

115th Fires Brigade



Cowboy Thunder

Volume 1 Issue 3

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**MRAPs Make their Mark
On Convoy Escort Teams**

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Commanders' Comments

Howdy from Cowboy 6

The mission is going well and all servicemembers and units are doing a great job. All the commands are doing a good job of balancing mission versus Soldier care. The byline is mission first, Soldiers and Sailors or Coast Guardsmen, always.

As a unit commander I am always working to balance the personal needs of Soldiers and Families and the needs of the mission and nation. Our first and foremost responsibility as commanders is to provide well



Col. Richard C. Knowlton

trained, manned and equipped units to support our military's role in supporting our national objectives. This is why our servicemembers train continually throughout the year to be ready when our nation calls.

This is often at odds with the personal requirements of our servicemembers and their personal lives or careers. It is very hard for a serviceman to miss a high school graduation or anniversary to go and train with the unit. It is challenging to keep a civilian career progressing when the employee is in the service and trains two or more weeks a year and faces multiple deployments.

Commanders continually try to balance competing military requirements with the personal requirements of the servicemember. I always look at it from this perspective. What is the best for the nation, mission, unit and Soldier?

Each and every servicemember in this command has made a conscious decision to be a part of the armed forces of the United States in a time of war. Each has endured many missed anniversaries, ball games, graduations etc. in order to serve. Each has sacrificed much to protect and serve the nation that has meant so much too each and every one of us. Some have sacrificed all to serve.

They all make this decision to serve for a purpose larger than themselves. How can anyone describe the quality of a person willing to do that?

Each and every decision a commander makes balances the needs of these incredible servicemember and the needs of the nation, mission and unit. When I make a decision that doesn't seem to be in the best interests of an individual it is because I am looking at a bigger picture and supporting the needs of the nation, mission and unit.

Happy Trails
Cowboy 6 Out

Command Sgt. Maj. Comments

The Soldiers of the 115th Fires Brigade continue to do amazing things during our training and our deployment. Completion of One Million Miles and searching of over 140,000 individuals and their vehicles demonstrates continual mission focus and an ability to overcome obstacles to get the job done.

We need to be cognizant of how we relate to our fellow Soldiers. I heard a joking comment recently that the sound of Velcro is becoming very annoying. I think it probably wasn't so much of a joke as we continue to stand up to the pressures of the mission and the length of time away from home. I ask all of our Soldiers to be understanding of each other and that little things probably have become annoying right now. Take a step back and think "is this really a big deal" and act accordingly, profes-

sionally and treat each other with dignity and respect. In treating each other with dignity and respect we will continue to develop our teams that will allow us to accomplish the mission to standard and bring everyone home better than when we left.

Along with communicating with each other as Soldiers, please keep in mind that our Families

and friends at home continue to deal with the day to day stresses at home often taking care of the duties of both parents, additional financial management responsibilities and just the worries of having a loved one in harm's way. I ask that we communicate with our loved ones at home with this in mind and express appreciation to them for what they are doing for us back home.

On the 15th of October the organic units of the Brigade will have completed one half of our mobilization. As I take a minute to reflect on our accomplishments, I take a lot of pride in what our Soldiers have accomplished. I am also very proud of how our Soldiers conduct themselves as we have had relatively few incidences compared to a city with the population of what we have in the Brigade.



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenton Franklin

115th Fires Brigade
Commander
Col. Richard Knowlton

Command Sergeant Major
Command Sgt. Maj. Kenton Franklin

Cowboy Thunder Staff

Editor
Master Sgt. Dave Largent

Assistant Editor
Sgt. Robert Walden

Contributing Journalists
Sgt. Katie Gray
Spc. Matthew Oda

On the Cover:



Convoy Escort Teams of the 1st Battalion 151st Field Artillery (FA), 115th Fires Brigade, use MRAPs and armored humvees to escort truck convoys from Kuwait to Iraq. (Pages 8-10)

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115thFiB_PAO@Kuwait.swa.army.mil
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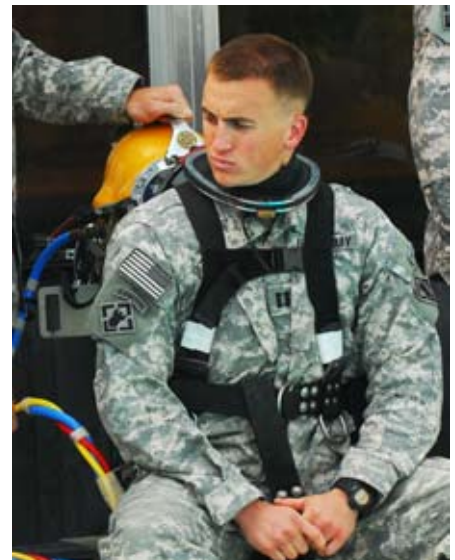
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A Million Miles One Mile at a Time

Story and photos by
Sgt. Robert D Walden

The Security Force and Convoy Security components of the 115th Fires Brigade from Cheyenne Wyo. reached a major milestone Sept. 18 by traveling over one million miles throughout Kuwait and Iraq during the deployment without any serious injuries.

“One million mission miles in less than 60 days on mission, while maintaining an equipment readiness rate throughout the brigade in excess of 90% is a huge success,” said Sgt. Maj. William N. Frost, operations sergeant major, Headquarters, Headquarters Battery 115th FiB. “The vast majority of these miles are driven at night while escorting large convoys that (in the past) have experienced accidents, medical emergencies and the occasional Improvised Explosive Device.”

The Soldiers attribute their safety record to constant training and avoiding complacency.

“We review battle drills and have safety briefs before every mission,”



Soldiers from 1-151 FA modify the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle (MRAP) by putting reflective tape on the steps leading into the cargo compartment at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Sept. 19. This attention to detail shows the mind set that keeps the Soldiers safe while operating around the vehicle.

said Staff Sgt. Shawn M. Hauf, a convoy commander, 2-300 Field Artillery (FA) from the Wyo. National Guard. “There’s always something we are training on to better ourselves and stay prepared

so that we can come home safe.”

After every mission, the Soldiers in the convoy meet to discuss the scenarios they faced and point out the good and bad. They talk about how they could have done things differently to improve the situation and compile this information into an After Action Report. These reports are used to determine training needs and to establish standard operating procedures.

“You learn from each mission because they are all different,” said Hauf. “We escort different trucks, and the terrain and weather changes. The training we do on our off time is to better us and will defeat complacency.”

The 115th FiB mileage started accumulating the end of July when the individual units completed their Relief in Place (RIP) training with the unit they replaced from the 29th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Hawaii National Guard.

“Within the first 30 days, we realized



Pfc. Aaron C. Thoreson, a mechanic with the 1-151 FA from Madison Minn., repairs the air conditioning on a humvee at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, Sept. 19. Thoreson graduated high school last year and joined the Army to become a mechanic and acquire skills that he can use in the civilian community.

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we were accumulating mission miles at an unbelievable rate,” said Frost. “When we started totaling the mileage early after the RIP, the magnitude of the mileage we would accumulate became evident.”

The 1-151 FA from the Minn. National Guard, the 2-300 FA from Wyo. National Guard, and A Company, 960 Brigade Support Battalion from the Wyo. National Guard are the Units conducting convoy security. The 1-147 FA from the S.D. National Guard and the 151 Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) from the Alabama National Guard conduct Security Force missions.

Only the security force and convoy security mission mileage is counted in the brigade’s million miles. This does not count the miles driven from the separate companies conducting other missions. Travel from commanders and staff members for administrative reasons is excluded as well.

The mechanics performing maintenance on the vehicles have also made a significant contribution to the brigade’s first million miles.

“They put 200 to a thousand miles on each vehicle during a mission then bring it in here and we spend about four hours checking it out and doing repairs,” said Sgt. 1st Class Albert R. Marcus, motor sergeant, 1-151 FA. “If its broke, we fix it. If it needs a new engine, we just replace the engine. If it needs springs, we replace the springs,” he added.

“As a rule, we have the vehicles ready by the time the crew is ready to go out again for their next mission,” said Marcus.

According to Frost, the brigade will exceed four million miles during the deployment at the current rate of missions, however; the number of convoys is expected to increase due to the responsible drawdown in Iraq.

“Safety will have to be the Soldiers highest priority in completing these missions,” said Frost. “The next goal will be for each of the individual units to achieve a million miles.”

“This is a big deal for the mechanics as well. If they didn’t keep the vehicles running we wouldn’t have achieved this million mile mark, and we won’t reach future goals,” explained Frost.



Pfc. Justin Sirek, a humvee gunner with the 1-151 FA, Minn. National Guard, prepares the vehicle by washing the windows before departing on a mission at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, Sept. 19. At every stop, Sirek checks the outside of the vehicle from his gunner’s turret on top of the humvee for anything harmful before letting anyone exit the vehicle.



Preparing for a mission, a Soldier from the 2-300 FA, Wyo. National Guard, verifies the equipment serial numbers during a pre-combat check at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, Sept. 20.

Finding Freedom in Confinement

Story and photos by
Spc. Matthew H. Oda

He was sitting in his office as the duty chaplain when the phone rang. Two weeks ago, Chaplain (Lt. Col.) David Hall, 115th Fires Brigade, Headquarters, Headquarters Battery received a call requesting him to visit the confinement center at Camp Arifjan. Little did he realize his visit would result in the first baptism to take place at the confinement center.

He spoke to two service members that day. During their conversation, it became clear to him he was there for a purpose.

“The first person I spoke with was very interested about spiritual matters, and, as we spoke about what a Christian is, her face lit up,” said Hall. “After talking

“I told her how appropriate it seemed that she was finding freedom in a place of confinement,” Chaplain Hall

about this for awhile I asked if she wanted to pray and trust Him for her salvation. She said yes without hesitation. So we prayed right then and there and it was joyful. As I then spoke further of the completeness of forgiveness, and how there is a party in heaven when one person comes to the Lord, tears started to roll down her face and that was evidence of the new found freedom she discovered. I told her how appropriate it seemed that she was finding freedom in a place of confinement,” he said.

“I explained that baptism is an outward display of how our sins were buried with Christ and how coming up out of the water is a



Chaplain (Lt. Col.) David Hall, 115th Fires Brigade, Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, hugs a service member after her baptism at the confinement center on Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

picture of our new forgiveness and relationship with Him,” said Hall, who called himself a dunker. “She was still smiling and said this made sense as well. I asked if she would like to get baptized and the

answer was an immediate yes.”

The other person requesting a visit from the chaplain had committed

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his life to Christ about three months earlier.

“He had the same look on his face about his faith just like the first person I spoke with, the look of excitement, freedom and joy,” said Hall. “He also had not been baptized, but was very interested in doing so. The Lord had obviously prepared two hearts for this moment,” he added.

“I told them both I did not know if it was possible to pull it off in their present situation, but I would try,” he said.

The personnel at the confinement facility were very helpful and more than willing to make it happen. They picked up the baptistery from the chapel (a wooden box with a liner to put the water in) and moved it to the confinement’s main yard. They filled it with water and about six bags of ice to cool it down and brought a couple of their staff to witness the event.

The chaplain said he can’t say enough about how nice the confine-



Staff Sgt. Norman Bartley, chaplain's assistant, 115th Fires Brigade stands by to assist with the baptism.



ment facility personnel were to work with.

“Because they are Navy, it was a joint event so I should have known they would be good with water,” said Hall. Their commander said

Chaplain Hall dunks a service member for their baptism, as three members of the confinement facilities staff witness the event.

this was, to the best of his recollection, a first at that site.”

“Both of these military members told me during a later visit what a meaningful experience this was for them. From their faces and words I already knew this was true. Their lives had been changed,” said Hall.

“While I am most excited for them, I know this will be one of the highlights of my deployment,” Hall exclaimed. “I wish you could see their faces!”

Note: Names were not used to protect identities of confined service members.



Chaplain Hall prepares to baptize a service member at the confinement center in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

MRAPS: MINNESOTA GUARD RELIES ON THEM FOR CONVOY ESCORT MISSION

Story by Master Sgt. Dave Largent

The Convoy Escort Teams of the 1st Battalion 151st Field Artillery (FA), 115th Fires Brigade, are using Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles and armored humvees to escort truck convoys from Kuwait to Iraq, ensuring Soldiers have the supplies they need.

The battalion, based in Minn., is finishing its second month of running the convoy security missions.

“My battalion is currently at 495,000

(miles) with four crews coming back last night. So we should be over half a million miles now,” said Lt. Col. Scott A. St. Sauver, commander, 1-151 FA. With the miles from the four crews returning the night before, they completed 163 missions for a total of 512,504 miles for their battalion alone.

The number of miles in such a short period of time is impressive to most, but even more rewarding is that they’ve driven so many miles without any serious accidents.

Safety is a primary concern for all



The gunners view is great, but the ride can get bumpy. (photo provided by 1-151 FA Battalion)

members when scheduling, planning and conducting their missions concerning the safety of their Soldiers, vehicles and the local population.

Using an MRAP as the lead vehicle has a lot of benefits to the Combat Escort Teams (CETs). They have enough MRAPs to have one in each of their CETs with extra to rotate in if they have maintenance problems. They also have a couple configured as ambulances.

The escort teams use the MRAP to add to their survivability. “We need to keep our Soldiers safe and the MRAP does it,” said St. Sauver.

“My mission is long haul; we go from North to South (Iraq). The missions last anywhere from six to ten days,” said St. Sauver. “We put the meanest, toughest vehicles up front. (MRAPs) are a high visibility platform, have night vision capabilities and are the most survivable platform in case of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED),” said St. Sauver.

Additional advantages are its height. Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs) and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are less effective against it and it’s safer for the occupants with the armor it carries.

“I’ve got a visual of everything and my guys don’t have to relay the situation back to me,” said Staff Sgt. James R. Otto, CET leader, A Battery, 1-151 FA from Tracy, Minn..

“The MRAP is an asset we have

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After completion of the Pre Combat Checks and Pre Combat Inspections an Escort Team member guides the MRAP out of the inspection area. (photo by Master Sgt. Dave Largent)

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that provides increased security and protection for our Soldiers to increase their survivability. The MRAP is a lead vehicle that can take a hit and survive. It helps our Soldiers come home safe,” said Capt. Jeff M. Nelson, commander, A Battery, 1-151 FA from Zimmerman, Minn..

But it’s not all good.

“The seat is very uncomfortable, not very soft. It’s like a metal folding chair that’s not very comfortable. It’s bumpy in back, like riding a school bus, but some versions are getting better,” said Otto.

“It’s a bumpy ride but I think the benefits are worth it; you definitely feel a lot safer,” said Pfc. Craig A. Dokken, MRAP gunner, C Battery, 1-151 FA. He’s on his second tour, both with the National Guard. Ten days is the longest mission he’s been on.

The MRAPs have only been used here for the CET missions a few months.

“Our predecessors (29th Infantry Brigade Combat Team based in Hawaii) received the MRAPs a couple months before we arrived,” said St. Sauver.

While it takes time for the operators to learn the MRAP, it can also throw a wrench into the maintenance operations. Since it’s fairly new to the Army inventory it will take some time to get the mechanics trained to repair and maintain the MRAP.

“These are a new vehicle to us; we’ve only been working on them since we got here,” said Sgt. 1st Class Albert R. Marcus, motor sergeant, Headquarters 1-151 FA.

“Our mechanics train each other. Four of our mechanics have deployed before and they train the younger guys.”

One disadvantage is maintenance.

“The added stuff is what goes wrong. It’s vehicle specific, if you take care of it and maintain it, it’s better,” said Otto.

“Once you know a vehicle, it’s a huge benefit. You recognize new sounds and know you need to check it,” he explained.



Staff Sgt. Jonah R. Jenniges, A battery 1-151 Field Artillery, provides over watch at a river crossing north of Baghdad. (photo provided by 1-151 FA Battalion)

“It’s like an old dump truck. The truck is alright, but it’s all the stuff added on that gives us problems,” said Marcus referring to the MRAP. It’s not an overall problem; each vehicle has its own mechanical personality according to Marcus.

His mechanics work with the drivers who find and report the problems, so the mechanics can get them fixed.

“I’ve had small issues, nothing major. If it was serious it would take longer than a Humvee to get repaired,” said Otto. “It’s hard to get them worked on while at Forward Operating Bases because not all mechanics are familiar with MRAPs,” he added.

“The operators bring them in as good of condition as can be expected,” said Marcus. “Then the mechanics run them through inspections and repair any deficiencies to get them ready for the next mission.”

“They put 200 to a thousand miles on each vehicle during a mission then bring it in here and we spend about four hours checking it out and doing repairs,” said Marcus.

The repairs can range from changing a light bulb, to replacing the springs in the suspension system, to more major repairs.

“If it’s broke, we fix it. If it needs a new engine, we just replace the engine. If it needs springs, we replace the springs,” said Marcus. “As a rule we have the vehicles ready by the time the crew is ready to go out again for the next mission,” said Marcus.

According to Marcus, the time goes by pretty fast because the mechanics are busy. Being a National Guard unit, the mechanics bring a lot of skills from their civilian jobs that help them with their work at Camp Buehring.

“We have guys who weld, electricians, fabricators and air conditioning guys in their civilian jobs. They all use those skills from civilian jobs here,” Marcus said.

The mechanics aren’t the only ones getting high speed training.

“Here it’s the staff sergeants who are out there getting it done. The E-6s are out where the rubber meets the road,” said Nelson, it’s some of the best small unit leadership duty and training you can get. These guys are on the road anywhere from four days to ten days, some up to two-and-a-half to three weeks. It’s a very significant responsibility for an E-5 or E6.

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Truly they are the boss when they are out on the road. It's a fantastic opportunity to develop leadership skills."

Responsible leadership, dedicated Soldiers and good training is the key to their success.

"The key is hands on training, especially for a National Guard Field Artillery unit. We don't have the MRAPs in our unit back home, so we are training everyone we can on the MRAP during our deployment. We do rollover training and refresher rollover training. Even after Soldiers return from leave, we do refresher training," said St. Sauver.

"Before every mission we do Pre Combat Checks (PCC) and Pre Combat Inspections (PCI) and make sure Soldiers have done Preventative Maintenance, Checks and Services (PMCS) and help with anything we can," said 1st Lt. Jeffrey J. Halla, platoon leader, A Battery 1-151 FA. They do the PCCs and PCIs to ensure a second set of eyes are check-



Sgt. 1st Class Douglas D. Anderson, C Battery, 1-151 FA, gives a thumbs up signaling that the lights on their MRAP are properly functioning. (photo by Master Sgt. Dave Largent)

ing equipment and personnel before sending them out on the convoys, according to Halla.

According to the Soldiers of the 1-151 FA that drive and maintain MRAPs,

they're worth all the time and effort it takes to keep them running.

"It's the best platform to keep our crews safe. I want more of them," said St. Sauver. 🇺🇸



MRAPs are washed and turned into the maintenance section after each mission. Any minor deficiencies are corrected and the vehicle is prepared for the next mission. (photo by Master Sgt. Dave Largent)



From left to right: Sgt. 1st Class Brett Boyer, Capt. Russell Destremps, Col. Richard Knowlton, and 1st Lt. Joseph Lunn walk underwater with the guidon to the center of the pool to perform the 86th Engineer Dive Team change of command ceremony, which took place at Camp Patriot, Kuwait, Sept. 24.

Underwater Change of Command

Story by Spc. Matthew Oda
 Photos by Sgt. Chaise Turner

The former commander of the 86th Engineer Dive Team relinquished his command Sept. 24, and passed it on to the new commander during a change-of-command ceremony held underwater at Camp Patriot, Kuwait.

First Lieutenant Joseph Lunn succeeded Capt. Russell Destremps, who's started with the unit on Sept. 6, as a team leader. Destremps left the unit last summer to fill a staff position at Camp Patriot. After being there for several months, he discovered his unit was deploying to his location. Army Central Command became aware of this and relocated him to join the unit as the commander for their deployment last March.

The ceremony was held underwater at the camp's pool to honor a dive team tradition.

"It goes along with the traditions of what we do in the dive field," said Destremps. "Our job set is unique; therefore our change of command ceremony should follow suit with that. It also gives

an opportunity for everyone else to come out, see, and participate in a change of command ceremony that's not like every other one," explained Destremps.

His first time commanding a dive team, the 24-year-old Lunn has many expectations to uphold and traditions to learn.

"We will continue to keep the high expectations and traditions of being a deep sea diver," said Lunn. "We will continue with our mission, not lose focus, and within the next few months increase our

operational tempo," he added. "Ever since I've been running with the team when we first deployed, I got to know the ins and outs of everything so I have no fears about anything. Working together we've developed a great camaraderie, and I know my leadership will pull through whenever we face those



1st Lt. Joseph Lunn (left) receives the guidon from Col. Richard Knowlton (right) as they perform a change of command ceremony underwater for the 86th Engineer Dive Team at Camp Patriot, Kuwait, Sept. 24.



1st Lt. Joseph Lunn swims to the bottom of the pool on his way to take command of the 86th Engineer Dive Team.

Protecting Home from Abroad

Story and photos by
Spc. Matthew Oda

Deploying for the first time in his Army career, Spc. Robert Buechler, fire direction control specialist for the multiple launch rocket system, is learning valuable skills to take home while he works as

part of the security force at the Sea Port of Debarkation site in Kuwait. The SPOD is where all the equipment, supplies, and vehicles for mobilized units are shipped to theater. Buechler is responsible for making sure only authorized people and equipment are allowed to get on the SPOD.

“We search all the equipment

to look for contraband and check everyone’s I.D. Basically, we are the security of the SPOD, keeping it secure and safe,” said Buechler.

Even though he joined the guard in May 2008, Buechler is still the new guy of the unit. He is in 3rd Platoon, C Battery, 1-147 Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard.

“His workmanship abilities are outstanding,” said Staff Sgt. James Meyer, Buechler’s squad leader. “He takes his orders and drives on to excel with whatever his task may be. It can be anything like moving a pile of dirt. He will turn it into a pile of gold by the way he handles it,” he added.

On orders for deployment since April, Buechler spent a couple months training at Fort Hood, Texas and arrived in Kuwait about two months ago.

“It’s not too bad. I’ve heard a lot of stories from friends of mine who have been deployed before and veterans in the battery who have been to Iraq,” said Buechler. “They were telling me stories of how hot it is and what the people and land features are like. I had a pretty good idea from all that but it’s nothing compared to when you first experience it yourself. When we landed here and stepped off the plane, it was like walking into a convection oven! It was just hot and windy I’ve never felt anything like it before it’s definitely an eye opener,” he said.

After work, Buechler likes to workout and run with a group of friends he has made while in Kuwait.

“We have a lot of fun challenging each other,” said 36-year-old Buechler. “It’s fun because we keep each other motivated and push each other so it becomes a competition between us. We lift a lot and do a lot of running to help pass the time,” he added.

Buechler also loves to speak with



Spc. Robert Buechler, 3rd Platoon, C Battery, 1-147 Field Artillery, South Dakota Army National Guard, stands in front of an up armored humvee after coming back from a day’s work at the Sea Port of Debarkation near Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

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his wife Amanda every night through Skype, an internet video chat service. On occasion, he also gets to speak to his daughter Morgan from his previous marriage. Being able to speak to his family makes being deployed easier.

“Eight o’clock p.m. here is noon back home so my wife’s boss was good enough to let her talk with me during that noon hour at work,” said Buechler. “Once a week, my ex would drop off my daughter at my wife’s place and I usually get to speak with my daughter on Skype as well and hear about what she learned during the last week of school. I was surprised at how easy it was to communicate with family back home, which made it a lot easier to cope with being deployed,” he said with a smile on his face.

Being newlyweds, Buechler and

Amanda plan on celebrating their first anniversary a little early in the month of Feb. while he’s home for R&R. They plan on celebrating their honeymoon when the deployment is finished because they didn’t get a chance to have one due to the mobilization. Amanda’s birthday and Valentine’s Day are both in the month of Feb. so they plan on consolidating everything into one big celebration.

“Feb. 1st is her birthday, and then you know of course there’s Valentine’s Day, followed by our anniversary on the 28th, so in that two-week period (R&R) we are just going to celebrate those three things at once,” said Buechler. “When this deployment is done, we plan on taking our honeymoon in the Florida Keys. We wanted to go somewhere warm and exotic and somewhat close to the country,” explained Buechler.

As a police officer back home for

the past 11-1/2 years with the Yankton Police Department, Buechler is the senior patrolman, taking the responsibility when the supervisor is not around.

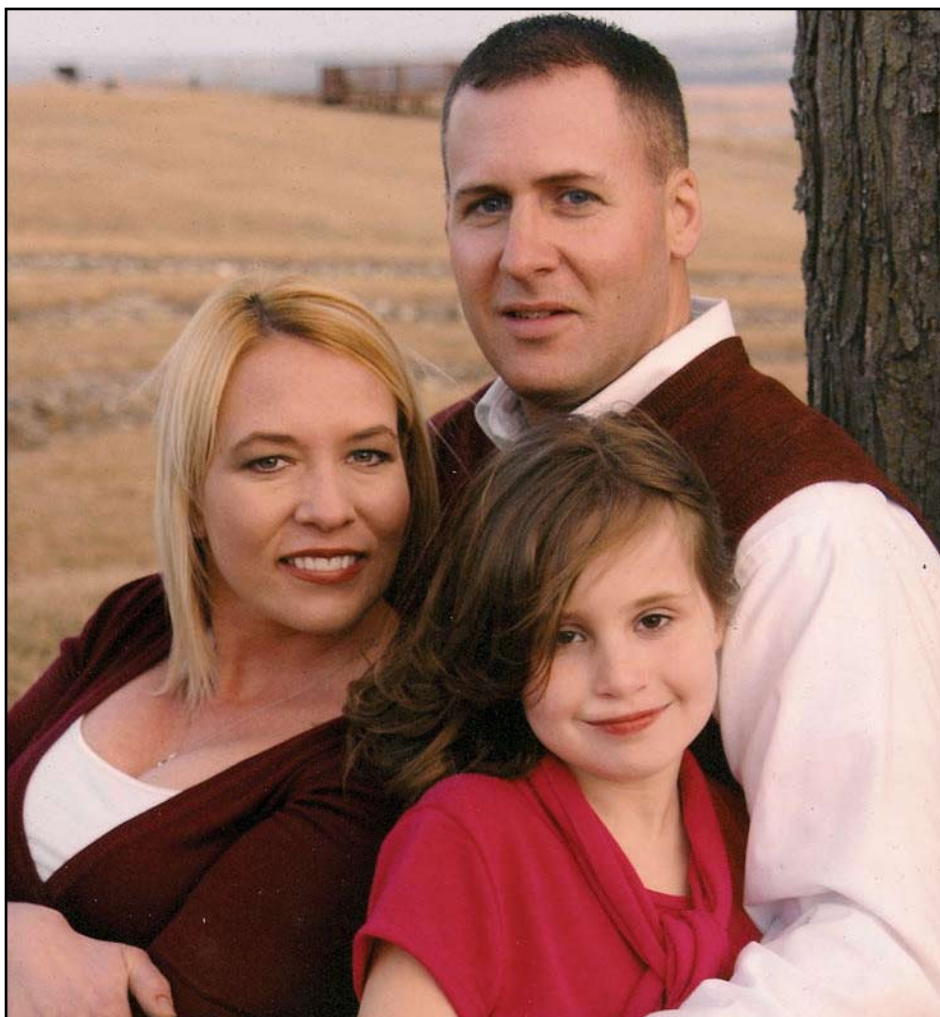
“It’s a pretty demanding job, but I like it because it’s challenging and there’s always something to do, although it’s not as glamorous as what you see on T.V.,” said Buechler. “It also helped me prepare for the military because the police is a paramilitary force. There is a Chief of Police and an assistant, and then there’s squads headed by a Sgt., then a corporal, who are both in charge of officers. We have inspections just like we have in the military and carry firearms,” he said.

With new ways of searching vehicles and building, and different perspectives I’ve gained from the Army, I can apply them to my job as a police officer. We get so set in our ways on how we are going to search things at home that I can say, ‘well hey this is what I learned in the Army, how about we try and do it this way?’” he added.

“His prior experience as a cop really helped him transition well into the military,” said Sgt. Clay Simonsen, Buechler’s team leader. “He’s very focused, self driven, and pays attention to detail very well,” he added.

Back home when he’s not working, he likes to play the guitar, spend time with friends, do some yard work, and go to the family farm about 25 miles north of Yankton and help out there.

“I have these roses that use to belong to my grandmother up at the farm and when she passed on, I transplanted them to my place in Yankton and spend a lot of time with them, trying to keep them living because they hold sentimental value to me,” explained Buechler. “They are kind of an unusual rose, with an off white color and pink stripes on them like a candy cane. My wife has been taking care of them all summer, and when we chat using Skype she holds the computer so I can see them. They’re all looking good, so I know she’s doing a good job,” he said with a proud look on his face. 🌹



Spc. Buechler and his wife Amanda and third-grade daughter Morgan in Yankton, SD. (photo provided by Amanda Buechler)

Best Reward: Wearing the Uniform

Story and photos by
Sgt. Robert D Walden

God fearing, motivating, and challenge driven is one way to describe Spc. Aaron J. Reynolds, a chemical specialist serving with the 61st Chemical Company from Ft. Lewis, Wash., a unit attached to the 115th Fires Brigade from Cheyenne, Wyo. in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"I sometimes feel a little over driven," explained Reynolds. "I love to take care of and inspire Soldiers to do better, and be better. I want my fellow Soldier to know that their service to their country matters," said Reynolds.

This West African native has a unique outlook on life and service in the military. Much of his early life was spent in the war torn city Monroeville, Liberia.

"I missed my first daughter's birth because of the civil war," said Reynolds. "She was born Oct. 29, 1989, which was the onset of the civil war in Liberia."

"I was on one side of the town and they were on the other. When the fighting broke out, we were separated," explained Reynolds. "I actually didn't see them for a few years. She came to the United States at the age of six, and I came over a couple years later and was able to see her. So, when I first saw her she was already grown."

"Liberia is like a sister country to the United States," explained Reynolds. "We have had political and economic relations since 1847. The first free slaves landed there after the emancipation from the states."

Reynolds came to the U.S. about nine years ago and settled in Chicago, Ill. He completed his bachelor's degree while in Liberia and has completed a master's degree in business since moving to the States. Reynolds and his wife have been married four years and just had their first child.

"I went on leave and was able to be there for her birth," he said with a big smile. "That was pretty awesome."

"I'm glad that I was there to help

her the first couple weeks because it was pretty hard on her and the baby getting adjusted," said Reynolds. "But after the first two weeks the baby started to settle down and my wife got used to having a new born."

In his free time, Reynolds talks with his wife, swims, and plays soccer. He plays on a team called AJ United. According to Reynolds, they are pretty good and are second in the league behind a team from 1st Theater Sustainment Command.

"I'm trying to improve on swimming," said Reynolds. "I love the water. I also read and spend time on the internet. I call my wife almost every other day and we do internet calls on Skype or Yahoo."

After moving to the States, one of the challenges Reynolds faced was becoming a U.S. citizen. His desire to become a citizen inspired him, and helped him take the steps to join the Army.

"I had always wanted to join the military, so I joined, and after about four months I became a U.S. citizen," explained Reynolds. "I love it here. This is something that I would have done ten years ago if I didn't have the interruption as result of the civil war back home."

"What I like about the military is that we teach Soldiers to strive for better and to press forward," said Reynolds. "It will not only benefit the Soldiers, but also the military for Soldiers to go for more education, higher leadership and to become an officer."

"I believe in maximizing my full potential," said Reynolds. "I love the capacity in which I serve, but I would like to become an officer. That is what I will strive for."

Before Reynolds joined the Army on Aug. 23, 2007, he did a lot of research and chose to go into chemical because it interested him, and he wanted to work in a field that is challenging and new.

"I wanted to do something different. Both of my degrees are in business and I worked in retail," explained Reynolds. "I had done some research



Spc. Aaron J. Reynolds has a positive attitude about life and service in the military. "I love the capacity in which I serve, but I would like to become an officer. That is what I will strive for."

and heard about chemical weapons and times they had been used. While speaking to the recruiter, he listed that as one of my options and I decided to do it."

"While working in retail, one of the things that got to me was that we are exposed to so many different chemicals from fragrance, to sprays and aerosol," said Reynolds. "I wondered what would happen if this store caught on fire and imagined the amount of poisoning that would spread out in the store instantly."

"I believe the best thing about being in chemical is having the knowledge and being proactive with it. Chemical is like any other disease that has the potential to spread and kill people," said Reynolds. "I like being in a position to teach and train people by spreading knowledge on how to prevent it, or to countermeasure it, and how to prepare for a chemical attack."

Reynolds uses his experience and the things he has learned in the military to make his house a safer place.

"One of the first things I did in my home after basic training and Advanced Individual Training was to rearrange all the stuff in my house,

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and I told my wife about what I had learned,” said Reynolds. “I didn’t realize what kind of reaction we could have just by having chlorine in the same spot with something that contains formaldehyde. We changed the way we were containing the chemicals and made sure to store them separately.”

“The worst part would be responding to an attack in which the enemy actually deploys a chemical,” said Reynolds. “Even with the anthrax scare in the states a few years back. There were a few deaths from it, but the anthrax attacks also created a sense of terror and panic for so many people.”

While on deployment in Kuwait, Reynolds works in a chemical reconnaissance platoon.

“The company is a heavy decontamination unit,” explained Reynolds. “We spend our time trying to detect and identify possible chemical munitions being used.”

“We primarily do this by using a Fox reconnaissance vehicle,” said Reynolds. “We are able to drive this vehicle into an area and extend a probe to the ground which draws vapor from the ground or the air. The probe can then analyze it, to determine what chemical agent is in the environment. We also have a type of laser that can detect chemical vapor in the air.”

Some of the goals that Reynolds has during this deployment are to

raise his ASVAB scores, and to improve his fitness level.

“I’ve always been pretty good on fitness, but I want a better score,” said Reynolds. “My company standard is 250. Right now I’m at 277, and before I leave here I want to get a 290 or 300.”

“I have also advanced in my military education by taking correspondence courses, and I am scheduled for a promotion board in November,” explained Reynolds.

“Between now and the end of deployment, I also want to submit a packet to go to officer Candidate School.”

Reynolds background has helped him focus on the important things in life, and increased his desire to sustain a higher way of life.

“Where I’m from, I’ve seen chaos,” said Reynolds. “Most of the young people I work with on a day to day basis don’t understand what its like to go without running water or electricity for about five years straight. They have not really seen atrocities of war and what it can be like.”

Reynolds is serving his country honorably to protect a way of life where men can live peacefully, with their wives and children, practicing their religion and worshipping God.

He is doing his part for a country at war, to promote peace, and to ensure that the freedom and stability

that our citizens enjoy will remain.

“Being in this uniform means that we are willing to pay a price so that our fellow Americans and people around the world can live in peace,” said Reynolds. “For me, this is pretty important. My uniform is my reward. I am honored by the men that serve next to me. Like myself, they are willing to die, which is the greatest sacrifice that someone could ever give to our fellow Americans so they can sustain their way of life.”

“It’s great to be in the service. I want every American and every Soldier to understand that being in uniform isn’t just a job,” Reynolds explained. “It’s more than a career. It’s a way of life. It’s

about protecting and defending that way of life. I think that everyone should understand that this way of life is worth fighting and dying for. Being in this uniform is probably the best reward I will ever have.”



Spc. Aaron J. Reynolds

Clarification

The “Joint CBRN Training Helps Fight Global War on Terrorism” story on pages 11-12 in the last issue of the **Cowboy Thunder** was erroneously attributed to 1st Lt. Benjamin G. Abbott and should have been credited to Cpl. Justin Martinez, USMC.

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