battalion for its upcoming month-long rotation in August to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.

During this rotation, Kuhlman says, 3rd Bde., which already holds the legacy of being the Army's first Stryker brigade, will claim another landmark first.

"Our brigade is supposed to be



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Capt. Kevin Hansen shows Sgt. Gordon Feenstra how to properly search a subject during an exercise at Yakima Training Center.

the first brigade coming through NTC to actually have a no kidding full-spectrum operations environment," he said.

What that means, he said, is that the entire brigade will engage in full conflict that includes every type of warfare, from conventional force-on-force fighting experienced in World War II to the detaining of civilian insurgents that is common to the Army's most recent conflicts, and everything in between.

Kuhlman says the significance in this for 1-37 FA is that his battery, along with two others, will do it all — something the battalion's never experienced.

"The majority of our time here we're doing artillery," he said, "but with full-spectrum operations it can

go from convoy and dismounted movement, going through mock towns and villages and interacting with the people, to clearing a room, reacting to contact and reacting to improvised explosive devices."

"Last rotation to NTC, one-third of the battalion was doing artillery missions, and the other two-thirds were doing maneuver operations," Kuhlman said.

With the freedom and time to train for an unseen enemy, 1-37 FA is able to put the primary focus back on artillery fundamentals that might otherwise leave with an older generation of Soldiers.

"The majority of the time our battalion has deployed it's been given a non-fire mission," Kuhlman said.

"A lot of guys who have deployed several times have never really done artillery, so we're refocusing ourselves."

"As the guys who have been in 10 to 15 years leave, we're losing a lot of our core competencies," said Sgt. 1st Class Faataui Iuli, the platoon sergeant for 1st Platoon, B Battery, 1-37 FA.

Iuli's platoon conducted dismounted maneuver operations May 22 through a simulated village intended to mirror a general urban overseas environment, eventually apprehending a local with plans to emplace an IED — a task that new artillery Soldiers like Pvt. Guillermo Urrego might not have seen coming.

"I didn't expect to be clearing rooms," he said. "But we're here to support the infantry, whether it's with the howitzer cannon or breaking down doors."

"Whatever it takes," he said.

It's the new guys like Urrego, however, that Iuli says will benefit most from such a wide array of training.

"It gives these young guys out here a taste of what the future's going to be for artillerymen," Iuli said. "We have to be proficient in infantry skills, and we have to be proficient in artillery skills."

Full-spectrum training may be complex, but the end result — at least in this battalion's case — is simple to Hansen.

"This is preparing us for the next battle," Hansen said. "Whenever the nation calls, this unit will be ready to go."

Soldiers learn teamwork key to full-spectrum operations

By Spc. Hannah Frenchick
20th Public Affairs Detachment

YAKIMA TRAINING CENTER — As four Soldiers await a radio call to fire their mortars downrange, they stand in the back of a Stryker overlooking the hills of Yakima Training Center. Playing the game, hurry up and wait, the Soldiers are anxious to employ their weapons system. One Soldier begins humming a tune, and soon enough all four are singing a song, trying to keep motivated on a windy, rainy day.

The Soldiers of 3rd Squad, Mortar Platoon, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division,

a team that calls itself "3 Gun," live and work in the confines of a Stryker vehicle during a brigade field training exercise at YTC, May 18 through June 8.

"The past four days we've been doing a fire coordination exercise," said Spc. Clifford Woodward, indirect fire infantryman. "It's working together to make sure the mortars are on deck with our mortars system and talking to the fire support platoons making sure we are coordinated with them to get the job done."

Teamwork plays an important role in full-spectrum operations, as well as within the three-man team it takes to run the mortar system.

"The gunner, assistant gunner and the ammo bearer all have to

work in sync," said Pfc. Josh Dirricle, indirect fire infantryman. "They all have to be able to communicate with each other, feel comfortable around each other and know how each other works. That comes into play during a fire mission, you know what's going on with everyone."

"If you don't have teamwork, then you can't work together," Dirricle said. "You'd be fighting all the time."

During the three years the Soldiers of 3 Gun have been together, its members have become more of a family than a squad.

"I don't have family here in Washington, so these guys are my family," said Spc. Andrew Richardson, indirect fire infantryman. "I'm

not around anybody, everyone is back home. They are my brothers."

Knowing each other like brothers is a benefit for 3 Gun when it comes to performing their jobs.

"When you train with the same guys over and over you start to learn their habits," Woodward said. "It's like a brother thing. You know exactly how they are going to act when something goes wrong, how they are going to react when something goes right. You know exactly when they need a little push to get that extra oomph in their step."

For the platoon's new guy, Spc. Christian Olivarez, a combat medic, the team accepted him with open arms into their Stryker and family.

"I've been with the mortars for

about seven months," Olivarez said. "As soon as I got attached with them they welcomed me in. As long as I'm taking care of them, they are taking care of me."

The Soldiers of 3 Gun have learned what motivates each other and how each person reacts to different situations. Without teamwork and sense of family, the team members wouldn't be able to pull together to perform their piece of the fire coordination exercise. With the wind whipping across the faces of the singing Soldiers, they hear a radio call come in. The singing immediately stops and the members of 3 Gun jump into action, ready to load and fire a mortar round across the baron land of YTC.



Photos by Ingrid Barrentine

Spc. Adrian Falcon, left, and Spc. Kenneth Allen run through a manual arms drill Monday during a JBLM honor guard practice at the unit office.

PRIDE AND DISCIPLINE

Honor guard's job to be I Corps' ambassadors

By Laura M. Levering
Northwest Guardian

Despite only being six Soldiers strong, its members form easily the most visible group in a parade or ceremony.

For the I Corps Command Honor Guard, there is no room for error. From the perfectly aligned flags they carry to their precise cadence, Soldiers work diligently to ensure everything about the I Corps Command Honor Guard is flawless.

"Our job is to be the ambassadors for I Corps to the community, and we must conduct ourselves that way," said Sgt. 1st Class Devon Grier, I Corps Command Honor Guard NCOIC.

Thirteen Soldiers serve in the unit. Twelve of them stay with the honor guard for one year before returning to their units, while the NCOIC remains two years.

They are hand selected by their command sergeants major and considered "borrowed military manpower" from units across the installation, keeping with the intent to represent all of I Corps and its units.

To be eligible for the I Corps Command Honor Guard, Soldiers must have zero military or civilian adverse actions against them, be able to pass their physical fitness test and meet a height requirement of between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet 2 inches. After Soldiers are recommended by their command sergeants major, they are sent to Grier and his battalion command sergeant major for interviews and a



Soldiers of the I Corps Command Honor Guard work alongside other servicemembers at local events as part of a joint service honor guard.

final decision.

The next and final step is week-long drilling of military related knowledge including drill and ceremony, rifles and flags. On the final day of training, Soldiers must pass a written knowledge test and two hour standing test before joining the unit. The first half of the standing test requires Soldiers to stand motionless in uniform and Kevlar — regardless of weather conditions — holding the Army flag and streamers. The second half entails conducting various drill-and-ceremony moves with a rifle.

"We put Soldiers in a worst-case scenario where we'd be on the parade field and they are exposed to whatever the weather conditions are," Grier said. "We have to ... make

sure that the Soldier is able to stand that long no matter what is going on around them."

The honor guard receives requests from organizations on the installation and from communities surrounding JBLM as far away as Ocean Shores. The request Grier has seen from the most distant city was from Leavenworth, Wash. The honor guard will partner there next month with the 56th Army Band to represent I Corps in the Autumn Leaf Festival Parade.

Endless hours of practicing weapons handling, marching and standing result in the honor guard's utmost professional appearance — a trait Grier said that is key to representing the military.

"We are all some people know of

the military when we're out in the community," Grier said. "Frankly, everything that we do needs to be perfect — or close to perfect I'd say."

Perfect can often equate to redundant, but most of the Soldiers do not mind. They would rather do things right than risk the Army being embarrassed at the expense of their actions.

Both Sgt. Daniel Sims and Sgt. John Cooper joined the I Corps Command Honor Guard less than a month ago and have no regrets. As infantrymen, the two welcomed the change of pace, but agreed the position requires a high level of discipline. In the short time they have been part of the honor guard, both are looking forward to busy schedules packed with parades, ceremonies and anything else thrown their way.

"I'm really glad I got the opportunity to come over here," Sims said.

"My family is ecstatic," Cooper said. "They could not be happier," adding that his Family plans to accompany him to several future events.

The level of discipline required for the position stems from outward appearance as well as being able to do the right thing when nobody is looking. As an infantry team leader, Cooper will have to make up for lost time performing his military occupational specialty while part of the honor guard. In a sense some might see the honor guard as a vacation away from one's specialty, but the reality is Soldiers are expected to be at the same pace or higher than they were when they left the unit despite an absence of mandatory MOS training.

"I'm losing a year of training, basically, to come over here, so I have to stay up on my training," Cooper said. "You can't allow yourself to forget what your job is just because you're over here branching out."

Grier said it's one of many aspects that make the honor guard so demanding. He recognizes the need for individual training and makes it a point to conduct other training when possible. All members of the honor guard are required to conduct physical training, weapons qualification and are encouraged to enroll in military and college courses.

"We are constantly working to keep the Soldiers skills up so that when they go back to their units, they haven't lost any of the knowledge that they left with," Grier said.

In the end, it's ultimately up to the individual Soldier to meet their unit's requirements. Fortunately for members of the I Corps Command Honor Guard, few should have any problems. It's the same high level of discipline that earned them the position in the first place that will ultimately send them back to their units on top of their game.

"As Soldiers, we train a lot on shooting, moving and communicating, and drill and ceremony is kind of a lost form," Cooper said. "It's actually a big discipline builder that gets neglected. Not only am I getting caught up on (drill and ceremony) over here, but I'll be able to take what I've learned here back to my unit and incorporate it more there," Cooper said.

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Performance enhancement specialist living 'dream job'

By Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord
5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

At a point in her life when most other girls were probably trying on makeup, playing with dolls and dreaming of fairytale love, Shannon Baird had her mind set on something else completely: becoming an elite Navy Seal.

Since the military doesn't currently allow females to join special operations units, that aspiration wasn't realistic.

But Baird is living proof that even with dreams you can shift fire.

A performance enhancement specialist with the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness-Performance and Resilience Enhancement Program on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Baird now works alongside the military instead of as a member of it.

"If I joined the military I wanted to be the best of the best," Baird said. "If you tell me I can't be the best of the best — the cream of the crop — then I'm out."

But while she did sideline the possibility of a career in uniform, Baird never put to rest her desire to help the military community.

Her assistance comes in the form of mental preparedness, something she says is absolutely crucial to performance.

Baird's job is to fine-tune Sol-

diers' mental skills to enhance performance, whether in anticipation of a combat deployment, preparation for a sport or reinforcement of confidence.

"These Soldiers are well prepared in terms of tactical and physical training, and my role is to add a deliberate and succinct mental training for them as well," she said.

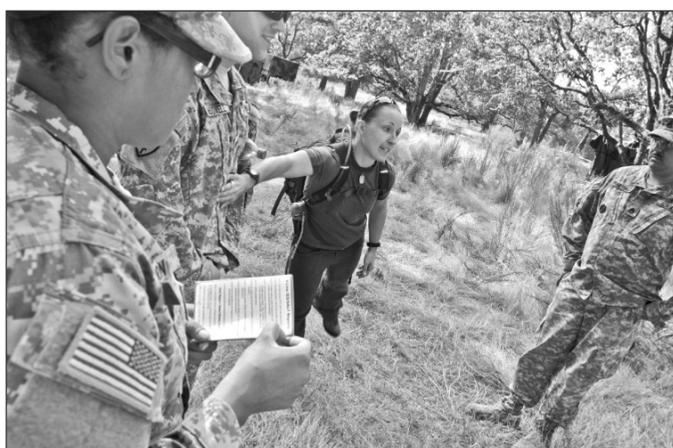
Baird and the other members of her team at CSF-PREP teach units how to set goals, how to relax and how to direct attention under stress.

They're lessons she's brought to the 109th Military Intelligence Battalion for six months. She's worked with the unit in classroom settings and even maxed one of its company's weapons qualification scores.

"Everyone (is) 100 percent qualified from our company, when normally 75 percent might qualify," said Sgt. 1st Class David Benbrook, the first sergeant for B Company, 109th MI Bn. "She refocused us not to worry about the things you can't control and only about the things you can."

Baird headed into the field to work with Soldiers from B Co. for the duration of a 10-day field training exercise through Aug. 18 to prepare them for a deployment.

She put together a tailored program for the company, which she



Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord

Shannon Baird (center) talks to B Co., 109th MI Bn. Soldiers about using deep breathing techniques to calm them before performing a task during pre-execution training.

calls a strategic mental plan, and spent each day observing the Soldiers perform training missions.

As the company's senior sergeants gave classes, Baird interjected advice on mental imagery to aid their preparations.

"If you can imagine it, you've done it," she said as Soldiers rehearsed IED counter-measures for a three-vehicle convoy.

While the Soldiers talked through their actions, Baird walked

from group to group, intervening to coach their planning process.

She told one of the Soldiers, Spc. Alexandra Czarnota, a human intelligence collector, to focus on the underlying task rather than minute details of her IED report.

Staff Sgt. Richard Pendleton, Czarnota's platoon sergeant, said Soldiers often get wrapped up in technicalities and forget what's really important.

They worry too much about

how they sound on the radio, when what's important is that they get the information across, he said.

Pendleton said the skills Baird teaches help Soldiers relax, crucial to the execution of tasks.

"These skills she gives them allow the Soldiers to calm themselves down, so they can react in a manner that will help them do their jobs better," he said. "To put out that nine-line medical evacuation request better, or that nine-line IED report, or to evacuate a casualty and not be so stressed."

Baird said the military literally saved her life, when her mother enlisted to rescue her family from poverty. Now she wants to give something back to the community that, since childhood, has been such a big part of her being.

"We're giving Soldiers another weapon — a weapon they'll always have, and that they can use to achieve the end result, and with any mission the end result we all want to see is everyone coming home," she said.

And although Baird will likely never be seen as a member of the military's most elite troops, she can't say she's given up her dream — she just found a new one.

"This is my dream," Baird said. "I'm living my dream; it's just a different dream."

Spouses bond during holiday bazaar

By Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord
5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Jessica Morales values sewing as far more than just a handy household skill.

To the 12-year Army spouse, it's a hobby, a relaxer and a stress reliever. It's a way to deal with her husband's deployments, a chance to honor her Japanese heritage and an opportunity to craft products that make others happy.

Morales is like most of the other craft enthusiasts who showed up to the McChord Holiday Bazaar at the McChord Field Community Center Dec. 1, all devoted to their chosen interests, which often serve to take them away from the chaos of the world — away from everything.

But here, at this annual event, things like sewing, stitching and painting bring them all closer to people — to other military spouses, to complete strangers and to anyone willing to chat a while, if nothing else.

"I like to meet new people," Morales said, standing just feet from a card table piled high with sewn dolls. "I like to get out there, because I'm normally a very shy person, so to come to something like this — we all have something in common."

Morales, a mother of four with an online shop, has come to the bazaar on McChord each year since its inception three years ago. Here, she sells Japanese kyoko dresses for children, sewn toys for babies who are teething, and dolls of varying fabric textures that stimulate the touch senses of infants and toddlers alike.

This year, she shared a booth with new friend and fellow Army spouse Christina Pruitt, a designer with a similar drive to create. The two spouses, neighbors in a secluded neighborhood near Yelm, met this summer and collaborated to bring something unique to the event.

"We call it C and J Designs and Crafts," Morales said, explaining that the acronym represents each of their names.

On a second table adjacent to the first sits a vast collection of painted, glittered and etched beverage bottles, some adorned with colorful ribbons — center pieces, as Morales calls them.

The two decorated the recycled bottles together throughout last month and had them on sale for passersby.



Jim Bryant

Dawn Fucci and Jeannette Gozalo search for gifts at the annual JBLM Holiday Bazaar Dec. 1 at the McChord Field Collocated Club .

"It's new and it's fun, and we get to try it out this year," Morales said, adding that she and Pruitt salvaged old items that would otherwise have been trash to make their products.

It's just one of several things Morales and Pruitt have in common. Their children go to school together, and their husbands get along. They live in the same isolated community, on a mountain where there are no gas stations — no stores. But they have each other.

"She puts a smile on my face," says Morales. "There's nothing like having a friend. Yes, I have my husband, and he puts a smile on my face, too, but it's nice to have a female friend to break away with."

"It gave us kind of a chance to bond together, and we're both very creative people, so it all just came together so wonderfully," said Pruitt of their monthlong onslaught of crafting, staying up late to watch

movies and sharing a bottle of wine in the process.

Pruitt, whose husband is new to the Army, says through their friendship she and her husband have amassed a great deal of knowledge on a community still very new to them both.

"She's been able to give us advice about the military because she and her husband have been in for so long," she said. "It's just really nice to know someone who's been through those things before, since I haven't yet."

All throughout the community center ballroom, packed with 34 different vendors, military veterans and spouses from all different walks of life have found the same social enjoyment as Morales and Pruitt.

"I've already gotten numbers from people so we can network," said Army spouse and two-year bazaar veteran Erica Watt, stand-

ing next to a table of hair bows she made from old fabric, recycled paper and unworn clothing. "It's good for spouses to be connected."

Today, Watt has made a friend from the Air Force community: Air Force spouse Ellen Drake, a first-time bazaar participant.

"I don't really have a connection with the Air Force, and since we're a joint base now it's also nice to have a chance to meet a different service member's spouse," Watt said.

Between customer visits, Watt and Drake sit at their tables facing one another, talking and laughing. Watt makes flowers as hair accessories and Drake crochets hats and dishrags, but both automatically have at least two things in common: crafts and the military.

"My husband doesn't really work with any married people," says Drake, "so it's kind of hard to make friends with other couples with kids,

but being here today we see other peoples' crafts, and I'm making friends."

"It's a good opportunity for her to network," said Sgt. Nathan Watt during a visit to his wife's booth. "Just to build community and morale — to give them something to do while their spouse is deployed."

And that sentiment certainly isn't lost on Erica.

"Our spouses aren't guaranteed to be here, so to have that kind of connection outside the comfort of our Families is nice," she said.

And while the Air Force and Army spouses sit at their booths and chat, good friends Morales and Pruitt are enticing browsers by talking up one another's craftsmanship.

They're enjoying the fruits of various hobbies that most other times help them escape the world. But today, they're more immersed in it than anything else.

Airman puts disc golf on the map

IF YOU GO
What: McChord Field Disc Golf Course
Where: At Dog Park
What: Nine-hole course

MORE ONLINE
 To follow Kirk's disc golf career visit www.dgcourse.com
review.com

Air National Guardsman still pursues his passion after achieving his goal to play disc golf in all 50 states

By Somer Breeze-Hanson
 Northwest Guardian

Since 1982 the Air Force has taken Larry Kirk all over the country. As a member the California Air National Guard he is sent to different locations every year to serve his two-week annual tour. Over the past decade 50-year-old Kirk took advantage of his travels and mapped out his own course — to play disc golf in all 50 states.

"I started traveling when I had the chance to," the Atwater, Calif. resident said. "I'm really dedicated to meeting new people and playing (disc golf)." Disc golf is similar to the game of golf, but rather than using a ball and clubs, a course is played by throwing discs into chain baskets. Modern disc golf is a product of the 1960s and Kirk began playing as a teenager in 1978. During his time in the Air Force

Kirk's sport of choice was golf, while disc golf was a novelty game he looked forward to playing when he returned home to Southern California. But while on a road trip where he played disc golf courses in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, Kirk got the idea to expand beyond the West Coast and play courses all over the United States. "That's really when it all started. I was playing a long time ago in high school, but in 2001 my first goal was to play everything in California," Kirk said. Kirk has played in 65 courses in



Courtesy photo

Larry Kirk tosses a disc into a basket at a disc golf course in Roseburg, Ore. Kirk played disc golf in all 50 states.

See **DISC GOLF**, Page B2

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE



Photos by Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord

Staff Sgt. Frank Pigors (right), currently assigned to the Warrior Transition Battalion on JBLM, checks his line during a recent sturgeon fishing trip on the Columbia River initiated by the Wounded Veterans Fishing Program, a nonprofit organization for WTB Soldiers who are transitioning to civilian life.

FISHING OFFERS SAFE HAVEN

Capt. Marshall Davis (left), who is currently assigned to the Warrior Transition Battalion on JBLM, baits his hook while talking with Army veteran Danny Gabriel.



By Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord
 5th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

PORTLAND, Ore. — Captain Marshall Davis recalls life during his recent deployment to Iraq with one word: Indescribable — at least to anyone who wasn't physically there. The Idaho Army National Guard construction officer oversaw the movement of concrete barriers and walls, massive storage containers and other equipment out of Victory Base Complex in Baghdad at the completion of Operation New Dawn, a formal transition signifying the end of U.S. military involvement in the country. But for Davis, the real stress didn't necessarily come from the nine straight months of intense construction work that eventually tore his

See **FISHING**, Page B2

Nonprofit fishing program is helping Soldiers as they transition to civilian life

Teams tune up for intramural season

Airmen prepare for season during four-day tournament

By Airman 1st Class Leah Young
 62nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

The ball is tossed into the air and for a moment, everyone holds their breath. Eyes follow the ball as an Airman's hand reaches up to take possession, and the first game of the four-day intramural basketball tournament officially began. Although the 627th Security Forces Squadron maintained possession of the ball at the start, when the 373rd Training Squadron Det. 12 finally got the ball, they showed their true dominance winning the game 58-35. Entering halftime, with the 373rd



Airman 1st Class Leah Young

TRS leading 26-8, teams grouped together, wiped the sweat from their brows, and worked to improve during the next half.

"We've only had one practice before this game," said

See **INTRAMURAL**, Page B2

Couple runs together though assigned half a world apart

By Somer Breeze-Hanson
 Northwest Guardian

At 8:15 a.m. Erin McCormack lined up at the start line of the Seattle Marathon Nov. 27. Eleven hours ahead at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, her husband Ryan McCormack set out to run at 7:15 p.m. Half a world apart from each other, they ran together. Erin knew Ryan would only be with her for the first 13.1 miles, but the Army spouse pushed to reach the 26 miles to complete her first marathon. "This is something where I actually feel like we're running together," Erin said. "He probably



Erin McCormack



Ryan McCormack

got to (mile) 13 before I did. He runs a lot faster."

The McCormacks moved to Joint Base Lewis-McChord last summer from England where they enjoyed running along small roads lined with sheep and cot-

See **RUNNING**, Page B2

Disc golf

Continued from Page B1

California, which today has more than 100 courses. It served as a springboard to Kirk's cross-country attempt to conquer the other 46 states. For nine years Kirk took road trip after road trip following a mapped out course. Last year he took a 10-day, 10-state trip of the East Coast. He completed the 50-state feat after he played in Delaware of October 2010. But it didn't end there. Even though he already had recorded Pennsylvania, he was advised to go up to Fairmount Park in Philadelphia to play the second course built in the country.

After Kirk played Philadelphia he went out to find the iconic art museum steps shown in the movie 'Rocky.' He celebrated nearby with a lobster dinner.

Kirk thought he might have been the first person to accomplish such a feat, but he learned in 2009 someone beat him to it.

"He was retired Navy," Kirk said. "Then I'll be the first Air Force person to do it."

These days Kirk is taking some time off to job search while he continues to serve in the Air National Guard. He still makes time for road trips, traveling with 40 discs in his trunk. With one major feat accomplished, Kirk still sets goals for the game he enjoys.

Last October Kirk spent two days to map out the 11 courses in Phoenix. He started out at 5 a.m. and played each course until he finished at 9:30 p.m. Four of those hours were spent driving. He did it simply because he could.

"It's not a passing fad. I've been doing it for 10 years fanatically," Kirk said.

Nearly a decade after his cross-country adventure began Kirk returned to the state where it began — Washington. While on yet another road trip, Kirk drove through McChord Field last month to visit with firefighters and MPs he previously worked with, and of course to play the nine-hole

course on McChord Field, located at the dog park. Despite the wet Washington weather, Kirk still went out and recorded another course on his growing list of courses played.

To date Kirk has played at more than 300 courses. According to the Disc Golf Review website, there are 3,626 courses in the United States.

Kirk plans to retire from the Air National Guard when he is 60 and spend more time teeing off on disc courses.

"My kids have grown up and I stayed in kid mode," he said.

Somer Breeze-Hanson: somer.breeze-hanson@nwguardian.com

Running

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tages. A serious distance runner the past three years, Erin began to ask around for a local run group in DuPont. Someone told her about Lisa Hallett and the "wear blue: run to remember" group. Founded by Hallett, wear blue is a running community that serves as a living memorial to the service and sacrifice of the military.

It took just one weekly Saturday run in DuPont for the McCormacks to find their group.

"Before 'wear blue,' running was my alone time," Erin said. "With 'wear blue' it's a little bit different because we just named a bunch of (fallen) men and women and it's hard to just walk away from that and get into your routine without really thinking about why we wear the blue shirts. Saturday runs are a little more personal."

Before Ryan deployed in June the McCormacks had the idea that Ryan would shadow run Erin as a way to run together. What initially was a good idea to spend time together while they were apart turned into a harsh reality for Ryan. While the weather is mild in Washington during the summer months, it was brutal for Ryan.

"With temperatures hitting the upper-90s at 6 a.m. and spiking at 127 (degrees) in the afternoon it was very difficult to find similar time to run with Erin," he said.

As the seasons changed and Ryan's battalion's operational tempo slowed down, Ryan ran with Erin to clear his head and think about his family and friends back home.

"I use these shadow runs as opportunities to remember all of my friends and brothers in arms that have fallen throughout the years, and make a conscious effort to reflect on their families and loved ones," he said.

Ryan communicates with Erin to let her know what block of time he can give her during her runs so she knows at what point he is running with her. But the McCormacks do more than just run for each other. They look forward to the Saturday runs when they're running for a bigger purpose than themselves.

"When you hit the pavement on those Saturdays you're honoring them and you're taking on a huge responsibility," Erin said. "You step out of everything; of the kids, the errands you have to run, when you're going to make it to the commissary and the names come out and it's extremely powerful."

Hallett has run numerous marathons since she founded wear blue in 2009. Last month at the Seattle Marathon, Erin felt the nerves as she prepared to run her first. It took one look at Hallett at the start line to put her at ease.

"She just had this glow as though it wasn't 26 miles we were running," Erin said.

The training and commitment for Erin's first marathon was one of the hardest challenges she endured. But as she ran mile after mile she didn't feel the fatigue that comes with the infamous "wall" runners experience. Rather, she reached mile 19 and was inspired by the street lined with American flags and blue shirts.

"A friend told me, 'Before you hit the wall, remember why you're doing this. You're doing this to honor them. You will finish because you have a bigger mission than this,'" Erin said.

Part of the bigger mission is spreading the word of "wear blue" beyond the JBLM and DuPont communities. Ryan runs with wear blue in Kuwait and has plans to honor fallen West Point classmates from his 1997 graduating class. The idea is to give his classmates the opportunity to run to remember at the 15-year reunion. The eight names of the classmates who passed will be printed on the back of wear blue shirts, and a 5K and 10K run will be organized.

Erin has plans to run more marathons in 2012 and Ryan plans to shadow run alongside her. Always designated the pusher of the jogging stroller for their 4 and 6-year olds when he's home, Ryan looks forward to returning to his role where he receives "encouraging" words from his children.

"They're usually complaining of how slow we are moving," he said.

For more information about "wear blue," visit www.wearblue-eruntoremember.org.

Somer Breeze-Hanson: somer.breeze-hanson@nwguardian.com



Photos by Sgt. Christopher M. Gaylord

Staff Sgt. Benjamin Reduque (center), a former tanker and platoon sergeant currently assigned to the Warrior Transition Battalion on JBLM, proudly displays a sturgeon he caught during a recent fishing trip on the Columbia River sponsored by the Wounded Veterans Fishing Program.

Fishing

Continued from Page B1

shoulders apart and sent him to the Joint Base Lewis-McChord Warrior Transition Battalion.

It came from constant defenses in a region that became less safe as time went on and forces began to take down the base's blast walls.

"We had many places that were ghost towns; nobody was around and security was very awkward," Davis says. "For quite a long time we had to be hyper-vigilant to kidnappings, to stabbings, to snipers, etcetera, in the outlying areas. The stress of living that way for a year is indescribable."

But today, in the cold mist of a foggy Portland, Ore., morning, 7,000 miles and a few months past the trying experience, Davis has lost touch with that stress, at least for a brief time.

Standing on the deck of a 26-foot fishing boat on the waters of the Columbia River, his hands shoved in the pockets of his coat, life has slowed down a bit for the Boise, Idaho, native.

"It allows me to completely and utterly relax," said Davis of his experiences with the Wounded Veterans Fishing Program, a nonprofit organization under which civilian volunteers — also military veterans themselves — invite Soldiers from JBLM's WTBM out on their own boats for a Saturday of fishing.

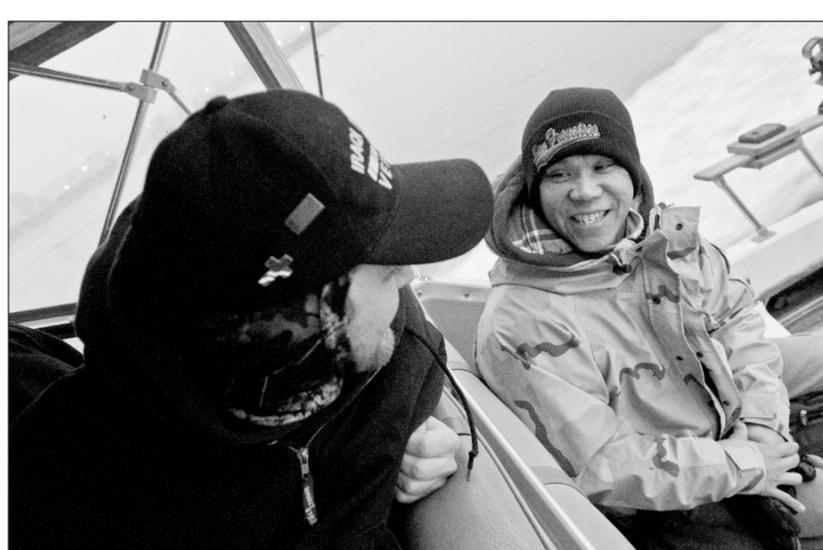
"I've had three trips now, and they're huge stepping stones for me mentally relaxing and shifting back into civilian life," said Davis, who has been at the WTBM for two months now.

The program, the brainchild of Army veteran Danny Gabriel, seeks to give wounded Soldiers in the process of transitioning to civilian life a time to relax and clear their minds — to let go of worry.

"By accommodating them with just this little, short period of time that is a (stress-free) environment for them, they're able to adapt and cope with their injuries and disabilities a lot better. I feel," said Gabriel, leaning against the driver's seat of his boat, four fishing lines submerged in the water, waiting for a bite.

Today the catch is sturgeon, one of the oldest families of fish in existence.

And sturgeon fishing on



Staff Sgt. Benjamin Reduque (right), a former tanker and platoon sergeant assigned to the Warrior Transition Battalion on JBLM, talks with Army veteran Jeffery Stein.

Columbia River, which divides Washington and Oregon, is just one of several venues the program offers.

Gabriel and the other veterans whose help he has enlisted over the past few years have also taken Soldiers fishing for salmon, steelhead trout and halibut in Port Angeles, Longview and across the Puget Sound. They have taken WTBM Soldiers on about 40 trips this year alone and have averaged 25 to 30 in previous years.

"Fishing, I feel, is one of the most relaxing things you can do," said Gabriel, who served in the Army from 1979 to 1982 and severely damaged his right shoulder.

But what hurt him more, perhaps, was the mental damage.

"I still suffer from post-traumatic stress ...," he said, adding that he has used fishing to heal both his physical and emotional scars — something he tries to bring to the wounded Soldiers.

"What we've learned on how to cope and deal with our disabilities and live with our disabilities — we feel that we're able to pass this knowledge on, not by talking to them but by actually physically showing them that it can be done," he said. "It's easier for a Soldier to actually talk to a veteran — somebody that's walked in their shoes, that's been there, that's experienced some of the things they've done."

Gabriel started his program in

late summer 2007 after helping his daughter's Army boyfriend through his struggles with suicidal thoughts following a deployment to Afghanistan. The Soldier was involved in an explosion resulting in the deaths of several of his comrades and blamed himself for the incident, he said.

"I could not see this young man take his life for something he had no control over," he said.

So Gabriel bought a boat and took the Soldier fishing. He took him crabbing, too.

"We did a lot of talking on the boat, and he finally realized that he wasn't responsible for it, and he started getting help through the military and through civilian life," Gabriel said. "I saw that there was a definite need for something like this — for all of our warriors to be able to go out and enjoy a little bit of free time away from the stressful environment that they're in."

Staff Sgt. Benjamin Reduque, a former tanker and platoon sergeant now assigned to the WTBM, sat on Gabriel's boat. While he waited for a tug at one of the lines, he and Gabriel discussed some of Reduque's Iraq experiences.

In one instance Reduque recapped the moment one of his platoon's vehicles was destroyed by a land mine.

"We thought we were dead," he said.

But today he's very much alive. And Gabriel listened to him

intently, his eyes fixed sternly across Reduque's face.

He recalled the attack vividly, gesturing, waving his arms and providing sound effects that almost took you there with him.

Reduque said he developed severe PTSD from his deployments. But now, he's healing, and the water helps him, he said.

"The environment is quiet, and out on the water you feel something," he said. "And sometimes I have to get time for myself."

A few hundred feet across the river, Maj. Natalie Vines sat in a chair on Army veteran Rex Cuniff's boat, smiling with a recollection of Cuniff's basic training days.

"It's kind of like the weight's off your shoulders," said Vines, who suffered a traumatic brain injury in Iraq. "You're just kind of out here, just enjoying the peace and quiet, and the events among veterans and your own Soldiers. It's camaraderie; it just brings us all together."

There are plenty of boats on the river, all carrying fishermen passionate enough about their sport to have braved the cold December air.

But on those four boats, all gathered closely together, it was the beginning of a healing process — the start to a long road of recovery.

"It was my first chance to not be stressed in a year," Davis said. "These Soldiers need this mental break. It's huge."

struggled to establish a clean defensive strategy. The 373rd TRS completed two separate foul shots and began to work together as a team.

"We have a pretty good team this year," said Henry Moultrie, 373rd TRS instructor and intramural participant for the past eight years. "Last year we went 7 and 1, so hopefully

we can repeat that and go all the way."

As the final buzzer rang, the 627th SFS attempted one final three-point shot. Teams lined up and shook hands.

"Today's game went really well," said Moultrie after his first victory of the season. "We had some mistakes here and there but overall, I'm

happy with our team."

According to Staff Sgt. Dana Wagner, 627th Force Support Squadron fitness center manager, the four-day tournament was comprised of eight McChord Field teams.

The official intramural basketball season is scheduled to begin shortly after the holiday season.

Intramural

Continued from Page B1

Sarah Draper, 627th SFS raven. "We need to work on defense and practicing our plays. We'll get it together and be better."

Entering the second half determined to improve, the 627th SFS