

People In Service

KM Guard helps build multi-sports complex

By Pfc KAREN NICKLES HENDERSON Whenever possible, soldiers of the North Carolina National Guard plan training missions that not only prepare troops for war but add value to the community.

That is the case with the 505th Engineer Battalion's latest mission in Vance County. Through Operation Tarheel Support, about 90 soldiers from Company B - based in Kings Mountain - are preparing land for a multi-field sports complex that will serve as the community's primary recreation facility.

The National Guard's participation will save the community about \$450,000, according to officials. Additional money will come from city and county governments as well as other sources.

A groundbreaking ceremony celebrating the joint venture between National Guard engineers and civilian contractors was held recently at the site on Carey Chapel Road near Henderson's Aycock Elementary School and Fox Pond Park.

"In the last three years Henderson has grown from 437 participants in the youth baseball/softball program to 816 participants," said Ralph Peace, Director of Henderson/Vance County Parks and Recreation Department. "The complex is the best thing that has happened to Henderson in 50 years. I believe it will have a positive impact on the children as well as the adults of the community."

The complex will include a recreation center, three baseball fields, a softball field, a soccer field and a parking lot. It will encompass about 20 acres of land.

Attending the ceremony were Maj. Gen. Gerald Rudisill Jr., Adjutant General of North Carolina; Richard Moore, Secretary of the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety; Henderson Mayor R.G. Young Jr., and other school and county officials. Maj. Gen. Rudisill said adding value to the community is one of the Guard's top five priori-

ties. "This is a win for the youth, a win for the community, a win for the county and a win for the North Carolina National Guard."

Sgt. Roy Rucker, a heavy equipment operator for Company B, said he's pleased to be involved with a project that will help children. "As long as kids have a place to go to participate in wholesome activities, we are doing them a service," he said.

Company B soldiers are responsible for completing phase one of the project during their annual training, which involves clearing trees, removing roots, grading the site and installing an access driveway.

The second phase will involve building a recreation center with a concession stand area and an indoor pool, track and gymnasium. And the third phase will be an assessment of additional community needs.

The project is one of the most involved for Company B, according to its Commander, Capt. Michael Bowen. Over a two-week period, the soldiers will move more than 55,000 cubic yards of dirt by conducting cut and fill operations.

"This is the largest horizontal project that anyone can ever remember being done by a single company," Bowen said. "It's good training for our troops."

The complex is expected to be open for public use in about five years.

Hodge deployed to Persian Gulf

Navy Seaman Harvey L. Hodge, son of Gloria J. Hodge of 422 St. Luke Church Road, Kings Mountain, is currently halfway through a six-month deployment to the Persian Gulf aboard the destroyer USS Caron.

Hodge is one of 322 sailors aboard the ship. So far, Hodge has traveled nearly 12,000 miles and has been conducting maritime interception operations in the Per-

sian Gulf near Iraq. The operations prevent ships from smuggling prohibited materials to and from Iraq. So far, Hodge's ship has stopped 18 and searched 11 vessels suspected of transporting contraband. Helicopters from Hodge's ship have already flown nearly 330 hours searching for suspicious vessels.

Destroyers like USS Caron have traditionally been the workhorses of the U.S. Navy, defending operating units against threats from land, sea and air. Equipped with advanced sonar systems and torpedoes, USS Caron's primary role is to protect against under sea attacks.

While spending 63 days at sea, Hodge and fellow sailors also visited Bahrain, Kenya, Oman and South Africa, and had an opportunity to enjoy local sites.

Capable of traveling nearly 700 miles a day, the 563-foot-long USS Caron features the Tomahawk and harpoon missiles, and the close-in weapons systems, a 20 millimeter rapid fire gatling gun capable of accurately firing more than 3,000 rounds per minute in defense against missiles or aircraft.

The 1993 graduate of Kings Mountain High School joined the Navy in July 1993.

Gnandt completes 6-week deployment

Navy Chief Petty Officer Stephen J. Gnandt, a 1981 graduate of Kings Mountain High School, has returned to his homeport in Norfolk, Va., after completing a six-week Counter Drug Operation deployment in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean on board the guided missile cruiser USS Mississippi.

Gnandt is one of 600 sailors and a seven-member Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team on board the cruiser who completed the 12,000-mile voyage. During the deployment, Gnandt's ship queried nearly 70 suspicious vessels and boarded nine in search

of illegal drugs.

Gnandt's ship is a multi-mission surface combatant capable of supporting carrier battle groups, amphibious forces, or operating independently. Gnandt's ship has weapons and sensors that allow it to effectively protect itself from aircraft, surface ships, or submarine attacks.

The counter drug deployment enabled Gnandt to visit Colombia and Panama.

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