

# THE WIRE

A JTF Journal



**General Zanetti  
says farewell**  
Experiences, expectations

**Puerto Rico  
National Guard**  
Making the mission run smoothly

# Family Sacrifices

**Air Force Senior Master Sgt.  
Christopher Foster**

474<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron

The year was 1775, and America was at war with Great Britain. It was June 14 and more than 2,000 British Soldiers were in Boston, marching toward Bunker Hill. With the men off to war and their families left at home to defend themselves and look after the farm, the sacrifices made were enormous. Crops destroyed, homes burned, and family members killed – these were some of the hardships endured by military families.

August 1914 to November 1918 was the time of the First World War. During this time 65 million men were mobilized, more than 10 million were killed, and over 20 million wounded.

During World War II – September 1939 to September 1945 – 100 million people were mobilized. Approximately 70 million people – the majority of them civilians – were killed, making it the deadliest conflict in history.

The Korean War, 1950 to 1953, gave the United States more than 54,000 casualties, 103,000 wounded, and 8,196 missing in action. Total enemy casualties exceeded 1.5 million. Even now nobody really knows the number of civilian casualties.

The Vietnam War, or conflict, lasted from 1959 to April 1975. Fatalities included between 3 and 4 million Vietnamese from both sides, 1.5 to 2 million Laotians and Cambodians, and 58,159 United States Soldiers.

As you can see with all of the casualties and sacrifices made from past wars, millions of families have endured great suffering. Grandparents lost grandchildren, fathers and mothers lost sons and daughters, husbands and wives lost their spouses, children lost their parents. There is no greater sacrifice than Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen or Marines giving their lives for their country, but parents should never have to bury their own children, no children should have to grow up not knowing their father or mother, and no spouse should be left alone to raise the family they began together.

However, we know too often this does occur. Being military personnel and a part of the military family, we should all be aware of these realities.

While we are deployed, we know the problems that occur back home – cars breaking down, roofs leaking, children getting into trouble at school, loved ones getting hurt or seriously sick.

Just remember that as your spouses and family members are following their normal day-to-day routines, they are also trying to fill your shoes.

At times, they are getting a bit frustrated, angry, lonely, and scared. These are all normal reactions, and most can be smoothed over by keeping the communication lines open. As much as you need air and water, you need to hear from your spouse and they need to hear from you.

After your deployment is over and you're returning home to the hero's welcome you deserve, with everyone telling you how proud they are of you and the job you did, enjoy it. As the dust settles and things start to get back to normal, gather the family together and let them know what a great job they did while you were gone. Share with them how important the role they played to make the deployment/mission a success. Let them know we are a team. Tell them how proud you are of them. Because no one can, nor ever will, deliver this message like you. ★



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**Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Anthony Romero, a J-3 NCO with the 111<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Brigade (Forward) lights luminarias which were placed along the roads and sidewalks, lighting the way to the Naval Station chapel at the top of the hill. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Staff Sgt. Emily J. Russell**



The WIRE is the official news magazine of Joint Task Force Guantanamo. It is produced by the JTF Public Affairs Office to inform and educate the Troopers of JTF Guantanamo through news, features, command guidance, sports and entertainment. The WIRE seeks to provide maximum disclosure with minimum delay with regards to security, accuracy, propriety and policy. This DoD news magazine is an authorized publication for the members of the Department of Defense. Contents of The WIRE are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or Joint Task Force Guantanamo. It is printed by the Document Automation & Production Service with a circulation of 1000.

# Puerto Rico takes over HHC

**Army Pfc.  
Eric Liese**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

With the change of a year comes changes for Joint Task Force Guantanamo. Now, the JTF's Headquarters, Headquarters Company is handled by a different unit – new to the island and the Army.

The 191<sup>st</sup> Regional Support Group of the Puerto Rico Army National Guard deployed approximately 100 of its 1100 Soldiers to the JTF, replacing Soldiers from the New Mexico Army National Guard to take over operations of the Camp America HHC.

"We'll be here taking charge of the logistical side of the house, and be here making sure the whole mission runs smoothly," said Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Miguel Bonilla, the new first sergeant of the HHC.

Though the JTF already has Puerto Rico Guardsmen serving as gate and area security, the 191<sup>st</sup> RSG has never before sent personnel here – or anywhere else for that matter.

The 191<sup>st</sup> has only been in existence since 2008, when it was stood up during an overall transformation of the PRNG.

As a regional support group, the 191<sup>st</sup> "provides command and control structure for non-major combat operations, and assists [active and reserve] units in meeting training, readiness and deployment requirement," said Army Lt. Col. Millie Rosa with the PRNG.

The 191<sup>st</sup>'s deployment to the JTF is the first mobilization in the unit's brief history. Bonilla marks his unit's Guantanamo mission as an important milestone, saying they are "making history in the unit itself."

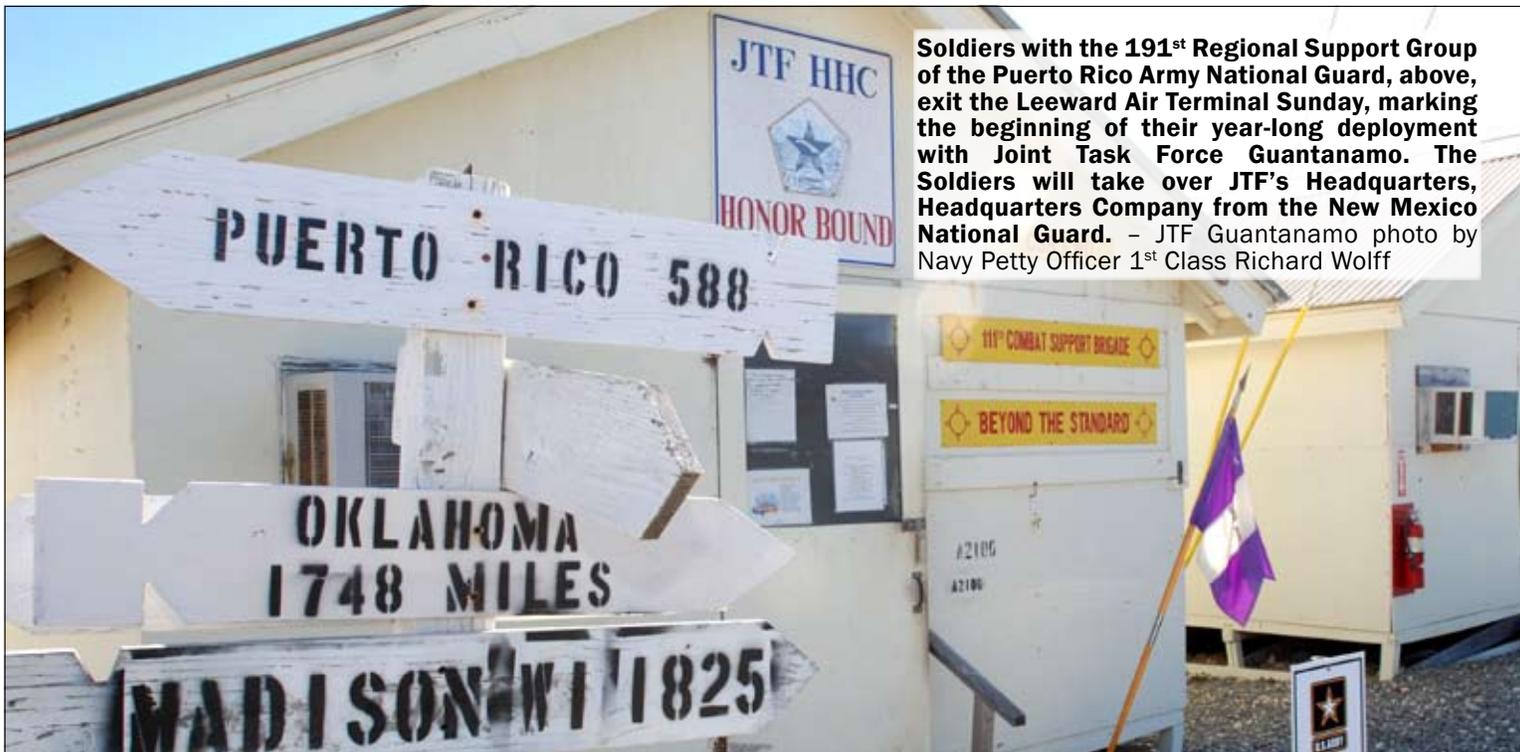
As the new first sergeant of the HHC, Bonilla commands 30 years of military experience with multiple backgrounds. He spent 12 years on active duty, with about half that time in Germany and half in the U.S., with another 18 years with the Guard.

Bonilla was previously activated for nine months as a platoon sergeant with a military police unit to Fort Buchanan, San Juan, Puerto Rico, after the terror attacks of

Sept. 11, 2001. He also holds a background in field artillery and is currently classified as an infantryman.

"We have high-experienced personnel in all areas," Bonilla said of his company. "My Troopers are all highly motivated, and they're looking forward to completing all the assigned tasks to them to the best of their ability. So I don't have any doubt that we'll be able to comply with the mission and be successful in ours."

Bonilla closed with a few words of encouragement for all his Soldiers, as well as all JTF personnel: "Give your best, live the values, and always put the nation first." 🇺🇸



**Soldiers with the 191<sup>st</sup> Regional Support Group of the Puerto Rico Army National Guard, above, exit the Leeward Air Terminal Sunday, marking the beginning of their year-long deployment with Joint Task Force Guantanamo. The Soldiers will take over JTF's Headquarters, Headquarters Company from the New Mexico National Guard. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Navy Petty Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class Richard Wolff**



**Soldiers of the 111th Combat Support Brigade (Forward) stand by their unit emblem, Oct. 21.** – JTF Guantanamo photo by Navy Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Patrick Thompson

# Second Cuba tour completed

**Army Spc.  
Megan Burnham**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

As the new year begins, the Joint Task Force will go through some changes as the 111<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Brigade (Forward) of the New Mexico National Guard completes their mission, and the Puerto Rico National Guard returns for their fourth deployment.

This is the second time the New Mexico National Guard has deployed to Cuba, their first mission was quite different. It was in 1898 when the New Mexico Guardsmen first served with Teddy Roosevelt's "Rough Riders" and took part in the legendary charge of San Juan Hill near Santiago, Cuba.

More than 100 years later, in January 2008, the New Mexico National Guard deployed to Guantanamo Bay to relieve the Puerto Rico National Guard as the Headquarters, Headquarters Company of the JTF.

"We basically deployed to be the command element of the JTF," said Army Sgt. Maj. Matt Aragon. "The mission was stressful at first, but we took charge and have been doing an outstanding job ever since."

As the unit first arrived, everyone was assigned to a specific mission that related to their military occupational specialty. The

different missions included: transportation, military commissions, support Headquarters of the HHC, engineering, the Joint Detention Group, operations, supply, security and administration.

"A majority came already knowing what they needed to do and had prior training," said Aragon. "When we had to fill slots, we tried to recruit Soldiers with the required MOS."

"A lot of the officers were assigned different and unfamiliar jobs," Aragon added, "but they soon learned and exceeded in their work which demonstrated good caliber of the officers."

This deployment was New Mexico's first time working in a joint environment, where different languages and styles of work were put to the test.

"There was a noticeable change when we got here, but everyone did their part and performed their work to standard," said Army Sgt. Griselda Holquin. "This all paid off because we'll be leaving [the JTF] on a good note."

"Everyone has developed in their leadership and organization skills," Aragon said, "and raised the bar of the standard operating procedures."

Army Brig. Gen. Gregory Zanetti, ground forces commander of the New Mexico National Guard, said that he was also exceptionally proud of how the New

**New Mexico's state flag flies in front of the HHC building at Camp America.**



Mexico Soldiers performed at Guantanamo Bay.

"They are knowledgeable, professional, and dedicated Soldiers, America's best," said Zanetti.

As the Puerto Rico National Guard returns to Guantanamo Bay, Aragon had some encouraging words and advice to ease the transition.

"We're going to take advantage of the time we're here together so [the Puerto Rico National Guard] can ask us any questions they might need to accomplish the mission and to ease the transformation. We're going to ensure they can do the best job possible because they are the command element and they have to set the standard for the JTF."

"My advice to the Puerto Rico National Guard is to stay flexible," added Zanetti. "Much will be changing at Guantanamo Bay in 2009 but, I know they will perform the mission admirably." 🇺🇸

# JTF gets visit from Imam

**Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class  
Vaughn R. Larson**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

One of only two Muslim chaplains in the U.S. Air Force paid a visit to the naval station over the holidays.

Before Air Force Capt. Walid Habash arrived in mid-December, it had been about one and one-half years since the last visit by a Muslim chaplain.

Navy Lt. Cmdr. Clint Pickett, the Joint Task Force Guantanamo command chaplain, said he hopes it doesn't take another 18 months or so for a return visit.

"It's our goal to have one down here twice a year," Pickett said.

There are an estimated 6,500 Muslims in the U.S. armed forces, according to Habash. While exact numbers were not provided, Pickett said there are practicing Muslims at Guantanamo Bay, in uniform and out. It is these individuals Habash came to see, not the approximately 250 detainees here.

However, Habash emphasized that he is here to serve everyone regardless of their particular faith.

"I function like every other chaplain in the armed forces," he explained. "In addition, I attend to Muslim needs."

Those needs include the five daily prayers, Friday worship services and Muslim holy days. He conducted the Maghrib (sunset) and Isha (evening) prayers Dec. 17 at the base mosque – a room across from the main chapel on the naval station – as well as Friday services.

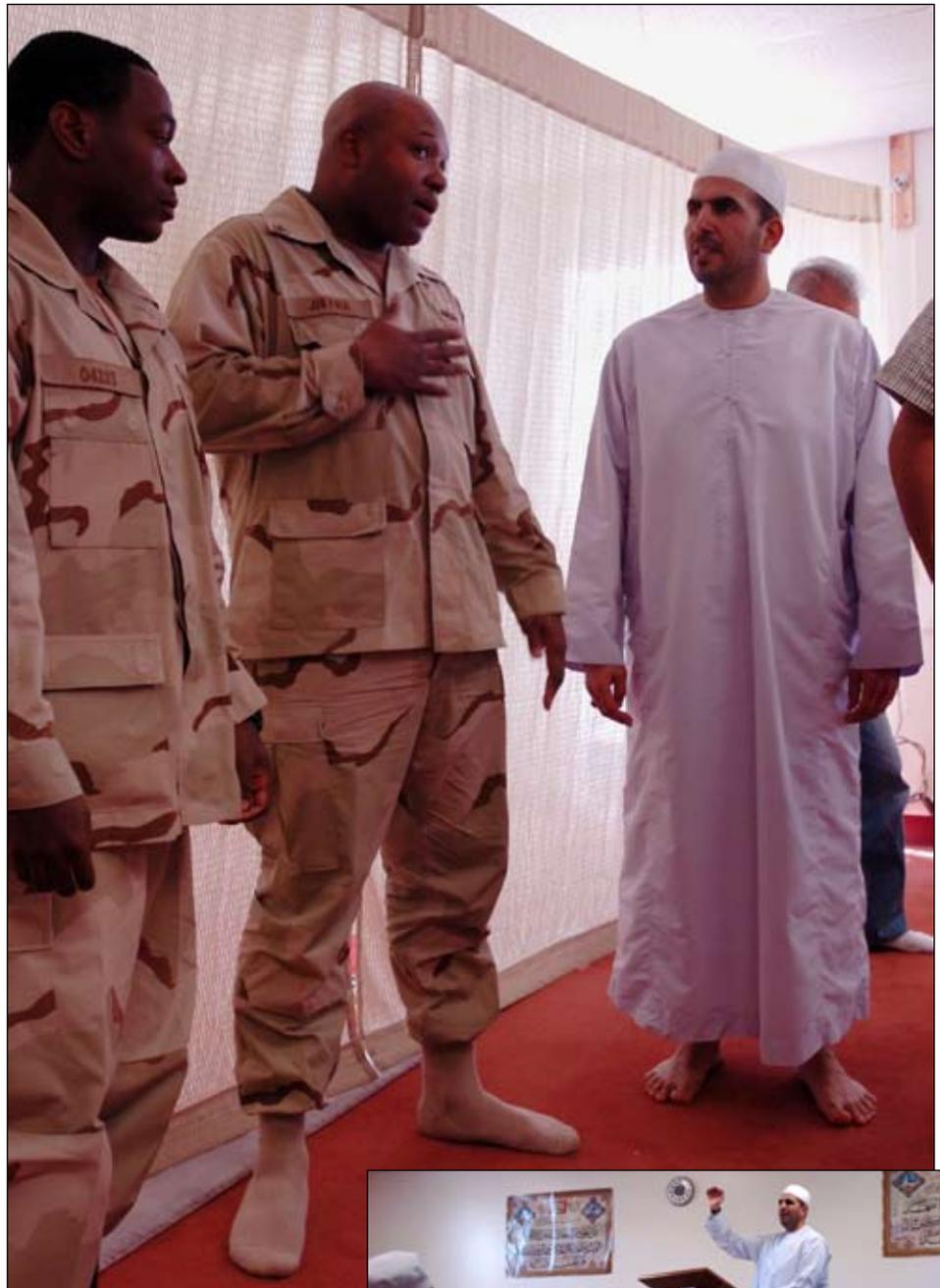
Habash said he may also be asked to provide briefings on the Islamic faith or culture, depending on the situation.

Habash conducted his Masters degree studies at the Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences in Leesburg, Va. Following that, he spent two years in clinical pastoral education at a clinical hospital in Ohio. This provided the civilian experience required by the Department of Defense to become a military chaplain. He has served as a chaplain for more than five years and is presently stationed at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

Habash did not describe himself as either a Sunni or a Shiite.

"I see myself as someone really following the authentic teachings of Islam without creating boundaries or obstacles for either sect," he said. "The prophet Mohammed was neither Sunni or Shiite – those things did not exist at that time. The goal is to be obedient and submissive to the almighty God."

Pickett acknowledged that all chaplains experience misconceptions about their faith to some degree. Habash



**Air Force Chaplain Capt. Walid Habash speaks to Troopers from the Joint Detention Group, above, following a prayer service Friday, Dec. 19. At right, Habash speaks on values prior to the call to prayer. – JTF Guantanamo photos by Army Pfc. Eric Liesse**

was philosophical about this.

"Life is a journey," he observed. "To make this journey interesting, you must have some bumps along the way. Being a Muslim chaplain in the service, you might get some of these."

Habash said he tries to educate individuals and get past some issues,

but conceded that stereotyping can be a formidable obstacle.

"Allow yourself to be open-minded," he urged. "Search for the truth. Are there differences? Most certainly, but it's not the end if we allow ourselves to see others as a human being that can share certain things." ★

# Let's play!

■ *MWR gears up for a new season of sporting fun*

**Navy Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class  
Chris Little**  
JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Guantanamo Bay Morale Welfare and Recreation offered many sporting events last year which provided Troopers abundant opportunities for recreation, especially with the opening of the new Cooper Field sports complex. Looking to 2009, MWR has planned another assortment of sporting events.

"I just really want to increase participation," said Robert Neuman, MWR sports director.

The new year's events kick off with the New Year's bash, a one-pitch softball tournament which starts Jan. 3 between 9 and 10 a.m., depending on the number of teams participating. The tournament is an open recreation event meaning everyone can participate. Teams can be made up of all men, all women, or a mixture of both.

The next event on the horizon is the start of Captain's Cup basketball league Jan. 7. As with most Captain's Cup events, there will be a men's division as well as a women's division. This will be followed by the winter softball league starting Jan. 12. Winter league will be open to everyone, but it will follow men's slow-pitch softball rules.

Two more tournaments, a doubles racquetball tournament and a Martin Luther King basketball tournament are scheduled for Jan. 17. The basketball tournament will be double elimination and will run until Jan. 19. These events are open recreation events, with projected start times between 10 and 11 a.m., depending on the number of teams that participate.

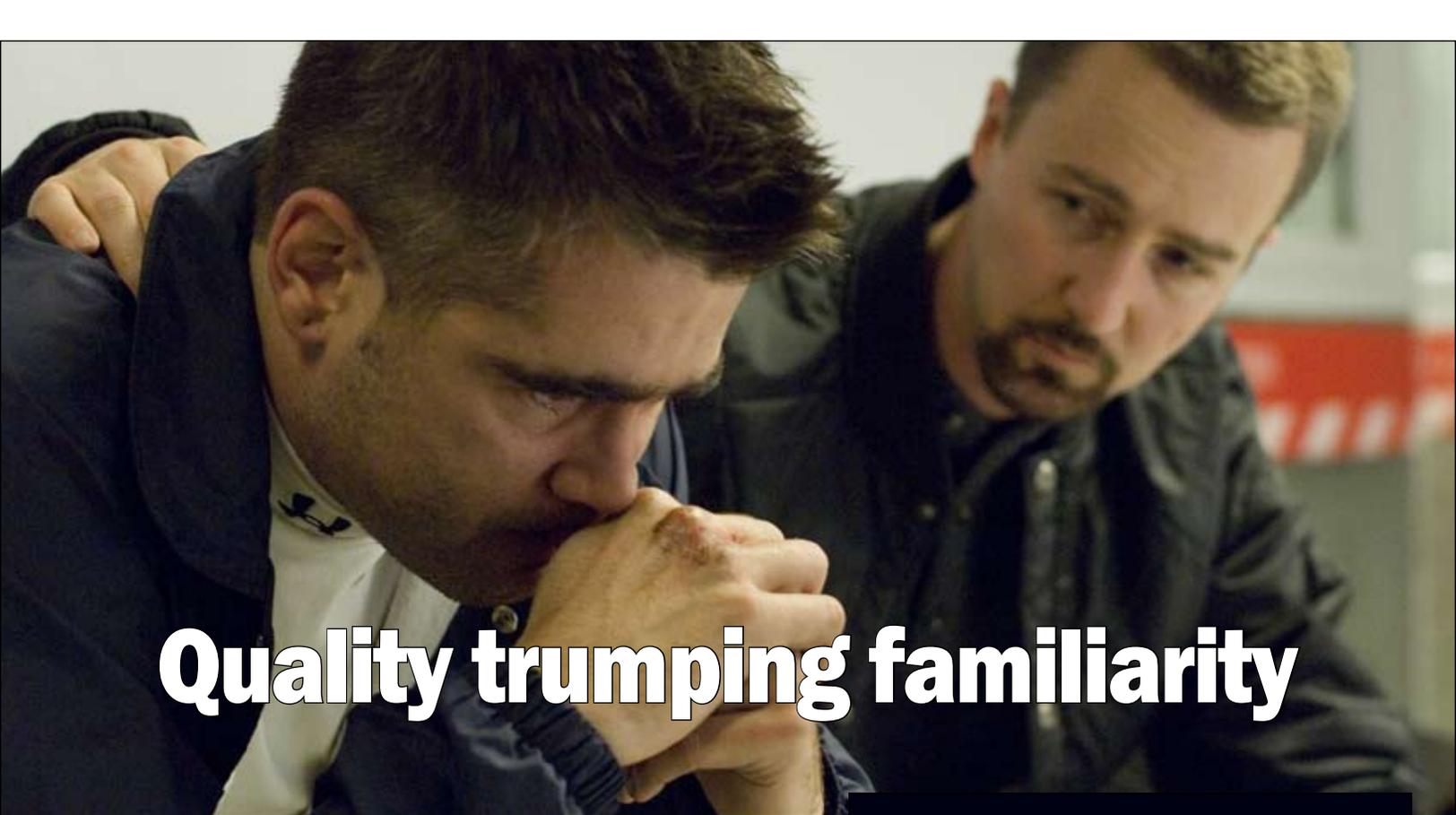
Guantanamo is an ideal place for sports because the weather is generally sunny and warm giving Troopers a unique opportunity to play many sports outside of their regular seasons.

"I figure if you have the facilities, why not use them year round?" Neuman said.

All events will be well advertised via posters and flyers throughout the base. Troopers can also find out about the upcoming events by visiting Denich gym or viewing the roller on channel four.

If Troopers have any ideas for sporting events, they can contact Neuman at Denich gym or any other MWR representatives. However, it should be noted that ideas should also consist of ways to gather resources if they're not for the traditional sports. ★





# Quality trumping familiarity

**Army Pfc.  
Eric Liesse**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Originality in a story usually gets it remembered. However, when a story seen hundreds of times before is done exceptionally well, it's usually far more memorable.

"Pride and Glory" – written by Gavin O'Connor and Joe Carnahan, and directed by O'Connor – centers on the all-too-familiar story of corrupt cops in New York City and the politicization of right and wrong. O'Connor said in an interview that he wrote the film as a fictionalized homage to his father, who was a policeman, and the celebration of honest cops. Thankfully, the film does them justice.

Edward Norton, again with a goateed and scarred face, drives the movie as Detective Ray Tierney, the son, younger brother and brother-in-law, of a New York policemen. Against his own disdain for the position, he takes his father's request to join a task force to investigate the killing of four policemen found in a Brooklyn drug house.

The basic premise of the story is nothing new, but the execution is what shines. Norton plays off both Jon Voight as his father and police chief, and Noah Emmerich as his older brother and officer in charge of the dead officers' 31<sup>st</sup> Precinct. Watching such talent sparring back and forth over corruption and its public image makes this movie work.

From the get-go, Ray feels something is amiss after finding the suspected killer's cell phone and tracing 911 calls to find the junkies had been tipped off about the raid.

He finally starts seeing cracks in the 31<sup>st</sup> when he finds the drug den's tip came from another cop.

Norton embodies the honest cop trying not to throw his entire family into a public fire, while still pursuing the justice that his father and brother sometimes try to minimize. Ray's brother-in-law, Sgt. Jimmy Egan (predictably but well-played by Colin Farrell), takes Ray's focus as he begins to see that Jimmy may have been dishing vigilante justice for longer than anyone knew.

The casting of such A+ dramatic talent as Norton – whom I've yet to dislike in a movie – and Voight brings the entire movie up. However, the sordid look of the city and its protectors is solidified by the stellar camera work that always directs the eye in compelling ways. The editing and sound design also shine since the transitions of the visuals and audio add a critical feel of fluidity to a story that otherwise would be jumping between the multiple characters' perspectives.

Though it took about eight years to finally see the silver screen, O'Connor's story of rooted-out corruption made its mark, proving that just because a story isn't new, doesn't mean it's not worth telling. 📌

# PRIDE

EDWARD NORTON COLIN FARRELL



AND **TRUTH. HONOR. LOYALTY. FAMILY. WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO SACRIFICE?** **OCTOBER 24TH**

# GLORY

**R**  
**2 hours, 10 minutes**

Rating: ★★★★★☆



# Guantanamo Bay's Holiday Lights

Military and civilian personnel gathered Dec. 28, 2008 to light Menorahs in observance of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah. The Menorah lighting took place at the residence of Jeffery Einhorn, a Columbia College faculty member. Along with the lighting of Menorahs, many Guantanamo families celebrated the holidays by lighting the outside of their houses.

Photos by Navy Petty Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class Richard Wolfe and Army Spc. Megan Burnham

# Beyond the standard

■ *Joint Task Force deputy commander thanks Troopers for a job well done*

**Army Staff Sgt.  
Emily J. Russell**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Joint Task Force Guantanamo Deputy Commander Army Brig. Gen. Gregory Zanetti will soon say farewell after his year-long tour.

Between working in a joint environment with all military services and the realization of what Guantanamo is really like, Zanetti considers this tour “mind expanding.”

“I didn’t know much about the place,” Zanetti said. “Everything I read about Guantanamo Bay was so negative. I think the expectation was that we were coming to close the place, because that’s what was in the news.”

Upon stepping into his role as JTF deputy commander Zanetti realized the opposite was true.

“There were expectations that bad things were happening here,” he said. “All that turned out to be false. I realized this is the most American place on the planet. It’s where Americans are performing their best. Every expectation I had was wrong.”

Working closely with the Navy gave Zanetti a different perspective to military operations and the opportunity to understand how different military forces work together.

“I had no idea there were so many moving parts to this assignment and that there was such attention to detail paid by so many people on so many different levels,” Zanetti said. “That was the surprising part of this mission – watching all of it play out and performed professionally and knowledgeably every day.”

For Zanetti, things like guards exercising judgment and keeping a situation under control or military commissions attorneys persevering through complicated proceedings is what gave him “a feeling of trust that embodied the whole command here, and makes the [JTF] work.”

“You have to trust those who are working with you,” said Zanetti. “You have to trust their judgment, you have to give them freedom, ownership and responsibility and let them take charge of what they know best. Occasionally things will go wrong, and that’s okay – you learn from your mistakes and drive on. No one person can do this – it’s got



“

**I realized this is the most American place on the planet. It’s where Americans are performing their best.**

– Army Brig. Gen Gregory Zanetti

to be a team effort.”

Looking toward the future, Zanetti plans to continue his service. “There are lots of ways to serve [one’s] country,” he said. “It doesn’t always have to be in uniform.”

Zanetti’s command philosophy, which embodies the Army values, challenges Troopers to “go beyond the standards, do your best and share your success with others.” These guides echo within his message to the JTF Troopers.

“Thank you. Thank you for what you do, day in and day out,” he said. “The nation really needs you right now and your willingness to step up and do this, is a testament to your honor, integrity, your loyalty and commitment. I truly believe the nation is in good hands because I see it. This generation coming up is going to serve better than we did.”

# Port Call

## President Bush wishes Guantanamo Troopers a Merry Christmas

**Army Staff Sgt.  
Emily J. Russell**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

It's not every day a Trooper receives a phone call from President George W. Bush. For Coast Guard Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Neil Ambrose, however, Dec. 24 was that day.

"It was an honor," said Ambrose of speaking with President Bush. "I was shocked that I was selected out of hundreds of thousands of deployed members."

"At first he called me by my name," he continued. "He said, 'Neil, this is President Bush, how are you today?'"

Ambrose replied that he was fine, and thanked President Bush for "all he's done for the Coast Guard and military members over the past eight years."

Ambrose chatted with the president, with Bush asking, "How's the weather down there?"

"It's warm," Ambrose replied. "How would you like to join us?"

The call lasted a moment longer before President Bush delivered his traditional Christmas message.

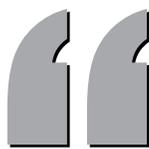
According to Ambrose, President Bush said, "On behalf of Laura and myself, I want you to pass along to other deployed members that we appreciate your service and wish you a Merry Christmas, especially to the Mighty Coast Guard."

"I specifically remember him saying, 'the mighty Coast Guard,'" Ambrose said, smiling.

The Christmas Eve phone call has become a tradition for President Bush. Each year, he calls 10 service members from all



**Coast Guard Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Neil Ambrose, member of Port Security Unit 305 currently stationed here in support of Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, received a presidential phone call Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> with holiday greetings from President Bush. Ambrose was selected as one of 10 military service members world-wide to receive the call.**



**On behalf of my family, we wish you and all deployed members a Merry Christmas.**

**– President George W. Bush**

branches of the armed forces around the world to thank them for their service and pass on holiday wishes.

"Ambrose was selected above his peers because he's a high performer and the right one to be chosen to receive a call from the president," said Coast Guard Cmdr. Steven H. Pope, commanding officer of Port Security Unit 305.

"I submitted his packet in October of this year," Pope continued. "[It] had all the information that made him competitive

to be selected out of all the other Coast Guard members."

This isn't the first time Coast Guard Port Security Unit 305 has answered the call. In 2005, Coast Guard Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Travis Johnston was one of the lucky service members selected to speak to the president.

Pope was not the commanding officer of PSU 305 when the last presidential call to Guantanamo was received. However, he was thrilled to learn they were selected again.

"It's a high honor to receive a call from the president," said Pope. "Our unit is a tight family, and we're all very proud and very happy that Petty Officer Ambrose was selected." ☆



## Santa's helpers

Jason Kies and Navy Chaplain Dave Mowbry load boxes of Christmas stockings on Christmas morning for those who worked on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Churches across the United States donated items for the stockings, which numbered close to 2,000, and families on base made cookies to be included. Stockings went to many third-country nationals as well as the Coast Guard and Air Force Troopers at Camp Justice. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Vaughn R. Larson



## FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

- 1 HOLD UPRIGHT, PULL RING (SAFETY) PIN



- 2 START BACK 8-10 FEET  
AIM AT BASE OF FIRE



- 3 SQUEEZE LEVER  
SWEEP SIDE TO SIDE



- Familiarize yourself with the fire extinguisher operation and locations around your home and work.
- Inappropriate use of fire extinguishers could be subject to fine or penalties.

For more information, please email [safety@jftgmo.southcom.mil](mailto:safety@jftgmo.southcom.mil)

# This is the year

## ■ Achieve your New Year's resolution (really)

**Navy Lt. Cmdr.  
Chris Blair**  
JTF JSMArt OIC

Jan. 1 is an exciting time of year. Everything is new and fresh. It's time to change old habits, improve oneself and make this year better than the last. By Feb. 1, our well-intentioned ideas and promises often come to a screeching halt. They tend to be replaced with frustration, anger, guilt and remorse. We hear ourselves saying, "Next year will be better." How can we make "next year" finally become "this year?" Here are nine helpful tips that could make all the difference:

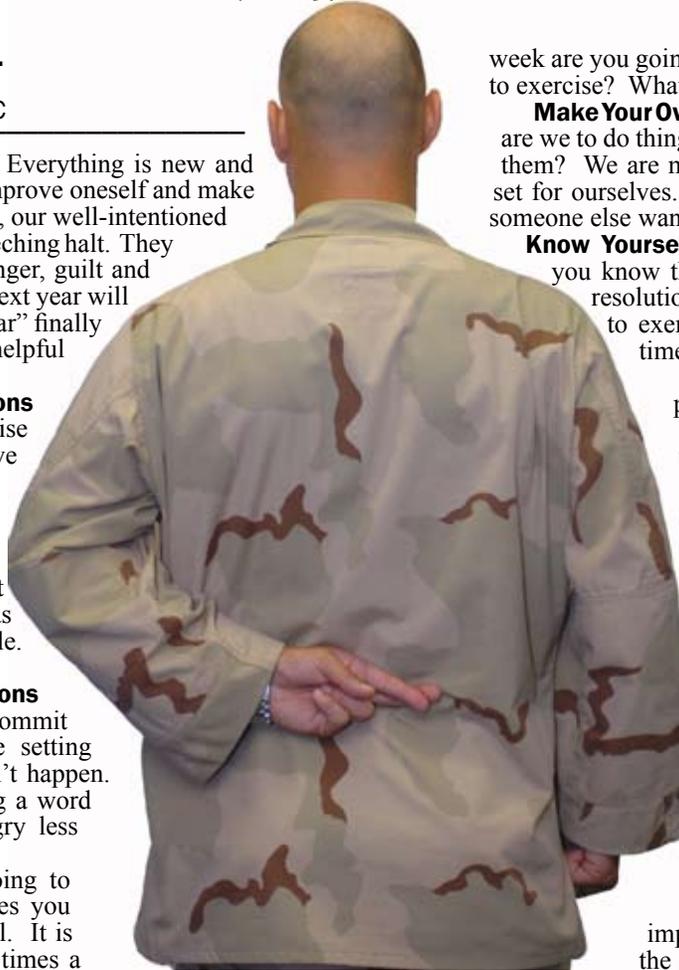
### **Don't Make Too Many Resolutions**

If you resolve to eat better, exercise more, quit smoking, reduce stress, save more money, give to charity, be nicer to everyone, etc., you may be setting yourself up for failure. Your stress level and frustration will increase if you have too many things going on at once. Your goals may then be viewed as a burden instead of something worthwhile. Limit yourself to 3-5 goals.

### **Don't Make Absolute Resolutions**

Keep the resolutions realistic. If you commit to "never get upset again," you are setting yourself up for failure – that just won't happen. Instead of making it absolute by using a word like "never," resolve to "become angry less frequently."

**Be Specific** Just saying "I'm going to exercise more," is too vague and gives you too much wiggle room to drop the ball. It is important to be specific – how many times a



week are you going to exercise? How long are you going to exercise? What exercises are you going to do?

**Make Your Own Resolution** Honestly, how motivated are we to do things because someone else wants us to do them? We are much more likely to achieve a goal we set for ourselves. Avoid the trap of making resolutions someone else wants you to make.

**Know Yourself** Too often we forget this rule. If you know that you like your sleep, don't make a resolution that involves getting up an hour early to exercise. The snooze bar will win every time!

**Make it Public** Tell others about your plans. Friends can help keep you honest and can provide positive peer pressure to help you obtain that goal.

**Forgive Yourself** Trying something new often means running into some bumps along the way. When we falter, we often think, "What's the point now? I may as well give up." Be kind to yourself and give yourself a break if you go off track.

**Congratulate Yourself** Celebrate achievements with small rewards along the way. Make sure the rewards are productive to the goal. If your goal is to lose weight, don't reward yourself after a week of exercise with a giant brownie sundae.

**Have Fun** It is important to remember why you are setting goals and resolutions – you are trying to improve. Enjoy the journey. You'll find the scenery can be quite lovely. ☆

## Boots on the Ground

What is your New Year's Resolution?

by Army Spc. Megan Burnham

**Army Spc. Samnoeun  
Luy**



"To make it home for my daughter's first birthday."

**Navy Seaman Jamaal  
Moore**



"To save between \$5,000 to \$10,000."

**Army Pfc. Brandon Little**



"To be a good father for my son who was born on Dec. 26, 2008."

**Army Sgt. Domanic  
Bloomfield**



"To become 225 solid pounds of muscle and to make the Warfighter Team."

# True Christmas spirit

**Army Capt.  
Eric Bey**

525<sup>th</sup> M.P. Battalion Chaplain

As this holiday season draws to a close, I have some musings that I would like to pass on to the readers about the power of Christmas.

I am particularly reminded of the story during World War One where German and British troops laid down their weapons on Christmas Eve and celebrated the holiday with the exchanging of gifts, well wishing, carol singing and the somberness of clearing the battlefield of the dead for proper burials which both sides attended. It is an exceptional example of the power of Christmas. I have found examples of how the Germans and French Soldiers did the same thing.

It is a powerful thing now to hear about it, but I imagine that to be there and to experience it first-hand would have been nothing short of miraculous.

So as I wandered about to the different parties and events of the season, I was impressed with the greetings and general feeling of community. I love the foods, smells, and all of the colorful lights. People go out of their way to decorate

their houses and yards for the occasion and they even have a contest and awards for the best house. Within the houses themselves there appears to be warmth and love.

Almost everyone has a Christmas tree that they have taken great care in decorating. Some have ornaments that have been in their families for generations. It becomes the focal point of the room that it is in and maybe even the whole house.

The Christmas spirit is still alive and well, but I feel compelled to remind everyone that the true Christmas story doesn't include Santa Claus or Christmas trees or gifts. These three serve as powerful metaphors to the true, powerful Christmas story, though.

The truth is that there is no Santa Claus, but he can serve as an example of how God almighty is the one who showers humanity with His gifts of love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and peace. He is the One who really keeps a list of who is naughty and nice and rewards each person according to their deeds.

The quintessential Christmas tree can serve as a way for you to share with all who will listen how God used a tree to give us the gift of His son and atonement for our sins.

The presents under the tree can be used to share the knowledge of Christ and all that one attains by entering into a sincere, healthy relationship with God.

My plea is that we not let the reason for the season slip from our celebrations. He is the power behind the season. We should seek out every opportunity to share the wonderful message of the gift of Christ. We should tell the stories of His deeds so that our children and children's children will never forget about the Lord our God.

So as we close out this season, if you haven't already told the old old story of Jesus and His love, make it a point to gather the family together, with possibly some close and dear friends, and tell the story again.

You might just be surprised who hasn't heard it yet, or the closeness it will generate in your home. ☆

## JTF CHAPEL SCHEDULED PROGRAMS

### Catholic Mass

**Sunday:** 7 a.m. Confession  
7:30 Mass

**Wednesday:** 11 a.m. Mass

### Protestant Worship

**Sunday:** 9 a.m.

### Spanish Protestant Worship

**Sunday:** Noon

# Counting his blessings

**Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Tommy Benavidez, the senior noncommissioned officer of Joint Task Force Guantanamo's motor pool, stands ready with part of his fleet of full-size buses.**

**Army Lt. Col.  
Joe Romero**

Joint Visitor Bureau Director

Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Tommy Benavidez, the Joint Task Force motor pool non-commissioned officer in charge, is known to everyone at the motor pool as a hard-working and easy-going Trooper, quick to smile and laugh, and just as quick to tell you about his latest fishing trip. What most people don't know about him is that for eight years of his life, Benavidez lived in an orphanage in England.

His father, native New Mexican Jose Benavidez, was stationed at England's Lakenheath Air Force Base. There Jose met and married Joyce Last, an English citizen residing in Brentwood. Benavidez was born a year later in 1958, but his parents soon divorced and his father returned to New Mexico. His mother suffered a series of seizures and developed a nervous disorder that kept her from supporting and caring for Benavidez.

Believing his father had abandoned him and his mother unable to care for him, social workers placed Benavidez in foster care. At age 8 he was placed in Harris Lodge, an orphanage located in Rayleigh, approximately 45 miles from London.

Harris Lodge was a three-story castle-like building. An elderly English couple in charge lived in an apartment located on the top floor of the lodge, and mostly supervised the lodge employees – a cook, a cleaning lady, and a large middle-aged man known as “Uncle Ron.” Uncle Ron lived on the same floor as the residents and slept with his bedroom door open – a room strategically located between the girls' open bay dorm and the boys' open bay dorm. He was a tough but fair disciplinarian who enforced all lodge rules for the approximately 30 residents, some of whom were true orphans.

Meals at the lodge were always the highlight and lowlight of Benavidez's day.

He was always hungry, but the food was always bland and never enough. Residents were served three meals at designated times. Those who missed a meal did not eat until the next meal was served. Uncle Ron would walk around the tables and enforce the lodge rule that everything served had to be eaten. Once meal time was over, the cook locked all food in a kitchen pantry.

Breakfast at the lodge was always the same: porridge and boiled eggs. Lunch and dinner consisted of bland pot roasts, including a dish called Toad in the Hole (a potato pot roast with whole sausages), Yorkshire pudding and occasionally lamb chops. Residents would fight or barter for bread edges to wipe the fat drippings from the roasts or lamb chops. The only time they drank anything besides water was at supper, when a large hot pot of tea was served. At no time at Harris Lodge was Benavidez ever served snacks or fast food.

All residents were required to do chores – primarily cleaning their dormitory, washing dishes and shining shoes. Each resident took a turn shining everyone else's school uniform shoes. During the school year, they were required to do their homework prior to lights being turned off at 9 p.m.

There was one television, and Uncle Ron picked the program that everyone would watch.

When not wearing their school uniforms, the residents wore hand-me-down clothing donated to the lodge by various charities. Residents were allowed to earn money by doing work outside the lodge. Most earned extra money working at a nearby farm picking bushels of peas during harvest season.

To break up the monotony, or simply for sheer adventure, Benavidez ran away numerous times. He and a fellow resident named Colin would typically sneak out their dormitory window, go down the fire escape, and ride the train into nearby London. They would visit local bakeries and ask or beg

for sweet bread or other exotic baked goods unavailable at the orphanage. They would then wander aimlessly around London before hiking back, usually stopping to sleep in an empty barn with a haystack. The next day, the farmer would discover them, call the police, and Benavidez and Colin would be returned to the lodge. They would dutifully accept their punishment for running away – usually extra shoe-shining duty.

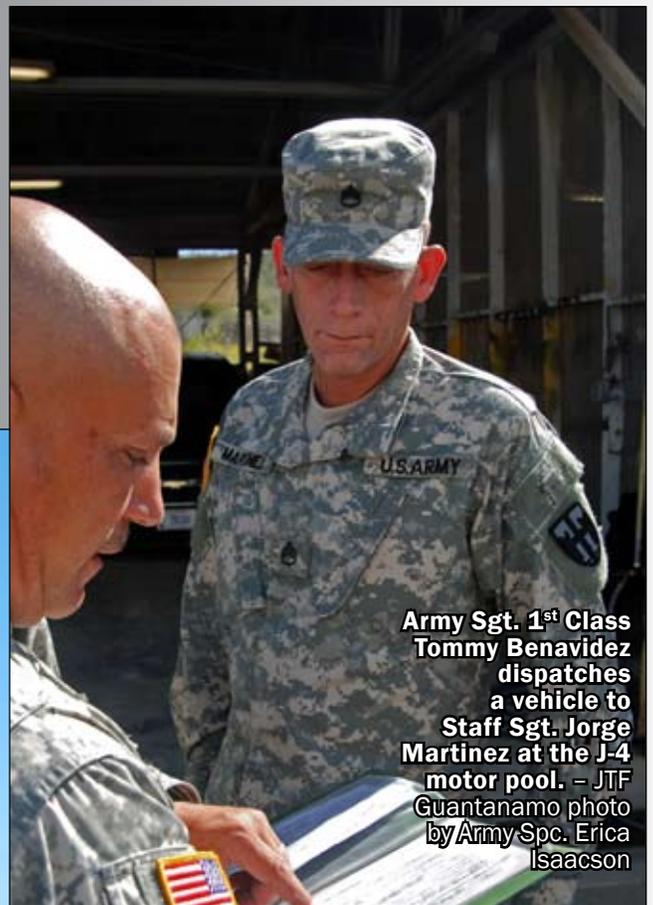
As he neared his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, social workers were determining where next to place him as the orphanage age limit was 16. During a visit to his mother's house, a social worker discovered a stack of letters from Jose – letters that his mother had never let him see. The social workers helped Benavidez contact his father, who agreed to take immediate custody. A couple days later, he was taken to Heathrow Airport on his way to his new home in Albuquerque, N.M.

There, Benavidez experienced culture shock. Speaking with a thick English accent, his fellow students at Rio Grande High School laughed at him as he struggled to pronounce his own Spanish surname. Football, baseball and basketball were completely alien to him – he had grown up playing cricket, rugby and soccer. The food in New Mexico was different too – he had never seen an avocado, much less eaten guacamole.

In due course, he lost his English accent, learned some Spanish and, despite adjusting to a different country and culture, he considers himself the luckiest person in the world. Unlike many of his mates at Harris Lodge, he experienced being part of a family, living with his family, being hugged and mentored by a parent.

When his JTF deployment ends, Benavidez will return to his family in New Mexico and spend every spare minute he can with his wife, children and extended family. Knowing what it's like to live in an institution without any family, Benavidez never takes his family for granted. ★

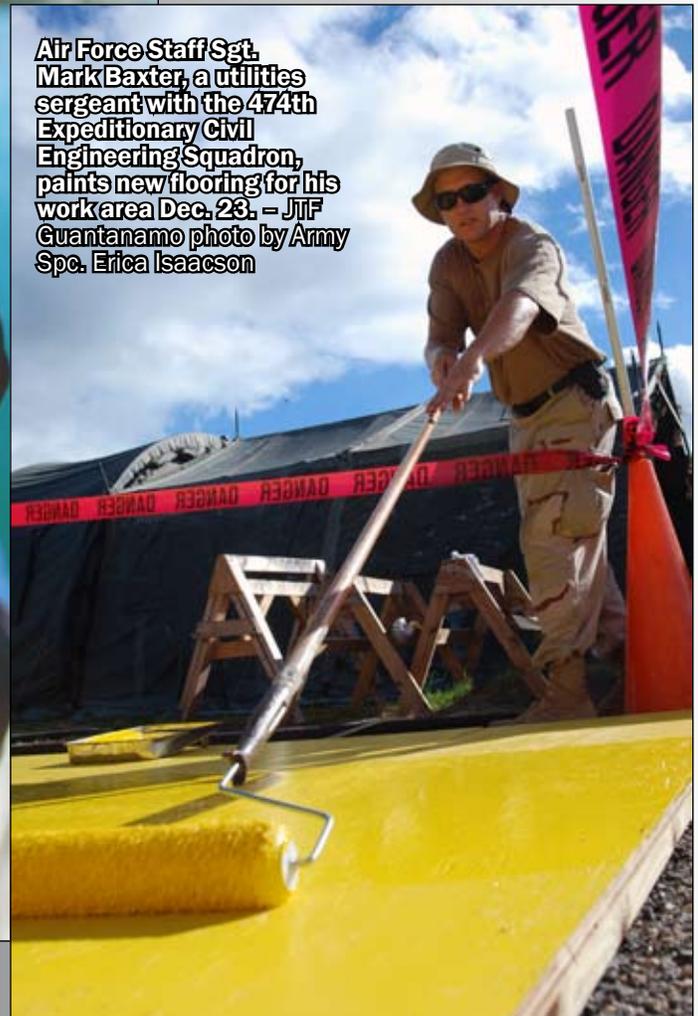
# Around the JTF



**Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Tommy Benavidez** dispatches a vehicle to **Staff Sgt. Jorge Martinez** at the J-4 motor pool. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Spc. Erica Isaacson



**Army Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class John Kinny** holds a blowfish he caught while fishing Christmas. Kinny, a member of the Puerto Rican National Guard deployed to support the Joint Task Force, spends some of his free time boating and fishing the waters of the bay. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Staff Sgt. Emily J. Russell



**Air Force Staff Sgt. Mark Baxter**, a utilities sergeant with the 474th Expeditionary Civil Engineering Squadron, paints new flooring for his work area Dec. 23. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Spc. Erica Isaacson