

Children: 800 chairs donated

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More than half of the wheelchairs donated during the day were funded by 10-year-old Ben Werdegar, of Woodside, Calif. Werdegar heard about the program online in February 2008 and decided he wanted to help the children of Iraq.

"Ben decided he would play his guitar and raise money for the Iraqi children on the streets of San Francisco," said Blausler. "Since that time, Ben has played most weekends for more than 52 weeks, raising over \$13,000 to help the children of Iraq. He deserves a huge amount of recognition for his commitment and dedication in helping disabled Iraqi kids." Blausler founded the organization in 2005 at the request of military officials in the city of Mosul after Soldiers observed children dragging themselves on the ground because of birth defects such as cerebral palsy and spina bifida and has since given away more than 800 wheelchairs all over Iraq.

The wheelchairs, designed by ROC Wheels in Bozeman, Mont., are

designed for rough terrain. Each wheelchair costs \$3,500 and is funded entirely through donations. The U.S. government ships the wheelchairs to Blausler overseas for free.

"This was an excellent opportunity to show the population how the government of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces are working together to provide for the people they represent and protect," said Capt. Jesse Stewart, the commander of Troop C, 5th Battalion, 73rd Cavalry Regiment.

Blausler hopes he can start to manufacture the wheelchairs in Iraq in order to help more disabled children and help the local economy. Blausler said that making the chairs locally is important because shipping them from the U.S. and getting them on the ground in Iraq can take around four to six months.

Blausler added that his goal is to produce 50,000 wheelchairs over the next five years to give to needy children in the Baghdad area. The long-term goal is to have every disabled child in Iraq provided with a free pediatric wheelchair, regardless of their ability to pay.

Hope: Outreach program helps Soldiers

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Phase one of the stand down, Soldier awareness, lasted from Feb. 14 to March 14. Phase two, training the trainer, will last from March to July.

"There are no easy solutions," Cocklin said. "One of the areas that will really help is to focus the training and awareness to the battle-buddy level."

Chaplain (Capt.) Chris Carson, Warrior Transition Battalion chaplain, explained what he believes makes some Soldiers contemplate suicide.

"Every single person in the WTB is transitioning," he said. "They're recouping from an injury, some may return to duty while others are forced to (go through a medical evaluation board to be separated). Their dreams and hopes (are lost), all they ever wanted to be were infantry Soldiers, jump out of airplanes and serve their country. Now they can't do it anymore."

Carson has worked to address and nurture Soldiers by engaging them on a personal level, speaking with them or getting them out to his fellowship retreats.

"It's a way to get the Soldiers out of their rooms. So they're not drinking or playing video games," said Spc. Alex Zachman, Co. C, WTB. "The stereotype (that's) brought into the Army is it's wrong to ask for help, that you're not a man if you ask for help."

Carson said he frequently fights the stigma associated with seeking a chaplain's help.

"You don't have to be afraid of the chaplain," Carson said. "I put on pants just like you do. If you cut me, I bleed. I'm not going to try to throw the Bible at you."

Cocklin encouraged Army leaders to become more actively engaged in their Soldiers' routine needs for emotional and spiritual health.

During mandatory Fort Bragg suicide prevention training, facilitators provided some simple

advice to help noncommissioned officers begin to engage.

"Know your Soldiers. You need to know their background and recognize if they're having personal issues," said Staff Sgt. Tiwanda Brown, a Womack Army Medical Center training NCO.

Jen Hartsock, an operations and tasking specialist at WAMC, said we owe it to our Soldiers to be sensitive to their needs and take care of them.

"Our Soldiers do a very special thing for all of us," she said. "They provide security to the homeland. So because of that, we need to go above and beyond to make sure we're taking care of those who are taking care of us here at home."

There is 24-hour help available to Soldiers or Family members who feel they need help or know of someone who needs help. They can call Chaplains Office at 356-HELP (4357), WAMC emergency room at 907-7000, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Stop-Loss: Future policy to offer incentives for Soldiers who stay

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which Soldiers see in their April 1 paycheck.

The congressional approval also allows the Army to retroactively pay Soldiers as far back as Oct. 1, 2008, for time served under stop-loss. Most Soldiers who qualify to receive the retroactive payments will receive that money in May or June as a lump sum payment, Rochelle said.

Additionally, the \$500 per month payments for stop-loss time served in a combat, tax-exclusion zone will not be taxed, said Col. Larry Lock, Army director of compensation and entitlements.

The funds Congress appropriated for stop-loss pay are only for Fiscal Year 2009, which runs Oct. 1, 2008 through Sept. 30, 2009. Future funding is being discussed.

Rochelle pointed out that there is risk associated with eliminating the use of stop-loss, such as an unexpected demand for forces beyond what the Army anticipates. But he said such things as the projected reduction of forces in Iraq will mitigate that risk.

"Let's not diminish the significance of the reduction in demand, anticipated as a result of the drawdown in Iraq. The anticipated reduction in demand, recently announced

by President Obama, is a major factor," Rochelle said. He added that were demand not so high for Army forces around the world, the Army would eliminate stop-loss "tomorrow."

An additional factor in the Army's ability to pare down its use of stop-loss is that the service was able to meet its resize objectives ahead of schedule.

"The Army has now achieved its end strength growth to its (547,400) end strength, three years ahead of schedule," Rochelle said. "We were on track and projected to achieve that growth through 2012 we are there now."

Thirdly, he said, is the Army's

enterprise wide approach to match up accessions, individual training and leader development training with the Army's Force Generation.

Rochelle said the Army will create a policy to offer incentives to Soldiers to encourage them to extend their enlistment beyond their date of separation in order to allow them to stay with their unit for the duration of a deployment.

Those incentives would most likely be financial, said Maj. Gen. Gina Farrissee, director of personnel management.

"I think it would be safe to say there will be monetary incentives, but the policy has not been written yet as to what

the incentives will be," she said.

There are currently around 13,000 Soldiers affected by stop-loss within all three components of the Army. According to Army officials, the active component has about 7,307 Soldiers affected; the National Guard has 4,458 affected Soldiers; and in the Army Reserve, 1,452 Soldiers are affected. Stop-loss is spelled out in Title 10, United States Code, Section 12305(a).

The law allowing the military services to implement stop-loss has not changed and the Army may again use the policy in the future if extraordinary needs require it.

Fort Bragg weekly water usage

*Millions of gallons per day

March 10	March 16
Date	MGD*
March 10	4.9
March 11	5.9
March 12	4.4
March 13	4.9
March 14	4.5
March 15	4.3
March 16	5.2
Total per week	34.1
March 17	March 23
Date	MGD*
March 17	4.6
March 18	4.9
March 19	5.1
March 20	4.8
March 21	5.0
March 22	3.8
March 23	5.1
Total per week	33.3
Difference	-0.8



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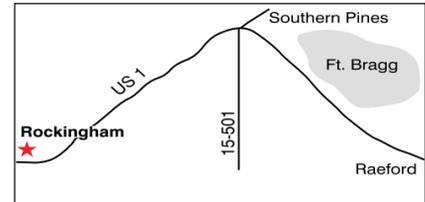
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