



A Real Face on War

Tim Graczewski, son of Pine Knoll Shores residents Tom and Arleen Graczewski, spent a year in Afghanistan in 2009-2010. While there, he wrote a blog about his over-all experiences. An excerpt appears here, describing ramp ceremonies, the final salute to fallen comrades as they begin the journey back home. With Memorial Day just a few weeks away, Arleen's comment as she shared Tim's account of the ramp ceremonies is indeed apt: it does put a real face on war and reminds us of the sacrifices our military personnel and their families make on our behalf.

Ramp ceremonies

A somber regularity here on KAF (Kandahar Airfield) is the ramp ceremony, the official military procession for honoring a fallen comrade. Unfortunately, I was initiated into the experience on my first night here and have since participated in four more, totaling 15 Americans and Canadians killed in action in and around Kandahar and neighboring Helmand province in the past two weeks.

News of an impending ramp ceremony usually begins with a rumor in the office that an event has occurred somewhere outside the wire. About an hour after that, we receive an email on our NATO-classified computers, informing us of the number and nationality of those killed and the time to meet for the ceremony.

These events can happen at any time of the day—the one for the seven members of Stryker Brigade killed in a massive 1,500-pound IED in the Arghanab Valley occurred at 1 a.m. No matter when they occur or how little advance is provided, troops from all nations pour out of their barracks and offices and converge on the designated entrance to the airfield.

A C-130 transport is parked about one hundred yards out; its rear payload door is open, a steel ramp extended and touching the tarmac, the flight crew standing in a line on the left-hand side of the plane.

The troops flow from all directions into a holding area, their numbers swelling behind a cyclone fence topped with razor-sharp concertina wire, like disparate streams pooling together, deeper and wider. As the elongated pen reaches capacity, the throng of multinational soldiers and civilians coagulates into a single, cohesive mass. The mood is subdued; there is some light banter and an occasional laugh, but most are just standing and waiting quietly. The crowd is large. The actual number is difficult to estimate. I can empathize with Herodotus' tendency to inflate troop numbers in the Persian Wars—large groups of men in uniform in confined spaces generate a disproportionate sense of size.

The fence opens and the pool of humanity hemorrhages onto the tarmac. The troops form up by unit off to the left. I join the RC South Headquarters group, a band of different national services that make up NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Polyglot orders to attention and to dress ranks begin to ring

(Continued on page 4)

KAYAK FOR THE WARRIORS

Auction, Anyone?

By Jean McDanal

Items keep coming in to be auctioned off on Thursday, June 4, at the eighth annual Kayak for the Warriors reception and auction at the NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores. This is a delightfully entertaining evening, and your admission fee of \$5 not only gives you access to the aquarium and all of its exhibits, but also entitles you to enjoy some of the finest food our local restaurants can present. The silent auction will feature 60 items by local artists and craftsmen as well as items donated by local merchants.

While featuring the antics of Auctioneers on Deck in the aquarium auditorium, there will be another 40 or so items in the live auction. So far, these include Panthers tickets, a townie bike, passes to Lost Treasure Golf, a season's fishing pass, private golf lesson by a golf pro, a will-preparation package, lodging at DoubleTree and Atlantis Lodge, items by Kites Unlimited and much more. There are pictures of these items on our website, k4tw.org, as well as on our Facebook page. As new items come in, these pages will be updated.

Set aside Thursday, June 4, beginning at 6:30 p.m., for a fun evening and to support a great cause.

New Director at PKS Aquarium

By Barbara Milhaven

Michael "Hap" Fatzinger comes to the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores as the new director after 18 years with the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher. He began his time at Fort Fisher as a volunteer, was hired as a temporary employee and became a full-time employee in 1998. He leaves Fort Fisher after proudly achieving goals as a curator, aquarist responsible for the maintenance and the environment of fish and marine animals in captivity, and instructor. He brings these skills with him to Pine Knoll Shores where he plans to involve the public in more interaction with the aquarium staff and volunteers and add new programs. He chooses to reveal his ideas for the new programs at a later time when he's closer to implementing them. One of the new aquarium programs, called "Venom," is being prepared right now with an active beehive already in place, but not yet unveiled.

Hap grew up in Colorado and his coastal experiences were originally with the Pacific Ocean. His Bachelor of Science degree in biology, obtained in 1996, is from the University of the Virgin Islands. Having started out as an aquarium

(Continued on page 4)

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