



# DMAVA HIGHLIGHTS



NOVEMBER 29, 2012

## NJ National Guard Soldier's behavioral health initiative helps troops drive on

Story and photo by Sgt. 1st Class Erick Studenicka, 117th MPAD

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – One of the largest sustainment brigades in Afghanistan is getting a lot of mileage out of simple behavioral health initiatives implemented for its motor transport operators.

With the incorporation of the initiatives, the 45th Sustainment Brigade has reduced its average number of losses of motor transport operators due to behavioral or mental health issues per quarter from eight to one.

The initiatives are the brainchild of Maj. Edward Dowgin, the executive officer of the 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, a subordinate New Jersey Army National Guard battalion within the brigade that includes five units and is headquartered in Trenton, N.J. Dowgin long had a notion what changes could be made to decrease BMH losses and he decided to incorporate the initiatives and study their effect in conjunction with a process improvement class.

“We lost 12 Soldiers between February and August due to BMH issues,” said Dowgin, 35, of Hamilton, N.J. “That is a high percentage considering we only have 465 motor transport operators in the battalion. But those losses had a growing snowball effect on the battalion – the loss of those Soldiers adds stress and workload to remaining Soldiers. Then the remaining Soldiers are at a higher risk for early re-deployment.”

Using Lean Six Sigma analysis theories and statistical data provided by brigade surgeon Capt. Pedro Manibusan, Dowgin realized BMH issues needed attention long before a Soldier requested or required an evaluation. Dowgin concluded the only time he could help Soldiers prevent early re-deployment due to a BMH issue was before a BMH episode ever occurred; otherwise the Soldier's future was in the hands of a behavioral health specialist and their respective commander.

With prevention of BMH issues in mind, Dowgin implemented three solutions to offset the root causes of the high number of operator BMH losses. Although each was fairly simple, the three combined solutions – one resiliency day per week, dynamic counseling sessions with first line supervisors that include personal issues, and immediate counseling of Soldiers who received Uniform Code of Military Justice action – reduced losses by 87 percent this quarter.

With the battalion's unparalleled operations tempo that's included nearly 2 million miles of driving to 45 far-flung forward operating bases and combat outposts, Dowgin said that an increase in the frequency of days off was a clear-cut solution. The brigade now gives each Soldier one day off every seven days (without affecting mission) versus the previous standard of one day off every 10 days.



*Pvt. Drew Lancop, 20, of Heartland, Mich., left, discusses an upcoming convoy with Maj. Edward Dowgin, executive officer, 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Nov. 21, 2012 at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. Dowgin recently completed a study, which indicated informal discussions between first line leaders and junior enlisted Soldiers contribute to a decrease in early behavioral or mental health-related re-deployments.*

“The Soldiers were simply not getting enough time off and it had become an issue,” Dowgin said. “People need time to unwind. They need time to call their own and decide what they want to do, whether it's go to the gym or sleep all day.”

Dowgin's second solution involves an ongoing monthly counseling for all specialists and below that entail discussion of personal issues, not just mission-specific issues. Dowgin defined the concept as compassionate leadership.

“First line supervisors should get to know their subordinate Soldiers on a personal level,” Dowgin said. “Once a month at least, these meetings allow Soldiers to explain what is going on in their lives to their supervisors.”

The third solution stemmed from Manibusan's behavioral health statistics that revealed 57 percent of Soldiers who re-deployed early due to BMH issues had recently been the subject of UCMJ actions. Dowgin quickly implemented a counseling program for all Soldiers immediately following an UCMJ reading.

“The counseling emphasizes ‘don't feel bad, life's not over' following UCMJ action,” Dowgin said. “These are usually good Soldiers who made one mistake. The counseling encourages them to bounce back and drive on.”

Dowgin said the initiatives will remain in place for the remainder of the 45th's tour, which is set to conclude in January. He said he'll encourage the Third Sustainment Brigade, the 45th's replacement brigade, to sustain the BMH gains made by the 45th.



*Brig. Gen. Michael L. Cunniff, the Adjutant General, Ray Zawacki, Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, and elected officials unveil an American Eagle statue at the Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park Nov. 26, 2012. The statue, created by students of the Piscataway campus of the Middlesex County Vocational and Technical High School, is a three-ton, 12-foot wingspan Eagle sculpture named "Fierce Allegiance" and will adorn the gateway to the entrance of the Veterans Home. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Armando Vasquez/Released)*

## ***NJVVM announces 2013 scholarship program***

HOLMDEL, N.J. - Graduating seniors have until April 19, 2013, to submit their applications and essays to qualify for one of two scholarships offered by the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation. The scholarships, each in the amount of \$2,500, will be awarded to high school seniors from New Jersey who plan to further their education either at a college or university or trade/technical school.

Winners will be notified in early May and will be awarded the scholarship on Monday, May 27, 2013, during the Memorial Day Ceremony held at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial.

In addition to the scholarship application and proof of acceptance to a college or trade school, all applicants must submit an essay about his/her visit to the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, which is located off the Garden State Parkway at exit 116 in Holmdel.

To assist students in writing their essays, the Foundation offers free, veteran-led guided tours of the Memorial. Beginning Feb. 2, 2013 and continuing through April 13, 2013, these tours are held every Saturday at 11 a.m., and at 1 p.m. These tours are also available to the members of the general public who would like to learn more about the Memorial. Tours are approximately 45 minutes in length.

The deadline for application and essay submission is 5 p.m. Friday, April 19, 2013. Applications may be mailed, faxed to 732-335-1107 or delivered to the NJVVM Scholarship Program, 1 Memorial Lane, P.O. Box 648, Holmdel, N.J. 07733.

For a scholarship application form or more information about the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Foundation, please visit [www.njvvmf.org](http://www.njvvmf.org) or call 732-335-0033 ext. 100.



*The Monmouth County Bowlers Association donates \$2,400 to the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park Nov. 11, 2012. From left to right, Joseph Brandspiegel, chief executive officer at New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park; Ray Vogel, New Jersey State Bowlers Association delegate; Joanne Ramsey, president of MCBA; and Christine A. Caratozzolo, supervisor of recreation at the Veterans Home. (Courtesy photo)*

E-mail your Photo of the Week or Highlights submissions to:  
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***Congratulations to the following New Jersey National Guardsmen for outstanding work during the recent Hurricane Sandy relief efforts. Here they are pictured with Vice President Joe Biden. Photo left, Senior Airman Jennifer Robledo, 108th Wing; second from left, Army Staff Sgt. Curvey Purkett, A Co. 2nd 113th Infantry; and second from right, Air Force Staff Sgt. Carl Hilpl, 108th Wing. (Courtesy photo from 87th Air Base Public Affairs/Released)***

## ***FEDERAL RETIREMENT THRIFT INVESTMENT BOARD ANNOUNCES A RELAXATION OF HARDSHIP WITHDRAWAL RULES TO HELP VICTIMS OF HURRICANE SANDY***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board (FRTIB) announced Nov. 21 that it has made temporary changes to the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) hardship withdrawal rules to help victims of Hurricane Sandy pursuant to the guidance issued by the Internal Revenue Service on Nov. 16.

Beginning Nov. 21, the TSP will treat any Financial Hardship In-Service Withdrawal Request (Form TSP-76) received until Jan. 25, 2013 as qualifying for a hardship withdrawal if the participant writes “Hurricane Sandy” at the top of the form and checks the block on the form for personal casualty. The distributions must occur before Feb. 1, 2013 to qualify for this treatment.

The participant should write Hurricane Sandy at the top of the form and check the “personal casualty” box on the TSP-76. The TSP will then waive the rule that prohibits a participant from making employee contributions for six months after

taking a hardship withdrawal. This will allow an employee to continue to make contributions to the TSP and receive the employer match (if eligible).

These temporary changes will not be effective retroactively. For more information, please go to <https://www.tsp.gov/whatsnew/plan/planNews.shtml>.

The TSP is a retirement savings plan for Federal employees; it is similar to the 401(k) plans offered by many private employers. As of October 2012, TSP assets totaled approximately \$324.1 billion, and retirement savings accounts were being maintained for roughly 4.6 million TSP participants.

Participants include Federal civilian employees in all branches of Government, employees of the U.S. Postal Service, and members of the uniformed services. Additional information can be found at [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov).



## Nominate a young patriot for 2013 Military Child of the Year!

Operation Homefront has announced that nominations for the Military Child of the Year Awards are being accepted on-line at [MilitaryChildOfTheYear.org](http://MilitaryChildOfTheYear.org) through Dec. 15. Winners will be recognized April 2013.

The Military Child of the Year Award recognizes children who stand out among their peers. Ideal candidates for the award demonstrate resilience, strength of character, and thrive in the face of the challenges of military life. These young heroes embody leadership within their families and communities.

This award is presented to an outstanding child from each branch of service – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The winners each receive \$5,000 and a laptop, and are flown with a parent or guardian to Washington, D.C., for a special recognition ceremony on April 11.

In previous years, recipients have had the honor of meeting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey, and first lady Michelle Obama, who were guest speakers for the award ceremonies.

“With so much uncertainty living in a military family, from constantly having to move to knowing that a parent is fighting for our country, it is amazing to see how strong these young people are to excel in the face of these challenges,” said Jim Knotts, president and chief executive officer of Operation Homefront. “It’s not just the military members who serve, but their families as well. We think these young patriots deserve to be honored for their sacrifice and their leadership.”

For more information on how to nominate a child in your community, to become a sponsor, or to see photos from past events, please go to [MilitaryChildOfTheYear.org](http://MilitaryChildOfTheYear.org).

## ARMS to host fundraiser for Morro Family

Hurricane Sandy affected the home of Sgt. William Morro and his wife, Maria. Morro, an Iraqi war veteran and Maria, the Family Assistance Center coordinator for five armories, have been an active part of the New Jersey National Guard family for years.

Now it is time to assist the Morro’s by enjoying a pasta dinner at the Toms River armory Friday, Dec. 7, from 5 to 8 p.m.

Adults are \$10 for the pasta, meatballs, salad, bread, dessert and beverages. Children three to 12 are \$5, and children under three are free. All proceeds will be given to the Morro family to assist in the rebuilding of their home.

American Recreational Military Services (ARMS) is sponsoring the fundraiser. For more information or to donate, please visit [www.supportarms.org](http://www.supportarms.org).

## Pay differential grants

The National Guard State Family Readiness Council of New Jersey has added Pay Differential Grant applications for those Army and Air members who served on State Active Duty in support of Hurricane Sandy and suffered a loss in pay because of that duty.

Application forms and guidance may be obtained from Family Assistance Centers at the following locations: 108th Wing, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst; 177th Fighter Wing, Atlantic City; Joint Military Family Assistance Center, Bordentown; and armories at Toms River, Woodbury, Morristown, Jersey City, and Lawrenceville.



*Brig. Gen. Michael L. Cunniff, right, the Adjutant General, coined several workers of the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery Nov. 29, 2012. The workers were coined for their dedicated efforts to continue burial ceremonies during Hurricane Sandy. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Mark C. Olsen/Released)*

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### New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

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