

'He was just a baby'

December 18, 2011

By Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler

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JOINT-BASE LEWIS MCCORD, Wash. (Dec. 18, 2011) -- While reading recent news from Afghanistan, I was surprised to open the Alaska Post and see a familiar face -- Spc. James Burnett Jr.

I spent time with Burnett while covering his battalion's operations in Kandahar province. Oct. 17 was the first night I met him; we spent eight hours waiting in a Stryker for the men in his company to return from a foot patrol in Do'ab village. In the not-so-spacious confines of the vehicle, I heard about this young man's life. He was 20, but his goofy demeanor reminded me of my little brother-- he was just a baby in my eyes.

He was 21 when he died one month later, Nov. 16th, in the same province he spent nearly every day patrolling.

The news stung.

The men of 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, along with the 3rd Bn., 21st Inf. Reg., both of the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, were sent to clear the Taliban stronghold that remained in Kandahar province's Panjwa'i district. It was an important mission, in a place where no other coalition forces had established a constant presence.

During the week I spent covering his unit's mission, Burnett would often tell me, "Sergeant, it's the real thing out here."

He was right. It was a dangerous place, and the insurgents were not willing to give it up easily.

I could sense he was scared, but I didn't want to ask him. Infantrymen don't share those vulnerabilities with anyone but their own. Fear seems to be one of the many things that bond them together, especially in times of war where they face the possibility of dying each time they go on patrol.

Pfc. Alberio Porto was Burnett's closest friend in the company. I called them twins because, in addition to their slight resemblance, they seemed to be attached at the hip

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the entire time I was with their unit.

In the week or so we had spent together, I was able to see the closeness they shared. Burnett talked about getting out of the Army, returning home to Wichita, Kan., marrying his fiancé, becoming a police officer and how he and Porto would celebrate his 21st birthday far away from Afghanistan.

The bond of infantrymen is one that, really, only infantrymen will ever be able to understand. As an outsider -- and a female at that -- catching a glimpse of it was a rare opportunity for me; one I will never forget.

There is nothing you are able to keep private when living in the close quarters these men do. They eat together, shower together (when showers are available), patrol together and sleep together, when and where ever they are able to get some rest. When it came to jokes, nothing was off limits -- mothers, grandmothers, physical features and weaknesses were all ammunition used in the tongue-in-cheek battle of wits.

Despite the banter and light hearted jabs thrown at each other on a daily basis, they also understood one another. They fight for the same thing, bleed for the same thing and die for the same thing -- each other.

Retired Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, author of *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, found that the most fearful thing for combat Soldiers was not the idea of death or injury but, rather, of the thought of letting down the men to their left and right.

"(The) bonding is so intense that it is fear of failing these comrades that preoccupies most combatants," the former Army Ranger wrote.

In our first meeting in the Stryker that chilly October night, Burnett and I talked about his role in this war. He said at times he didn't understand it but he knew that, in the grander scheme of things, he was doing his part like other infantrymen had done before him.

At 20, this seemed to be a profound thing for someone to grasp but that's the reality of war. You face fear and death and grow up faster, in many ways, than your peers who haven't served. The men fighting next you to understand this reality too.

The life of the infantry was new to me. As an Army Public Affairs noncommissioned officer, I've spent the majority of my time in a Corps headquarters, seeing the strategic side of the war when I deploy. But this particular trip to southern Afghanistan was enlightening and memorable.

Porto was with Burnett, and Pvt. Matthew Colin, the day both were killed by an improvised explosive device. Porto was seriously injured.

"I had other friends when I got to the company, but when (Burnett and I) started talking, we just connected like brothers," Porto explained. "Once we deployed, and after I came back from leave, we were never apart. We did guard duty, details, missions, ate and hung out together. We always talked about our personal problems. We helped each other out. We had plans after deployment.

"I lost a brother."

In the five years I have served my country, I've understood the Army to be a big family - - my extended family, so to speak. Not that I have thought of it differently, but my time with these men showed me just how tight of a family the Army can be.

In his last Facebook post, one day before he was killed, Burnett wrote, "miss and love everyone so very much!!!...tell my dogs I'll be home soon enough."

Sadly, Burnett -- the Soldier I saw as a baby, a young kid sent to southern Afghanistan, one of the most volatile regions in the world -- will not get the chance to see his dogs, marry his fiancé, become a police officer or celebrate being 21.

Perhaps I was wrong. Maybe the young man, who I saw as a baby during those few days in October, was in fact a man, mature beyond his years. This was a Soldier who understood the dangers of his profession. He was an American who volunteered a service to our country that so few have.

Spc. James Burnett, Jr., has taught me lessons that no other experience in my military career has come close to matching. He taught me to live life to the fullest, to love those closest to me and to face fear and adversity with the dignity and professionalism that is becoming of the most honorable Americans our nation has to offer.

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ALASKA POST

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WEEKEND WEATHER



Friday
Mostly cloudy with chance of snow in the evening
Low 0 High 20
Northeast winds 10 to 20 mph



Saturday
Mostly cloudy with chance of snow in a.m.
Low -15 High 10
South winds 10 to 20 mph



Sunday
Mostly cloudy
Low -10 High -5

Forecast courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Command Sgt. Major Todd Wentland to leave the Army on top of his game

Allen Shaw, Fort Wainwright PAO

He got his moose this year, he has accomplished about as much as any Soldier can accomplish and in Jan. 2012, Command Sgt. Major Todd Wentland, Fort Wainwright garrison command sergeant major will begin out-processing from the United States Army.

Wentland joined the Army in 1985 to help pay for college. "I told the recruiter I want to be the toughest Army guy there is and he hooked me up with a contract to be an Airborne Ranger," he said. "Rangers are the direct action kind of guys all the time."

His early leadership skills and bravery was echoed by Col. Ronald

M. Johnson, commander, Fort Wainwright Army Garrison. Johnson said, "When he (Wentland) was an E-5 Ranger battalion squad leader, he was chosen to be the primary jumpmaster for one of the assault aircraft that invaded Panama (during Operation Just Cause). He was a very junior (noncommissioned officer) and to have been given this extremely critical responsibility was amazing. He executed the mission under hostile fire and after getting all personnel safely out of the aircraft, parachuted himself from 500-feet onto a landing zone held by enemy forces."

"They didn't even wear a reserve



Command Sgt. Major Todd Wentland (File photo)

chute, because there wasn't enough time to activate it at that altitude," Johnson said.

See Wentland on page 5

Deep in the heart of Taliban country

Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler, 1-25th SBCT PAO

Editor's note: This is the first story in a three part series on the actions of Task Force Arctic Wolves to root out Taliban.

Somewhere in the vast terrain between Panjwa'i and Zharay is the birthplace of known Taliban leader Mullah Omar. The area has been a launch pad for insurgent activity and home to Taliban safe houses.

In the western tip of the Horne of Panjwa'i lies Do'ab, where Taliban activity has become a way of life for the villagers and farmers.

"Do'ab is a historic insurgent engagement area. It is the last piece of terrain in the area that allows the enemy freedom of movement," said Maj. Jimmy Kleager, operations officer with 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment "Gimlets," 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.

Since the beginning of the war, the area had been under control of the Canadian army, said Kleager, a Scottsbluff, Neb., native. In July, as the Canadians departed, elements of 1-25th



A bucket loader passes a Soldier from the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division while working to extend Route Agha through the Horne of Panjwa'i to the village of Do'ab and the new Combat Outpost Lion. (Photo by Pfc. Andrew Geisler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

settled into the area. The Canadians put great effort into building roads within Panjwa'i. The goal was to expand security and boost the economy. However, they did not venture into the tip of the horne or into Do'ab.

Do'ab would be pivotal for two reasons, Kleager explained.

First, by constructing and expanding roads throughout the village, farmers would have a safer, more direct route to larger cities. Villagers have been using rugged trails, only the width of one donkey-led cart, as a way to get to and from Do'ab.

"Building a road through

Do'ab would have a tremendous effect on access to and from the village. It would economically benefit the locals by allowing access to Kandahar, where their crops and produce, like grapes, bring more of a profit," added Kleager.

See ROADS on page 5

Fall back: Daylight saving ends; back to standard



Don't forget, Saturday evening or very early Sunday morning, set clocks back one hour to standard time.

This is also an opportune time to check smoke alarm batteries.

The official time for setting back clocks is 2 a.m. local time, Sunday.

Leadership lecture



Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum talks to Soldiers in the Taji Warrior Resiliency Campus movie theater about turning a disadvantage into an advantage. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Troth/eCAB, 1st Inf. Div. PAO)

A free leadership lecture and hands-on training session focusing on an Army-endorsed holistic program will be led by the director of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, M.D., Ph.D. The program, slated for 10 a.m. at in the Bureau of Land Management Building 1541 on Nov. 15, can give everyone the knowledge, thinking skills and behaviors to optimize their ability to "thrive" in their lives, as well as their capacity to successfully cope with life's challenges and adversity.

ROADS: Arctic Wolves help make way for villagers

Continued from page 1

In addition, the return on grapes and other produce will provide an alternative to harvesting marijuana.

"The road will allow the farmers to bring crops to the market, and allow them to expand their profits beyond drug crops, providing the area with an agricultural boost," said 1st Sgt. Jeff Peppin, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st SBCT, 25th Infantry Division.

Second, by having a troop presence in the area, the Taliban would face challenges while attempting to place improvised explosive devices.

"By moving into the tip of the Horn of Panjwa'i, the furthest west anyone has been, we can take away the last piece of terrain where the enemy has freedom of movement," said Kleager.

Not only would enemy terrain be taken away, the Soldiers in the area would be able to talk with the local villagers on a regular basis.

Building and establishing a presence would not be easy, though, as the area was laden with IEDs. IEDs pose a threat to local villagers and troops in the



An IED is detonated in front of bulldozers with the 368th Engineer Battalion, Naval Construction Regiment, and U.S. Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, clearing Route Agha on the way to the future location of Combat Outpost Lion. (Photo by Pfc. Andrew Geisler, 1-25th SBCT PAO)

area, according to Spc. Joshua Rinker, an intelligence analyst with Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment.

"IEDs, in particular pressure plate IEDs, are the biggest threat in Do'ab," said Rinker, a Richmond, Va., native. "When the Taliban moved into this area, they placed them everywhere—not just along the road, but in compounds and orchards throughout the village."

With the fear of the unknown,

villagers were wary of harvesting their crops, Kleager said.

"It got to the point where the locals were actually leaving their homes, their crops and the village altogether because they feared for their lives," said Rinker.

Knowing what they would be up against, the battalion enlisted the help of Afghan National Army in the area and prepared to head into Do'ab. The goal of the combined effort, Kleager said, is to bring

stability to the area and, in turn, boost the economy.

By September, the Gimlets, along with ANA engineers, broke ground and the transformation from Taliban stronghold to an active farming village began.

For photos related to this series see the 1-25th page at www.flickr.com/photos/1-25_sbct/sets/72157627856388923/.

WENTLAND: Making the transition

Continued from page 1

Arlie Nethken and Maurice Fischer, both former sergeants major, said Wentland epitomizes what a command sergeant major should be. "For nearly 20 years I have been directly associated with Fort Wainwright and the leaders, and in all that time have I never met a more confident, competent, selfless-serving, quiet, professional installation command sergeant major than him," said Nethken, training support officer.

"He serves as a role model for all sergeants major. His calm demeanor combined with knowledge and skills make him the catalyst which has made this garrison successfully function," said Fischer, the installation's director of Emergency Services.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at time of challenge and controversy." Wentland has met the challenge on and off the battlefield, and has claimed many victories. He has been instrumental in the recent developments of many facilities and programs. There is a laundry list of accomplishments from the improved Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program,



Command Sgt. Major Todd Wentland, United States Army Garrison Fort Wainwright command sergeant major, surveys the valley during a brown bear hunt in No Tell Um Bay on the Alaska Peninsula. (Courtesy photo)

the completion of the Warrior Transition Unit facility and the construction of the Monterey Lakes Memorial Park. "If I am taxed for being responsible for something, I'm going to take it seriously," Wentland said. As a command sergeant major he enjoys the opportunities to participate, as well as having the ability to give people what they need. "I am the one who can build the bridge to close that gap between a private and a command sergeant major," he said, "I am a resource provider."

An avid outdoorsman, Wentland wanted to study wildlife biology or get into the Forest Service. "I was going to be that guy on horseback with a pack string out in the wilderness

for month at a time," he said. That is one of the many reasons he loves Alaska and has chosen to stay. He, his wife Rose, and their two sons live in North Pole.

Rose, a retired Army first sergeant,

"was a better NCO than I ever was," he said, "She's pretty tough and I'm very proud of her." He said she is always out in front setting standards. The same goes for their boys. Chris, a sophomore at Southern Oregon was one of the best football players in the state and still holds the squat-lifting record at North Pole High School. "I think his maximum weight was 543 pounds," Wentland said. His younger son Mathew is currently a student at North Pole High and is successful in sports as well as being an accomplished musician. He was recently named prep athlete of the week and voted homecoming king. Wentland said, "They're both really good kids. They've stayed out of trouble and have been good role models for their friends and peers."

As some would say, the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. Wentland himself is well-respected and admired. Melissa Fernandez, executive assistant, United States Army garrison, Fort Wainwright said Wentland personifies integrity. "He is able to look at the pros and cons of any situation objectively, make a decision, and do the right thing for all the right reasons," she said.

"The command sergeant major is one of the greatest men I've ever met," said Michael Campbell, Commercial Sponsor and Advertising manager, Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and

Recreation. "His dedication and willingness to support his team (has) grown many Army civilian careers, including my own," he said. "I've learned more about the Army and myself because of his mentoring, even if he didn't know it."

As witnessed by the sentiments, Wentland has had a positive impact on and off the post. Althea St. Martin, special assistant to Senator Lisa Murkowski said, "Todd has been an outstanding member of the Fairbanks community while doing even more on his side of the gate. Todd is always the one at the meeting that says he will take care of something and you know it will get done," she said. "His leadership on the Monterey Lakes Memorial Park has been inspirational."

Wentland has been extremely active in the Fairbanks and Fort Wainwright communities serving on numerous boards and committees. Lisa Herbert, executive director, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, has worked with him on a number of military and community events since 2006. "Everything from the Army Community Covenant to the Military Appreciation Banquet to the North Pole Summer Festival," she said. "He has worked diligently at making sure that the community on the outside of the gates of Fort Wainwright has every opportunity to show their support for our military neighbors."

Many agreed that Wentland is a great leader and always looks out for the best interest of Soldiers and Families. He said he has been fortunate to experience and be part of some of the best programs in the Army and appreciates the people he has had an opportunity to work with. The command sergeant major is proud of being able to "see both sides." "Communication had always been critical to me," Wentland said. "I've tried to be a friend and an ally to help work through the tough issues."

The Wentland family plans to stay in the area, "but my wife says I can't retire, I have to transition," he said. "We'll just see how jobs work out."

Both Herbert and St. Martin said they are delighted he and his family will remain in the community. "While his departure means that he will be leaving the Army community of Fort Wainwright, the Fairbanks Community will be gaining another great leader," Herbert said.



Rose, left, wife of Command Sgt. Major Todd Wentland, Fort Wainwright garrison command sergeant major, and sons Matthew and Chris, right, enjoy a successful day of Northern pike fishing at Deadman Lake near Manley Hot Springs. (Courtesy photo)

ALASKA POST

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Home of the Arctic Warriors

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Army Band members
share music with
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BRIG. GEN. CORNUM LECTURE



Tuesday, 10 a.m.
at BLM Building 1541
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WEEKEND WEATHER

Friday
Mostly cloudy with
Chance of snow in the
morning
Low 0 High 15
South winds 10 to 20
turning to East winds 5 to
15 mph

Saturday
Cloudy with chance of
snow
Low 10 High 15
East winds 15 mph
becoming North in the
afternoon

Sunday
Cloudy with chance of
snow
Low -5 High 15

Forecast courtesy of
the National Oceanic
and Atmospheric

Military Appreciation Month activities planned

Staff Report, Fort Wainwright PAO

November is Military Family Appreciation Month, with the Army continuing its focus on building strong, resilient Families.

Many events are planned for the Fort Wainwright military community during Military Family Appreciation Week, Nov. 19 to 23.

Throughout November, Families will be recognized and honored in various ways on and off post. Community leaders, businesses and installations are teaming up to sponsor special activities such as open houses; Family fun nights; dinners; festivals and sporting-event nights. Fort Wainwright Soldiers and their Families are encouraged to join in the activities and programs on post.

A free pancake breakfast is planned for Nov. 19 from 9 to 11 a.m. for DoD ID cardholders at the Last Frontier Community Activity Center.

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Stronger Installation Management community, stronger support for Soldiers, Civilians and Families



Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch,
Installation Management
Command

When I took command of the Installation Management Command in November 2009, we set out to validate that we were doing the right things and doing things right, and to find better ways of doing business. This self-evaluation was

particularly important at the time, as the Army was focused on finding the right kinds and levels of support for Soldiers and Families stressed by repeated and extended deployments.

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Breaking ground: Road to Do'ab

Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler,
1-25th SBCT PAO

Editor's note: This is the second story of a three part series on the actions of Task Force Arctic Wolves to root out Taliban from the Horn of Panjwa'i.

With no coalition troops in the western tip of the Horn of Panjwa'i, Taliban fighters remained free to move, and place improvised explosive devices, throughout the rural farming village of Do'ab.

Seen as the last Taliban stronghold, Soldiers from 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, immediately began assessing a plan of action to disrupt enemy operations in the Panjwa'i district of Kandahar province, their area of responsibility.

After the unit's July arrival to Afghanistan, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, and 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, also under 1st SBCT, 25th Infantry Division, were assigned to cover specific areas within the district. By September, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, along with engineers from the Iowa and Puerto Rico Army Reserve and Afghan National Army, began operations.



A scrapper dumps dirt at Combat Outpost Lion Oct. 19. The dirt will be picked up later and used to fill Hesco barriers around COP Lion, the newest COP in the Panjwa'i district. The COP's location, in Do'ab village, is the furthest west into the Horn of Panjwa'i coalition forces have ever been. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

The first step was to build ANA checkpoints along the already-established Route Hyena. From the last checkpoint on Route Hyena, the road would be extended roughly one and one-half miles and end at the entrance to Combat Outpost Lion; the recent addition to the road was named Route Agha,

after the district's governor, Hajji Sayed Fazluddin Agha. Finally, at the end of the road would lay Combat Outpost Lion.

"Lion is the furthest west outpost in the Horn of Panjwa'i. No one had been into Do'ab, and it hasn't been patrolled regularly. By going into Do'ab, we can

deny the Taliban any terrain and, in turn, make the area more secure and help the government of Afghanistan support their people," said 1st Sgt. Jeff Peppin, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment first sergeant.

See Roads on page 5



Lily, 3, daughter of Amanda and Staff Sgt. Drexel Miller, C Company, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), 16th Combat Aviation Brigade enjoys physical activity at the Youth Center Tuesday during the home-school co-op time provided by the Child, Youth and School Services program. (Photo by Allen Shaw/Fort Wainwright PAO)

Fort Wainwright Families choose home schooling: Youth Center provides support

Allen Shaw, Fort Wainwright PAO

Along with keeping everything quiet on the home front and keeping the home fires burning, many Fort Wainwright spouses have chosen to home-school their children. Military Families often choose to take more control of student activities and curriculum by assuming the extra duties as educator.

Although not everyone takes advantage of the programs, Families stationed here can qualify for state-funded assistance. Cyberlynx Correspondence Program, Raven Correspondence School and the Interior Distance Education of Alaska are available to Fort Wainwright Families. On average, students registered with

one of these school district-sponsored programs can receive an allotment ranging from \$425 to \$2,200. This money can be spent on academic curriculums, art, music, physical education and classroom materials.

Barb Chasteen, wife of Sgt. 1st Class Jerry Chasteen, Warrior Transition Battalion, and mother of two home-schooled students, Kaitlyn, 10, and Kolton, 7, said, "Trying to find activities outside the home so they can let their energy out has been the hardest thing during the winter months. It's great we have time set up at the Youth Center to do that."

See Support on page 5

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SUPPORT: Youth Center provides for kids

Continued from page 1

The home-school co-op meets at the Children, Youth and School Service building every Tuesday from 10 a.m. to noon for a structured PE class and some unstructured play. The structured class, mainly for the older children, is led by Nicole Cox, another home school mom. Nicole is the wife of Sgt. 1st Class Ross Cox, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. "I did this through the church at our last assignment and really enjoy teaching PE," she said. "It's great to have a warm place like this (the Youth Center gym) where the kids can go and get some exercise."

Not everyone who has chosen to home-school does it through a school district sponsored program. Becki Cramton, wife of Chief Warrant Officer 2, David Cramton, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Brigade Training Battalion, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, home-schools their two children independently. "This is our eighth duty station and we are starting our fourth Alaskan winter. We are half-way through our third deployment and I teach my 7-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son," she said. "I appreciate being able to move through the curriculum at the pace of the student."

Cramton herself attended public

and private schools and was also home-schooled as a teenager. "I love home schooling my children," she said, "I am able to choose a curriculum that works with my kids' learning styles and enjoy having the freedom to 'do school' when they are ready." She said her son is an early riser and ready to start before his sister even gets up. Cramton said, "We do his pre-school level work then. My daughter is a late-riser and a slow starter in the morning, so we do her second grade level work later in the morning. By then my son's work is done and he is happy to play while I focus on my daughter," she said.

Another home-school mom, Amanda Miller, wife of Staff Sgt. Drexel Miller, C Company, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), 16th Combat Aviation Brigade, who had four children in tow, gave a run-down of what their weekly activities looked like. "Monday is usually a day off," she said. "Tuesday we'll do school in the morning, then come to the Youth Center to burn off some energy, then more schooling in the afternoon." Although the other children do activities, she said Drexel, 7, is her only school-age child. The others are 4, 3 and 4 months. "Wednesdays are pretty much devoted to Cub Scouts. Thursdays we go to the home-school class provided by the Protestant Women

of the Church. The PWOC class is usually a science project or lab. It's another good time to interact with other Families," Miller said.

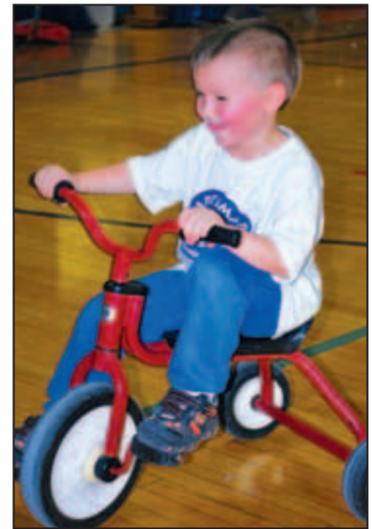
"There were at least 25 children who participated (in the PWOC program) last week, about 13 Families in all," Chasteen said.

Miller said, "Friday is usually a day to catch up on school work and then find something fun to do outside if the weather permits."

The Cramton Family enjoys other pursuits together like baking, gardening, board games, ice skating, sledding and nature walks. There are other bonuses to home schooling Cramton said, "It allows us important time that traditional schooling cannot. When we want hibernate as a Family or travel to visit my husband when he is on TDY, we can do so without compromising the kids' education. We are able to take school with us, while in traditional school it would be counted an unexcused absence."

Joan Smith York, Child Youth and School Services school support specialist said, "Home schooling can be quite challenging. Creating a structure for learning and keeping your students on task and on schedule can be difficult," she said. "It's a huge commitment."

Like any military community, Families are not alone. Alaska and Fort Wainwright provide many programs and activities to assist those who choose to home-school.



Drexel, 7, son of Amanda and Staff Sgt. Drexel Miller, C Company, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment (Air Ambulance), 16th Combat Aviation Brigade burns off some energy at the Youth Center Tuesday. Miller joined a group of children who use the home-school co-op time provided by Child, Youth and School Services for a structured physical education class. (Photo by Allen Shaw/Fort Wainwright PAO)

For more information on "Home School Rec Days" contact CYSS at 361-9377. For information on correspondence programs, resource libraries, field trips and science fairs visit the Fairbanks North Star School District website at www.k12northstar.org.



GI JANE: Reflects on Veterans Day, honors wounded warriors

Continued from page 3

Yes, this visit was important. It was important to honor veterans who are so deserving of thanks and recognition. But, it was also important to remind me that members of our Family -- our Fort Wainwright Family and our Army Family -- are still out there fighting. They are fighting to heal and recover in military medical centers rather than fighting the enemy at deployed locations, but they are fighting nonetheless. They deserve to be remembered

and honored this Veterans Day. They deserve to be remembered and honored every day.

They won't remember me. I was just one of many people who will filter in and out of their hospital rooms during their time there. But I will never forget them.

So, Veterans Day will forever have even more meaning for me now. I've seen the faces of those who gave so much for our freedom. I shook their hands and thanked them. It wasn't nearly enough, but it was a start. I encourage all of my GI Jane

friends to contemplate what we can all do to honor our veterans this Veterans Day. No, it won't be enough, but together, maybe some day it will come close.

Editor's Note: The Alaska Post features the GI Jane column every other week. GI Jane is a composite character of many different military spouse contributors and offers a wide variety of viewpoints and perspectives. We would like to hear from readers. Submit column ideas and feedback to pao.fwa@us.army.mil.

ROADS: Breaking ground to Do'ab

Continued from page 1

As construction began, there were met with resistance, often in the form of IEDs and small-arms fire, Peppin said. But the work continued on.

The entire project was slated to take about two months. The engineers worked feverishly while Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, provided security.

"We are out here from the time the sun rises until the sun sets, every day, making sure we get this done," said 1st Lt. Marc Helm, platoon leader with the 322nd Engineer Company, 368th Engineer Battalion, Naval Construction Regiment. Helm, a reservist from Des Moines, Iowa, oversees engineers from his company, as



A D7 bulldozer, driven by an engineer with Puerto Rico's 475th Engineer Company, working with the 368th Engineer Battalion, Naval Construction Regiment, dumps dirt into a Hesco barrier Oct. 19 at Combat Outpost Lion in Do'ab village, Panjwa'i district. Hesco barriers are used as a means of protection for smaller forward operating bases and combat outposts. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

well as Soldiers from the 475th Engineer Company, of Puerto Rico.

"We understand our part in this — to establish a force presence and get the Taliban out which will, economically, make a difference for the people of Do'ab," said Helm.

Aside from IEDs, engineers were met with another problem: dust.

Moon dust, a term used to describe the extremely fine dirt covering the area, was settling into the moving parts of the equipment and, mixed with the extreme heat, causing the heavy machinery to break down a lot quicker, said Helm. Waiting for parts to be shipped from the United States can take weeks or months, he added.

Regardless of equipment challenges, construction was finished more than a week ahead of schedule.

"The engineers did great work. Construction has been a success, and now we can help bring security to the area, get the locals to start trusting us and, hopefully, getting them to return." Said Peppin, adding that he is already seeing some of the local returning and tending to their crops.

An indisputable sign of success has been the decrease in enemy activity in and around Do'ab since construction began in September.

"The insurgents have tried extending



An engineer with Puerto Rico's 475th Engineer Company, 368th Engineer Battalion, Naval Construction Regiment, drives a loaded D7 bulldozer Oct. 19 at Combat Outpost Lion. The dirt will be used to fill Hesco barriers around COP Lion, a newly established combat outpost in the tip of the Horn on Panjwa'i, and was set up to take away the last bit of terrain the Taliban has a hold on. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

the fighting season because of the presence of troops in the area, but they have been unsuccessful" according to intelligence analyst Spc. Joshua Rinker, a Richmond, Va., native serving with Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment.

Rinker expects numbers of attacks to continue to drop as

villagers begin returning to their homes and interacting more with ANA and U.S. Soldiers in the area.

With construction of the road and Combat Outpost Lion finished, Peppin's men have begun a project of their own— make their COP a home.

For photos reference this story see the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division FLICKR page: www.flickr.com/photos/1-25_sbct/sets/72157627856388923/.



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ALASKA POST

Home of the Arctic Warriors

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Producers looking for military spouses in Alaska to be in new show. **More on page 5**

STAFF SGT. BRIAN BEEM



A Soldier re-enlistment. **More on page 8**

WEEKEND WEATHER

Friday
Clear with patchy ice fog
Low -35 High -15
Light winds

Saturday
Clear
Low -25 High -10
East winds 15 mph becoming North in the afternoon

Sunday
Clear
Low -25 High -20

Forecast courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

2 Stryker Soldiers die, 8 wounded in separate incidents

Staff Report, U.S. Army Alaska PAO



Sgt. 1st Class Johnathan B. McCain

Sergeant First Class Johnathan B. McCain, died Nov. 13, in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained when insurgents attacked his unit using an improvised explosive device while on a mounted patrol.

Six other Soldiers from the brigade were wounded in the same incident.

McCain, 38, of Apache Junction, Ariz., was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division at Fort Wainwright where he served as an infantry platoon sergeant.

Sgt. 1st Class McCain joined the Army in April 1992 and served at Kaiserslautern, Germany; Fort Hood, Texas; and Fort Bragg, N.C. before arriving in Alaska in October 2000. McCain also served two previous combat tours of duty in Iraq from August 2005 to November 2006; and from September 2008 to September 2009 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In a separate incident, Spc. Calvin



Spc. Calvin Matthew Pereda

Matthew Pereda, died Nov. 12, in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, of injuries sustained when insurgents attacked his unit using an improvised explosive device while on a dismounted patrol.

Two other Soldiers were wounded in the same incident. All three Soldiers were assigned to the 1-25th SBCT.

Pereda, 21, of Fayetteville, N.C., (shown as a Pfc. Pereda in the courtesy photo), was assigned to the 1-5th where he served as an infantryman.

Pereda joined the Army in March 2010 and graduated from Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Benning, Ga. He arrived in Alaska in August 2010.

The Arctic Wolves, as the 1-25th is known, is a 4,000-Soldier brigade deployed to Afghanistan for a one-year tour in support of Operation Enduring Freedom that began Mid-April 2011.

The next of kin have been notified.

Delegates address Fort Wainwright issues during 3-day AFAP work session

Allen Shaw, Fort Wainwright PAO

Changes in Family Readiness Support Assistance roles and responsibilities, family care plans for married Soldiers and a variety of transportation issues concerning the Fort Wainwright community were a few of the topics discussed by the working groups during the Army Family Action Plan conference at the Last Frontier Community Activity Center this week.



Chaplain (Maj.) Michael Allen, Fort Wainwright garrison chaplain answers questions for one of the workgroups during the Army Family Action Plan conference Wednesday at the Last Frontier Community Activity Center. The local delegates of Soldiers, Family members and DoD civilians addressed several topics involving quality-of-life issues at the local level and concluded with an out-brief on the issues to command leadership. (Photo by Allen Shaw/Fort Wainwright PAO)

See AFAP on page 4

Combat Outpost Lion: Task Force Arctic Wolves

Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler,
1-25th SBCT PAO

Editor's note: This is the last story in a three part series on the actions of Task Force Arctic Wolves from the Home of Panjwa'i.

The newly-established Combat Outpost Lion, in Do'ab Village, needed work. With only some tents surrounded by dirt-filled Hesco barriers, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment set out to make the COP more secure and more comfortable.

"My guys teamed up with engineers. We provided the design, the engineers built it and my guys worked on the infrastructure inside of it," explained 1st Sgt. Jeff Peppin, Company A's first sergeant and a Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, native.

On the company's building to-do list: a Role 1 medical clinic, guard towers for oversight of the village, living accommodations, toilets, showers and shade. They wasted no time.

Peppin said the soldiers were eager to get to work. It was not only a chance for them to do their part in building their new digs, but also a chance for them to showcase their carpentry skills.

The Role 1 medical clinic



Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, return to Combat Outpost Lion after hours-long patrol around the village of Do'ab, Oct. 18. Company A has had a constant presence in the area, extending a road throughout the village and building the COP in an effort to rid the village of Taliban activity. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

was set up immediately and is able to administer aid to Soldiers and local Afghans. COP Lion's medics have treated a few local nationals since construction of Lion began.

"With the locals, you see amputations and gunshot wounds. When they come to us, they actually respond well to our treatment and are

very appreciative of us," said Pfc. Sky Nosaka, of Trinidad, Colo. Nosaka is a medic with 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment.

Within in the first month of starting the construction, engineers from the 368th Engineer Battalion, Naval Construction Regiment and infantrymen from 1-5th had assembled tents for housing,

a bathroom and shower facility with hot water.

With the necessities built and in working order, it was up to the platoons in the 1-5th to make improvements. It would take time though. There was still another mission to accomplish: securing Do'ab.

See HOME on page 5

HOME: There's no place like it

Continued from page 1

“Our platoon is on a rotating schedule with the other platoons in the company. We will help out with construction at Lion, pull guard duty at the towers and do dismounted patrols within the village,” explained Pfc. Alberio Porto, a driver with 1-5th and a Campina Grande, Brazil, native.

Dismounted patrols are a chance for soldiers to interact with the locals and assess the insurgency threat.

“We are starting to know the locals, and they are beginning to trust us. Trust has been a hard thing to build since the Taliban moved into this area, but [the locals] are welcoming of what we are doing here,” Peppin said.

village, or guarding COP Lion, the platoons are responsible for taking care of mission-essential equipment like vehicles, weapons and communications. Without this equipment, they wouldn't be able to complete the mission.

“We do most of the maintenance on the Strykers ourselves,” said Porto. “We have to make sure that everything is in working order, because if something breaks on us while we are on mission or dismounted patrol, it could be a matter of life or death.”

After nearly two months of construction, the men are ready to make the permanent move to COP Lion from their current outpost, COP Mushan, on the other side of Do'ab Village. For Nosaka, being at COP Lion is a way to continue



Soldiers from Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division “Arctic Wolves” use sandbags to reinforce the top of a guard tower at Combat Outpost Lion. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

When the Taliban moved into the area, the villagers began leaving the area for fear of being injured or killed. Since the expansion of the road through Do'ab and the added security of the Afghan National Police and 1-5th, Peppin said there has been an increase in villagers returning to their homes and crops.

“The more we interact with the villagers, the more they will begin to trust us. When they trust us, they tell us information about enemy activity in the area,” said Peppin.

When not patrolling the

honing his medic skills and, most importantly he says, stay connected to the war.

For Porto, moving to Lion is a matter of pride.

“You spend so much time building and patrolling and building some more, you want to get there and enjoy it.”

For photos reference this series see the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division Flickr page: www.flickr.com/photos/1-25_sbct/sets/72157627856388923/



Pfc. Drew Johnson brings sandbags to the rest of his platoon, Oct. 19, at Combat Outpost Lion in Do'ab village, Panjwa'i province. Johnson, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, spent the day filling these sandbags and using them to reinforce guard towers around COP Lion as an extra means of protection. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)



Pfc. Sky Noaska, a medic with 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, works on a shelf for the medic station, Oct. 19, at Combat Outpost Lion. Since September, COP Lion has been under construction as engineers with the 368th Engineer Battalion, Naval Construction Regiment, work on expanding a road through the village of Do'ab and bring COP Lion to fully-operational capacity. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Lindsey Kibler/1-25th SBCT PAO)

'Army Wives' reality comes to Alaska

Staff Sgt. Matthew E. Winstead, U.S. Army Alaska PAO

A Los Angeles-based production company is looking for military family members to cast in a new show about military spouses in Alaska.

The company, 44 Blue Productions, is developing what it describes as a documentary series for the Oprah Winfrey Network, or OWN.

The show, whose working title is “Army Wives of Alaska,” will focus on the real-world lives, struggles and sacrifices of military spouses stationed in the 49th state.

The show's existence is thanks in part to the efforts of Stephanie Woodard, whose husband, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brian “Clint” Woodard, is a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot with A Company, 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment at Fort Wainwright.

“I found information on an old casting for a show that never launched and asked if they were still looking for volunteer cast [members],” Woodard said. “They said no, but I started talking about some of the wives' experiences anyway and they got interested.”

Woodard feels there are important issues that

need to be explained to the American public and they can only be told from the unique perspective of the families of service members.

“I feel that there is a lot of fear and uncertainty when a spouse thinks about getting into a relationship that is headed toward the military, but if there is one message that I hope the average viewer takes away from this it is ‘I can do this,’” Woodard said. “Yes, there's tough times. Yes, there are fears that naturally come with a deployment, but the close bonds you can form with other military Families are unique and will get you through those times. No matter how hard someone tries, you just can't get that kind of understanding from someone who has never been in that situation.”

After several phone calls and meetings with producers at 44 Blue, the Army warmed up to the idea. Eventually, the Army's Office of the Chief of Public Affairs granted approval for 44 Blue to cast volunteers for the show.

See ARMY WIVES on page 7

29 YEARS OF SERVICE, NO REGRETS

Dream of becoming paratrooper leads to lifelong career for I Corps command sergeant major

By Sgt. Lindsey Kibler
I Corps Public Affairs

There are men and women who join the Army and know being a Soldier is for them. There are other Soldiers who join but aren't quite sure if they will be "lifers," as the military community calls retirees.

I Corps Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell was one of those unsure Soldiers, but soon enough he would know.

After joining the Army in 1982, Troxell spent his first year at Fort Bliss, Texas, where he met his wife, Sandra. Soon he received orders to report to Germany. Despite his reservations, Troxell did well in Germany, earning 3rd Armored Division's Soldier of the Year title and an induction into the Sgt. Morales Club. Eventually, homesickness made him re-evaluate life as a Soldier.

"I told my wife that I wanted to get out, and when she asked 'where will we go?' I told her I wanted to go back home to Davenport, Iowa," he said. "That made her upset and she ended up ignoring me for three days. That's when I had to do some soul searching."

Troxell said he spent those three days thinking about what to do, and he came up with a solution — and stipulations. He would re-enlist only if he could go to the 82nd Airborne Division and be a paratrooper. He got what he wanted and, after arriving, he said he knew the Army was his calling.

With that realization came reality. He had a family to support.

"You get promoted; you get more money, the better you can take care of your family. I needed to be the best Soldier I could be so I could do that," he said.

Many Soldiers get stuck in the mindset to only do the minimum; they become "middle of the road" Soldiers and that is the problem, he said. That was never a choice for Troxell, because the 82nd Airborne Div. didn't allow middle-of-the-road Soldiers in its ranks.

"My assignment at the 82nd was very influential in making me the kind of Soldier I became. You were expected to give 100 percent, all the time. There was no 70 percent. If you weren't continually getting better, continually excelling — you were out," he said. Although being a paratrooper helped define the type of career Troxell would have, he said his most memorable assignment was being the command sergeant major of a Stryker brigade combat team that deployed to Iraq from Fort Lewis, the 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division.

"With the Stryker (brigade), I saw how we have revolutionized as an Army," he said. "It was the best assignment I ever had ... aside from this one, of course."

The opportunity to help lead I Corps and serve as the commanding general's senior enlisted adviser brought him back to JBLM, and he eagerly accepted it. Working as the



Spc. John Crosby

senior enlisted member at Army Accessions Command, Troxell was itching to get back into the fight. Upon hearing I Corps was deploying to Afghanistan, he told his commander he wanted to go, as long as they approved. They did and his name was submitted, along with four other command sergeants major, for the coveted position.

On Jan. 28, Troxell received a call from Lt. Gen. Mike Scaparrotti, I Corps CG, notifying him of his selection for the position.

"I was in a parking garage at the time ... and I know you could hear me throughout the entire garage — yelling, screaming, doing back flips," Troxell joked. "Then he told me two things. First was congratulations, and second was 'pack your stuff, you're going to Afghanistan in a week.'"

The trip to Afghanistan was the first of many for Troxell, as he began evaluating the operating and living conditions he and his Soldiers will see in the upcoming summer months as they deploy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Although the mission might be different because of the NATO environment, Troxell believes the corps is prepared.

"We are a trained and ready corps headquarters, and we will be providing direction and resources to regional commands so they are able to accomplish their missions," he said.

His deployment as I Corps' command sergeant major will be yet another chapter in the military life Troxell has lived for nearly three decades.

But in the meantime, Troxell will be focused on the professional development of Soldiers and Airmen on JBLM, as well as continuing

to improve the quality of life for servicemembers and their families. This will be a collaborative effort with his rear detachment replacement, Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Verbeke.

"We are going to continue to do great things for Soldiers, Airmen and families here."

Fundamentals, having fun

It's been nearly three years since Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell has been in the Northwest, and since his return this year he has noticed some big changes — most recognizable is the change to JBLM.

But there are other things he has seen as well. With positive changes in the quality of life, including better housing facilities, he said things on JBLM are heading in the right direction.

Troxell was stationed here as the command sergeant major for 4th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div., and has returned as the I Corps command sergeant major. In the short time he has before taking the I Corps Headquarters downrange, Troxell has no plans to stop making improvements for the Soldiers, Airmen and family members on JBLM.

"It's been a collaborative effort between the Air Force and the Army to make life better for everyone here," he said. "We need to continue to focus on our force, too."

For Troxell, focusing on the force means getting back to the fundamentals that he said make the Army great.

"We need to develop (more) hardened Soldiers ... and build (more) resiliency," Troxell said.

To aid the return to the basics while continuing to develop Soldiers, Troxell relies heavily on the Com-

prehensive Soldier Fitness model. The model is designed to strengthen the spiritual, emotional, physical, social and family dimensions of all Soldiers and their families.

Emphasizing the need to strengthen troops both physically and mentally allows for the return to military standards, positioning units and Soldiers with the opportunity to grow and succeed to meet the current and future demands on our forces, Troxell said. This also applies to family members.

"We need to have hardened families as well," he said. "They know our lives are at risk every time we go out. Some (families) understand that, but some are in denial and don't want to accept it."

If Soldiers can be resilient, they are able to be more efficient and combat effective. If families are resilient, they are able to be the solid rock for Soldiers to lean on for support, he said.

While Troxell is building resiliency in his Soldiers downrange, he is handing the reins to Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Verbeke, the former 593rd Sustainment Brigade command sergeant major who will be serving as the I Corps command sergeant major.

Verbeke believes there are three components that help build resiliency: structure, education and good leadership.

Since daily physical training and work standards allow Soldiers to know what to expect, life can be a little more predictable and help prepare them to handle daily stressors, Verbeke said. Education is not just about military schools and colleges, but knowing when and where to seek help if they need it. Lastly, Verbeke put great emphasis

Installation Management Command Command Sgt. Maj. Neil Ciotola (center) talks with then-4th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div. Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell (left) and 2nd Battalion, 12th Field Artillery Regiment Command Sgt. Maj. Theodore Sutton during a patrol through Rashid-yah, Iraq. Ciotola was the Multi-National Corps - Iraq command sergeant major at the time. Troxell said he is implementing lessons learned during his deployment with the Raider Brigade in preparing I Corps Headquarters for its future duties in Afghanistan.

on senior noncommissioned officers and junior officers.

"These leaders are like middle level managers. They have to be more aware of their Soldiers and what they are doing. They need to plan for the Soldiers, which goes back to providing that structure and education," Verbeke said.

Even though Troxell and Verbeke agree that Soldiers need to continue to work on building resiliency, getting back to basic Soldier fundamentals and continuing to stay disciplined, they encourage Soldiers to have fun while doing it.

"Leaders and Soldiers forget what it means to have fun," Troxell said.

"We're in a tragic business. We continue to honor the fallen and take care of their families, but would they (the fallen Soldiers) want us to just sit around and be down? Heck no!"

Verbeke believes team building is a great way leaders can have fun with their Soldiers, but they have to set the conditions no matter what level of leadership they are in.

"When you enjoy the people you're with and you enjoy the things you're doing, then you're going to have fun. If you have leaders with a good plan, with good conditions, Soldiers will walk away having fun," Verbeke said.

Despite Troxell and a large element of the corps headquarters deploying, Verbeke believes good things will continue to come about for JBLM Soldiers, Airmen and families.

"This time we have a luxury," Verbeke said. "All the brigades are here, unlike the last time I Corps deployed, so we have a large pool of outstanding people to grab from if we ever need to make something happen."