



# OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 20 YEARS LATER



SPECIAL INSERT TO THE MARCH 24, 2023, EDITION OF THE REAL MCCOY, RECALLING THE START OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM ON MARCH 19, 2003.

## OIF 20th Anniversary: Fort McCoy was fully engaged in its mobilization mission at beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom



Photo by Lou Ann Mittelstadt

Members of the 333rd Military Police Company (Combat Support) undergo M-203 Grenade Launcher training March 24, 2003, at Fort McCoy's Range 35 on North Post at the installation. The 333rd is an Illinois Army National Guard unit headquartered in Freeport. The unit was training as part of mobilization for deployment overseas.

BY SCOTT T. STURKOL  
Public Affairs Staff

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) officially started 20 years ago on March 19, 2003, as coalition forces that included U.S. Army troops who had trained at Fort McCoy began operations.

At Fort McCoy, the installation had already been busy operating a mobilization mission supporting the Global War on Terrorism that was part of the already ongoing worldwide operations for Operation Enduring Freedom that began on Oct. 7, 2001. So, when OIF began, the rotation of mobilizing units and service members for deployments just grew to include the OIF mission.

Specifically in March 2003, several things were taking place on the mobilization front. In the March 14, 2003, edition of the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper (later renamed The Real McCoy), a story by the Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office highlighted the work being done by the 107th Maintenance Company.

"The 107th Maintenance Company, a Wisconsin Army National Guard unit headquartered in Sparta with detachments in Viroqua and Sussex, has been assigned to support the Installation Materiel Maintenance Activity workforce in the Fort McCoy mission. Fort McCoy was assigned a mobilization mission as one of the Army's 15 power projection platforms.

"First Lt. Kevin Gregar, the 107th's Maintenance Control officer, said the unit arrived at Fort McCoy in late January. Unit members are participating in the mission to ensure the equipment meets Army 10-20 standards before it is deployed, he said.

"Gary Flock, the IMMA supervisor, said that Griffin Services Inc., had been performing the IMMA mission for less than a month when the installation received the mobilization mission. The IMMA portion of the mobilization mission includes inspection, preventive maintenance and repair of equipment ranging from night-vision goggles and radio equipment to weapons and from HUMVEES to heavy expanded mobility tactical trucks and large construction equipment."

That same newspaper edition also reflected training taking place by the 1555th Quartermaster Detachment in another story by the Fort McCoy Public

Affairs Office team.

"The Army's water needs during deployments are being met by units such as the 1555th Quartermaster Detachment, an Iowa National Guard unit headquartered at Dubuque," the story states. "Capt. Wes Golden, unit commander, said the unit was mobilized earlier this year at Fort McCoy to support Army needs. The unit was created in 1997 as a result of lessons learned during Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

"The Army had water purification units, but they didn't realize how much water they needed (during deployments)," Golden said. "So this unit was one of many formed to help overcome the shortages."

"The unit can produce several thousand gallons of drinkable water per hour under optimum conditions," the story states. Golden said the water can be used for a number of purposes including drinking, cooking, laundry, and showering.

The unit uses reverse-osmosis water purification techniques and acts as a water distribution point for other units. The unit has been receiving water-purification equipment from several locations to update and augment its equipment, he said.

Also featured in the March 14, 2003, edition of the Triad newspaper was the 7228th Medical Support Unit. They unit was also supporting mobilizing service members as described in another story by the Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office.

"Five years of rehearsing the unit's wartime mission during annual training sessions at Fort McCoy helped prepare personnel from the 7228th Medical Support Unit when the call came," the story states. "Lt. Col. Beth Zimmer, the commander of the Columbia, Mo., Army Reserve medical unit, said the unit handles medical and dental readiness issues for military personnel mobilizing at Fort McCoy, one of the Army's 15 power-projection platforms.

"The 7228th also supports the installation's Troop Medical Clinic and staffs the Dental Clinic during mobilization," the story states. "The unit conducts its mobilization mission at Fort McCoy under the command of Troop Command.

"We train doing the exact same mission during our annual training here," Zimmer said. "This had us well-prepared (See [MOBILIZATION](#), Insert Page 2)

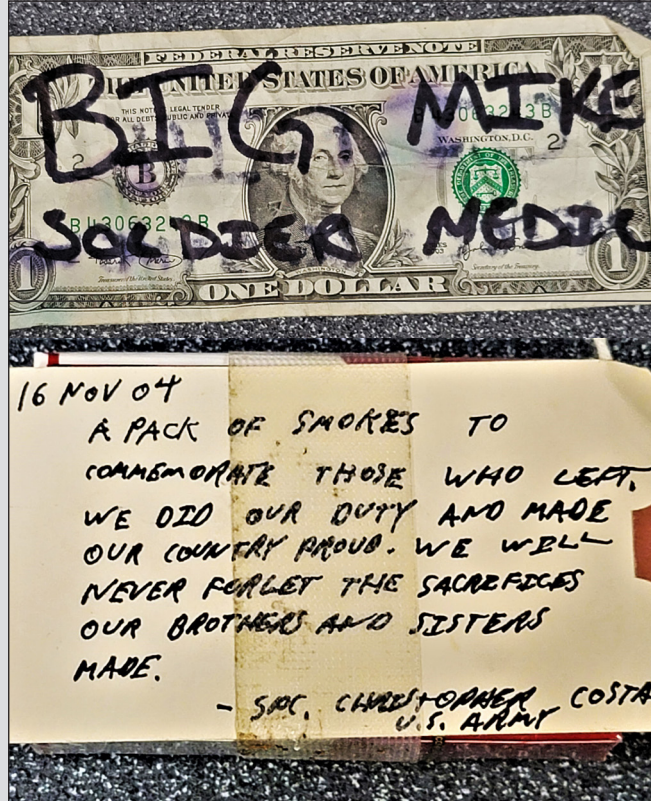


Photo by Robert Schuette

Sgt. Alexis Wood, Sgt. Larry Maeder, and Sgt. Jamie Karshbaum (left to right), all with the 1555th Quartermaster Detachment, an Iowa National Guard unit headquartered at Dubuque, prepare to inspect a water pump March 11, 2003, during operations at Fort McCoy. The unit was training in preparation for a deployment while mobilizing at Fort McCoy. At the time, Fort McCoy had an ongoing mobilization mission preparing service members for deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

## TIME CAPSULE FOUND

### Item left by decorated Kentucky Guard MP unit found in Fort McCoy barracks nearly 20 years after unit left of Operation Iraqi Freedom



Photos by Scott T. Sturkol

Some of the items and a time capsule are shown March 13 at Fort McCoy. The time capsule was left by the Kentucky National Guard's 617th Military Police Company in November 2004. It discovered in late 2022 by contractors working on Fort McCoy barracks.

BY SCOTT T. STURKOL  
Public Affairs Staff

In November 2004, the 617th Military Police Company of the Kentucky National Guard was one of many military units completing their mobilization at Fort McCoy for deployment.

It was in that month the unit wrapped up their training at Wisconsin's only Army installation and prepared to head off to Iraq for a year deployment for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Before they left, however, some members of the unit decided they'd put together a "time capsule" of sorts in a plastic drawer they got from the Fort McCoy Exchange, put some mementos in it, and stash it away in the walls of one of the hundreds of barracks on the installation's cantonment area.

"I think the concept was we believed when we got back, we were we were gonna be able to open it when we (got back)," said Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy F. Nein, battalion sergeant major of the 198th Military Police Battalion of the Kentucky Army National Guard at Louisville. At the time, Nein was a staff sergeant with the 617th.

But after their deployment, members of the unit never went back to find their time capsule. Whoever stashed the drawer of mementos into the wall did it well because it remained undiscovered for 19 years. The time capsule was found in fall 2022 when contractors were beginning major renovations on 200 of the barracks at Fort McCoy.

When workers discovered the capsule, they made sure to give it to members of the Fort McCoy Directorate of Public Works, who in turn presented it to the Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office for eventual presentation into the Fort McCoy History Center.

Nein said he and probably everyone else probably never thought about the capsule until just recently when a member of the Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office contacted him to ask if he was part of the team who left their names on items in the capsule. When they came back from their deployment where every member of the unit faced combat engagement on nearly a daily basis, he said the time capsule was the furthest thing from their minds.

"It was a very long year," he said.

### How they got to McCoy

The 617th Military Police Company is part of the Kentucky National Guard. Soldiers with the company arrived at Fort McCoy in October 2004 to begin their mobilization for 30 days before deploying to Southwest Asia for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Shortly after arriving, Nein's unit was included as part of



a Rapid Fielding Initiative. In the Nov. 12, 2004, edition of the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper, in a story written by Karen Mast, Nein and the 617th were mentioned about being a part of the initiative.

"Among those issued equipment were more than 150 Soldiers from the 617th Military Police Company, a Kentucky Army National Guard unit headquartered in Richmond. Staff Sgt. Timothy Nein believes the additional equipment will help his unit better achieve its missions in Iraq. "The additional clothing and gear makes our job more comfortable," said Nein. "I expect we'll be better focused on our mission, not on the heat or how we feel."

"In addition to Nein, several other members of the unit returned from a 10-month deployment in Iraq last year and will deploy again with the 617th later this month," the story states. "Spc. Joseph Fields said the new equipment would give the Soldiers a definite advantage over last time."

Nein said the 617th trained hard while at Fort McCoy in all sorts of operations and skill sets. "I appreciated the mobilization process," he said.

And when they were wrapping up their time at McCoy, that's when they created the time capsule with the plastic drawer.

### What was in time capsule

Some experts say people in the past have created time capsules to give the people of the future an idea of what their lives were like at the time the objects were placed in the capsule itself.

In the case of what found in the McCoy barracks, as Nein said, it was something they had planned to recover a year after their deployment — not have everyone forget about it for two decades.

"I think it was a real surprise to everyone to hear about it," Nein said. "I posted pictures of it to the unit's Facebook page, and of course it created a lot of discussion."

On top of the white plastic drawer, someone wrote, "617th MP Co., 4th PLT DRAGONS, TIME CAPSULE, DO NOT OPEN TILL WE RETURN."

Then within the drawer is a mix of stuff that Soldiers from the unit randomly placed into it. Many things were signed or initialed or had messages. Included were dollar bills, military coins, a pack of cigarettes, a can of snuff, two small New Testament books, a ball cap filled with many signatures, an old Happy Birthday hat that was signed by three Soldiers who celebrated birthdays in October 2004, a plastic badge, candy, a Six Flags season park pass for 2004, a CD case, air freshener, and shaving cream.

Soldiers who left notes on items within the capsule that were identifiable included Nein, Sgt. Mike Adams, Spc.

(See [CAPSULE](#), Insert Page 4)



Photo by Karen Mast/Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office

Soldiers with the 617th Military Police Company, a Kentucky Army National Guard unit headquartered in Richmond, prepare to fire on a target on Oct. 25, 2004, at Range 41 at Fort McCoy. The 617th was preparing for deployment.

## REMEMBERING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

## MOBILIZATION

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when we got a call do an actual mission.”

Timothy Werstein, who currently works with the Fort McCoy Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security, was a sergeant first class back in March 2003 and was supporting the mobilization mission at Fort McCoy as a unit assistant assigned to the 1st Battalion, 338th Regiment (Training Support) of the 2nd Brigade, 85th Training Division (Training Support).

“As a unit assistant part of the Army’s active-component/reserve-component program, it consisted of highly skilled and qualified active duty noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers to teach, coach, and mentor reserve-component units,” Werstein said. “As a transportation NCO, I was assigned Army rail units in Milwaukee, Chicago, and Saint Louis. Part of my job was to ensure that my units were ready and prepared to deploy if called upon. I served with the 1st, 338th from April 2001 thru April 2004.”

Werstein said at the start of the mobilization, all the active-duty Soldiers were called in and told that the unit was being activated and all Reserve members of the unit would be activated.

“We would assist mobilizing and deploying Army Reserve units through Fort McCoy,” Werstein said. “The active-duty Soldiers were given the mission to shepherd our assigned units through the process of mobilization and deployment as part of the Mobilization Assistant Team. We were directly responsible to the commander of the 2nd, 85th Division to ensure that each unit was prepared and certified to deploy to the theater of operations. He would only sign off that a unit was prepared to deploy after each team validated that the unit was combat ready and had met all Army standards.”

“All the units that I was involved with were very motivated and eager to deploy,” Werstein said. “They trained day-in and day-out with the end goal of taking the fight to the enemy — all without much complaint. I met and served with some great individuals who put their personal lives on hold to go and fight for our country. Did we have some problem children, sure. But all-in-all, the vast majority were eager to do what was right and did everything in their power to be ready to deploy with their units.”

In 2011, the mobilization mission was coming to an end at Fort McCoy and so was the mission in Iraq. An article by the Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office discussed the end of the mission.

“Col. Scott McFarlane, Fort McCoy Deputy Commander for Mobilization, said for the past 10 years, ‘The mission went very well, smooth and successful. We took good care of the Soldiers.’

McFarlane said the mobilization and demobilization mission evolved from being supported by a small cell of Soldiers in the 6015th Garrison Support Unit soon after Sept. 11, 2001, to the full operation of the Mobilization Support Brigade with about 50 Soldiers, and about 160 contract civilians and mobilizing training support from about 600 Soldiers with the 181st Infantry Brigade for classroom and field exercises.

“Statistics through fiscal year 2011 show that 67,200 Soldiers mobilized, trained, and deployed through Fort McCoy, and 94,300 were demobilized at the installation. The mobilization figure also includes 10,500 Air Force and Navy personnel.”

On Dec. 15, 2011, after nearly nine years of conflict, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top U.S. military leaders observed the official end to OIF, a Department of Veterans of Affairs press release states. And according to the Department of Defense, nearly 4,500 U.S. military personnel were killed and nearly 32,000 wounded in the Iraq War.

Fort McCoy’s motto is to be the “Total Force Training Center.” Located in the heart of the upper Midwest, Fort McCoy is the only U.S. Army installation in Wisconsin.

The installation has provided support and facilities for the field and classroom training of more than 100,000 military personnel from all services nearly every year since 1984.

Learn more about Fort McCoy online at <https://home.army.mil/mccoy>, on the Defense Visual Information Distribution System at <https://www.dvidshub.net/fmpao>, on Facebook by searching “ftmccoy,” and on Twitter by searching “usagmccoy.”

(Former Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office members Lou Ann Mittelstadt and Robert Schuette contributed to this article.)



Personnel with the 229th Engineer Company prepare to fire weapons March 11, 2003, at Range 34, a Multipurpose Machine-Gun Range, on North Post at Fort McCoy, Wis. The 229th was one of many units preparing to deploy at Fort McCoy. At the time, Fort McCoy had an ongoing mobilization mission preparing service members for deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Personnel with the 482nd Medical Logistics Detachment participate in the the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Confidence Course on March 11, 2003, at Fort McCoy. The personnel from the Milwaukee Army Reserve unit were training in preparation for a deployment.

## THIS MONTH IN FORT MCCOY HISTORY — MARCH 2003

Fort McCoy, Wis., was established in 1909. This edition of Fort McCoy’s history look-back focuses specifically back on what was going on at Fort McCoy in March 2003 during the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 19, 2003.

### 20 Years Ago — March 28, 2003: From the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper

**TROOP COMMAND ASSISTS MOBILIZING SOLDIERS:** Multi-unit structure provides variety of support services — When mobilizing Soldiers at Fort McCoy need food, transportation, equipment repair, or anything else to prepare for deployment, the Fort McCoy Troop Command is there to help ensure Soldiers’ and units’ needs are met.

Command Sgt. Maj. Don Hobson of Troop Command said each mobilizing unit is assigned a mobilization assistance team to help them through the mobilizing process. Soldiers staffing Troop Command perform a wide variety of functions at Fort McCoy to support mobilization, deployment, redeployment and demobilization; he said.

The 6015th Garrison Support Unit (GSU) of Forest Park, Ill., provides the command and control for Troop Command and supports Fort McCoy’s mobilization needs as one of the U.S. Army’s 15 power projection platforms. Upon deployment to Fort McCoy in January 2003, the 6015th GSU was redesignated the Troop Command Troop Command’s mobilization mission also includes providing personnel from either the 6015th GSU or from other units attached to the Troop Command Support Battalion to support all of the installation’s garrison directorates to meet their mission requirements.

The directorates include the Directorate of Training, Mobilization and Security, the Directorate of Support Services, the Directorate of Community Activities and the Directorate of Business Services.

The Troop Command Support Battalion units that provide mobilization support are: the 7228th Medical Support Unit of Columbia, Mo.; the 1074th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) of North Platte, Neb.; the 107th Maintenance Company of Sparta, Wis., with detachments in Viroqua and Sussex; and the 417th General Support Company of Faribault, Minn.

“We’re here to ensure the soldiers have everything they need to successfully complete their various missions,” Hobson said. “We prepare the force.”

The Troop Command helps set Soldier training schedules to ensure their Soldier skills, training missions, collective and individual training requirements and military occupational specialty skills are validated or on track to be validated, he said. Troop Command also works with other installation training organizations, such as the 2nd Brigade, 85th Division (Training Support) and Regional Training Site-Medical, for example, to meet training needs. Hobson said the 2nd, 85th (TS) supports individual and collective training needs for soldiers, and RTS-Medical supports medical training needs.

One of the other important duties of Troop Command is to staff the Soldier Readiness Center (SRC), Hobson said.

Here, mobilized Soldiers have their paperwork double-checked and updated, as necessary, including finance, legal, medical and dental, personnel and family support. Family-support documents, such as the family care package, help ensure a servicemember’s family members are taken care of during the deployment and through the Soldiers’ redeployment and demobilization, he said.



Members of the 940th Transportation Company of Fort Sheridan, Ill., load their equipment March 24, 2003, on pallets at Fort McCoy, in preparation for deployment via aircraft. The company was one of many units mobilized for deployment through Fort McCoy at the time.

Maj. Pamela Dowdy, the SRC officer in charge, said the key to good operations is customer service and being flexible. Some units come to the SRC with most of their paperwork in good order. Other units need to have work done on their paperwork.

“I encourage the Soldiers here to look at each and every one of the Soldiers being processed through the SRC and salute them,” Dowdy said. “We need to give each individual special care and the utmost respect and ensure all the ‘i’s are dotted and the ‘t’s are crossed. If I were sitting on the other side of the desk, I would want someone to do it right for me to ensure my family was taken care of.”

### 20 Years Ago — March 28, 2003: From the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper

**MOBILIZATION ASSISTANCE TEAM KEEPS UNIT TRAINING ON TRACK:** The Fort McCoy Mobilization Assistance Team (MAT) serves as the central processing location to provide up-to-date information about the training status of units mobilizing at Fort McCoy, said Lt. Col. Jay Orbik.

Orbik is the Fort McCoy MAT Emergency Operations Center (EOC) officer in charge. He is a member of the 2nd Brigade, 85th Division (Train-

ing Support) (2nd, 85th [TS]). Orbik said the MAT EOC at Fort McCoy was activated in early January. The team produces a daily update of information that helps installation mobilization personnel determine whether a unit is ready to deploy.

Among the items addressed in the reports are personnel and logistics issues, as well as individual and collective tasks, he said.

“We provide the training information that everyone involved with the process needs to know to help determine whether a unit can be considered validated for deployment,” he said.

Sgt. 1st Class Cliff Gocha, the noncommissioned officer in charge of MAT Headquarters at McCoy, said the validation process starts at a unit’s home station. When a unit aligned with the 2nd Brigade receives a mobilization alert, unit assistants (UAs) from the 2nd Brigade, go to home stations and do everything possible to help prepare a unit to successfully complete a mobilization.

The size of a mobilizing unit determines the number of assigned by the 2nd Brigade, he said.

Sgt. 1st Class Tim Werstein, a UA with the 1st Battalion, 338th Regiment of the 2nd, 85th (TS) at Fort McCoy, said the UAs help coordinate customer requests for day-to-day missions. For example, that may mean arranging for the use of the installation’s Nuclear, Biological and Chemical confidence course to help mobilizing personnel ensure their protective masks fit and work properly.



Personnel with the 1555th Quartermaster Detachment, an Iowa National Guard unit from Dubuque, help load their equipment on railcars March 24, 2003, at Fort McCoy. The effort was part of the mobilization mission that was ongoing at the time at Fort McCoy in preparing and sending troops for deployment overseas.

Capt. Del Volpel, the commander of the 482nd Medical Logistics Detachment, said his unit was glad to have a UA ready to support his unit’s training. The unit is an Army Reserve unit from Milwaukee.

“They’ll (unit assistants) help arrange training and do anything they can do to help us accomplish our training (and increase our readiness),” Volpel said.

Staff Sgt. Scott Graham, the first sergeant of the 106th Quarry Team, an Army National Guard unit from Ashland, Wis., said he reports any problem he has to his UA. “They’ll find out what is causing the problem and find a solution for you,” he said. Any concerns the UAs cannot solve are passed onto the UA’s liaison officers. In turn, concerns not solved at that level are presented during daily briefings.

In addition to input from the MAT liaison officers, the daily briefings about mobilization status of the units at Fort McCoy include input from representatives from other organizations, including Troop Command, the installation and the 2nd, 85th (TS), he said. The liaison officers have command and control of the unit assistants, with each liaison officer having 15 to 25 unit assistants under his control. Troop Command personnel are responsible for scheduling the training and other activities of the mobilizing units.

“The meetings serve as a forum to update the 2nd, 85th (TS) commander, Col. Michael L. Parker, about the status of the unit’s mobilization process,” Orbik said. “It also gives visibility to the problems the units are having and starts the process to correct those problems.”

Orbik said it is important to solve these issues promptly and note how a problem is handled because if one unit encounters a problem it is likely another unit will encounter the same problem.

The solutions can range from giving advice to unit assistants to helping them schedule a range for training or arranging other school training. Orbik said the meetings have helped find equipment for units that no one thought would be available or to schedule training for units, for example.

The MAT EOC is scheduled to remain open throughout the mobilization, deployment, redeployment and demobilization process to assist Soldiers and units, he said.

### 20 Years Ago — March 28, 2003: From the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper

**COMBAT LIFESAVER COURSE TEACHES BASIC MEDICAL SKILLS:** A number of soldiers going through the mobilization process at Fort McCoy are learning basic combat lifesaver procedures at a three-day course presented by the Regional Training Site (RTS)-Medical staff.

Darren Farquhar, an RTS-Medical staff member, said the course is offered to all Soldiers who do not have a medical military occupational specialty.

A recent class included postal, chemical, military police, and transportation personnel among others.

“This is basic care that Soldiers may utilize on the battlefield after an incident,” he said. “It’s like a civilian first responder.”

The Soldiers learn about administering IV fluids, treatment of sucking wounds, and bandaging injuries, among other skills, he said.

The course was requested by the 2nd Brigade, 85th Division (Training Support) at Fort McCoy and was driven by feedback from mobilizing units. Farquhar said RTS-Medical has offered four such courses to date.

(See HISTORY, Insert Page 3)

REMEMBERING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

'I didn't care if I lived or died'

# Retired CSM, Operation Iraqi Freedom vet, shares story of personal survival

STORY & PHOTO BY SCOTT T. STURKOL  
Public Affairs Staff

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas E. Campbell has had a lengthy Army career — 32 years — and since he retired from active service in November 2022 he hasn't stopped finding a way to serve. Now he's trying to share his story of survival from the brink of suicide in hopes to encourage others to know it's okay to seek help and be helped. That suicide isn't the answer and that seeking help, facing your demons, and taking life one step at a time can help you survive.

## Stellar career

Campbell's biography is a long list of demonstrating what it means to be a Soldier who leads from the front. A native of Center, Texas, he joined in 1989 and never looked back.

Through his career, Campbell has held positions of responsibility and leadership at many levels. He's been a driver/training noncommissioned officer (NCO), a machine gunner, rifleman, sniper, team leader, squad leader, drill sergeant, platoon and operations sergeant, first sergeant, sergeant major, training sergeant major, and command sergeant major.

Campbell has served and led at the squad, company, battalion, regiment, and command level at both stateside and overseas locations. And Campbell's awards and decorations are numerous. According to his biography they include the three Bronze Star awards, six Meritorious Service Medals; the Army Commendation Medal for Valor; five Army Commendation Medals; six Army Achievement Medals, three awards of the Valorous Unit Award, the Department of State Meritorious Honor Award, eight Army Good Conduct Medals; the National Defense Medal with Bronze Star, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal; the NCO Development Ribbon (with numeral 5), the Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon (with Numeral 4), the NATO Medal; the Multi-National Force and Observer Medal, the DrillSergeant Badge, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Expert Infantry Badge; the Pathfinder Badge, the Senior Parachutist Badge, the Parachutist Badge, the Air Assault Badge, and the Driver Badge. He was also inducted into the Orders of St. Maurice and St. George, and he was inducted into the Drill Sergeant Hall of Fame.

If someone outside the Army were looking at his experience and his biography, they might think he has done it all and would never have any problems. But as he explained March 3 to the Fort McCoy workforce in several special sessions, his trauma from personal loss and injury took its toll on his life during his Army career almost to the point that it could have cost him his career ... and his life.

## Sharing his story

Campbell spoke to Fort McCoy personnel on March 2, 3, and 4. His presentation about what he has experienced is probably not too unlike many he had addressed in his audience.

Since 2001, many service members like Campbell have experienced many deployments, high operations tempo, and there's also the possibility they've lost someone important in their life along the way — also like Campbell.

Campbell talked about being a sniper in Operation Iraqi Freedom and losing his spotter and friend, Sgt. Ryan Baum. Baum died in combat action in Iraq on May 18, 2007.

"He was killed on a patrol he wasn't supposed to be on," Campbell said. "He talked me into letting him go on the patrol. ... He was supposed to go on leave that night. And the reason he was supposed to go on leave was because his first child was going to be born."

Campbell talked about survivor guilt and how it haunted him. He also talked about coming home from a deployment and not being greeted with a loving embrace.

"Soldiers and their wives and their kids are coming out to hugs and kisses and all that good stuff," Campbell said. "And I'm looking around trying to find my wife and kids and there's nobody there. I found my duffel bags. I found somebody to give me a ride home. I get to the house, and I find out that I'm getting a divorce, and I've got two weeks to be in Texas."

Campbell was going to Texas for training. He went to Fort Bliss for the Sergeant Major Academy. He brought a camper, got set up, and commenced to spiraling downward with undiagnosed depression and head trauma he had suffered on the deployment he had just returned from, he said.

"Nobody's in charge of me," Campbell said. "I'm having a strange relationship with my kids. ... I (also) have prided myself — I had a perfect credit score. I prided myself in that I had never paid a late bill in my life. Now my credit score was 300. I couldn't finance a pencil if I wanted to."

"The dream house that I bought Alaska that I planned on retiring in and dying in — I had to give away and take it in the nose," Campbell said. "And I was having these freaking headaches when I would be sitting watching TV. I (would) get this freaking headache that hurt so bad. I couldn't move. I couldn't move my eyeballs, and I started self medicating. I thought Jim Beam was a pretty good doctor. He sucks."

"I would find out that nothing good comes out of a bottle," Campbell said. "So I'm self medicating on top of everything else. And, those saying that an idle mind is the devil's playground. My God, it is. And then I start thinking about the decisions that I made. I started thinking about the survival guilt. I started thinking about my 20 year marriage that just went down the drain, and the relationship that I wish I had with my kids and the fact that I don't have any. And then



Retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas E. Campbell shares his story March 3 at Fort McCoy during a presentation at building 60 at the installation. Campbell served as a featured speaker for Fort McCoy's suicide prevention awareness in early March 2023. He discussed his personal story of surviving several combat deployments, feeling survivor guilt for the Soldiers and friends he lost in combat, and how he survived his plan to take his own life. The event was organized by Terry Rogalla, Fort McCoy's Suicide Prevention Program manager.

I started drinking more because I started thinking about that. I start getting depressed, and I thought Jim Beam was a pretty good psychologist."

Campbell said it got so bad he would just drink himself to sleep. "I've burned a lot of bridges during this time because I also turned very angry," he said. "I hated everybody. If you meet anybody that graduated Class 61 from Sergeant Major Academy and asked if they know Tom Campbell, they'll say, 'Oh, yeah, I know that idiot.'"

In reflection, Campbell said the situation was pretty dire. "I was suicidal before I knew I was suicidal," he said. "And here's what I mean by that. 'I didn't think I was suicidal, but I didn't care if I lived or died.'"

## Continuous reckless abandon

If you've ever been in El Paso, you know in the afternoons Interstate 10 turns into Parking Lot 10," Campbell said. "And I went through cars at 100-plus miles an hour on my motorcycle."

"So I didn't care if I lived or died," he said. "I like rock climbing. I'd go to the Waco tanks, and I would climb just to get away from the world. And I would climb 100 plus feet up in the air with no anchor, no rope. I didn't care if I fell. I didn't care if I died or not. I didn't care about my health and safety, and nor did I care about yours."

"I would hear stories of me riding wheelies out of the trailer park at three o'clock in the morning," he said, "and I never had any recollection that I even cranked up the motorcycle that night. I just turned into a very bitter, bitter person."

## The plan to end it all

"I thought I was doing a selfless act by taking myself out of the equation," Campbell said. "My kids are gonna be better off. My kids will be taken care of. Everybody around me will be better off if I remove myself out of the equation. Now, I don't want to just put a pistol in my mouth for the trigger for two reasons. One, I didn't want to be a statistic, and I didn't want to jeopardize my kids getting a benefit. So I came up with the idea that I would stage an accident — that way it would just be a motorcycle (accident)."

Campbell found a place in the mountains he thought would be the perfect place to have his "accident."

"So I recon El Paso County to try to find the perfect place to have an accident between East and West El Paso," Campbell said. "Transplant Road goes up in the mountains back down the mountains and a connection to come down on the east side. Over on the left side, coming down the mountain makes a really sharp curve on the left and right there in that bend there are some picnic tables with some rock balls on the table with the sun shade over them. When you're coming down, you're looking right up on those walls. If you don't turn, you're gonna get that, so that was the place that I was gonna have my accident."

So then he said he had to get his affairs in order to make sure his children got his benefits. He got his will together, and he got everything ready.

"I rehearsed the plan a tremendous amount of times," Campbell said. "I drove up to the top, and I would race that motorcycle down

that mountain. I would slow down right before I hit that curve. I rehearsed that so many times, I can't even count — probably about three or four times a day."

## The day arrives, an angel comes calling

The day came where Campbell said he was going to end his life with the "accident" he'd been rehearsing day after day after day on a mountain road outside El Paso, Texas. He didn't think he had anything else to live for. But some where, for some reason, someone else thought differently.

As Campbell made his fateful ride down the mountain road toward that curve, he noted, "somebody parked their car in front of that wall."

And so because the car was there, as he came screaming down the hill he had to stop himself and change his plan.

"Somehow I got that motorcycle under control and went around that curve," Campbell said. "I went back up the hill, pulled off the side of the road, and waited for that car to leave."

And then his phone began to ring in his pocket, he said. He didn't answer it, and he lets it go to voicemail. And then it rings again. And he lets it go again. He's not going to change his plan. He's done. He's just waiting for that car to move, and then it's 100 miles per hour to a rock wall.

"It rings again," he said. And again ... until he finally answers it.

"And the voice on the other end was a little girl that I met at the VFW," Campbell said. "I met her through her dad who was a retired first sergeant in Vietnam. He was pissed off and hated everybody. We had something. We hated everybody together. And she, but she, his daughter, Theresa, she kept talking to me. She could not believe that I was really as angry as a person as I made out to be. And she kept talking to me, and she had this weird feeling that she just needed to call to check on me."

She saved him. She didn't know it at the time, but she saved him, Campbell said. Now years later they are husband and wife.

As Campbell completed his talk with the workforce, he also shared some other stories about helping and looking out for co-workers, troops, and friends and family.

He also encouraged everyone to seek help when needed and not see it as a stigma. And if anything, his story is more enough to relay that importance.

If you or someone you know needs help, please contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 and press 1 for the Military Crisis Line. Also learn more about the Army Suicide Prevention Program by visiting <https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/suicide-prevention/pages/about.html>.

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## HISTORY

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Spc. Stefan Youngbrandt of the 327th Military Police Battalion; an Army Reserve unit from Arlington Heights, Ill., said the course reviewed much of the medical treatment information he received in basic training.

The course covered how to start an IV. "This was more in-depth than what I had in basic training," he said. "It will help us if we run into heatstroke cases and ensure we take all the actions we can to help our fellow Soldiers."

Spc. Matthew Lapinski, a radio operator for the 708th Medical Company, an Army National Guard unit from Chicago, Ill., said he took the course because he wasn't familiar with a lot of the things instructed through the course. "If our medical folks needed treatment, I would be able to do it."

Spc. Jamie Hasenfang of the 327th HHD said she took the course to be able to help Soldiers if she was on the scene before medics arrived. As many of the soldiers were, Hasenfang said she was afraid of administering IV fluids before the training.

"I took the sense of being afraid to become prepared and informed by taking this course," she said. "I think I would be prepared if the situation arises to help other personnel, and I hopefully wouldn't hesitate."

## 20 Years Ago — March 28, 2003: From the Fort McCoy Triad newspaper

**106TH QUARRY TEAM TRAINS ON NEW EQUIPMENT:** Quarry support for a variety of engineering projects can be provided by members of the 106th Quarry Team, a Wisconsin Army National Guard unit from Ashland.

Members of the unit went through their mobilization process at Fort McCoy in early March to prepare for their upcoming deployment.

Staff Sgt. Scott Graham, the 106th's first sergeant, said the training was familiarization (new) training for some while it was refresher training for others" and brought them back into the "swing of things."

The 106th received the new equipment, called a crushing, screening and washing plant, last year. A commercial firm, Cedar Rapids Inc., of Cedar Rapids, Iowa- built the equipment specifically for military use.

"We've used the equipment through two annual-training sessions, and it works well," Graham said. "We can use the (aggregate) product produced by the equipment for both vertical and horizontal missions."

Horizontal missions include building roads of any type of asphalt base to filling potholes. Graham said vertical missions include providing the material for concrete, which could be used to support building or construction projects.

Spc. Steve Desrosiers, an equipment operator, said the unit was using the training opportunity to ensure the equipment worked. During their training at Fort McCoy, unit members also participated in weapons qualifications and a number of classes, including Nuclear, Biological and Chemical training.

Pfc. William Bissell, a heavy equipment operator, said the Soldier Readiness Center took care of the unit member's personal affairs. Bissell, who recently completed advanced individual training in his military occupational specialty, said he appreciated the opportunity to get familiar with the equipment. He said he had not seen the equipment before.

"The people who know a lot about the equipment, especially the NCOs, are helping those who don't know as much," Bissell said.



Mobilization Assistance Team (MAT) liaison officers participate in a daily mobilization briefing March 24, 2003, at Fort McCoy.



Staff Sgt. Tom Maier with the 333rd Military Police Company talks about his mobilization training March 24, 2003, with a media crew from WTVO of Rockford, Ill. Members of the 333rd Military Police Company (Combat Support) underwent M-203 Grenade Launcher training at Fort McCoy's Range 35 on North Post at the installation.

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(Article compiled by the Fort McCoy Public Affairs Office.)

## REMEMBERING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

## CAPSULE

from Page 2

Christopher Costa, Spc. Jason Mike, Sgt. Dustin Morris, Sgt. 1st Class Clyde Henderson, Sgt. Kevin Riddell, Sgt. Joe Rivera, Spc. Chris McClure, and Spc. Casey Cooper.

And some of the notes were interesting.

For instance, Costa left the pack of cigarettes with a tagged note taped to it stating, "16 NOV 04: A pack of smokes to commemorate those who left. We did our duty and made our country proud. We will never forget the sacrifices our brothers and sisters made."

On a \$1 bill, it states, "This is Sgt. Morris. I love my family & friends & I miss my dog. Lord, protect me."

Mike wrote on another \$1 bill, "Big Mike, Soldier Medic, OIF III, Medics Lead the Way."

"Jason was our medic and a guy bigger than life," Nein said. "Just a great guy overall."

For the ball cap that was in the cache of items, Nein said it wasn't anything special. He thinks it was probably something they would all end up having a laugh about when they returned for de-mobilization at McCoy in late 2005. But that never happened.

"I remember signing that," Nein said. "I don't know if it's something we found. I don't ever remember anyone wearing it."

Nein admitted there was probably no special meaning behind anything placed in the capsule, but now looking back it does bring back fond memories of his teammates who he trained with and fought with.

— Morris: Army Commendation Medal with valor.

Others receiving awards were Spc. Ashley Pullen who earned a Bronze Star with valor, Spc. William Haynes II who earned a Bronze Star with valor, and Spc. Jesse Ordunez who earned an Army Commendation Medal with valor. Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester was also awarded a Silver Star, becoming the first female Army Soldier since World War II to earn a Silver Star. And of course as time went on there were others who earned awards as well — more than can be listed.

But for Nein, he also earned a Silver Star in 2005. However, in 2007, that award was upgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross.

According to a Feb. 21, 2007, American Forces Press Service article, it states Nein became "the first Guard Soldier — and only the fifth servicemember overall — to receive the Distinguished Service Cross. The Distinguished Service Cross is second only to the Medal of Honor among awards for valor in battle.

"Staff Sgt. Timothy Nein received the medal from Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, at the National Guard Association of Kentucky's annual conference (in Louisville) Feb. 17," the story states.

"Nein originally received the Silver Star Medal for his actions as a squad leader with the 617th Military Police Company during an ambush in Iraq on March 20, 2005, but the award was upgraded, a process culminating with the presentation."

## Future of the capsule

After two decades of the capsule sitting in walls of a barracks building at Fort McCoy, the items, as basic and ordinary as they might be, will make their way to a permanent display in the Fort McCoy History Center as some point. The items are directly connected to a time in the installation's history where for a decade the installation mobilized tens of thousands of troops for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom between 2001 and 2011.

The time capsule also connects directly to a unit that spent its time at Fort McCoy, then went overseas to fight in a war like so many Soldiers had done before them.

In Fort McCoy's century-long history, units like the 76th Infantry Division and the famed 100th Infantry Division trained at Fort McCoy during World War II and went on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge and in Sicily and the Pacific. And now the 617th and the actions of Nein and his unit in Operation Iraqi Freedom continue that heritage of fighting spirit that Fort McCoy has supported for so long.

Fort McCoy's motto is to be the "Total Force Training Center."

Located in the heart of the upper Midwest, Fort McCoy is the only U.S. Army installation in Wisconsin.

The installation has provided support and facilities for the field and classroom training of more than 100,000 military personnel from all services nearly every year since 1984.

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Photo by Anita Johnson/Fort McCoy Multimedia-Visual Information Office

Soldiers with the Kentucky National Guard's 617th Military Police Company are shown in November 2004 at Fort McCoy just prior to their deployment to Iraq.

## The deployment

After leaving Fort McCoy and the time capsule behind, the Soldiers with the 617th went on to a deployment in central Iraq that was not only a year-long but was as Nein described as very intense and difficult.

"We deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, and we ran military police patrols for the most part," Nein said. "We did some convoy escorts but the majority of it was support to the main supply routes keeping them clear and free from enemy activity."

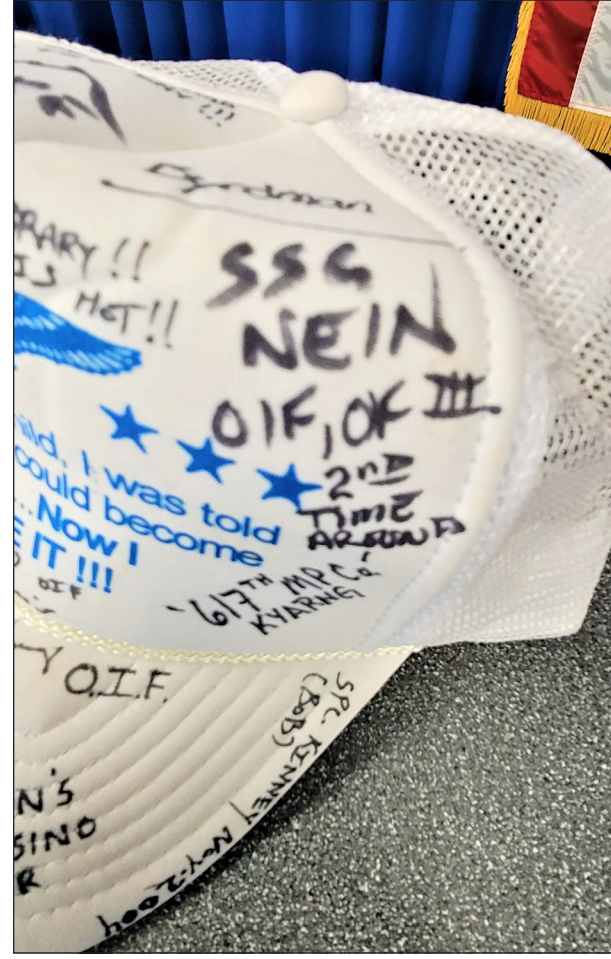
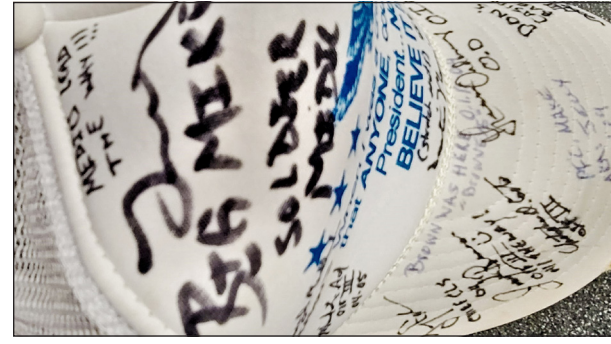
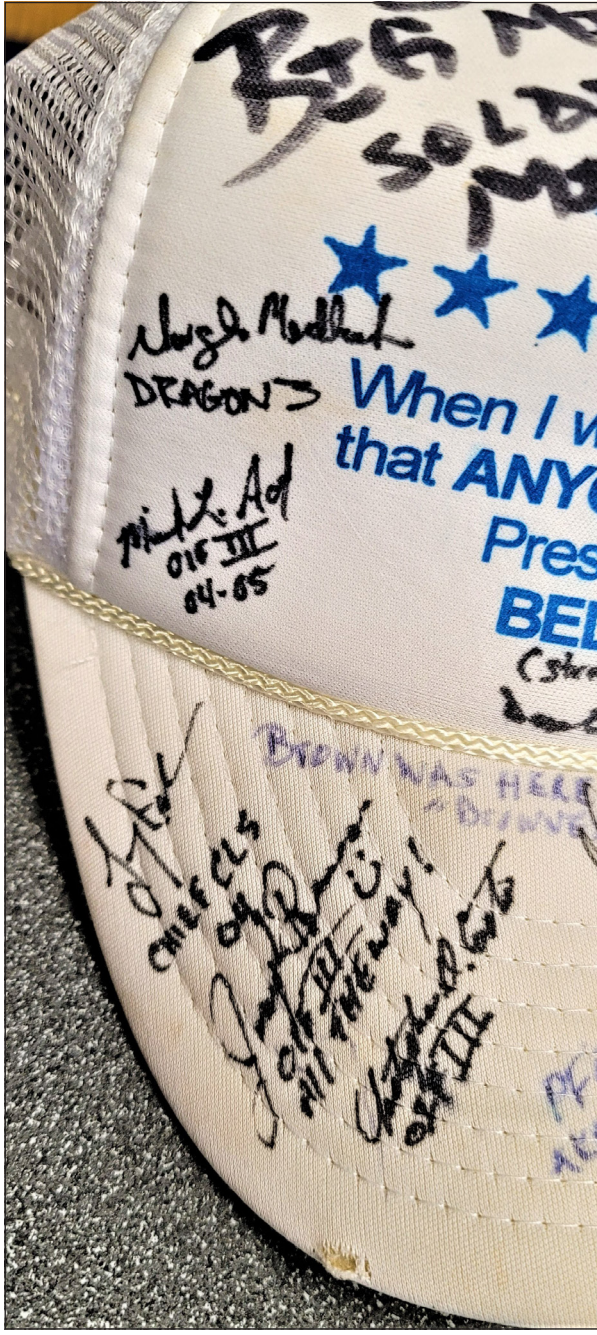
The daily patrols meant encountering improvised explosive devices (IEDs), enemy fire, and more, Nein said. In the time capsule, Sgt. Joe Rivera left his 2004 season pass for Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom as part of the mish-mash of items. Nein said Rivera is a leader and a fierce fighter and while out on one of those patrols in March 2005, Rivera received injuries in combat.

"He was injured during a gunfight and was medevacked," Nein said. "He later received a Purple Heart and an Army Commendation Medal with Valor."

And there were others, Nein said. "So, of the 183 who went over, probably 50 percent received Purple Hearts," Nein said. "Also two Silver Stars, multiple Bronze Stars with valor ... multiple. I'm gonna tell you ... (this is) probably one of the most decorated National Guard units for combat action in the Iraq conflict."

Of the people mentioned who contributed items to the time capsule, in addition to Rivera, here's what a few of them earned from the deployment:

— Mike: Silver Star.  
— Cooper: Bronze Star with valor, Army Commendation Medal with valor, and Purple Heart.



Photos by Scott T. Sturkol

Many members of the 617th Military Police Company signed a hat that was in the time capsule left in 2004. Included were Jason Mike "Big Mike" who earned a Silver Star in their deployment afterwards as well as then Staff Sgt. Timothy F. Nein (now command sergeant major) who earned Distinguished Service Cross from the same deployment.



Photo by Lou Ann Mittelstadt

(Above) Soldiers with the 617th Military Police Company of Richmond, Ky., participate in convoy training Nov. 9, 2004, on South Post at Fort McCoy.

(Right) Staff Sgt. Timothy F. Nein, squad leader, 617th Military Police Company and Sgt. Dustin T. Morris, team leader, 617th, stand beside their recently repaired Humvee that sustained multiple impacts from rounds fired by insurgents during an ambush March 20, 2005, on a supply route southeast of Baghdad. The Humvee armor repelled the rounds, and the Soldiers with the 617th thwarted the attack, sustaining only three injuries during the 45-minute firefight.



Photo by Spc. Jeremy D. Crisp



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Marshall P. Ware

(Above) Spc. Jeremy Eades, Sgt. William Baum and Spc. Casey Cooper, all military policemen, 617th Military Police Company, provide medical assistance to a wounded insurgent after a group of insurgents attacked a supply convoy March 20, 2005, about 18 miles southeast of Baghdad.

(Right) Soldiers with the 617th Military Police Company stand at the position of attention during an awards ceremony held in their honor at Camp Liberty, Iraq, June, 16, 2005. Receiving the Silver Star were: Staff Sgt. Timothy F. Nein from Henryville, Ind.; Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester from Bowling Green, Ky., and Spc. Jason Mike from Radcliff, Ky. Receiving the Bronze Star with V device were: Spc. Ashley Pullen from Danville, Ky.; Spc. William Haynes II (who was unable to make the ceremony); and Spc. Casey Cooper from Princeton, Ky. Cooper was also awarded the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during the attack. Receiving the Army Commendation Medal with V device were: Sgt. Dustin Morris from Murray, Ky., and Spc. Jesse Ordunez from Marshall County, Ky.



Photo by Spc. Jeremy D. Crisp