



HOW WE ARE STRIVING FOR MORE

SUPPORTING THE
DEFENDERS OF PEACE
CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, QATAR

MARCH
2015

THE
DESERT
MESH

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Right outside the gates of Camp As Sayliyah lies Doha, one of the most rapidly growing cities anywhere on Earth. Continuous road construction leaves streets perpetually congested with traffic. Each day, old buildings are reduced to rubble and new ones sprout up to take their place, seemingly over night. The city is continuously reinventing itself as it works out new ways to solve problems and takes on new challenges.

This edition of the Desert Mesh deals extensively with the issues of growth and development. The installation senior enlisted command advisor, Command. Sgt. Maj. Earla Reddock, gives us her personal views on the unique challenges of developing leaders who are rich in character.

A recent military appreciation event hosted by the American School of Doha allowed us to help strengthen our relationship with the local community.

The installation chaplain, Lt. Col. Tim Atkinson, crafted a worthwhile read on building resiliency in the face of post-traumatic stress, and the installation master fitness trainer, Staff Sgt. Demetrick Carter, discusses the importance of attitude when strengthening the body and the mind.

We have included other stories from across the Army that seem to echo this theme, and we want to encourage you to read those while keeping your own development in mind.

As always, we do our best to include the kind of content our readers want. So, as you read this, feel free to contact us and let us know what we can be doing better to serve you.

Until next time, stay safe. Stay strong, and remember to look out for one another.

Levi Spellman
Editor



ON THE COVER:
U.S. SERVICE
MEMBERS
TAKE TURNS
CLAIMING THE
INDOOR ROCK
WALL AT THE
AMERICAN
SCHOOL OF
DOHA CAMPUS
DURING
MILITARY
APPRECIATION
DAY, FEB. 23,
2015



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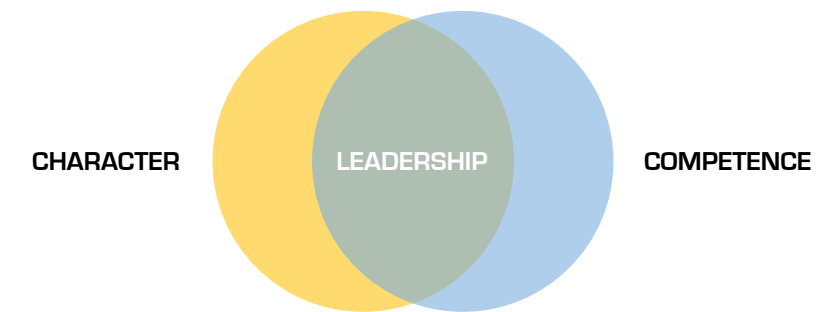
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CHARACTER AND COMPETENCE



STORY BY
COMMAND SGT. MAJ. EARLA L. REDDOCK
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
SENIOR ENLISTED COMMAND ADVISOR

THE CHALLENGE:

How does one go about building stronger leaders of high moral character? How does one ensure those leaders have the moral courage to do the right thing and to inspire their peers, subordinates and superiors to do the same?

I submit that senior leaders should first identify individuals of strong character as early as possible, and do so without using the officer or noncommissioned officer evaluation report. Since these evaluation reports measure only job performance as it relates to work accomplished, character is not accounted for when following the Army's education model of select, train and promote. If character is a trait we want in our leaders, it must become part of the equation.

We must also improve our recruiting practices. According to official Army figures, nearly 70 percent of all citizens fall outside of the prime age for recruitment and introduction to military service. More than half of those remaining are ineligible for military service because of stringent entry requirements. Some have had too many brushes with the law. Some have gang-related or extremist tattoos. Some have received psychiatric treatment for severe mental illness or anti-social behavior. And, some have been diagnosed with any of numerous physical disqualifying conditions, from heart murmurs to obesity.

Other potential recruits have too many dependents, scored too low on the Army aptitude test, or lack high school or general equivalency diplomas. Next, remove those already serving in other branches. Then, eliminate those who are qualified but uninterested, and the pool shrinks further.

Additionally, opportunities in an ever-widening array of civilian career fields serve to draw away potential recruits. Compared against the average of the last 30 years, interest in military service has markedly decreased in the last three years. By adding character requirement standards to the recruitment process, that pool of potential service members will shrink yet again.

Improving our recruitment process may help us mitigate some of these factors.

THE STRATEGY:

Leaders, especially platoon sergeants and platoon leaders,

are vital to developing their subordinate's character. These mid-level leaders are closest to the Soldiers and they exert the most influence on junior enlisted personnel. To get involved in these Soldiers' lives, and to lead by example, will require commitment. To enforce the seven Army Values will require vigilance and courage.

Character is important to the long-term success of both the mission and Soldier resiliency. Leaders must constantly engage their subordinates to think critically, along moral and ethical lines, and help them develop the character required to be successful leaders.

As part of developing our mid-level leaders, senior leaders must continue to use the Army's Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback tool, and implement peer assessment during quarterly senior leader counseling.

Lastly, commanders and directors should ensure every junior leader is assigned a senior mentor within the organization. This ensures that each junior leader has someone experienced and knowledgeable to talk to and discuss issues with, free of judgment.

While not intended to be a replacement for traditional mentorship models, this can serve to strengthen relationships and leadership paradigms within the organization. Having both official and unofficial mentor channels ensures a full spectrum of needs can be expressed and met by both senior and junior leaders.

THE RESULT:

Implementing these strategies will help to create an environment where junior leaders obtain a better understanding of the needs and character of the organization, and of themselves. Senior leaders will have an increased capacity to inspire junior leaders and mentor them through tough decisions, helping to reduce the likelihood of confusion, error or detachment. And, it will help foster the kind of collaboration that defines the values and mission of any well-led organization.

Like all leaders, I remain committed to making Camp As Sayliyah better tomorrow by what I do today.

CSM Earla L. Reddock

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SPRENKLE

ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF
GEN. RAY ODIERNO
TALKS TO 84 CAPTAINS
FROM THROUGHOUT
THE ARMY DURING
SOLARIUM 2015 ON
FORT LEAVENWORTH,
KANSAS, FEB. 26,
2015. THE FOCUS OF
THE DISCUSSIONS
WAS "THE U.S. ARMY
OPERATING CONCEPT:
WIN IN A COMPLEX
WORLD."



SOLARIUM 2015: DEVELOPING AGILE, ADAPTIVE LEADERS

STORY BY
DAVID VERGUN
COURTESY OF ARMY.MIL

FORT LEAVENWORTH, KAN.
(FEB. 27, 2015)

“Five, 10, 15, 20 years from now, you’ll be executing our future strategy to meet complex problems we have around the world,” said Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno.

The general spoke Feb. 26, to an audience of 84 captains from around the Army, as part of the three-day Solarium 2015 conference at the Command and General Staff College here.

As the Army prepares to execute its strategy: “The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World,” or AOC, Odierno said he wanted to get “those unique perspectives captains bring,” as they will be implementing this strategy in the future.

Odierno’s remarks came during an informal discussion he and other senior leaders had with the captains, who were divided into seven groups, each group tasked with taking on different aspects of the Army Operating Concept and coming up with ideas and solutions for its operationalization.

The first group discussed better ways to develop agile and adaptive leaders who

can operate in the complex and chaotic environment the Army expects for future conflicts.

Captains concluded that while the Army is good at developing junior and company-grade officers within their core competencies and warfighting functions, it could use some improvements in better broadening the expertise they need to operate as a regionally aligned and engaged force.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Capt. Matt Etheridge said the Army must put more emphasis on incorporating cultural, regional expertise and language, in the same way it now evaluates science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. He said the Army should make some measure of cultural, regional, language, or CREL, experience a requirement for promotion.

Experiences through fellowships, learning a language and studying abroad are a few of the ways to do this, he said. It would also be good to recognize officers who develop CREL skills on their own.

The Officer Record Brief is probably the best place to capture this experience, Odierno replied, adding that he liked the thought

process on this but was unsure he could get everyone to those types of assignments except for short duration events or perhaps to incorporate more aspects of it into professional military education.

Etheridge said exposing junior officers to joint commands earlier in their careers would be particularly beneficial.

“I’ve always believed that the first six or seven years should focus on developing core competencies within your branch through company command or equivalent,” Odierno said. “That should be your total focus. Then, when that’s done, we focus on broadening assignments to include potential joint assignments.”

But, “once leaders get into a joint environment, they lack familiarity.” That experience would be more useful early in their careers, Etheridge said. The captains, incidentally, were encouraged to provide their unvarnished feedback to Odierno, whether they agreed or disagreed.

PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

Capt. Jeffrey Bernard, also a member of the first group, said the Army lacks an effective how-to guide for counseling Soldiers.

Odierno said the new support form on the Officer Evaluation Report was designed to do just that. The intent, he said, was that it would drive leaders to sit down with subordinates and discuss not just performance but leadership traits.

For example, a leader might advise that a Soldier is a great motivator but perhaps needs some work on communications skills, Odierno said. The idea is to present honest feedback about what others think a Soldier’s strengths and weaknesses are and to encourage improvements.

“Is that happening in your experience?” Odierno asked.

It varies from leader to leader, Bernard said.

Gen. David G. Perkins, commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, asked if Bernard interacted with his commanders on a routine basis and thought their feedback was a form of counseling.

Bernard said he did, acknowledging that informal counseling was as valuable as formal sit-down types.

Perkins said that for effective counseling to occur, leaders and subordinates have to communicate well. If Soldiers “don’t have a good relationship with their bosses they go in different directions, because they don’t understand intent, and it’s hard to get that from a counseling form.”

COUNSELING VERSUS MENTORSHIP

Bernard said he thought mentorship was an art, while counseling was more a science, meaning that the mechanics of it could be taught in a formalized manner. However, not everyone can be a mentor, he said. It takes a personality match.

Odierno described his own experiences, saying he never asked someone to be his mentor. “It just happened. Frankly, the person might not even have known he was my mentor.”

Looking back, Odierno said he had about five mentors throughout his career. These were people he “liked,” he said. “I liked how they acted and handled themselves. So, I made sure I learned as much as I could

from them.”

The chief said he agreed with Bernard that personality plays a big part. “You can respect someone and recognize they’re a good officer, but if his or her personality doesn’t fit your leadership style,” it won’t work.

The takeaway, Odierno said, is that while formal counseling is important from an institutional perspective, informal counseling and mentoring are major factors in leader development. And that is something that needs to be fostered in an increasingly complex world, where even junior leaders need to make split-second decisions that have far-reaching impacts.

BROADENING TRAINING

Capt. Rebecca Cooper, speaking for the second group, discussed how to prepare leaders for operating with joint and partner agencies. She said the Army must embrace complexity and change by training as it fights: in a robust environment, with multiple, nontraditional partners.

This type of training could be accomplished using existing capabilities, she said. She cited the National Guard’s “Exportable Combat Training Capabilities,” or XCTC, as an example of a model on how it could be done.

The XCTC provides an experience similar to a combat training center for its Soldiers at home station or at a regional training center, minimizing cost and time away from home and jobs. Within an XCTC-type framework, she said, personnel from the other components and services, the Department of State and other agencies the Army operates with overseas could participate.

In such an environment, Cooper said, her knowledge of electronic warfare would benefit by working with her Navy electronic warfare counterpart.

The partnering could involve military police working with their civilian counterparts, comparing tactics, techniques and procedures. Public affairs units could partner with local news stations. Signal companies could partner with AT&T or Verizon in exercises, she continued.

WHILE FORMAL COUNSELING IS IMPORTANT FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE, INFORMAL COUNSELING AND MENTORING ARE MAJOR FACTORS IN LEADER DEVELOPMENT.

- GEN. RAY ODIERNO

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, would be a great place to test this out, she said, as there are multiple services and agencies located there, as well as nearby Canadian armed forces.

Capt. Matt Brian, also of group two, said inviting a person from the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of Transition Initiatives to a maneuver advanced leader course would educate Soldiers about negotiation techniques and cross-cultural exchanges. Exchanges with foreign services officers could also be an option.

“We’d like to see memorandums of agreement or understanding that enable us to partner with agencies,” Cooper said.

A lot of that type of training is happening at the combat training centers, Odierno said. “Would you replace that?”

No, not replace that, she replied. It would help to push mission command opportunities to lower levels and broaden the experiences of junior officers early on. It would also expand effectiveness of home-station training.

“I like the concept,” said Odierno, noting that XCTC is expensive since it is contractor-based, but other approaches could be examined.

CRITICAL THINKING

Brian said Soldiers at all levels need to be trained better in critical thinking skills, as they are often faced with complex challenges and dilemmas in chaotic environments.

Development of critical thinking situations could be injected into the non-commissioned education system as well professional military education courses such as the Warrior Leader Course, he said. The situations should be “open-ended, forcing leaders to identify the best way to approach situations, rather than just in a linear fashion with only one right answer.”

ABOUT SOLARIUM

The first Solarium, convened at the national security level by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953, focused on Cold War strategy.

The second Solarium was convened by Odierno in July 2014 to discuss key issues impacting the Army: talent management, vision and branding, culture, training, education and mission command. About 100 captains from throughout the Army met at the Command and General Staff College to discuss their topics and present their recommended solutions to the chief.

(For more ARNEWS stories, visit www.army.mil/ARNEWS, or Facebook at www.facebook.com/ArmyNewsService, or Twitter @ArmyNewsService)



RIGHT: U.S. AMBASSADOR TO QATAR, THE HON. DANA SHELL SMITH, SPEAKS TO TEACHERS, PARENTS, STUDENTS AND SOLDIERS AT THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF DOHA. SMITH EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY AND THANKED ALL INVOLVED FOR THEIR DEDICATION TO KEEPING THEIR COMMUNITY STRONG.

FAR RIGHT: STAFF SGT. ENRIQUE FORD, AN OPERATIONS NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER WITH THE AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, TEACHES SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN THE BASICS OF SCUBA DIVING. FORD IS A MEMBER OF THE SEA DRAGONS, A LOCAL SCUBA DIVING CLUB.



AMERICAN SCHOOL OF DOHA MILITARY APPRECIATION DAY 2015

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
ERIC VON FRANKLIN
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Students of the American School of Doha celebrated military appreciation day with Soldiers and Airmen of Camp As Sayliyah and Al Udeid Air Base at a Feb. 23 open house event on the ASD campus.

To kick off the festivities, Dr. Deborah Welch, the school's director, welcomed approximately 275 service members by opening athletic facilities and library for all to use. Teachers helped facilitate team events and provided service members with access to online video chat equipment and facilities, encouraging many to talk with their families back home.

Additionally, those in attendance enjoyed a multi-cultural barbecue, including hamburgers and shawarma, as a show of the ASD's appreciation for American service members.

Athletic events also punctuated the festivities, as participants engaged in friendly football, soccer, basketball and volleyball matches. Additionally, a climbing wall challenged all to scale its sheer face, while swimming and kayaking options added another unique dimension to the event.

"Thank you for everything you do for us. Thank you for what you do for ASD, but also for what you do as members of the armed services," said Welch. "For the 2014-2015 school year, you all have provided ASD hundreds of volunteers, amounting to 3,000 volunteer hours."

Welch continued to praise the service members in attendance, reiterating the importance of their volunteering.

"We have over 2,100 students here; 60 percent are from 74 different countries around the world. So you all send a strong message when you volunteer your time and skills to our student body, faculty and support staff. You truly are ambassadors [of] the U.S.," said Welch.

Also in attendance was Dana Shell Smith, U.S. Ambassador to Qatar. Smith remarked on the proud partnership the embassy has with the U.S. Central Command and the American School of Doha.

"We appreciate your contributions to ASD and the U.S. Embassy," said Smith while addressing the service members. "It has strengthened U.S.-Qatari ties."

Before the services members were released to enjoy the day, Air Force Col. Steve Biggs, 379th

Air Expeditionary Wing vice commander, and Army Col. William Wozniak, Area Support Group-Qatar commander, offered comments to the troops as well.

The colonels highlighted that the service members are making a difference and building long-lasting partnerships. They also mentioned they appreciate the choice to give up personal time to help ASD.

The event culminated with Soldiers and Airmen getting on to the bus, just like they did when they were kids, and heading home after a productive day at school.

For more photos of this great event, make sure to check out the album on our Flickr page:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/asgqapao/sets>



LEFT: SPC . RONIKA COWHERD, A MEDICAL SUPPLY LOGISTICIAN FROM WESTCHESTER, PA., SERVES WITH THE U.S. ARMY MEDICAL MATERIAL COMMAND - SOUTH WEST ASIA AT CAMP AS SAYLIYAH, AND WAS ONE OF MANY SOLDIERS TO ENJOY THE MILITARY APPRECIATION DAY FESTIVITIES AT THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF DOHA.



PTSD: WHAT YOUR CHAPLAIN CAN OFFER

STORY BY
CHAPLAIN (LT. COL.) TIM H. ATKINSON
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
COMMAND CHAPLAIN

PHOTO BY
ERIC VON FRANKLIN
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The mission of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps is to comfort the wounded, care for the living and honor the fallen. Our job as a unit ministry team is to answer that call, here at Camp As Sayliyah or anywhere we are stationed.

Comprehensive Soldier fitness covers a wide array of needs, and the spiritual component of that concept is our domain. In it, we find needs unique to each individual that we must meet in equally unique ways. But, due to the nature of military service, there are certain areas that require special attention.

Combat can affect people in unexpected ways. It is a traumatic event that each person experiences and processes differently. Some individuals develop lasting symptoms that can be categorized as post-traumatic stress disorder. And, as someone whose mission is to comfort the wounded and care for the living, my duty is to help those suffering from post-traumatic stress.

I have found the role of religion to be very helpful to the wellbeing of service members and families when dealing with these issues. My education, experience and nearly three decades of active duty

service have convinced me that pointing afflicted individuals toward resources outside of themselves – like religion or Family – is an effective way to help the healing process along.

This process incorporates an important element that can be found in many successful recovery programs: what I call the “God Factor.” Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, invokes a “higher power”. It is this belief in someone or something outside of oneself that is a vital component to a successful path to recovery. In the same way, such transcendence is highly beneficial for a service member who is dealing with issues of post-traumatic stress.

My first experience with this struggle came soon after joining the chaplain corps. During a training event, two Soldiers died when an armored personnel carrier rolled over. Several more were injured. I remember being in the field and informing their friends of what happened. Everyone in the unit was affected by what happened; and after few days later we held a memorial service to help bring everyone some closure.

Later, I counseled the driver of the APC. He had come to me with feelings of guilt over his friends’ deaths, and

was spending a lot of time reliving that day, finding things he could have done differently. Looking back on it, I think the deaths of those young Soldiers may have had a greater effect on the unit than I had realized. However, I believe the availability of professional counseling for those affected by the accident made a substantial difference in their processing of the event. And, I think it showed them the value of counseling as a tool, one that would be available to them after traumatic or stressful incidents in the future.

Since that time, I have seen Soldiers lost in combat and to other tragedies. I have counseled those who remained, walking them through pain and grief. Through all of that experience, my belief in the necessity of counseling for PTSD has only been reinforced. Chaplains should be aware of this important need, and service members and Families should be aware that help is available.

If you ever feel like talking about the things you have seen, or your thoughts and feelings, please do not hesitate to contact your unit ministry team. We are here to help.

Pro Deo et Patria – For God and Country.



MIND OVER MATTER

STORY BY
STAFF SGT. DEMETRICK CARTER
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
INSTALLATION MASTER FITNESS INSTRUCTOR

PHOTOS BY
ERIC VON FRANKLIN
AREA SUPPORT GROUP - QATAR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Growing up in New Orleans was not easy. I was born with natural athletic ability, but lacked the motivation to improve on my gifts. Throughout my life, I started to seek motivation anywhere I could find it.

It seemed like the best motivation came from people who doubted me. I started writing and visualizing tangible goals, which eventually led me to a football scholarship and a way out of New Orleans.

I used that experience to help me succeed in the military and to improve my physical fitness. I believe physical accomplishments are 75 percent dependent on your body’s ability, and 25 percent come from motivation and adrenaline.

Fitness excellence is just as mental as it is physical; it is a combination of desire and determination. I am not saying that the right mentality will allow you to just go up to a bench, throw on an enormous of weight and begin doing sets. What I am saying is that if you prepare yourself to lift that much weight, then – with the appropriate work ethic – you will eventually reach your goals.

But, I often see Soldiers asking about minimum qualifications instead. Nowhere is this more obvious than during physical fitness tests.

I am here to tell you, with that attitude, Soldiers defeat themselves before the test even begins. Mental limitations will indeed affect physical performance. I see it when Soldiers reach muscle failure, or even simply quit, once achieving the bare minimum.

These defeats are as much mental as they are physical, and they can

be avoided with a little resiliency.

I have experienced this in my own life. While waiting to attend the U.S. Army Master Fitness School, I was also playing semi-professional football in Fort Benning, Ga.

However, I broke two ribs and passed out on the field only two months before I was scheduled to attend school.

As the first master fitness class being offered in 20 years, many people were anxious to take my place, and I remember my unit command worrying that I might not be able to pass if I were to go.

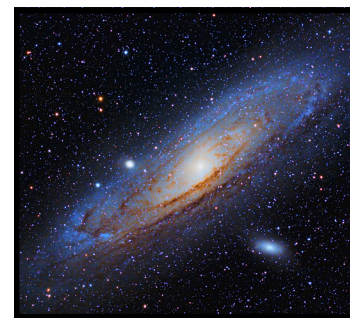
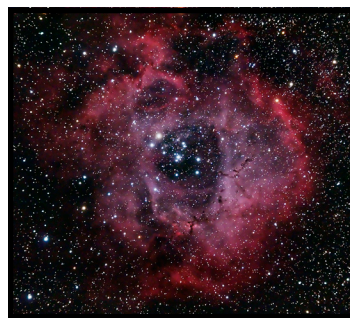
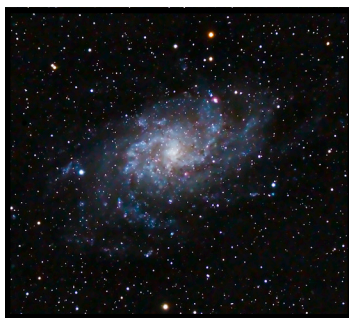
Just like when I was younger, that doubt was my motivation. After being on bed rest for two weeks, and with only five weeks before school, I began training and doing my own physical therapy.

My mentality was that I would succeed. I would complete the course and become one of the first graduates of the newly reinstated program. I believe my attitude played a large part in achieving that goal.

For many, all we need is that little push: something extra to get us going. Like most things, the beginning is the hardest part. Giving up those precious hours of sleep to go push yourself in the gym is difficult, at first. The hardest part of losing weight is that first pound. But, the easy path is also often the path to failure, or – at best – mediocrity.

While we cannot control many of the environmental factors in our lives, we can ALWAYS control our attitudes. Let them be your little push because, sometimes, that’s all it takes to succeed.

CAPTAIN CAPTURES PHOTOS OUT OF THIS WORLD



COURTESY STORY: ARMY.MIL
BY MARIE BERBEREA
FORT SILL, OKLA.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY
BY CAPT. JOE SPRACKLEN
30TH AIR DEFENSE ARTILLERY

FORT SILL, OKLA.
(FEB. 6, 2015)

Capt. Joe Spracklen, an Air Defense Artillery Captains Career Course student, sits in the dark waiting.

He has spent countless hours researching and preparing. He sets up his many pieces of equipment as he tracks the movement of his long-range target.

The stars.

Spracklen leaves the pollution of the city lights regularly to take aim at his hobby of astrophotography.

"My parents got me a telescope when I was really little. Kind of been hooked ever since," Spracklen said.

Recruited to play hockey at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, Spracklen said that is when he began looking into the art form.

"I spent a ton of time just researching and just figuring out how to do everything and figuring out what I was going to buy, so I was really prepared once I finally graduated," he said.

Five years later, Spracklen is still honing his skills.

"It's one of the most frustrating things I've ever done, especially because I didn't have anyone to teach me," he said. "I took all this stuff out probably 15 or 20 times, drove an hour away, set all this stuff up and then just completely failed."

Spracklen has since figured it out, and said a great spot for astrophotography locally is at Lake Lawtonka's campgrounds.

He sets up his equipment about an hour before sunset, and then waits until the North Star is visible before he focuses on a subject.

"You have to find everything yourself, so you learn a lot about where things are just by hunting through the constellations," Spracklen said.

His telescope and camera are fixed to a mount

on top of a tripod. The mount is motorized and controlled by a program on his laptop that tracks the exact rate of the earth's movement.

As an extra measure, Spracklen uses a second telescope, called a guide scope, that detects if the mount isn't tracking perfectly so he can adjust accordingly.

"The process to take these pictures is extremely complicated; there are a hundred variables that need to be exactly right for me to get a good image.

"Being able to create a detailed and systematic process has helped me get consistent results and allowed me to quickly diagnose problems that arise during an imaging session," he said.

Each click of the camera's shutter is open for 10 minutes to gather as much light in the photo as possible. After 20 viable frames, he layers them in editing software on his computer.

Spracklen also takes several negative frames with the lens cap on that are later used to reduce noise in the composite photo.

"I have to do some pretty extensive work in Photoshop to bring out details ... probably six to eight hours per picture," he said.

Although it seems a hobby like this can only be taken on by someone inherently patient, Spracklen said his time on the ice has helped him focus in this medium.

"I attribute a lot of my personality and character to playing hockey and I think that the dedication it took to reach a high level of competition in the hockey world has served me well in all areas of my life, including my hobbies," he said.

Spracklen said he is often teased about astrophotography until he shares the results of his labors. He said he loves to capture images that most think are only possible using the Hubble Space Telescope.

"What's anyone get out of any hobby," Spracklen asked. "It just fascinates me. It's always fascinated me."



ABOVE: CAPT. JOE SPRACKLEN, OF THE 30TH AIR DEFENSE ARTILLERY, USES A TELESCOPE, CAMERA, GUIDE SCOPE, MOUNT, TRIPOD AND A LAPTOP FOR ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY. HE ALSO CREATED A SHIELD TO DIMINISH ANY DISTURBANCE IN THE PHOTOS FROM WIND GUSTS IN OKLAHOMA.

TOP ROW: (FAR LEFT) THE TRIANGULUM GALAXY, ALSO KNOWN AS M33, IS ABOUT 3 MILLION LIGHT-YEARS AWAY FROM EARTH. (CENTER LEFT) THE ROSETTE NEBULA, ALSO KNOWN AS CALDWELL 49 OR NGC 2237, IS ABOUT 5,200 LIGHT-YEARS AWAY FROM EARTH. THIS FLOWER-SHAPED NEBULA IS A HUGE STAR-FORMING CLOUD OF DUST AND GAS IN THE MILKY WAY GALAXY. (CENTER RIGHT) THE HEART NEBULA IS LOCATED ABOUT 7,500 LIGHT-YEARS AWAY IN THE PERSEUS SPIRAL ARM OF THE MILKY WAY GALAXY. (FAR RIGHT) ANDROMEDA IS THE NEAREST MAJOR GALAXY TO THE MILKY WAY GALAXY. IT CONTAINS APPROXIMATELY 1 TRILLION STARS.



SPC. JESUS MEDINA, SPC. ISAAC NATERA, PFC. BOBBY NGENDUNG, PVT. HECTOR ORTIZPEREZ, AND PFC. FILIP VACO TAKE THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE DURING THEIR NATURALIZATION CEREMONY AT BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN, JAN. 30, 2015.

FIVE U.S. FORCES AFGHANISTAN SOLDIERS ACHIEVE DREAM OF BECOMING U.S. CITIZENS

COURTESY STORY: ARMY.MIL
BY SGT. 1ST CLASS DAVID WHEELER
U.S. FORCES - AFGHANISTAN

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN
(JAN. 30, 2015)

In a deployed environment, Soldiers are often faced with tough decisions on a daily basis.

Recently Spc. Jesus Medina, Spc. Isaac Natera, Pfc. Bobby Ngendung, Pvt. Hector OrtizPerez, and Pfc. Filip Vaco made a decision that will change both theirs and their families lives, as they were sworn in as U.S. citizens during a ceremony in Afghanistan.

The administrative portion of the journey took on average 10-14 months for these Soldiers, but for most of them, this dream has been a longtime coming.

"Back from where I am from, we don't get opportunities like this," said Ngendung, an infantryman from Task Force Thunder, originally from Yaounde, Cameroon. "Ever since I was a little kid, I admired Soldiers, and I always wanted to be a Soldier, especially in the U.S. Army. I saw them on TV and saw them always helping people out, and that made me want to be a part of that."

In the crowd watching the naturalization ceremony, was another enlisted Soldier, who remembers being in their shoes.

"I took the oath in February 1992," said Command Sgt. Major Christopher Gilpin, U.S. Forces Afghanistan -- Support, Senior Enlisted Leader. "The process was difficult but that was because the system was different back then."

With the former system, Gilpin had to try more than once to become a U.S. citizen. During his first attempt, he had all his paperwork completed, but there was a problem.

"Back then you had to first serve three years in the military, and I applied just before Desert Storm started," said Gilpin, originally a Jamaican citizen. "I was in Desert Storm when I finalized my application which was approved, but I was in the desert so I could not be sworn in. I missed my swear-in date, so when I redeployed

after the war I had to start everything over again."

Since Gilpin's experience, the rules have changed for Service members.

"In 2002, Congress changed the law so that a Service member only needs one year of active service to become eligible to be a citizen," Gilpin said. "Then President Bush signed an executive order stating that during periods of hostility, any Service member serving one day of active duty can apply for citizenship. Also, they can now be sworn in overseas."

Gilpin stressed that there are multiple ways to start the process. In garrison, you can visit Army Community Service, when deployed you can check in with anyone that works for the embassy to point you in the right direction, or you can start the process online at <http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/apply-citizen-ship>.

As the five Soldiers finished the Oath of Allegiance, Gilpin could not help but remember his own experience.

"I saw the Soldiers and they reminded me of myself, I was so emotional that I felt tears coming out and I had to compose myself," Gilpin said. "I remembered during Desert Storm, they always played Lee Greenwood's 'God Bless the U.S.A.' That was our theme song, and I was proud to sing it but at the end I would say I am proud to be an American...Soldier, because I wasn't a citizen yet. So I remember being so proud that day, because I could sing I am proud to be an American and not have to say Soldier at the end."

As the ceremony finished, just like Gilpin has been sharing his knowledge to the younger generation, this group of U.S. citizens are trying to pass on their experiences to the next generation.

"Just keep your head up, and eventually it will all be better," said OrtizPerez, a Task Force Thunder infantryman, originally from Mexico. "You might go through a lot of hard times, but eventually you will get to the top of the mountain, and it feels great."

SOLDIER-SPEAK: A BRIEF GUIDE TO MODERN MILITARY JARGON

BY
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Military jargon. It is inseparable from military life. For proof, one needs only a brief glance at television or film depictions of the military.

Official abbreviations and acronyms make up the bulk of the military's unique verbal catalogue. Just as unique, however, are the everyday expressions Soldiers create to meet the needs of the modern warrior lifestyle.

Military service has been described as long stretches of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. In such an environment, keeping one's sense of humor becomes a survival tool - almost as much as any training or equipment Soldiers possess.

This unofficial vernacular is often insightful and funny and, occasionally, even profound. As a result, many military expressions have found their way into common usage.

Here are just a few, and a little background on each.

... AND A WAKEUP

Military service often requires Soldiers to sacrifice comfort and convenience. So, it should come as no surprise that counting down the days becomes a common theme. This is just a way to shave a day off those numbers.

HOOAH!

Yes? Understood? Anything and everything except "no"? This one is difficult to quantify, since it can do anything from getting a Soldier off the hook to earning him or her pushups. Use with caution.

I'VE GOT YOUR SIX

Like a clock face can be used to indicate direction, this means someone is watching your back.

ZERO DARK THIRTY

No. Not the movie. But, it did borrow its title from this phrase, meaning extremely - possibly unnecessarily - early, where there is NO chance of the sun being up.

MANDATORY FUN

Soldiers value their time to the extreme. This can often result in low attendance in any event where their presence is not explicitly ordered, even recreational events. So, sometimes, the fun is by fiat.

VOLUNTOLD

A different animal than mandatory fun, a voluntold assignment is technically voluntary. However, it is understood to be mandatory.

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... LIKE A SOUP SANDWICH

Picture trying to eat a soup sandwich. Now, apply that poor planning and inefficiency to any similarly impossible mess you can imagine.

HIT THE HEAD

This is not a violent physical act, but the application of naval terminology. The head, on a ship, is its restroom.

ROGER / ROGER THAT

Long ago used by military radio operators to indicate a message had been received, this term is still in use and can now also be used to indicate an affirmative answer.

BOONDOCKS / BOONIES

During operations in the Philippines, American personnel would refer to the untamed parts of the islands as the boondocks, or the boonies. *Bundok* is the Tagalog word for *mountain*. Since then, the term has been used to describe any place that is wild, untamed or unreasonably far away.

POP SMOKE

When designating a landing zone for extraction, Soldiers would drop a smoke grenade to help guide helicopter pilots. This term is synonymous with leaving an area.

FULL BATTLE RATTLE

Full combat gear. The name comes from the sound the equipment makes when walking or running.

ON CYBER PATROL



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