

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**



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VET NEWS

October 2004

SUPPORT OUR TROOPS RALLY

On Sunday, September 12, Lexington District 1 Stadium was the scene of a Rally to support our deployed troops. The field was arrayed with flags from each of the fifty states and 6 territories. A large US flag was draped from the press box. Nearly 500 people were in attendance to pay tribute to the young men and women from Lexington County currently serving on active duty.

1SG Wallace Oswald, Co. B, 122nd Engineer Battalion, from Batesburg-Leesville, was the keynote speaker. He summarized the one-year tour of duty by the unit, which recently returned from Iraq. The unit performed infrastructure enhancements and was involved in considerable explosive ordnance demolition. The company also had its share of combat with 4 Purple Hearts, 14 Bronze Stars, and numerous other awards.



1SG Oswald receiving a standing ovation during his remarks

Remarks were made by Senator Jackie Knotts, County Council Chairman Smokey Davis, and BG Buford Mabry, 59th Troop Commander. Jane Caughman, mother of Thomas Caughman, the young

man from Lexington killed in Iraq in June, was presented a framed Gold Star Banner by the Blue Star Mothers.



Jane Caughman, mother of Thomas Caughman, receiving the Gold Star Banner from Ann Ricard on behalf of Blue Star Mothers

County Veterans Affairs Officer Gary Baker presented a certificate to Co. B for their outstanding service in Iraq. Retired State VA official Stan Thornburgh was presented a certificate for his service to the veterans of Lexington County.

The event kicked off with a flyover of four F16s from the 169th Fighter Wing at McEntire Air Base. Color guards from Fort Jackson and Co. B, 122nd Engineers were the centerpiece of the marching units which included ROTC units from Batesburg-Leesville HS, Lexington HS, White Knoll HS, and Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School. Contingents of Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Girl Scouts also participated.

Music was provided by Constance Flemming, Hannah Nelson, Tracey Owens, Jeff Flanders and the White Knoll High School Band.

The event included a minute of silence for the victims of 9/11. Stan Thornburgh, representing the Military Order of the Purple Heart, read the names of the 21 military personnel from South Carolina who

have died in Operation Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom. As each name was read, a red, white, or blue balloon was released. The event concluded with the playing of Taps.



**Speaker's stand with military and Scout units on the field.
Note the state flags on the far side of the field.**

Several organizations had displays or booths including the VFW, Blue Star Mothers, and the MOPH. Displays of uniforms, equipment, and camp equipage from WWI, WWII, and Vietnam were set up in the end zones.

CARDS TO TROOPS

Want to write to a service member? Thank a soldier? Two local women have started a campaign to write to activated troops. For just the cost of a card and a 37 cent stamp, and a little bit of time, you can assist with boosting the morale of our deployed troops.

For further information and addresses, contact Debbie Moye at 359-7047 or Jean Threath at 957-3122.



VETERANS PARADE

Plans are underway for a Veterans Parade to be held on Sunday, November 14 at 2:30 pm. WWII veterans will be the Grand Marshals. WWII veterans can ride in the parade on one of two floats designated for them.

The parade will start at Lexington Elementary School and proceed down North Lake Drive to the Veterans Monument.

Units desiring to participate can complete the attached entry form and return to Sharon Willis prior to October 29.



Korean War veterans on the 2003 float with children from the Columbia Korean Community

VETERANS TRUST FUND

It's a little early to be thinking about it but income taxes will be filed starting in just three months. While poring over your income tax records and filings, consider making a contribution to the Veterans Trust Fund. You can easily make a contribution on your income tax form to designate the contribution. The amount contributed is either added to your amount due or deducted from whatever refund you may be entitled to. Directions are included on your tax form, or you can ask your tax preparer for information.

The Veterans Trust Fund provides resources to serve the needs of South Carolina's veterans by supporting programs, both public and private, for veterans. The Veterans' Trust Fund may support veteran service programs by direct funding or through donation of property or services. The Fund may supplement and augment, but shall not take the place of, services provided by state agencies.

RECORDKEEPING

Veterans or their family members must provide certain documents when filing a claim with the VA. In addition, other government organizations, such as Social Security, human resource offices, retirement agencies, etc., need copies of records for their purposes. Failure to provide those records timely can result in lengthy delays in processing a claim, paying insurance, etc.

Consider completion of the attached checklist and maintain it in a safe location where you and family members can obtain it when needed. Better yet, keep a copy in a safe deposit box or other safe location and keep a copy with your personal records.

Keep it current; make any changes expeditiously.

Maintain copies of birth and death certificates of family members, marriage licenses of all marriages, military records, bank account and investment information, and insurance policies so they can be easily obtained.



SSG Wendell Harrleson of Pelion with the 3/178th Field Artillery Battalion with one of the 85 Iraqi children who received a backpack with school supplies

GIFTS FROM THE HOMEFRONT

Gifts can be made to deployed troops. The Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) provides certificates which can be purchased by any individual or group. The certificates allow the troops to purchase items at AAFES facilities.

The certificates may be purchased in \$10 or \$20 denominations and can be addressed to “any service member” or to individual service members.

Those wishing to send a “Gift from the Homefront” can go to <http://www.aafes.com> or call 1-877-770-4438.

DATES TO REMEMBER

October

- 5- Outreach, Batesburg-Leesville 8-12
- 6-8 County Veterans Affairs Officers Training
- 11- Columbus Day
- 12- Outreach, Chapin 8-12
- 19- Outreach, Swansea, 8-12
- 20- Stakeholders Meeting, Dorn, 10
- 29- Homeless Standdown

November

- 2- Election Day
Outreach, Batesburg-Leesville 8-12
- 4- VAVS, Dorn 1-2
- 6-7 Celebrate Freedom, Camden
- 9- Outreach, Chapin 8-12
- 10- Veterans Day Program, Dorn- 10
- 11- Veterans Day
Veterans Day Parade, Columbia
- 14- Veterans Day Parade, Lexington, 2:30
- 16- Outreach, Swansea, 8-12
- 25- Thanksgiving

CHIROPRACTIC CARE AT DORN

Later this fall, Dorn VA Medical Center will be providing chiropractic care. Chiropractors will provide patient evaluations and chiropractic care in consultation with VA primary care providers.

If you need chiropractic care, check with your primary care physician at Dorn.

CHRISTMAS FOR OUR DEPLOYED TROOPS

Janet Parsons with Military Support Ministry is asking people to send Christmas cards with hard candy such as candy canes for Operation Thank You.

Books are especially desired plus any form of entertainment (handheld games, videos, audio tapes or CDs) as well as stationery.

Collection points are at the VA Office or you can call Janet direct at 808-6485 or email her at wecaremilitary@aol.com. For further information, you can look at the website for Military Support Ministry at www.militarysupport.com.

Any donations for deployed troops should be made soon to allow sufficient time to reach the troops before the holidays and to beat the holiday mailing rush.

SURVIVING SPOUSE DEADLINE APPROACHES

A December 15 deadline is rapidly approaching which will affect benefit eligibility of surviving spouses of certain deceased veterans.

The VA pays Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to the surviving spouses of service members who die while on active duty or whose death resulted from service-connected causes. Under prior law, surviving spouses who remarried at any age were not eligible for DIC unless their later marriages ended. However, the new law provides that any surviving spouse who remarried after age 57 and before December 16, 2003 have until December 15, 2004 to apply for restoration of the DIC benefit.

Applications must be received by the VA no later than December 15; any received after that date will be denied.

No application is required for a surviving spouse who remarried on or after the age of 57 after the new law was passed (December 16, 2003).

PURPLE HEART VETERANS

The Purple Heart is the nation's oldest military medal. George Washington presented the first medals in 1783. Today, there are approximately 600,000 living veterans who were wounded in combat and received the medal, according to the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Recipients of the Purple Heart are entitled to some special State Benefits:

- Two motor vehicle license plates and special license plates - SC Dept. of Public Safety (803) 737-4000.

- Free Tuition for Certain War Veterans Children - forms may be obtained in County VA Office or Veterans Counselor at State Supported School

- *Priority group 3 at VA Medical Centers. Purple Heart Veterans don't have to make out-of-pocket payments, technically known as "co-payments" for either inpatient or outpatient VA medical services.

- *New rules in the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act authorize VA to reimburse Purple Heart recipients for any medical co-payments made to VA for care given after November 29, 1999.

Purple Heart recipients are still responsible for making co-payments of \$7 for each 30 day supply of prescription medicine given to outpatients for conditions that are not related to military service.

SC NATIONAL GUARD UNIT DELIVERS BACKPACKS TO KIDS IN IRAQ

South-Central, Iraq – September 28, 2004 – Soldiers from the SC Army National Guard's 3-178 Field Artillery Battalion provided 85 very excited Iraqi school children with backpacks filled with school supplies near their base this weekend. Commenting on his unit's third such backpack mission, the unit's commander Lieutenant Colonel Mark King said "the 'Old Backpack 4 Iraq' program is now in full swing with schools all over the countryside opening. The intrinsic rewards of delivering the backpacks and getting our soldiers involved in the actual handing-out of the backpacks have more and more of our soldiers requesting to participate every week. These missions offer a Christmas like excitement both for the kids and our soldiers. The benefit for all is immeasurable."

The backpacks the colonel is referring to are ones his unit has collected through their unit's family readiness group, churches and various civic organizations like Blue Star Mothers of SC. The unit kicked off their "Old Backpack 4 Iraq" campaign in April. When the program began, it was King's hope that as parents in SC started buying school supplies or the 2004-2005 school year, they would consider sending their child's old backpack to his unit for the soldiers to distribute to the students in their area of operations. With logistical assistance provided by Congressman Joe Wilson's office over a thousand backpacks filled with school supplies have been delivered from throughout SC. The number is now nearing 1,500 and continues to grow. So far, the battalion's soldiers have delivered 236 backpacks to school children in their area of operations.



Standing l to r behind Iraqi school children: SFC Richard Espinosa, CPT Mark A. Wilson, LTC Mark King; MAJ Scott Cato; SP Clayton Spinks, Iraqi school teacher, CPT Bailey Bartee, Iraqi school principal, and CPT Scott Bell during the 3/178th FA BN's third "Old Backpack for Iraq" mission.

The battalion's Executive Officer, Major Scott Cato says his unit's civil-military affairs "Old Backpack 4 Iraq" effort "has truly been a blessing" for him. Although his combat arms field artillery soldiers have been trained to be warriors, he believes "Operation Iraqi Freedom II has provided us with a different outlook on our role as a military force. Besides supporting sustainment operations, we are also winning hearts and minds. It has made me very proud to be able to help give something back to such a poor and deprived people."

The SC Army National Guard's Lancaster-based 3-178 Field Artillery Battalion was mobilized for active duty on December 27, 2003. A number of Lexington County Guard members serve in the unit.