THE GUARDIAN

Vol.2 No.2 • Serving Madera County Veterans • Feb. 2006

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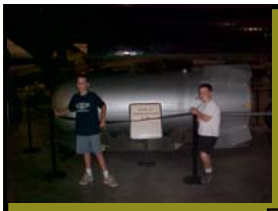

My grandsons enjoy checking out the Thermonuclear bomb "Old Mark 53"

A NOTE FROM DENNIS BLESSING

Visit our Web Site at:
www.madera-county.com Go to "Select a Department" then scroll down to "Veterans" At Veteran Resources find back copies

from the editor

APOLOGIES for the delay of the Guardian this month but "****" things Happen. Next month should be right on time.

TRAVELING down I-70 across beautiful Ohio, homeward bound from D.C. the troop stopped for a two nite stay at a KOA above Dayton. Finding some info on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base the "Boys" and I plan a trip to the U.S. Air Force Museum. What a place with somewhere near 200 airplanes on display. I must say the Thermonuclear bomb had me a little nervous but everything else was great. Situated in three huge hangers the displays are about as well exhibited as they could be. To the left

are Tyler and JJ (Dennis III) and a space suit. Tyler (not the best camera man) took this picture of JJ and myself in front of "Dennis the Menace".

Veterans Service Office

Madera Veterans Office
321 W. Yosemite Ave.
Madera Ca 93637
Suite 101

Hours
Mon., Through Fri. 8-5
Dennis Blessing, Service Officer
(559) 675-7766

Madera Transportation
(888) 826-2838 ext 6424
from Merced (72 Hr. Notice)
Oakhurst (559) 658-5399

VETERANS of FOREIGN WARS

VFW Commander
George Bloch
Post 1981
200 South G Street
Madera Ca 93639
(559) 661-9038

Guardian In-put, Feb 06

The following are excerpts from VFW's Commander-in-Chief, James R. Mueller's address on p. 4 of the VFW of January 2006:

"Age and current military status have no bearing on VFW eligibility. VFW has long admitted personnel on active duty and, today, that includes mobilized members of the National Guard and Reserves, provided they qualified for the appropriate campaign medal or award. Golden opportunities exist to recruit among those returning from Afghanistan and Iraq as he or she is a war veteran who belongs in the |VFW. Age, intensity of the combat experience or active duty status is irrelevant. Current VFW members are most strongly encouraged to take advantage of all situations to work with the troops….before, during and after their deployments.

The next time you see a young American in uniform ask him or her to join, if qualified, the elite of America's worldwide veterans groups."

DD-214 Application On-Line

The National Personnel Record center now provides veterans wishing to request a copy of their DD-214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, electronically. Visit their website at www.vetrecs.archives.gov. This web based application provides better service by eliminating the National Personnel Record center's mailroom processing time.

Next of kin of deceased former military members may also use the on-line military personnel records system web-site to request the forms.

Those individuals requesting a copy should receive the form in approximately 3-6 months from the time they submitted the application.

OBLIGATION

In the presence of Almighty God, I do, of my own free will and accord, solemnly promise and declare that:

I will bear true allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America and I will always be loyal thereto.

I do further solemnly promise and declare that I will comply with the Congressional Charter, bylaws and Ritual of this order and I will always be loyal thereto. I will never wrong or defraud this organization—nor a member thereof nor permit any wrong to be done to either if in my power to prevent it.

I will never propose for membership any person not eligible nor one whom I know to be unworthy.

I will never make known to anyone not authorized to receive it any of the work of this order.

Should my affiliation with the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States cease in any way I will consider this pledge as binding outside of the order as though I had remained a member of same.

All this I promise and pledge upon the honor of a true comrade and a citizen of our great republic.

_____
Applicant's Signature

I have investigated the character and campaign medal service of the applicant and hereby endorse him/her as eligible and worthy of membership in the VFW.

Signed _____

Date _____ Member of Post # _____

CERTIFICATION

Admission Fee paid $ _____ Dues paid $ _____

Date _____ LM Fee paid $ _____

(See Sec. 104 bylaws)
The Investigating Committee has performed its duties and recommends ❍approval ❍rejection.
(Signatures of Committee below)

_____
Committee Member

_____
Committee Member

_____
Committee Member

Applicant approved _____ Obligated _____
Date Date

The annual dues of each member includes a year's subscription to the VFW Magazine, official publication of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Each applicant, upon acceptance, will be so notified and furnished with an official dues receipt showing membership for the year for which dues or Life Membership fees have been paid.

VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

LIFE MEMBERSHIP FEES

Attained Age	Fee
Through 30	$245
31-40	235
41-50	215
51-60	195
61-70	165
71-80	125
81+	85

Any applicant whose 31st, 41st, 51st, 61st, 71st or 81st birthday will occur after the date of application and on or before December 31st of the current calendar year, shall pay only the fee that would be required on his next birthday.

DISABLED VETERANS BUSINESS

DVBE

THE CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE

Serving California's Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises

This Alliance is proud to announce our annual symposium titled

"Keeping the Promise" VOBE 2006

We need your support to ensure our veteran community understands the importance of this key event.

Please help us pass the word.

This is the **"Must Attend Event" in 2006** for Veteran and Disabled Veteran Businesses, and for Corporations and Government Agencies desiring to incorporate these businesses into their supplier programs.

The California Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) Alliance is holding its 14th annual "**Keeping the Promise**" Symposium in concert with The Veterans Business Journal's annual **Veterans Outreach Business Exposition (VOBE)**, at the Anaheim Hilton Hotel in Southern California, on May 3-4, 2006.

We anticipate this event will draw some **100 exhibitors and over 1500 veteran and service disabled veteran businessmen and women.**

The California DVBE Alliance is the **largest Service Disabled Veteran Business** organization in California. The **Veterans Business Journal reaches across the nation** to support all business oriented veterans.

This year we are enhancing the format to concentrate on training and one-on-one supplier/buyer interface meetings. This event intends to **address the needs of those veteran and disabled veterans in business,** and those who have returned from this country's **continuing overseas war on terror**, and who desire to pursue entrepreneurship.

Mark this date on your calendars-3 and 4 May 2006

Check the website at www.ktpvobe.com

1611 "S" Street, Suite 102
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 446-3510 ▪ Fax: (916) 446-3515
www.cadvbe.org

ARMY VS NAVY

A beautiful couple. God Bless em.

Subject: A TRAIN STORY & THE ARMY-NAVY GAME

The following article appeared in the Philadelphia Daily News on December 22, 2005

"Here's a Yule Story That Ought to be a Movie"
By Ronnie Polaneczky
AND NOW, in time for the holidays, I bring you the best Christmas story you never heard.

It started last Christmas, when Bennett and Vivian Levin were overwhelmed by sadness while listening to radio reports of injured American troops. "We have to let them know we care," Vivian told Bennett.

So they organized a trip to bring soldiers from Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Bethesda Naval Hospital

CONTINUED ON PAGE, 5 ARMY-NAVY

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One car, the elegant Pennsylvania, carried John F. Kennedy to the Army-Navy game in 1961 and '62. Later, it carried his brother Bobby's body to D.C. for burial.

"That's a lot of history for one car," says Bennett.

He and Vivian wanted to revive a tradition that endured from 1936 to 1975, during which trains carried Army-Navy spectators from around the country directly to the stadium where the annual game is played.

The Levins could think of no better passengers to reinstate the ceremonial ride than the wounded men and

to keep the focus on the troops alone:

No press on the trip, lest the soldiers' day of pampering devolve into a media circus.

No politicians either, because, says Bennett, "I didn't want some idiot making this trip into a campaign photo op."

And no Pentagon suits on-board, otherwise the soldiers would be too busy saluting superiors to relax.

The general agreed to the conditions, and Bennett realized he had a problem on his hands.

"I had to actually make this thing happen," he laughs.

Over the next months, he recruited owners of 15 other

to the annual Army-Navy football game in Philly, on Dec. 3.

The cool part is, they created their own train line to do it.

Yes, there are people in this country who actually own real trains. Bennett Levin - native Philly guy, self-made millionaire and irascible former L&I commish - is one of them.

He has three luxury rail cars. Think mahogany paneling, plush seating and white-linen dining areas. He also has two locomotives, which he stores at his Juniata Park train yard.

women recovering at Walter Reed in D.C. and Bethesda, in Maryland.

"We wanted to give them a first-class experience," says Bennett. "Gourmet meals on board, private transportation from the train to the stadium, perfect seats - real hero treatment."

Through the Army War College Foundation, of which he is a trustee, Bennett met with Walter Reed's commanding general, who loved the idea.

But Bennett had some ground rules first, all designed

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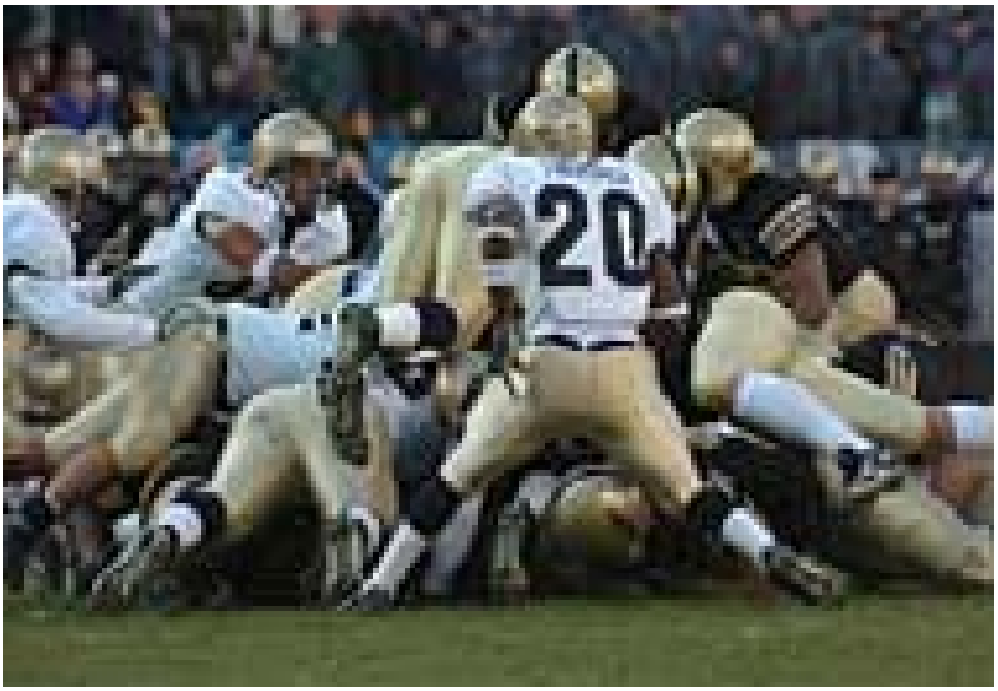

sumptuous rail cars from around the country - these people tend to know each other - into lending their vehicles for the day. The name of their temporary train?

The Liberty Limited.

Amtrak volunteered to transport the cars to D.C. – where they'd be coupled together for the round-trip ride to Philly - then back to their owners later.

Conrail offered to service the Liberty while it was in Philly. And SEPTA drivers would bus the disabled soldiers 200 yards from the train to Lincoln Financial Field, for the game.

A benefactor from the War College ponied up 100 seats to the game - on the 50-yard line - and lunch in a hospitality suite.

And corporate donors filled, for free and without asking for publicity, goodie bags for attendees:

From Woolrich, stadium blankets. From Wal-Mart, digital cameras. From Nikon, field glasses. From GEAR, down jackets.

There was booty not just for the soldiers, but for their guests, too, since each was allowed to bring a friend or family member.

The Marines, though, declined the offer. "They voted not to take guests with them, so they could take more Marines," says Levin, choking up at the memory.

Bennett's an emotional guy, so he was worried about how he'd react to meeting the 88 troops and guests at D.C.'s Union Station, where the trip originated. Some GIs were missing limbs. Others were wheelchair-bound or accompanied by medical personnel for the day

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"They made it easy to be with them," he says. "They were all smiles on the ride to Philly. Not an ounce of self-pity from any of them. They're so full of life and determination."

At the stadium, the troops reveled in the game, recalls Bennett. Not even Army's lopsided loss to Navy could deflate the group's rollicking mood.

Afterward, it was back to the train and yet another gourmet meal - heroes get hungry, says Levin - before returning to Walter Reed and Bethesda.

"The day was spectacular," says Levin. "It was all about these kids. It was awesome to be part of it."

The most poignant moment for the Levins was when 11 Marines hugged them goodbye, then sang them the Marine Hymn on the platform at Union Station.

"One of the guys was blind, but he said, 'I can't see you, but man, you must be f---ing beautiful!' " says Bennett. "I got a lump so big in my throat, I couldn't even answer him."

It's been three weeks, but the Levins and their guests are still feeling the day's love.

"My Christmas came early," says Levin, who is Jewish and who loves the Christmas season. "I can't describe the feeling in the air."

Maybe it was hope.

As one guest wrote in a thank-you note to Bennett and Vivian, "The fond memories generated last Saturday will sustain us all - whatever the future may bring."

God bless the Levins. And bless the troops, every one.

FROM THE FRONT

REPAIRING CAPTURED WEAPONS

Support Area Anaconda in Iraq can fix just about any Army ground weapon. So when the order came down to refurbish 88 Russian-made AK-47 assault rifles, the battalion's Soldiers were ready for the challenge.

Some might ask why the Army is refurbishing old enemy weapons, but the AKs are being used to arm Iraq's military and security forces, putting insurgents' weapons to use against insurgents. When the Iraqi police force was being assembled units were short on weaponry, and this program is solving the shortage problem and saves the Iraqis having to buy new weapons, said Army Chief Warrant Officer Pedro Munoz, the 3rd FSB's battalion armament and repair technician.

"In helping them, we are helping ourselves because the program is saving the U.S. and the Iraqi army money and bringing the country one step closer to being self-sufficient," he said.

AK-47s are not the only foreign weapons the armorers have had to fix. They also work on other Russian-made rifles and automatic weapons.

The first time the soldiers were tasked with this mission, an explosive ordnance disposal team brought 453 foreign weapon systems to the 3rd FSB armory. Of these, 420 were fixable.

"Cross-training everyone in the shop has helped out a lot," said Army Spc. Evan Lewis, battalion fire control repairman. "It feels good to take weapons out of insurgents' hands and put them into play against them," Lewis added.

Bulldogs clamp down on

insurgency

Submitted by: **2nd Marine Aircraft Wing**

Story by: **Computed Name: Cpl. Micah Snead**

Story Identification #: 20061521022

Captain Marc F. Arnold, a pilot with Marine Attack Squadron 223 and an Auburn, Ohio, native, climbs out of an AV-8B after a mission, Jan. 3, at Al Asad, Iraq. The Bulldogs of VMA-223 deployed to Al Asad, Iraq, from their home at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., during August. Photo by: Cpl. Micah Snead

AL ASAD, Iraq(Jan. 5, 2006) -- The Bulldogs of Marine Attack Squadron 223 are taking a bite out of the insurgency in western Iraq.

The AV-8B Harrier squadron deployed to Al Asad, Iraq, from its home at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., during August. Since arriving, the squadron's pilots and maintainers have worked hand in hand to ensure the squadron's bite is worse than its bark.

"These Marines have been busting their butts," said Capt. Marc F. Arnold, a '223 pilot and Auburn, Ohio, native. "Witnessing all the work they do to keep the squadron up and running is amazing."

Aside from their usual stateside duties of maintaining the squadron's Harriers, the Bulldogs have faced an extra challenge in Iraq.

"They have changed 11 engines so far, and that will be up to 13 soon," Arnold said. "It's just amazing to see their professionalism and work ethic."

As an attack squadron, the Bulldogs' success depends on the readiness of their aircraft. Arnold said the maintainers take that to heart and do their best to make sure their jets are in the air, supporting Marines and Soldiers on the ground.

"We can only fly as much as our jets can handle," Arnold said. "We are totally dependent on the health of our jets to keep our support up, and there is a lot of support required out here. We probably fly more in four months here than during an entire year in the states."

The Bulldogs have supported more than a dozen ground operations in the Anbar province along with lower level operations, convoys and reconnaissance missions. Although the pilots are separated from the ground forces by several thousand feet, a common connection can be felt even if it only materializes through the radio, Arnold said.

"There is nothing more exciting than coordinating with the forward air controllers and laying down ordnance in direct support of the guys on the ground," Arnold said. "After one raid, a company commander actually came on the radio to tell us they appreciated us and felt safer knowing they had our support. Nothing is more motivating than that."

The Bulldogs tackled two exercises, Desert Talon in Yuma, Ariz., and Joint Red Flag in Nellis, Nev., to prepare for the deployment. Arnold said the experiences of the pilots and maintainers are a culmination of the training and hard work that goes into preparing the squadron for a combat deployment.

"Everyone has gotten a lot of experience on this deployment," said Lance Cpl. Jeromy Artz, an airframe mechanic with the Bulldogs and a Morrisville, Mo., native. "The amount of work out here is double what we normally do, but it's worth it. Things have gone pretty well so far, we're looking forward to keeping up the same pace until we get out of here."

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Artz also found time to sharpen his own skills and recently won the squadron's Marine of the Quarter board. Artz said there is always time to focus on your individual skills as a Marine, even if it means mixing one job with another.
"The Marines I work with would help me prepare for the board by quizzing me constantly," Artz said. "I'd be out working on a jet and they'd fire off a question about Marine Corps history. It made it easier to prepare because your mind is constantly working over a lot of things."
While the maintainers can't see the results of their hard work firsthand, they always want to hear as much as they can from pilots returning from missions, Arnold said.
"They are all extremely interested in how effective our squadron is," Arnold said. "Marines from every section always want to know exactly what their work is going into. We try and tell them as much as we can about results of strikes and reconnaissance because we know it motivates them."
Arnold said the combat environment also allows the pilots and maintenance Marines to work closer and spend more time together.
"The pilots don't have quite as much administrative duties when we're deployed so that's more time to spend around the Marines," Arnold said. "I like making that personal connection. I think it helps make us a better unit all around."
The Bulldogs have worked through birthdays, anniversaries and holidays during the deployment, with few breaks from the steady workload for pilots and maintainers alike. The unit grilled hamburgers and hotdogs for a joint Christmas-New Year's celebration, Dec. 30. Many of the maintainers only stopped working long enough to grab something to eat before heading back to the flightline.

"When we're out there working those hard days, we just have to think about Marines on the ground to remember why we do this," Artz said. "We know what we're doing matters, and we'll all be able to go home before long."

Major William R. Sauerland, a pilot with the Bulldogs of Marine Attack Squadron 223, taxis toward a '223 hangar after completing a flight mission, Jan. 3, at Al Asad, Iraq. Photo by: Cpl. Micah Snead

Major William R. Sauerland, a pilot with the Bulldogs of Marine Attack Squadron 223, taxis toward a '223 hangar after completing a flight mission, Jan. 3, at Al Asad, Iraq. The Bulldogs deployed to Al Asad, Iraq, from their home at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., during August. Photo by: Cpl. Micah Snead

Captain Marc F. Arnold, a pilot with Marine Attack Squadron 223 and an Auburn, Ohio, native, taxis an AV-8B Harrier across the flightline, Jan. 3, at Al Asad, Iraq. Photo by: Cpl. Micah Snead

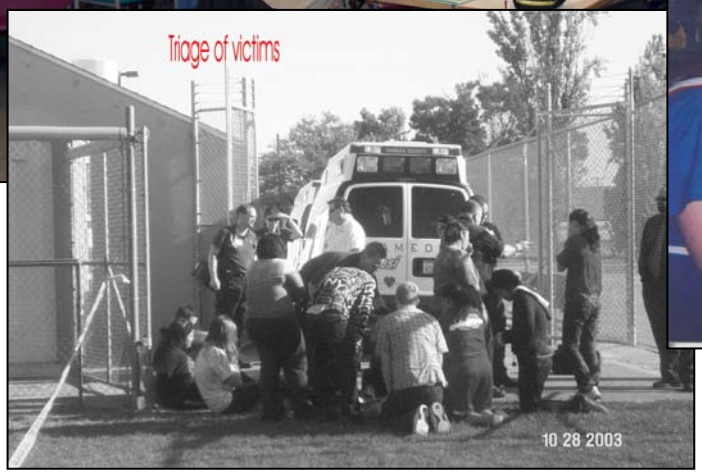
What is Madera County doing to Prepare to Respond to a Major Health Emergency?

With the threat of bioterrorism and a possible pandemic influenza, public health has been thrust into the new role of emergency response planning. Madera County Public Health Department (MCPHD) is meeting this challenge by coordinating with local and regional agencies to develop methods to strengthen our county's ability to respond and safeguard our community.

Top Left
1-POD Clinic

2-Drive Thru Clinic

3-Regional Smallpox Tabletop



5-Chowchilla High School crop duster crash

4-Children's Hospital disaster drill

THE GUARDIAN

SERVING MADERA COUNTY VETERANS

News You Can Use

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

VA Regional Office, Oakland
1-800-827-1000
VA Life Insurance Center
1-800-669-8477
VA Medical Center Toll Free (Fresno)
1-888-826-2838 ext 6424
Cal-Vet Home Loan Information, (Fresno)
559-445-5466
Patient Advocate (Fresno VA)**
Ext. 6970
Telephone Advice Nurse (Fresno VA)**
Ext. 6933
Outpatient Clinic – Merced/Atwater (Castle)
209-381-0105
Service Representative: (DAV, Fresno VA)**
Ext. 5642
Service Representative: (VFW, Fresno VA)**
Ext. 5647
Service Representative: (AMVETS, Fresno VA)**
Ext. 5816
Service Representative: (American Legion, Fresno VA) Ext. 5648**
****Fresno VA Pharmacy, (to order14 days before you run out call by touch tone phone)****
559-225-6100 Ext.5333
CVSO Madera County (pager) D. Blessing
559-661-6895
Fresno Vet Center (Fresno)
559-487-5660
Transportation to VA Medical appointments
**** Call VA Fresno toll free number first**
1-888-826-2838 ext. 6424