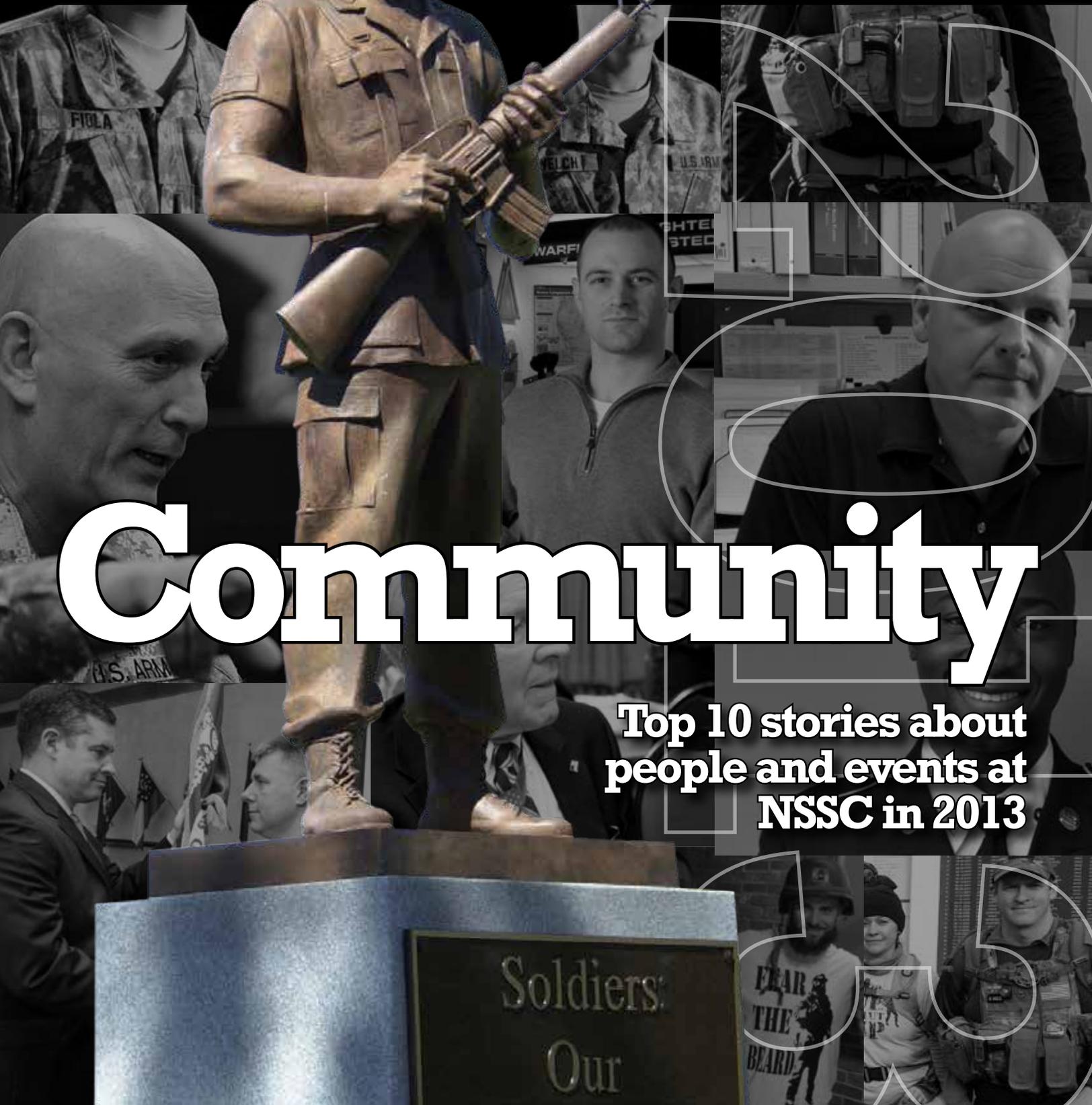


December 13, 2013

NSSC This Week



Natick Soldier Systems Center Public Affairs Office



Community

Top 10 stories about people and events at NSSC in 2013

Soldiers:
Our





Publisher's Note

John Harlow
USAG-Natick and NSSC Chief of Public Affairs

It's the people ...

This is something I have heard from NASCAR drivers to Tom Brady to Army senior leaders ... It's the people that make this organization tick.

Here at the Natick Soldier Systems Center, that is 100 percent true.

This final edition of NSSC This Week for 2013 is all about the People of the Natick Soldier Systems Center.

Let me take you back to the day after Marathon Monday. Bob Reinert and I came in knowing that people from Natick had participated in the Marathon. It felt like a newsroom. I was lining up interviews and Bob put together a story that made the front page of Army.mil.

We learned that Shivaun Pacitto had just crossed the finish line before the bombs went off. We learned that Lt. Col. Tim Haley was helping the elite runners who needed medical assistance, and we heard the story of Mike Nixon, who only made 23 1/2 miles on the course before being detoured. Thankfully, everyone from NSSC who participated in the marathon escaped injury.

That didn't stop Bob. We all remember seeing the National Guard Soldiers who pulled the fence off of victims at the finish line, but almost a week went by and nobody knew their story. He kept digging and found the three Soldiers, and it is our top People story of 2013.

We learned of Capt. Justin Fitch's battles. His personal battle against cancer and the battle he continues to wage on behalf of veterans who are taking their own lives at the pace of 22 per day. Tazanyia Mouton shared Justin's inspirational story with us.

Alexandra Foran brought us the story of Brian Scott, who was wounded in an IED attack in Iraq, made a full recovery and has re-deployed to Afghanistan.

It is the people who make the Natick Soldier Systems Center a special place, and we hope you enjoy reading some of the great stories about some of our special people.

John Harlow
USAG-Natick and NSSC Chief of Public Affairs

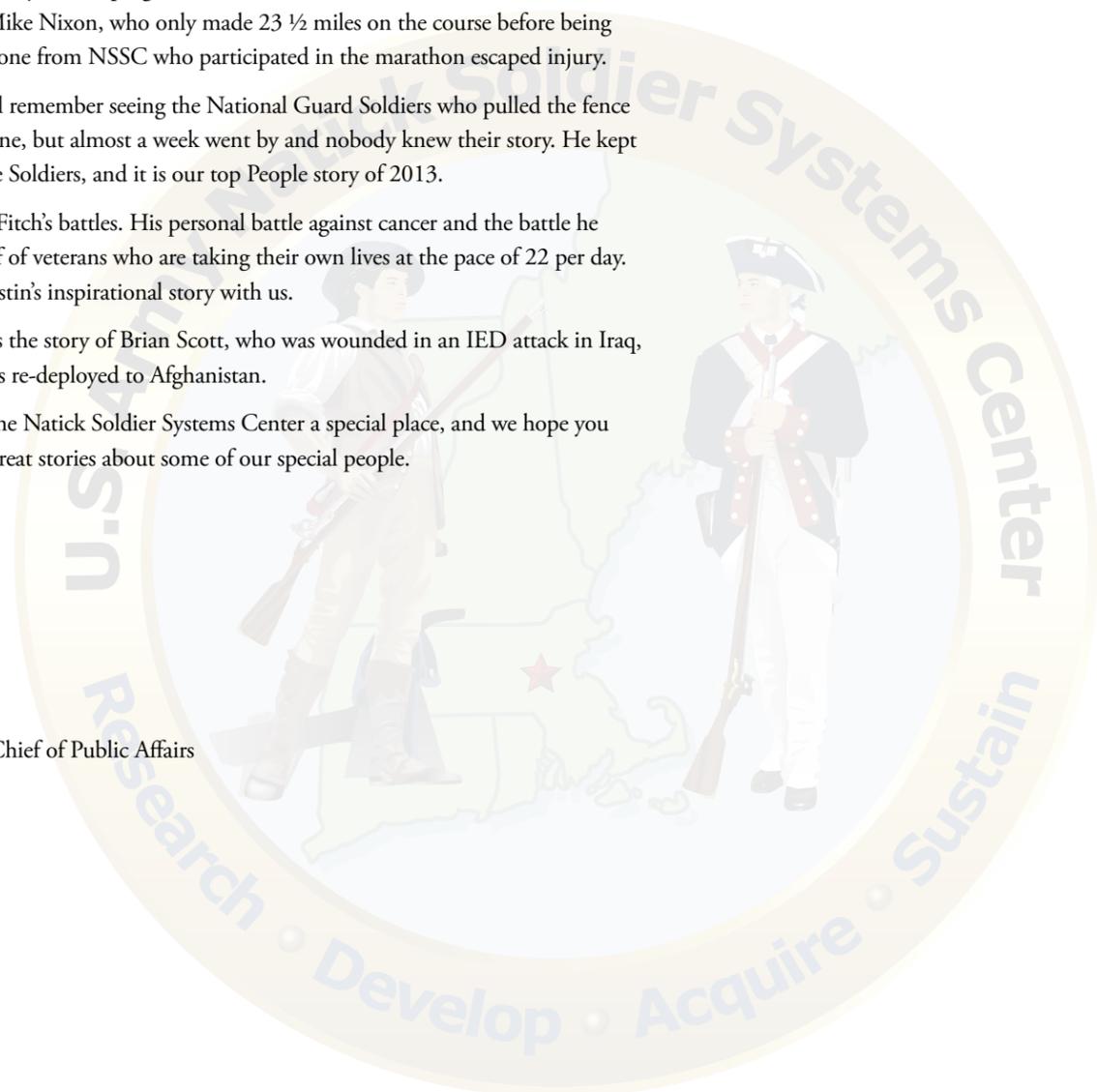


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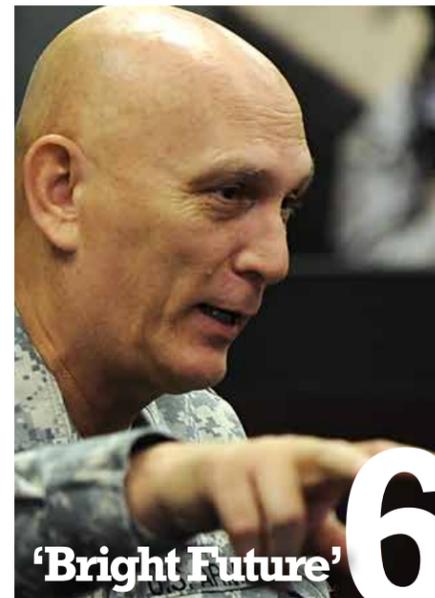
NSSC This Week



Marathon Men



Rucking for a Cause



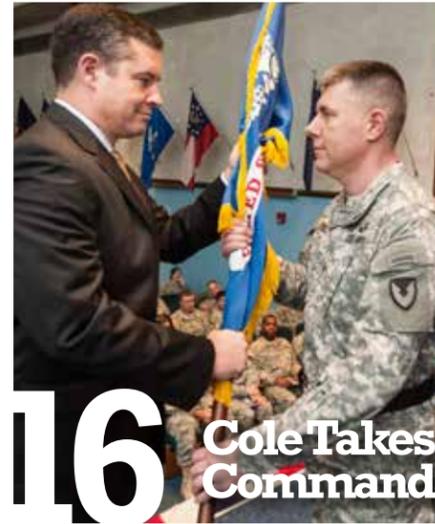
'Bright Future'



Back to the 'Family'



Natick to Bagram



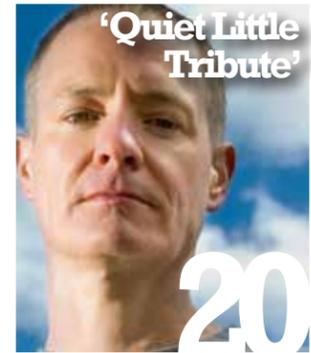
Cole Takes Command



Band of Brothers



Pledging Allegiance



'Quiet Little Tribute'

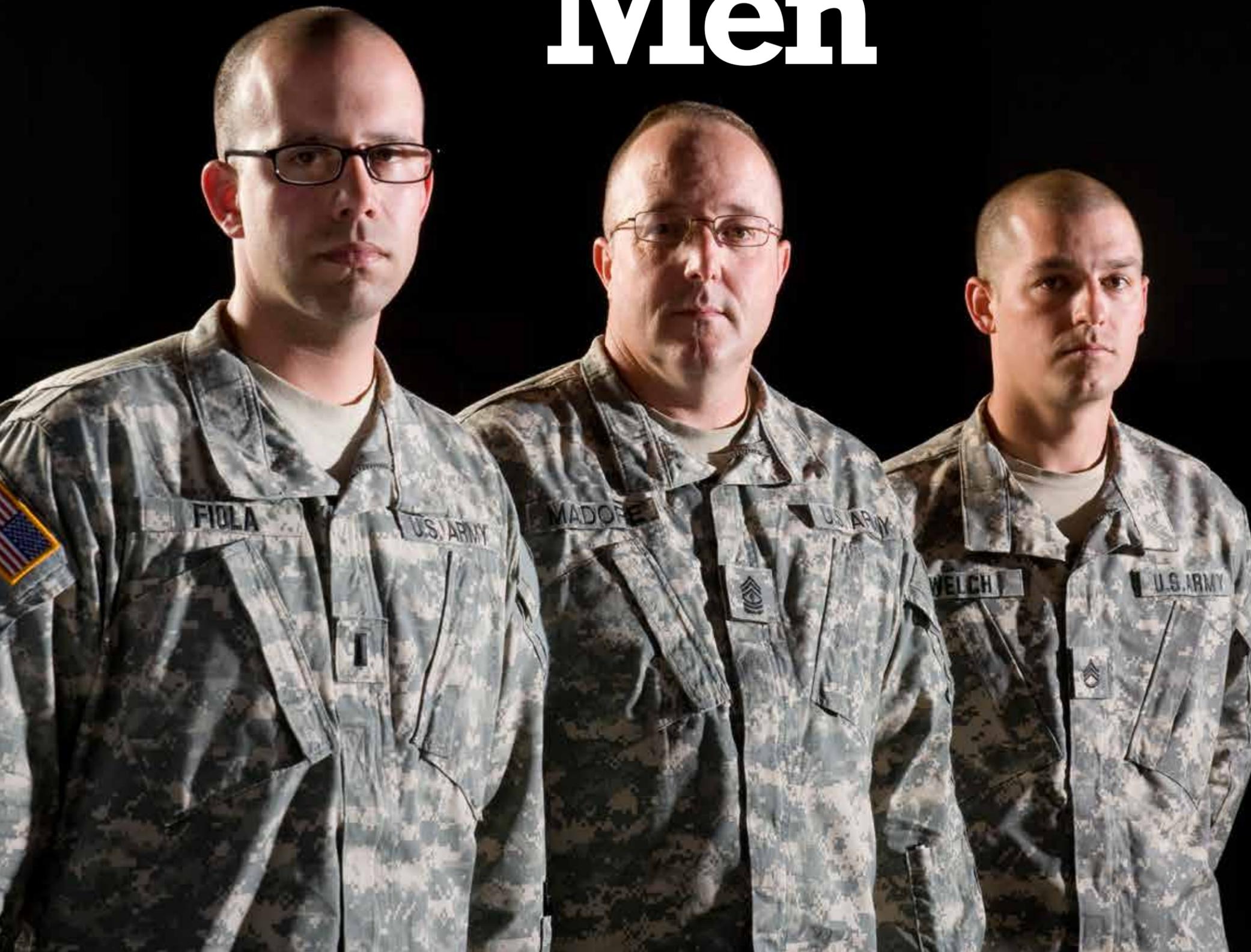


Special Gift



12 Hours

Marathon Men



National Guardsmen recall heroic actions

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / FRAMINGHAM, Mass. (April 25, 2013)

If you saw news video from the Boston Marathon bombing, you likely witnessed how Massachusetts Army National Guard Soldiers reacted to the attack by running directly toward the scene of the first explosion to help rescue victims.

When those two bombs detonated April 15, 1st Lt. Steve Fiola, 1st Sgt. Bernard Madore and Staff Sgt. Mark Welch, three Massachusetts natives assigned to the 1060th Transportation Company of Framingham, followed their instincts and training without hesitation after the second blast.

“So then it’s game on,” said Madore, who had done two combat tours in Iraq. “You know that these are bombs. So I scanned the area. I was looking for a shooter. I didn’t know what to look for — a trigger man, something.”

One video clearly shows Fiola and Madore rushing across Boylston Street to move the tangle of scaffolding and fencing that separated first responders from the injured on a blood-soaked sidewalk.

“It was really hard,” Madore said. “It was intertwined. It was made to keep people out.”

They acted quickly, with resolve, and without the slightest regard for their own safety in the face of unknown perils.

“People keep asking, ‘What were you guys thinking?’ We weren’t thinking about anything,” Fiola said. “It’s like the switch turns on, and you just go, and you just do what you’re supposed to do to accomplish the mission.”

By 2:50 p.m. when the bombs went off, Fiola, Madore and Welch had already spent a long day helping others. They had set off on the marathon course at 5:22 a.m. as part of a group of Massachusetts Army National Guard Soldiers doing the “Tough Ruck,” marching the 26.2 miles from Hopkinton to Boston, carrying approximately 35 pounds each to raise funds for families of fallen Massachusetts service members. The end of that effort had put them into position when the unthinkable demanded even more of them.

In an instant, adrenaline replaced fatigue in the Soldiers as they heard the sound of one

blast and then another 12 seconds later. The painful blisters that he had developed at mile 14 and that left him limping for another 12 miles didn’t matter to Welch anymore.

“I jumped over the wall, and the pain instantly went away,” said Welch, who, like Madore, had deployed twice to Iraq. “It was like a bolt of lightning. It was just boom, we’re gone. We headed right over towards the first explosion.”

After the barricades were removed, the Soldiers moved to the sidewalk to assist the wounded in any way they could.

“It was just a mess of just stuff that used to resemble people,” Fiola said. “So we just started pulling debris off. There was burning debris everywhere.”

Fiola helped a man whose clothing was still smoldering after the blast. Madore did triage

“It’s like the switch turns on, and you just go, and you just do what you’re supposed to do to accomplish the mission.”

and then watched over a young boy named Noah with a compound fracture to his leg. Welch helped Madore find cloths and waters to treat the wounded, and he cared for a woman with a bad head wound as a man who had lost both legs was wheeled by them. “That’s a sight I’ll never, ever forget,” Welch said.

At one point, Madore was kneeling in blood on that sidewalk, and the situation took him back to his experiences in Iraq.

“I do remember looking down and going, ‘Oh, God, we can’t deal with this,’” Madore said. “And then right back to action — fortunately. So I stood fast, and I’m proud of that, because it got kind of real for a second.”

Madore was astounded by how quickly medical personnel moved the injured out of the area.

“Literally, when we turned back around, the emergency workers already had all these people picked up and gone,” Madore said.

Marathon Men *continued page 5*

Three Massachusetts National Guard Soldiers helped save lives in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing, April 15, 2013. From left are: 1st Lt. Steve Fiola, 1st Sgt. Bernard Madore and Staff Sgt. Mark Welch.

Natick employees endure marathon tragedy

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (April 16, 2013)

About five minutes earlier, Shivaun Pacitto had crossed the finish line in the 117th Boston Marathon. She was milling about with hundreds of other runners who were waiting to receive their medals and space blankets to ward off the spring chill.

Pacitto, a research psychologist with the Consumer Research Team at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, was a bit disappointed with her time of 4 hours 3 minutes, 37 seconds, but she otherwise was enjoying the atmosphere before that instant when everything changed.

"All of a sudden, I heard a loud boom, and it shook through my body," Pacitto recalled. "And I turned back and I said, 'Oh, my God.' And then I heard a second one, and I fell to my knees. A runner picked me up and he said, 'You have to run. There might be another (bomb) at the finish line.'"

Her husband, Gary Pacitto, chief of the engineering division of the Directorate of Public Works for U.S. Army Garrison Natick, also heard the explosions but couldn't see them from where he was standing. As others ran in the other direction, Gary jumped a fence and sprinted toward the finish line on Boylston Street.

"All I could think of was Shivaun," Gary said. "When I got there, there was just mayhem. There (were) people coming in wheelchairs without legs. It was devastating to see how many people were injured and how injured they were."

Gary finally reached the finish line but couldn't find his wife.

"I walked to the side of the road, and I prayed that she was OK, because I didn't know where she was," Gary said. "And then the phone rang, and it was her."

Pacitto had borrowed a cell phone from another runner and called her husband. They, their young sons and other family members made it to Boston Common but still didn't feel safe.

"We got stuck in Boston for hours," Pacitto said. "We were afraid to take the train home. We didn't know what was going on with other bombings. My brother came into the city and picked us up and we got home safely."

The Pacittos said the day after the marathon was worse for them.

"Families that have lost lives and have injured, you know, how do you pray for them in a way that can reach their families to give them comfort?" Gary said. "That's the hardest part about today, is realizing that there's so many people affect by this and so many families that will never be the same. Today, it was hard realizing there was an 8-year-old boy who died, and others (who) died."

Lt. Col. Tim Haley, a physician assigned to the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, knows exactly how Gary Pacitto feels. He was helping elite runners who needed medical treatment earlier in the race and was eating at a nearby restaurant when the explosions took place. In the confusion, first responders wouldn't allow him back into the medical area.

"I know that an 8-year-old died," said Haley, a pediatrician by training. "It was sort of frustrating for me."

At the same time, running between miles 23 and 24 of the race, Mike Nixon came upon spectators on the course and runners walking the opposite way. The ex-Marine wondered what was happening.

"So I was a couple miles away (from the finish line) at that point," Nixon said. "I had my headphones in. Nobody knew what was going on."

It soon became all too apparent to Nixon, a program analyst with the Expeditionary Basing and Collective Protection Directorate at NSRDEC.

"I ran into some of my running club friends," said Nixon, who has run three marathons.



Courtesy photo

"They flagged me down. They were shouting at me because I had my headphones in, and I stopped. They were like, 'It's over. A bomb went off at the finish.' It was kind of like September 11th in the way you're getting information from other people but you're not sure what's really going on."

Nixon's thoughts immediately went to his wife, daughter and other family members, who were planning to meet him after the race.

"And I said, 'Oh, my God, my family's at the finish,'" Nixon said. "And then, of course, I started texting and trying to call, frantically, to make sure everybody was OK. And everybody was OK, thankfully. They hadn't made it down yet to that point."

"The phones weren't working very well for obvious reasons, but the text messages were pretty quick, so thankfully, it wasn't as bad as 9/11, because I remember being in South Carolina and trying to call home. I was in the Marines at the time."

Behind Nixon on the marathon course in Framingham was Wes Long, an equipment specialist at Natick's Department of Defense Combat Feeding Directorate. Long was on hand in his capacity as an auxiliary police officer.

"We were able to ensure that marathon ran smoothly and safely through the Framingham section," Long said. "I am truly saddened by the events that unfolded at the finish line. My thoughts, prayers and support

go out to the victims and their families.

"Also, thank you to all the police officers, firemen, EMTs, first responders, military and anyone else who helped and continues to help during these difficult times. We stand together."

Earlier in the day, Jenna Scisco, a research psychologist for the Military Nutrition Division of USARIEM, had served as one of the volunteers who guided buses from Boston and greeted runners as they arrived at the starting line in Hopkinton. Fortunately, she wasn't near the finish line, but she shared some thoughts about the events of the day.

"I am praying for those who lost their lives and were injured, and for their families and friends," Scisco said. "It is so difficult to understand what happened yesterday, and so hard to imagine the pain and suffering that those directly affected by this tragedy are experiencing."

Scisco pointed out that more than 20,000 athletes had taken part in the race and raised millions for charity, and that more than 8,000 volunteers had turned out to help them achieve their goals. Then, when tragedy struck, they went the extra mile for each other.

"Race organizers, first responders, spectators, volunteers, and runners risked their own safety and came to the aid of the injured," Scisco said. "In the midst of this terrible tragedy, we saw the strength and inherent goodness of humanity shine through."

After enduring minutes that seemed like hours, Mike Nixon used the GPS in his cell phone and was reunited with his family. His third marathon attempt had been cut short, but it became apparent it wouldn't be his last.

"My reaction to this kind of stuff is, I'm not going to let them control me via fear, you know?" Nixon said. "You gotta stay strong. You gotta think of the good things. This could have been so much worse."

Shivaun Pacitto was just as unflinching as Nixon.

"The Boston Marathon means too much to our city or even to our nation," Pacitto said. "It's an international event that we're so proud of, and I just don't want it to be tarnished like this. You know, I've thought about it, and I would (run again) because I don't want to live in fear. I will not let whoever did this win."

Marathon Men *continued*

"It was so fast. Those people were amazing. I couldn't believe how fast the first responders were in there."

While their leaders tended to the injured, the 1060th's junior enlisted helped those in the grandstand across the street, including families from the Newtown, Conn., school shooting, and the disabled and elderly.

"They created a funnel," Fiola said of his Soldiers. "There (were) a lot of people there that needed to be assisted. At that time, they could only get out past our Soldiers."

When there was nothing more that they could do, the Soldiers heeded safety officials, went to the medical tent to wipe off as much blood as possible, and left the area for home. They continue to process what they saw and did that day, when three people died and more than 250 were injured.

"I'm still kind of pissed, but I'm happy we were there to help," said Madore, who grew up in nearby Somerville. "I don't feel that we did anything that any other Soldier wouldn't do."

Welch almost didn't do the ruck march but is glad he was there.

"I don't ever want this to happen again, but (if) for some ungodly reason it does, I hope I'm there," said Welch, "or I'm hoping that someone like us will be there to do what we did."

Welch, an 11-year Guard veteran, pointed out that the tragedy was a lesson to young Soldiers about the importance of training.

"Take pride and learn that stuff," Welch said. "Know that at some point in your life, you could need it, like we needed it last week. We've lived it."

Fiola agreed, saying, "It's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it."

All three Soldiers plan to be at next year's Boston Marathon with their rucks to march again. Eight states and Canada have contacted Fiola about sending Soldiers in 2014. Another six states want to do Tough Rucks at their own marathons.

"There's a bigger meaning behind it now," Fiola said. "It's not just about Boston. It's not just about the Massachusetts National Guard. It's about Soldiers, and it's about resiliency and being strong."



“What they do here is an incredibly important mission to the Army, as they continue to work what I consider to be our center of gravity, which is helping our Soldiers do their job. That’s something that will never change. The Army is about Soldiers. It’s about their ability to perform and conduct their mission.”

Gen. Raymond T. Odierno,
Army Chief of Staff

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (Nov. 18, 2013)

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno visited Natick Soldier Systems Center Nov. 15 to tour its facilities and learn more about the research and development done to keep Soldiers safe and provide them with a better quality of life during deployments.

Odierno was briefed on female body armor and body armor design enhancements, human systems performance, Soldier power, multi-functional fibers, vision protection, and the operational energy savings that the Army will realize from work done at Natick.

“What they do here is an incredibly important mission to the Army, as they continue to work what I consider to be our center of gravity, which is helping our Soldiers do their job,” Odierno said. “That’s something that will never change. The Army is about Soldiers. It’s about their ability to perform and conduct their mission.

“This lab is focused on how they can do that better, how they can do it with less load, how they can do it in an expeditionary manner,” he continued. “And everything that they do here adds to that. So it’s a very, very important place in the Army, and the work they do here is critical for our future.”

Odierno pointed out that Natick civilians and contractors persevered despite the recent furloughs and government shutdown.

“I wanted to personally thank them for their tremendous dedication to their mission, their dedication to our Army, and

the dedication that they bring to their job every, single day,” Odierno said. “They are a critical part of the Army. They are a critical part of the joint force, because much of the work they do here not only impacts the Army, but the other services, as well.”

Odierno learned how Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center used anthropometric surveys of Army and Marine Corps personnel, including three-dimensional scans of thousands of Soldiers and Marines, to help develop body armor designed for females. He also heard about the next generation of body armor.

At the Center for Military Biomechanics Research, he was briefed about the collaboration between NSRDEC and the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, known as USARIEM, to conduct basic and applied research in biomechanics, including current work on physical fatigue and cognition.

USARIEM researchers told Odierno of their work to develop gender- and age-neutral physical performance standards and predictive performance tests for several combat-related military occupational specialties.

Later, he heard about NSRDEC’s research into wireless power transmission technologies for Soldiers, fiber technologies that will respond to changes in temperature, fibers that actually can generate power, and the latest in vision protection to counteract battlefield threats.

Finally, Odierno was briefed on strides being made by Product Manager Force Sustainment Systems to reduce fuel and energy use at expeditionary base camps, which in turn will help keep convoys off the roads and Soldiers safer.

“All of these things are incredibly efficient as we look ahead, and that’s what we need,” Odierno said. “Those are the kind of technologies that we need, making our individual Soldier more effective, more efficient, better able to do (the) job.”

Odierno expressed great interest in anything that would lighten a Soldier’s load in the field, such as improved body armor.

“Having body armor that fits better and has better performance might not save direct money, but what it does do is allows our Soldiers to operate for longer periods of time without injury,” Odierno said. “That’s saving lots of money over time.”

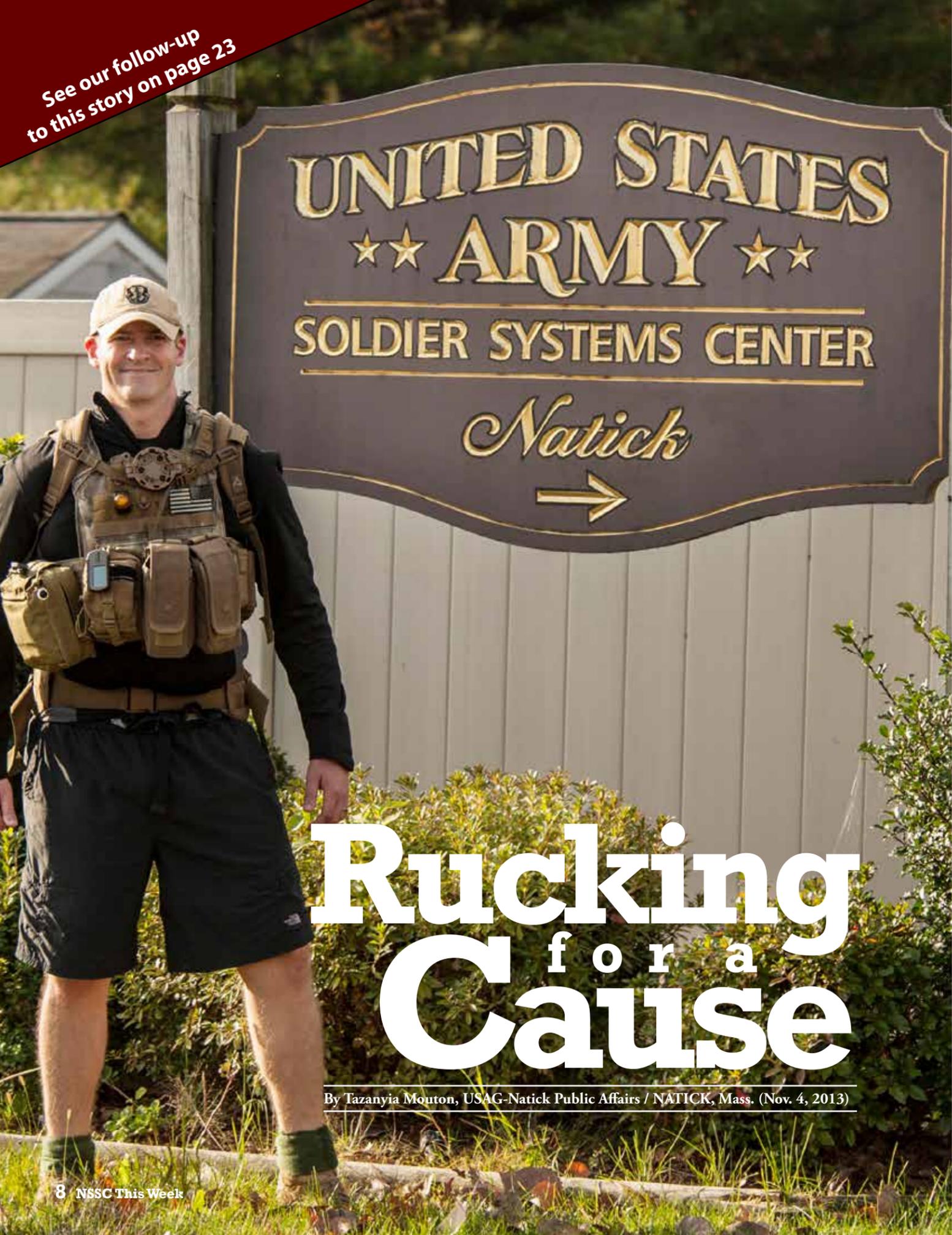
Odierno spoke of Natick’s “bright future” and praised its “synergy” with academia and small businesses in the area.

“We couldn’t replicate that anywhere else, or it would be very difficult to replicate that anywhere else,” Odierno said. “In my mind, this is one of the key installations that we have, and it’s our only footprint in this area, and that’s important, as well, because this is such an important area for the Army. I can’t foresee any circumstances that would cause us to walk away from it.”

Army Chief
of Staff visits
Natick

‘Bright
Future’

See our follow-up to this story on page 23



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Rucking for a Cause

By Tazanyia Mouton, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (Nov. 4, 2013)

Every day, 22 veterans take their own lives. That's almost one veteran each hour.

Capt. Justin Fitch, the Headquarters Research and Development Detachment commander at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, wants that number to be as close to zero as possible, because he understands what it's like to face great personal challenges.

Fitch grew up in the Midwest and decided to join ROTC while he was in college. For the first few years after his commission, Fitch was an infantry officer, and he deployed to Iraq with his platoon. After re-deploying, he transitioned into an adjutant position with a Special Forces group, and in February 2012, he took command of HRDD.

In May of that same year, after running an adventure race, Fitch said he didn't feel quite right.

"I felt ill for almost a year, and I ignored intense abdominal pain for about four months," said Fitch. "I came into work the next day and decided to go see a doctor."

Shortly after his visit to the doctor, Fitch was informed that he had a tumor, which caused his large intestine to rupture. It was then that Fitch was told that he had colon cancer.

On Oct. 18, Fitch finished his 23rd round of chemotherapy.

"I've got two more on this cycle, and then I get a small break before I start it up again," Fitch said. "But as of now, with stage four colon cancer, tumors have spread beyond the large intestines."

Fitch said he appreciates the support he has received from his Army counterparts through his treatment.

"I am fortunate that the command here at Natick has supported me and allowed me to still be in command," Fitch said, "which has been a big psychological boost for me to be able to still contribute to the Army."

Fitch went on to add that he is receiving world-class care at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Tufts University.

While Fitch is trying to maintain good command, control and discipline in his unit, in his free time he enjoys competition shooting. Fitch placed first in his division at the 2013

New England Regional Championship for the International Defensive Pistol Association. Fitch also said his wife and two dogs keep him sane.

Fitch said he has been pushing himself to physically rehabilitate after his numerous surgeries. He added that working on Soldier basics such as push-ups, sit-ups and the run have proven to be challenges.

"One thing that I have been able to rely on through rehabilitation, in exercise therapy, almost like a meditative state, is ruck marching," Fitch said. "It's not requiring my core to twist in weird ways, and it's something that I've always been good at."

"Since I have started this campaign, I have had Soldiers that I have worked with in the past, (and) people that I've never talked to in my life, become very open with me about how important it is to them because they lost their buddy or they lost their brother, or their father committed suicide."

Capt. Justin Fitch, Headquarters Research and Development Detachment commander, NSRDEC

Fitch said that he has been trying to ruck to work at least twice a month. On a recent day, Fitch was recovering from a nine and a half mile ruck, which he completed in a little more than three hours, with 80 pounds of weight strapped to his back.

"The last time I came in was 72 pounds; I think 65 (pounds) was the time before that. Just about a week and half ago, I took 85 pounds on a five-mile ruck around my house to try to build up that kind of strength and endurance," Fitch said. "I'm also being careful not to wear myself into the ground because I have to balance recovery from chemotherapy, not over-train, and recovering from when I do train."

Fitch said his motivation to train hard comes from an organization he recently joined.

"The charity is 'Active Heroes' (and) the campaign is 'Carry the Fallen,' where we're doing everything that we can to raise money and awareness ... to intervene, mitigate and reduce the trigger points of post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal tendencies in veterans," Fitch said.

The organization was started by Fitch's close

friend, Troy Yocum, a former Soldier who returned from his deployment and wanted to do something to help veterans.

"He walked with a whole bunch of gear, kind of like rucking, across the whole continental United States," said Fitch. "He got so much attention and (donations) from this that he started up this nonprofit."

On Nov. 10, Veterans Day weekend, about 200 people around the world, including Fitch, rucked to raise money and awareness for veterans and families who deal with PTSD and suicidal ideations and tendencies. Fitch said the campaign allows for the offering of financial support, counseling and retreats for veterans in need.

To date, Fitch and Team Minuteman have already raised thousands of dollars, and the totals rise daily.

Fitch said he is blown away by the amount of support from people across the nation.

The team rucked from Hopkinton to Boston, which included following the Boston Marathon route.

Fitch said the organization and the cause have kept him motivated.

"I think without having things like this to focus on, I probably wouldn't be as mentally resilient as I have been," Fitch said.

Fitch also said he is willing to do anything that he can to help.

"Since I have started this campaign, I have had Soldiers that I have worked with in the past, (and) people that I've never talked to in my life, become very open with me about how important it is to them," Fitch said, "because they lost their buddy or they lost their brother, or their father committed suicide."

"It's pretty dark to hear these things, but it's good that they're talking about it."

To learn more information about Fitch and the "Carry the Fallen" campaign, visit <http://bit.ly/1fGBxEQ>.

Capt. Justin Fitch, the Headquarters Research and Development Detachment commander at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, rucks to work Oct. 23 as part of his training for the campaign "Carry the Fallen," part of the charity "Active Heroes." On Nov. 10, Fitch, along with approximately 200 others around the world, rucked to raise money and awareness for veterans and families who deal with PTSD and suicidal ideations and tendencies.

Back to the 'Family'

NSRDEC Employee redeploys

By Alexandra Foran, NSRDEC Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (April 2, 2013)

Staff Sgt. Brian Scott is getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan as a squad leader with the 344th Military Police Company, an Army Reserve unit out of Massachusetts, after being wounded in Iraq only five years ago.

On Aug. 28, 2008, Scott's four-vehicle convoy was on a mission to an Iraqi police station. The vehicles were cutting across two main supply routes to get to the station. Scott was in the second vehicle, and an improvised explosive device, known as an IED, went off between his vehicle and the first vehicle.

"We had to stop and set up security and make calls to (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) and get an outer perimeter security out there," Scott said. Iraqi National Police took care of outer perimeter security, but "they weren't fully doing the job at the time, so I was in charge of interpreters."

Scott had an interpreter in his vehicle who had to be moved to the vehicle behind them to speak to the Iraqi National Police and let them know to start tightening up security on the outside. That's when the unexpected happened.

"As soon as our vehicle backed up, we were hit with another IED," Scott said. "I was cognizant, it knocked me out for a good thirty seconds, but after that I slowly started coming back to reality again, and that's when I realized that I had lost my gunner, that my driver was injured, and my vehicle was disabled."

Scott suffered from a traumatic brain injury, or TBI. He had shrapnel that was embedded in his left temple that is still there, as well as back injuries.

"The (Advanced Combat Helmet) is something that saved my life," Scott said. "It took most of the shrapnel when we got hit."

"After the blast, they tried to take me out first, but I said, 'No, leave me here. Take care of my Soldiers first.' So I had them take my driver out, bring him to a vehicle, and then I waited there with my gunner, and then they took me out of the vehicle and brought me to another vehicle."

After the initial shock of the IED blast wore off, Scott was in and out of consciousness. His unit performed a casualty evacuation out of that scene, he went to three different hospitals in Iraq, was medically evacuated from Iraq to Landstuhl, Germany, and then from Germany was medevaced to Walter Reed.

"I actually proposed to my wife, Tanya, at Walter Reed," Scott said. "She was just my girlfriend at the time, and the day I got to Walter Reed she was there, she showed up, and she didn't leave until the day I left. So I figured, 'She's a keeper.'"

While at then Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Scott went through many physical therapy programs. At first, he couldn't walk very well.

"I was in a wheelchair at first, then a walker, then a cane and then nothing," Scott said.

Scott went through a particularly intensive three-week long physical therapy program



while in the Warrior Transition Unit that focused on his back. By the end of that, he was running two miles without problems.

During the year after Scott sustained his injuries, he wasn't sure if he would be medically discharged from the Army.

"There was a point where I thought I was definitely out because they weren't going to let me stay in because of my injuries," Scott said. "But then I started getting better by going through all of the therapies, and it just started to look a little more positive that I was getting back to more normal health. After that, I was more motivated to stay in my full 20 (years)."

Scott was cleared for duty in 2010 and went back to Reserve status. Six months later, he started working as an equipment specialist for the Office of the Director at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center; in addition to procurement of equipment, supplies and rations, he does a lot of outreach and takes part in a lot of events, media visits, VIP ration sampling, and has done several off-sites.

Talking about rations to civilians and veterans alike is rewarding for Scott, as he can discuss seeing the research and development, and also talk about being a customer with the end product and how it is used in the field.

"I think back to when I first came in and how everything for the individual Soldier has progressed since the day I came in the late 90's pre-9/11 with the old (Battle Dress Uniform) and old Kevlar helmets and flak jackets and load-bearing vests with just two straps and a pistol belt to what we have now with the (Improved Outer Tactical Vest) and the [Advanced Combat Helmet]."

Although Scott has been busy training for his upcoming mission, a transitional mission training the Afghan National Army and police, he still finds time to support other Wounded Warriors by attending events and talking to other veterans.

The Army is "like a big family" for Scott. "That's the way I look at it," he said. "I've noticed that and I've seen it from the active-duty side, I've seen it from the Reserve side, and now I've seen it from the civilian side. Ever since I was a private in '98, everybody just takes care of each other."

Scott first enlisted in the Army in 1998, spent four years on active duty, and then joined the Army Reserve. He is a lifetime member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and of the Wounded Warrior Project. Upon his return from duty next year, he will come back to his civilian "family" at NSRDEC.



Natick to Bagram



Courtesy photo

Photo: Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (April 15, 2013)

It's hard to imagine two more different places than the Natick Soldier Systems Center and Bagram Airfield. Just ask David Sanborn.

While one is a 78-acre military research and development facility on Lake Cochituate in Massachusetts, with approximately 1,800 Department of Defense civilian employees, contractors and service members, the other is a sprawling base in the high desert of Afghanistan with as many as 42,000 people.

They are separated by 6,500 miles, but Sanborn has spent time in both worlds. Normally the chief of Master Planning at U.S. Army Garrison Natick, the command sergeant major in the Army Reserve has been serving since Oct. 6, 2012, as the command sergeant major of USAG-Bagram.

When he and Col. Steven Campfield took over, it marked the first complete Installation Management Command, or IMCOM, change of command for an Army garrison in a combat zone.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Sanborn during a recent telephone interview from Bagram. "Having been selected as the garrison CSM for the largest (forward operating base) in Afghanistan has been a great honor and opportunity. We have everybody here. We've got all the military services, to include all the special operations 'tribes,' as we call them. We are a 'purple' base by all standards.

"I'm not only dealing with Army units and their respective missions, I'm also dealing with the Air Force and my counterparts there," explained Sanborn. "It's really a job in interaction and cooperation. I have made very good friends here, and we work together constantly to ensure the base is operational."

Sanborn also pointed out the advantages of being at a coalition base.

"I've had the opportunity to have dinner and attend functions with the Koreans, Egyptians, Polish, New Zealanders, French, British and Canadians," Sanborn said. "It's just such a great environment for the coalition. One of the most important things is just the friendship, camaraderie and focus on the mission that is here."

File this Afghanistan deployment under unfinished business for Sanborn. A knee injury had kept him out of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but he jumped at the chance to deploy last fall into this brigade-level position.

Sanborn has 31-plus years in uniform and

earned his Combat Infantryman Badge in 1983 with the 82nd Airborne Division during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada. The Portland, Maine, native has held every leadership position in the enlisted ranks, and his military and civilian backgrounds made him an ideal choice for his new assignment.

"I can honestly say that my experience working with IMCOM garrisons and my military background has set me up to succeed here," Sanborn said.

Among Sanborn's responsibilities is providing billeting for the tens of thousands on Bagram.

"We've got 27,000 permanent and another 6,000 transient billeting spaces we manage on a daily basis, with roughly a 91-percent occupancy rate," Sanborn said. "Garrison has 10 billeting offices to manage the day-to-day operations. That's one of my herding cats stories — trying to keep a handle on the transients and the permanent party that we have."

According to Sanborn, the Bagram Directorate of Public Works has more than \$500 million in ongoing military construction projects.

"Our [Directorate of Logistics] is busy with tracking over 5,000 non-tactical vehicles used on the base and also managing eight functioning [dining facilities] to feed all the personnel here," Sanborn said. "Garrison also runs the MWR, DES, PMO and has a detachment of MPs used for the law-and-order mission.

"I also travel around the battlefield visiting MPs that are stationed on some of the outlying [forward operating bases.] It is important to me that I go visit them so they know they are part of the garrison."

Sanborn also is helping to oversee retrograde operations at Bagram as the U.S. reduces its presence in Afghanistan. The garrison had the lead for implementing and identifying all the containers on Bagram, and it set the template for retrograde in theater.

But it doesn't end there for Sanborn.

"I'm not just talking containers," Sanborn said. "I'm talking [mine-resistant, ambush protected vehicles,] vehicles, equipment. We're closing [forward operating bases] and [contingency operating bases] all over the theater, and they're all coming through (Bagram) or Kandahar for processing out of theater or de-milling for disposal."

Those and other challenges have kept Sanborn busy seven days a week, and most of those days have stretched to 12 or 14 hours since last fall. Along the way, he has hosted town hall meetings for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Sergeant Major of the Army, and Chief of the Army Reserve, to name a few.

Campfield, the Bagram garrison commander, called Sanborn "one of the best CSM's in the Army. His time spent each day goes well beyond 10 to 12 hours per day to help run this city of over 30,000. USAG operations in a combat zone (are) no easy task, as the enemy lets us know they are just outside the fence on many occasions. CSM Sanborn helps in the coordination of life support, force protection, services, facilities, master planning and infrastructure, to tenant units and organizations on Bagram Airfield."

Unlike in his civilian career at Natick, Sanborn goes about his duties at Bagram under a constant threat of indirect fire. He recently earned his Combat Action Badge during one such attack.

"This is an active base, and the bad guys know we're here," Sanborn said. "We usually get two or three rounds at a time coming in. The last one we had was a few days back. It's going to increase now that the fighting season's back in session."

Soon, Sanborn will spend his mid-tour leave with family in New England and Florida. Then he will return to Bagram for his final six months of duty.

If anything, his experience in Afghanistan has only increased Sanborn's appreciation for the equipment researched and developed at Natick for warfighters.

"The technology that's been developed at Natick is here," Sanborn said. "It's all been developed at Natick — from the body armor, MREs, tent systems to the desert camouflage design. It's amazing what's here for equipment."

Sanborn said that he sees no difference between Soldiers in Afghanistan who use that equipment — active-duty Army, Reserve or National Guard. He has been surprised by his informal tally of those he has met.

"Three out of five are Reserve (or) Guard Soldiers," Sanborn said. "This mission could not function without these service members over here working side by side with their active-duty counterparts."

For evidence, look no further than Sanborn himself.

Band of Brothers

Soldiers, veterans celebrate Armed Forces Week together at Natick

In conjunction with Armed Forces Week, Natick Soldier Systems Center held a series of gatherings for current Soldiers and veterans May 15-17.

Veterans from the Town of Marlborough were invited May 15 to speak with some of the younger Soldiers and share their experiences. Pvt. Maryanne Fair, a human research volunteer, or HRV, at NSSC, participated in and appreciated the event.

"It's definitely an amazing opportunity for us, because in many units or places we will go, we won't have that opportunity," Fair said.

Fair said she is uncertain of where her career will take her, but speaking with other veterans has put her possible future into perspective.

"I do want to become an officer, so whether it is Green to Gold or West Point, I do plan to take full advantage of that," Fair said.

Pvt. Jacob Hergatt, another HRV, wants to become a warrant officer and said this experience helped him put one "boot" in front of another.

"It's always good to talk to the sergeant major, someone that has been in a lot longer than I have," Hergatt said. "Most of the time, we just talk to our sergeants, who more

than likely have just a couple more years experience (than us), so talking to someone that's been in for 20 years, it's a huge difference to get ahead and get planning set up."

Medal of Honor recipient Capt. (Ret.) Thomas Hudner shared his story with a group of NSSC veterans May 16.

Hudner graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946 and served as a communications officer. Initially, he had no desire

to fly, but soon found himself to be first in a group of about five who got orders for flight training. Hudner said he had no regrets and really enjoyed it.

In 1950 Hudner crash-landed his aircraft in an attempt to rescue his downed wingman, Ensign Jesse Brown. Brown died, but Hudner received the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions.

After 27 years of dedicated service to the Navy, Hudner, who also served in Vietnam, retired.

"I have been very proud of my service in the Navy and very proud of being part of the veterans' community all throughout the world," Hudner said. "It's great to be able to come out and see all of you and just talk a little bit."

Spc. Reginald Farrie, another HRV, was

"I think it's so important. Look around at the older veterans telling their stories. That is so good for them. I know as a licensed counselor that you have to tell your story to heal, and for these guys ... they are having such a great time."

— Paul Carew, Natick Veterans Services



surprised by the Hudner's recollection of that fateful evening.

"He got the highest award that he could possibly get, and he wasn't talking about himself, he was talking about the other officer," Farrie said. "It's just good to come here and be here for only a month and be a part of something that great."

Veterans from the Town of Natick were invited to share their stories May 17.

Paul Carew, director of veteran's services for the town, had a hand in coordinating this year's event.

"I think it's so important," Carew said. "Look around at the older veterans telling their stories. That is so good for them. I know as a licensed counselor that you have to tell your

story to heal, and for these guys ... they are having such a great time."

While the older veterans had a chance to heal, the younger Soldiers had a chance to gain insight about military history.

Pvt. Gabrielle Hancsak, HRV, wanted the event to continue. "They have so much more to teach us" she said.

When describing the day's events, one word came to her mind.

"Exquisite," Hancsak said. "It's like a delicacy that you won't be able to have; just to savor it and enjoy the moment that you have."

Flying Tigers veteran Joseph Poshefko, a Natick resident, was among those who visited NSSC.

"We need what (NSSC scientists and researchers) offer," Poshefko said. "The clothes, food, medical training, the dedication, the faithfulness of our young group; I think we have the finest group of members in service that I have ever seen."

Lt. Col. Frank Sobchak, Natick garrison commander, said that these gatherings give the younger generation a chance to learn from the older generation.

"Events like these are what Armed Forces Day is supposed to be all about," Sobchak said, "because the Armed Forces, ultimately, we're a family."

"People talk about the one percent and about the special few (who serve). Well guess what? We are the one percent. We are the ones who

all put our lives on the line all so we can serve our country, serve in times of war and in times of peace."

Medal of Honor recipient Thomas J. Hudner Jr. (left) speaks with Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Beausoleil during a veterans' luncheon, May 16, 2013, at Natick Soldier Systems Center, Mass.



Brig. Gen. William E. Cole receives the colors from Dale Ormond, director, U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command, during the Dec. 5 Assumption of Command ceremony at Natick Soldier Systems Center. Cole became Natick's senior commander.

Cole Takes Command

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick / NATICK, Mass.
(Dec. 5, 2013)

Brig. Gen. William E. Cole assumed command of the Natick Soldier Systems Center in a Dec. 5 ceremony at NSSC's Hunter Auditorium.

Cole also serves as deputy commanding general of the U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command, or RDECOM, at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.

"I think it's fitting that the Army have an active-duty general officer stationed here in the state where the Army was born," Cole said. "As the only active-duty general officer stationed north of New York City and east of the Hudson River, I look forward to representing our Army here in Massachusetts, as well as in the surrounding New England states.

"The state motto of Massachusetts, translated from the Latin, is, 'By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under liberty. That is a fitting motto for a great state, and it could also apply to the work done by the team here at Natick and throughout the Research, Development and Engineering Command."

Cole pointed out that Army military scientists and engineers are developing better "swords" for future battles.

"They are doing this in the hopes that by equipping our Soldiers with the best weapons and equipment in the world, we might deter

war," said Cole, "but failing that, that our warfighters will be victorious, and thereby able to secure a lasting peace with liberty.

"I know first-hand that the advances made here at Natick, along with their industry and academic partners, saves Soldiers' lives on the battlefield with better concealment and much better body armor and ballistic protection."

As Cole noted, that critical work is being done in an era of uncertainty.

"Our country has many fiscal and budgetary pressures, and the resulting reductions in the Army budget will make our job more challenging," Cole said. "But the Army leadership has recognized the vital importance of maintaining a technological edge over our adversaries, and I'm confident that the RDECOM team will continue to develop the technology that our Soldiers need to remain dominant on the battlefield."

In his most recent assignment, Cole was chief of staff in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Acquisition, Logistics and Technology). He worked closely with the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center from 2009 to 2012, when he was Product Manager for Soldier Protection and Individual Equipment.

"I know that he looks forward to being a part of the team that makes a difference in the lives of our Soldiers every day," said Dale

Ormond, RDECOM director, who hosted the ceremony. "He has experienced first-hand the world-class work done here not only as an acquisition officer, but also as an artillery officer at places such as Fort Bragg, in Germany, and while deployed to Operation Desert Storm."

In a congratulatory letter to Cole, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick wrote: "As I'm sure you can already see, the highly educated and talented workforce supporting Natick's vital mission provide the Armed Forces and partners in academia and industry with cutting-edge innovation and other advantages that truly make a difference in the lives of our Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen."

Prior to his assumption of command, Cole met with local media and spoke enthusiastically about coming to Natick.

"I was really delighted to get this assignment," Cole said. "I've worked closely with Natick before, with the other labs in RDECOM, and to be able to be part of that team again is just a real thrill to me. I know the talented people that work here, and I look forward to working with them more closely."

A U.S. Military Academy graduate whose family has deep Massachusetts roots, Cole has served in the Army for more than 26 years. He is married and has four children.

By Tazanyia Mouton, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (Nov. 26, 2013)

Growing up in Guinea, West Africa, was tough, said Spc. Michel Kamano, a human research volunteer with Headquarters Research Development Detachment.

Through that toughness, he persevered and now he is a naturalized U.S. citizen.

“Guinea is a small country and it’s poor, so things weren’t easy,” he said. “Things weren’t easy for me going through school.”

Kamano said that before being cleared to graduate from high school, all students in his country are subjected to an exit exam.

“It was very difficult,” he said. “Some people dropped because of that ... The exam is not easy.”

He said his first attempt at the test did not produce the result he wanted, but again, he didn’t give up. He said he was motivated by his entire family, including his father, who passed away while Kamano was in the tenth grade.

After completing high school, he went on to college, where he studied engineering and construction. He said people in his country go to college and complete a degree, but still struggle to find employment.

“(The United States) is the (most) powerful country in the world,” he said. “People appreciate the freedom in this country, and (there are) a lot of opportunities to get jobs.”

Kamano came to the U.S. with a green card qualification in 2010, and after about a year of working at fast food restaurants and as a

“It was a long process, because I failed the (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) test because of English,” he said. “(When) I came here, I didn’t know how to speak a single word of English.”

Kamano said he missed passing the ASVAB by four points. Thirty days later, he took the test and failed a second time.

“I want to go back to school and get my masters. My dream is to work for the U.S. Embassy.”

“Since I wanted to do it, I studied for six months,” he said. “So I took my time, and I studied hard. I took (English as a Second Language) classes ... That’s how I passed the test.”

Kamano raised his right hand to defend this country in April. He enlisted as a Quartermaster and Chemical Equipment Repairer, and he will be stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., after he leaves Natick.

Although his Army career has been a short one, he feels he has been able to contribute by participating at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center as an HRV.

“Since they told us that (this is) something that will work for us, to improve military combat systems, I said ‘OK, I’m going to participate since I’m in the Army,’” Kamano said.

Kamano said he has seen fascinating research

have a focus in administration, finance or engineering.

“I want to go back to school and get my masters,” he said. “My dream is to work for the U.S. Embassy.”

On Nov. 20, Kamano, along with almost 900 others, raised his right hand, yet again. This time, he took an Oath of Allegiance and became a naturalized citizen.

The ceremony took place at the Lowell Memorial Auditorium among 2,000 family, friends and associates. Of all who became naturalized citizens, Kamano was the only Soldier.

“The ceremony was more amazing than I expected, and I felt very special about that,” he said.

Dressed in his Army Service Uniform, Kamano was singled out to lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

“It was a surprise to me to be chosen to lead the pledge to the flag for the ceremony,” he said. “I didn’t know how to say the pledge to the flag, so I was worried and nervous about it when I got the news.”

Kamano said he was thankful for his fellow Soldiers and leaders who helped him practice the pledge, which allowed him to be more comfortable.

“I realized that people can have family members, even not (of) the same blood,” he said. “People that were around (me) gave me lots of feelings that I can’t forget.”

Now that he is a naturalized citizen, he plans to apply for his family in Guinea to join him.

Pledging Allegiance

Natick Soldier becomes naturalized citizen

security guard, he decided he wanted to join the Army.

“I tried to go back to school,” he said. “It wasn’t easy for me, because I had to pay and go to work.”

Instead, Kamano decided to take another route, and he joined the Army. That was no easy road, however.

happen here at Natick.

“The last time I tested (an Advanced Combat Helmet), backpack, and (Interceptor Body Armor). It’s very interesting,” he said. “Like those we used in basic training, ... they (were) heavier and not stable; these are very stable.”

Kamano plans to re-enlist and go to Officer Candidate School, where he would like to

“I called my brother the day before the ceremony to let everyone (in) my family know that I was becoming a citizen of the United States of America,” he said. “(My brother) was very excited and quickly drove back home to announce the news to the family.

“Later, I got a call back telling me the excitement which made them dance. That gave me much more confidence.”



Spc. Michel Kamano, a human research volunteer with Headquarters Research Development Detachment, Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, recently became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Kamano is from Guinea, West Africa.

Photo: Tazanyia Mouton, USAG-Natick Public Affairs

'Quiet Little Tribute'

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (May 3, 2013)

When he heard that some of those prevented from finishing the recent Boston Marathon would honor bombing victims by entering and completing another marathon, Maj. Owen Hill knew he could do but one thing — lace up his running shoes and join them in the tribute.

That's why Maj. Owen Hill, Ph.D., entered the 2013 Cox Sports Marathon, which will be run May 12, in Providence, R.I.

Hill, deputy chief of the Military Performance Division at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, Natick Soldier Systems Center, might not be quite ready for the distance, but that doesn't matter to him.

"I just said, 'All right, I'm running it for everybody who can't,'" Hill said. "I just pictured those individuals who lost their limbs lying in a hospital bed. What would they give to run a marathon, just run, just get out there and run and have that freedom?"

Hill also had a direct connection to this year's Boston Marathon. His girlfriend, Jesse-Lee Lavoie, 33, a cardiology critical care nurse practitioner, had run the race in a personal-record 3 hours, 22 minutes, and finished just 45 minutes before the bombing.

Work commitments had kept Hill from attending the marathon, so when he learned of the attack, he was concerned about Lavoie's safety.

"I couldn't reach her for a good hour," Hill recalled. "Her parents couldn't reach her. That was terrifying. I knew that she had finished. I wasn't sure (if) she was in the area. It was a really difficult hour, but thank good-

ness, she was OK."

So when he read about the Mother's Day marathon in Providence, Hill had plenty of motivation to register. He figured that if he runs just a quarter-mile for each of those either killed or injured, he will cover the entire 26.2 miles.

"So I just said to myself, 'I'm doing it,' and I signed up," said Hill, "and then I realized I've got a marathon in about two weeks."

Hill had done a pair of half-marathons while deployed to Iraq in 2007, but he hadn't been training anywhere near enough lately to justify attempting his first marathon.

"I'm just an Army runner," said the 43-year-old Hill, who entered the service at 18 and is an avid rock climber. "I'm a recreational runner. On average, I try to run 20-30 miles a week."

Ironically, Lavoie, a veteran marathoner, had been trying to talk Hill into attempting the distance. He had always resisted.

"She's done many marathons," Hill said. "She's done Boston three times. I said, 'Hey, you're going to have to train me, or you're going to have to be my coach.'"

Lavoie advised Hill that he was in big trouble, but he bought new running shoes and hit the road. On the Sunday after the tragic events in Boston, he completed an 18-miler, his longest run ever. He was on his way.

"(I) did OK," Hill said. "I was like, 'You know, I might be able to do this.'"

In his position at USARIEM, Hill studies heat stroke and musculoskeletal injuries, so he understands the inherent risks in running

a marathon without establishing a base and tapering off his mileage beforehand.

"I will say that I respect the risk of the injuries, and I certainly will hydrate and rest up," said Hill, "and I'm not being reckless about this, other than the fact that I signed up two weeks before the marathon without any true training."

Despite a little soreness, Hill soldiers on as the marathon approaches.

"I feel like I'm fortunate enough to be able to do this race, so I'm just going to do it," Hill said. "I'm going to try to do well. I'm not going to just do an 'airborne shuffle' for 26 miles. I plan to run at a decent clip."

No one has to tell Hill that the Providence race is a qualifier for the 2014 Boston Marathon.

"Without a doubt, if I qualify, I will be running the Boston Marathon — absolutely. After the events of this last marathon, there's no way in the world I'd miss it," said Hill, who grew up in Houston. "I love Boston, and I love the people of Massachusetts and New England. I really respect their passion for these types of events."

His first step toward Boston comes May 12, in Providence, but Hill won't be thinking about himself.

"This is not about me," Hill said. "It's my own quiet little tribute to everybody. Anybody who was directly affected (in Boston), they would do anything to have that opportunity to run. So every time I even start to feel like this is a task too big, I just think about those individuals and I need to keep going, because they would."



**Natick Soldier
trains for first
marathon to honor
Boston victims**

On a late June day at Fenway Park in Boston, Master Sgt. Miguel Chacon was looking on with great pleasure as Red Sox players signed autographs for his three children and dozens of others when he felt something hit him on the side.

Chacon, in uniform, looked down to see a pair of batting gloves, which he assumed that some fan had tossed down to be signed. A moment later, an usher tapped Chacon on the shoulder and told him that it was Red Sox outfielder Jonny Gomes, known for his unwavering support of the U.S. military, who had thrown them over.

Later, he was able to thank Gomes personally for the unsolicited gesture, but Chacon wanted to do more.

So when Lee Cummings, who works at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine at Natick Soldier Systems Center, offered him tickets to the Sept. 15 Red Sox-Yankees game at Fenway, Chacon, the USARIEM senior enlisted advisor, brought along the Advanced Combat Helmet that he had worn in Iraq and a bag of “recruiting goodies.”

On a pregame tour of Fenway, Chacon showed the helmet to a club official and told her that he had brought it for Gomes. She escorted Chacon and fellow USARIEM Soldier Spc. Travis Crook below the stands and to a door outside the Red Sox clubhouse.

“About three minutes later, here comes Jonny Gomes through the door!” Chacon said. “I reached into the bag and I said, ‘This is the helmet that I had in combat.’”

Chacon told Gomes that he wanted him to have it.

“Are you serious? This is cool. This rocks,” Chacon recalled Gomes saying.

“He was just taken by that helmet,” Chacon said. “He loved it. He lit up.”

As they talked, Gomes pulled down his right sock to reveal a tattoo that stretches from his knee to his ankle. The tattoo includes an American flag, the Statue of Liberty, and a target with the date Osama bin Laden was killed.

“I’ve met some players,” said Chacon, “but I’ve never met a player as patriotic as Jonny. Never.”

The helmet — with Chacon’s rank, roster number, blood type, an American flag and a Special Forces sticker on the outside — has become as much a celebratory icon as the beards worn by the Red Sox, now facing the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. Chacon didn’t part with it lightly.

“Things that I’ve taken to combat and back, they have a lot of value to me,” said Chacon, who has set aside the gear for his children to one day give to theirs. “This is the stuff that dad went to war with. I wanted to give a piece of the battlefield back to Jonny.”

Chacon’s helmet couldn’t have found a better home than Gomes’ locker.

“It’s an honor to see him wear that,” said Chacon, adding that Gomes, in turn, “honors the military. That’s bigger than anything.”

“I’m glad it’s getting them through the battle that they’re battling through right now ... to win the World Series.”

Special Gift

By Bob Reinert, USAG-Natick Public Affairs
(Oct. 24, 2013)



12 Hours to Awareness

By Tazanyia Mouton, USAG-Natick Public Affairs / NATICK, Mass. (Nov. 20, 2013)

On Nov. 10, Veterans Day weekend, about 200 people around the world, including Capt. Justin Fitch, the Headquarters Research Development Detachment commander, rucked for 12 hours to raise money and awareness for veterans and families who deal with PTSD and suicidal ideations and tendencies.

The campaign, “Carry the Fallen,” is part of a larger organization, “Active Heroes.” Fitch said the campaign allows for the offering of financial support, counseling and retreats for veterans in need.

On the morning of the ruck, well before the sun was up, a group of about 30 people gathered in Hopkinton with one goal in mind: ruck the Boston Marathon route to raise awareness.

“I assumed a leadership role in this; that’s not what I intended, I just wanted to be a participant,” said Fitch. “We had a lot of support from local people and friends and families of (those) ruck marching.”

Fitch added that the group received a huge amount of support from the personnel at the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center.

“We had NSRDEC team members that had set up refreshment stands along the way ... driving back and forth to make sure everybody was medically OK,” said 1st Sgt. Brian Gemmill, HRDD first sergeant.

Gemmill joined the ruck around the nine-mile mark to show his support.

“About a good 15 or 20 people volunteered their Sunday to help, make sure people had water, make sure people had enough cold-weather gear once it started cooling down,” Gemmill said.

Gemmill also said that he didn’t intend to ruck all the way to Boston.

“Actually, all I was going to do was walk through Natick, and I had my jeep loaded up with a bunch of water bottles and bananas,” Gemmill said. “But I didn’t realize that so

Team Minuteman takes a break to snap a photo at the Fallen Soldiers Memorial at the Natick Veterans of Foreign Affairs Nov. 10. The team rucked from Hopkinton to Boston along the Boston Marathon route for “Carry the Fallen,” a campaign within the charity “Active Heroes.”

many other people were driving and supporting, so I figured, ‘I didn’t have anything else to do, might as well hang out with Capt. Fitch and walk.’”

Fitch said everyone around him helped push him along.

One participant, a 14-year-old son of a retired Army Ranger, also gave Fitch inspiration.

“I honestly thought about quitting a couple times, but I looked at this kid and thought, ‘This kid has got heart. There is no damn way I’m going to quit,’” Fitch said.

Fitch went on to say that the ruck was “definitely bigger than me, bigger than anyone there. We actually had strangers come up and start walking with us.”

Gemmill added, “In Wayland, we had about five or six people that walked with us to the end of town.”

Col. Collier Slade, military deputy of NSR-DEC, said he was pleased with the team.

“As a senior officer, it gives me great hope for the future to see this younger generation, military and civilian, so motivated and so willing to endure such a physical, painful challenge for an important cause,” said Slade. “I am proud of and inspired by Captain Fitch and the entire Minuteman Team.”

After the ruck, Fitch, who is battling stage IV colon cancer, endured three straight days of chemotherapy. It was Fitch’s 25th treatment.

“I will find out in two weeks if I can get a six-week break before I have to start it up again,” he said.

Fitch remains hopeful that he can get some form of a breather in between treatments.

Because of the success of the campaign, “Active Heroes” is allowing “Carry the Fallen” to remain open until the end of the year. To find out how to get involved, visit <http://bit.ly/1fGBxEQ>.

“All of a sudden, I heard a loud boom, and it shook through my body. And I turned back and I said, ‘Oh, my God.’ And then I heard a second one, and I fell to my knees. A runner picked me up, and he said, ‘You have to run. There might be another (bomb) at the finish line.’”

Shivaun Pacitto, an NSRDEC employee who had just finished the Boston Marathon when the bombs went off April 15, 2013

“People keep asking, ‘What were you guys thinking?’ We weren’t thinking about anything. It’s like the switch turns on, and you just go, and you just do what you’re supposed to do to accomplish the mission.”

Lt. Steve Fiola, a Massachusetts National Guardsman who helped save victims at the Boston Marathon bombings

“This is an active base, and the bad guys know we’re here. We usually get two or three rounds at a time coming in. The last one we had was a few days back. It’s going to increase now that the fighting season’s back in session.”

Command Sgt. Maj. David Sanborn, an Army Reservist and Natick employee who was serving as command sergeant major of U.S. Army Garrison Bagram, Afghanistan

“People talk about the one percent and about the special few (who serve). Well, guess what? We are the one percent. We are the ones who all put our lives on the line all so we can serve our country, serve in times of war and in times of peace.”

Lt. Col. Frank Sobchak, Natick garrison commander, speaking on Armed Forces Day

“Since I have started this campaign, I have had Soldiers that I have worked with in the past, (and) people that I’ve never talked to in my life, become very open with me about how important it is to them, because they lost their buddy or they lost their brother, or their father committed suicide. It’s pretty dark to hear these things, but it’s good that they’re talking about it.”

Capt. Justin Fitch, who was ruck marching to raise money for suicide prevention while battling colon cancer

“This is not about me. It’s my own quiet little tribute to everybody. Anybody who was directly affected (in Boston), they would do anything to have that opportunity to run. So every time I even start to feel like this is a task too big, I just think about those individuals and I need to keep going, because they would.”

Maj. Owen Hill of USARIEM, who decided to run his first marathon in honor of Boston victims

“What they do here is an incredibly important mission to the Army, as they continue to work what I consider to be our center of gravity, which is helping our Soldiers do their job. That’s something that will never change. The Army is about Soldiers. It’s about their ability to perform and conduct their mission.”

Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, Army chief of staff, talking about Natick

“The ceremony was more amazing than I expected, and I felt very special about that.”

Spc. Michel Kamano, a Guinea, West Africa, native, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen

“After the blast, they tried to take me out first, but I said, ‘No, leave me here. Take care of my Soldiers first.’ So I had them take my driver out, bring him to a vehicle, and then I waited there with my gunner, and then they took me out of the vehicle and brought me to another vehicle.”

Staff Sgt. Brian Scott, an Army Reservist and NSRDEC employee who deployed to Afghanistan less than five years after being wounded in Iraq

“Things that I’ve taken to combat and back, they have a lot of value to me. I wanted to give a piece of the battlefield back to Jonny.”

Master Sgt. Miguel Chacon, who gave an Advanced Combat Helmet to Boston Red Sox outfielder Jonny Gomes, who wore it in celebration as the team won the World Series

“I think it’s fitting that the Army have an active-duty general officer stationed here in the state where the Army was born. As the only active-duty general officer stationed north of New York City and east of the Hudson River, I look forward to representing our Army here in Massachusetts, as well as in the surrounding New England states.

Brig. Gen. William E. Cole, upon taking command at Natick

Favorite Quotes of 2013



NSSC This Week

NSSC

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Brig. Gen. William E. Cole

Garrison Commander

Lt. Col. Brian Greata

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