



VFW NATIONAL MILITARY SERVICES

NOVEMBER 2008

VFW OPERATION UPLINK™ • VFW UNMET NEEDS • VFW MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



20 Million Minutes and Rising!

VFW "Free Call Days" have already provided more than 20 million minutes of free phone time for troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait. Read about this innovative program on page 4.

Pictured: Crystal Lauver, VFW National Military Services Assistant Director, now deployed to Iraq

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We're Here to Help.

VFW UNMET NEEDS HELPS WOUNDED WARRIOR "KEEP GOING"

Tech. Sgt. Terry Garner was stationed in Iraq with the 187th Fighter Wing, Alabama Air National Guard.

One night, without warning, mortars began to fly into the base. The enemy had surrounded the camp.

Garner scrambled to escape the fire. Racing for his life, he found safety behind a cement bunker.

"Another soldier was fleeing the mortar fire," Garner described. "He flew behind the bunker and landed violently on my back."

Garner emerged from the attack with a herniated disc on vertebrae L4, L5 and S1. Immediately, he was transported to a field hospital.

Three surgeries alleviated Garner's pain, but he was left 100% disabled. He could no longer return to his job as a paper mill inspector.

In a tragic twist of fate, his wife Shelly suffered a massive stroke around the same time. She, too, permanently lost her job. Before they knew it, the Garners' income was sliced in half. They worked to stretch every

penny until VA compensation would kick in.

However, house and car payments refused to wait.

"When it rains, it pours," recalled Garner.

Learning about *VFW Unmet Needs* from a friend, Garner received desperately needed assistance for home and car expenses.

"It was absolutely great! I can't say any more. I never realized organizations like VFW could help in such a way."

Garner and his wife recognize the road ahead will not become easier, but that hasn't led them to dwell upon the past.

"Things happen, but you gotta keep going," concluded Garner.



VFW MEMBER BRINGS COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR FORMER UNIT

Staff Sgt. Miguel Hernandez once served with Bravo Company 1/111th of the Army National Guard. Now retired, he still serves his former unit, but as a VFW member of Post 845, Downingtown, Pa.

“The unit was preparing to deploy, so our Post thought it was fitting to throw them a celebration before they left,” explained Hernandez.

On August 24, over 100 soldiers and 100-plus family members gathered for a summertime picnic in their honor.

“I think they thought it would be ‘mandatory fun,’ as it was the final few hours of their weekend drill,” said Paul Dougherty, Commander of Post 845.

“However, the vast majority of the troops and their families were pleasantly surprised. Everyone seemed to be having a great time.”



Great weather painted the day as the smell of barbecue filled the air. Children explored the many activities—face painting, a moon bounce, a magician and games—while adults relaxed to the sounds of a local band.

A few special guests made appearances as well. Pennsylvania State Senator Andrew Dinniman came out in support of the local unit, as did one-time Vice President hopeful Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota.



“There was a tremendous amount of volunteer support from regular and social members as well as from the Ladies Auxiliary,” said Dougherty.

“They [soldiers and their families] were overwhelmed by the setup and support from VFW and the community,” said Hernandez.

But Post 845 and the Downingtown community did more for Bravo Company than just throw them a picnic.

“We have officially adopted the unit,” explained Hernandez. “It’s important to show the troops and families that VFW and their community are actively showing support for them.”

Plans are already under way to continue not only the summer picnic but introduce other events as well, including a Christmas party and an Easter egg hunt.

“Whatever these heroes and their families need, from care packages to a listening ear, we will be here to help,” stated Hernandez.

BECAUSE YOU CARE...

- ★ A military family struggling through a rough deployment received help with major car repairs and groceries.
- ★ Three months of unemployment won’t keep an OIF veteran’s family down. Rent, utilities and medical expenses were provided as he awaits an increase in VA compensation.
- ★ PTSD and degenerative spinal disease will be treated for an OEF/OIF veteran. As he awaits VA benefits and Social Security support, he’s not going into debt.
- ★ A soldier awaiting deployment orders whose home caught fire will receive help starting over.
- ★ An out-of-work veteran can pay her rent, car payment and utilities while she searches for employment.

So many heroes are facing tough times. Your gifts to VFW National Military Services go a long way toward easing their hardship.

SUPPORT COMES FULL CIRCLE

David Stephens is a life member of the VFW and through the years has donated to **VFW Operation Uplink™**.

Stephens is also a staff and operations officer for the Commander 7th Fleet Det. 111 of the United States Naval Reserve stationed at Camp Victory in Iraq. Now on active duty himself, he is assisted from the very programs he has long supported.



“It’s a very odd feeling. I can’t really describe it,” said Stephens. “You think of these programs benefiting 18- and 19-year-olds away from home for the first time.

“Then with a single phone call and mobilization orders, you’re in the pipeline to a war zone, and suddenly, being handed a VFW phone card from the chaplain.”

Stephens took full advantage of the phone time, which helped reduce the financial woes for his family back home. He used his card to talk to his wife and kids.

“I wanted them to know I had arrived in Kuwait safely. Plus, the kids were at summer camps, and I wanted to hear the adventure stories.”

The conversations are often simple, but Stephens wouldn’t give them up for the world. He believes they help him “keep connected to regular life.”

“It truly breaks the feeling of isolation and distance from home. I feel like I’m still involved in some small way with what is happening there,” he explained.

Each phone call reminds Stephens why he is a member of VFW.

“The fact VFW members want to ensure the service members feel important gives me great pride in this organization.

“I feel a deep appreciation for the individuals who greet the planes, who shake hands at stores and who take stands against the protestors demonstrating against the troops and not the politicians.”

When Stephens returns home, he plans to become more active in his own VFW Post. But first, there is something he has been waiting to do for a long time.

“I want to hug my family again.”



LETTERS FROM THE HEART

Here are just a few of the heartfelt thank you letters we received from America’s defenders, thankful for the programs of VFW National Military Services:

I couldn't survive w/o being able to talk to my mom. I'm an only child & she's my best friend. THANK YOU for helping make this possible

Talking to my 22 month old son is one of the most important things to me. Staying momma-in touch is important. When I come home, I need for him to recognize my voice — and you are helping keep my mind on my job here.

Thank you for this most generous donation. I am truly honored to earn membership in such a fine organization. The work you do is vital to the morale of our troops and the strength of our Great Nation.

Your card brings me closer to my family & makes me feel better about being deployed. A voice is our only link to memories sometimes.

YOUNG COUPLE KEEPS VOICES FRESH IN THEIR MINDS

Staff Sgt. Jeremiah Kaffenbarger and Becky Pennock are a typical couple in many ways. They do typical couple things, like telling each other about their day, joking or even fighting about the Cubs or White Sox. With every conversation, they remember to say “I love you.”

But they are different from most couples in one major way. Becky is in Chicago. Jeremiah is in Diyala Province, Iraq.



The engaged couple received a welcome surprise this past Labor Day when Jeremiah heard the announcement on the line that the call would be free, thanks to a “Free Call Day” sponsored by VFW.

“Being able to hear Becky’s voice is the greatest morale booster. We didn’t get to talk as much during my last tour, and I would almost forget what her voice sounded like,” said Kaffenbarger.

“Getting a free phone call to or from Iraq provides great financial relief,” said Pennock, noting that she spends \$.50 a minute every time she talks to her fiancé. “For just a few minutes, we forget that he is on the other side of the world!”

Until they reunite, the happy couple relies on their conversations to keep them connected—and keep their love for each other going strong.

“I am most looking forward to having him return to Germany because he will be out of Iraq, and I won’t wake up worried every single morning,” Pennock concluded.



VFW UNMET NEEDS SAYS “YES” WHEN OTHERS SAY “NO”

As a soldier in the Kansas Army National Guard, Pfc. Courtney Davis never expected to need help to pay the family’s bills. But then again she never expected to be injured so badly.

Davis suffered a string of injuries during basic combat training, breaking both her feet and her left leg. A month later—healed and back in BCT—Davis still winced in pain with each step as her arches had fallen from the initial injury.

A certified nurse assistant during the week, Davis was unable to continue her normal duties.

“The pain was so bad I had to take time off from the nursing home,” she said.

Combined with the military’s confusion over her status, Davis received no pay for over two months. However, the stall in pay did not mean a stall in house and car payments.

Davis, her husband James and her children—Gabriel, 3, and Luke, 8—

found themselves in a tight situation.

They didn’t know where to turn.

“Thankfully, Lisa Galindo of the Family Support Center told me about *VFW Unmet Needs*. I was so shocked at the amount of support that we received from them,” she continued.

“They covered our bills and gave us a gift card for groceries. I can’t thank them enough. They helped us when others would not.”

The help has righted the Davis family, now caught up on bills and doing much better. Davis recently had surgery and her husband James—also an Army National Guard soldier—is set to soon deploy.

“It’s nice to finally feel like people aren’t going to breathe down our necks about our house payment. We greatly appreciate everything [*VFW Unmet Needs*] did for us.”

