



Sgt. Leah R. Burton

Sgt. Donald Randall, 62nd Chem. Co., 23rd Chem. Bn., makes his way through an obstacle during the Dragon's Peak competition April 26. The competition is the Army Chemical Corps' NCO and Soldier of the year competition.

## Departure

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The Kiowa OH-58s and Black Hawk OH-60s belonging to 4-6 Air Cav. flew to Aberdeen April 25 and remained tucked away, blades folded, in warehouses at the port. With the 4-6 port team assisting, stevedores loaded the aircraft Sunday afternoon, again without incident.

Squadron staff members were impressed with the facilities from the beginning.

"We did a two-hour recon," said operations officer Maj. Demetri Nicholson. "Everyone we talked to were experts. They had more than what we needed out there — building space for us to have offices, space for the helicopters and all the equipment we're bringing in."

The location and facilities made it likely, Nicholson said, that other Fort Lewis organizations will use the facility. The choice to load in Aberdeen had nothing to do with avoiding demonstrations in Tacoma or Olympia, as those organizations claimed.

The original plan called for 4-6 Air Cav. to fall in on another unit's aircraft and equipment in theater. Those orders would have sent the squadron from Beaumont, Texas. Amended deployment schedules because of the January troop surge changed the plan.

"To fly from Beaumont costs a lot more money," said Nicholson. "Just trying to get all the helicopters to Texas and all the maintenance problems...AMC (U.S. Army Materiel Command) was able to switch it to the Northwest."

The first idea was to leave from Tacoma, but the budget, not protesters, dictated departure from Aberdeen.

"It cuts down the time for the boat," Nicholson said. "Instead of going up the Puget Sound, the boat can come right down the coast and cut off one or two days."

Saving time and effort on the front end of a deployment means the squadron can concentrate on the business end. The unit will perform reconnaissance, screen, air movement and security missions in Iraq.

"Our OH-58 Vs will do reconnaissance for ground units, convoy security, route reconnaissance, area reconnaissance," said Nicholson. "We're armed so we can also provide weapons for the ground maneuver guys. We've also got 10 Black Hawks. They do logistics or resupply runs. They move people around the battlefield, called battlefield circulation. They also do some tactical flights where they stop, bring in aerial insertions where they bring in infantrymen to stop vehicles that might have a high-value target in it."

The 4-6 Air Cav. will initially fall under the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, a unit that was extended under the 15-month rule. After the 25th departs, 4-6 will take orders from the 1st Combat Aviation Brigade War Hawks, a highly decorated organization during the Vietnam War.

Along with its mission-essential task lists, the squadron has incorporated scenarios based on aircraft shot down in Iraq, into its training plan. Pilots from 4-6 Air Cav. also trained with 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division during its Mission Readiness Exercise on Fort Lewis in February.

"It was a role kind of like what we'll have in Iraq," Nicholson said, "but a bit different because we had the whole squadron in one spot. We were supporting one infantry brigade, but in Iraq we'll be supporting more than one. But it's the same role, same missions that we would do."

The advance party from the squadron will leave later in May with the main body following later. The 4-6 Air Cav. will arrive at Operation Iraqi Freedom after training for an undetermined time in Kuwait.

*"Everyone we talked to were experts. They had more than what we needed out there — building space for us to have offices, space for the helicopters and all the equipment we're bringing in."*

**Maj. Demetri Nicholson**

## Competition

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The event was a coordinated effort between I Corps and 23rd Chem. Bn., with each unit sponsoring one NCO and one Soldier.

"Once those units select the best NCOs and Soldiers from Fort Lewis, those (Soldiers) will then go to Fort Leonard Wood and compete against the best chemical NCOs and Soldiers in the whole Chemical Corps," said Sgt. Maj. Leonard Augustine, I Corps Chemical sergeant major.

Day one began bright and early with an Army Physical Fitness Test, followed by a written test examining the competi-

tors' knowledge of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear topics, and a board.

Jackson gave a brief motivational talk to the competitors prior to the start of the written test.

"I'm curious to see what the outcome will be here today," he said. "The more you know, the further you'll go. You are the subject matter expert when it comes to CBRN defense."

Day two consisted of a 10-mile foot march, followed by weapons qualification.

Day three started at 1 a.m., when the competitors drew weapons and proceeded to conduct night land navigation, complete with 30-pound rucksacks.

From there, the Soldiers had to negotiate an obstacle course as quickly as possible, followed by hands-on performance testing, with some pieces of equipment that many of them hadn't seen since advanced individual training.

"Those that have participated understand the difficulty that the Dragon's Peak offers. Whoever wins certainly earns the respect of not only their peers and superiors but will be recognized as the best across the Chemical Corps," Jackson said.

After each event was completed, the scores were converted to a point scale, and the two NCOs and the two Soldiers with the highest scores were selected to represent Fort Lewis at Fort Leonard Wood.

The event was designed to be challenging, but two Soldiers and two NCOs rose to that challenge. They are Sgt. William Lopez and Pfc. Steven Zamora from 61st Chemical Company, 23rd Chem. Bn.; Spc. Matthew Chaison from 62nd Chemical Company, 23rd Chem. Bn.; and Sgt. Joseph Dela Rosa, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne).

"I knew I could do it. This competition here was really not that hard," said Zamora.

Lopez said, "I always thought I didn't have to prove to anyone what I can do. I wanted to prove to myself. Plus, my Soldiers were competing, and I'm not going to have my Soldiers do something that I can't do."

## MP

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He was born at Camp Pendleton, Calif., the son of a Marine. His brother, two uncles and his grandfather all served in the military.

By the accounts of fellow platoon and battalion members, Avery was a model Soldier who epitomized the military value of selfless service.

"He was one of those Soldiers," said

his platoon leader, 1st Lt. Alyssa Briones, "who, when I would open the window and yell, 'I need three Soldiers for a terrible detail,' he'd come running anyway, and with a smile on his face."

His mother agreed, telling the media that he loved putting the needs of others around him first.

Though unassuming, he quickly proved his value to his unit in dangerous surroundings in Iraq. His battalion executive officer, Maj. John Turner, quoted his team leader: "During missions, he was vigilant

at all times. He always paid attention to the little things and noticed things others didn't."

Growing up in Colorado, Avery loved the outdoors. He never missed an opportunity to hunt or fish. Even during one stop unit training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., he grabbed a fishing pole at every free moment and headed to nearby lakes.

Chaplain (Capt.) Douglas Yates of 502nd M.P. Battalion, sister unit of the 504th, said Avery's parents recalled a time during high school when he picked a fight

to purposely get suspended so he could join his father, brother and grandfather on a hunting trip.

Avery's life plan was to become a Colorado state highway patrolman. To that end, he took criminal justice classes at Pikes Peak Community College while he was still in high school.

"As important as that was to him," said Turner, "he decided to put that on hold so he could honorably serve his country...The Army value of selfless service was a part of who Jeff

was. It was not a value he had to learn."

Briones worried at first that the quiet Avery wouldn't fit in with the platoon.

"Within a few days, he was part of the family," she said. "I grieve for the beautiful soul the world has lost."

Avery is survived by his parents, Richard Avery III and Joann Sanchez, and his brother, Richard Avery IV.

His awards included the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal and Combat Action Badge.

## Activation

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In March, the brigade's equipment began to flow in, a pattern that is expected to continue up until deployment. Kirk hopes to have Strykers in the fall, he said.

For now, the brigade plans to train and develop. Col. Harry Tunnell, 5th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div commander, called the new brigade's activation a time of celebration and seriousness, and also one of great opportunity.

"We have the chance to properly establish rigorous training standards, but also work tirelessly to meet them," Tunnell said. "We must treat every day as if it were our last training day."

The Army's goal for 5th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div. is to be ready to deploy by the end of February 2009. But the brigade plans to be ready at least six months before that, Kirk said. "As we develop our training plans, it's all based on being ready to go earlier," the major said. "If we have time after that, great."

The new brigade also has the advantage of being the fourth Stryker brigade created on Fort Lewis. The people who have created Stryker brigades two or three times are all right here on post, so that wealth of expertise is at the brigade's disposal, Kirk said.

When it comes time for the unit to deploy, it will be ready, Tunnell said. And when that time comes, 5th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div. will "honor the sacrifices of our comrades in arms" and the other Stryker

units that have fought valiantly before them, he said.

In the mean time, the Destroyers are slotted to reflag in December and become 2nd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division.

Kirk is looking forward to taking ownership of 2nd Bde., 2nd Inf. Div.'s rich history, he said. "It's been great creating a new unit here...but in reality there is no brigade history at all," Kirk said. "It will be real nice to have a little lineage to fall back on."

For the Destroyers leadership, building 5th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div. is a great opportunity. "You never get to do something like this, where you create an organization and put your fingerprints all over it," he said. "Whatever you end up with is all due entirely to what you put into it."



Jason Kaye

Col. Harry D. Tunnell IV and Brig. Gen. William J. Troy unfurl the flag of the 5th Bde., 2nd Inf. Div. during the unit's activation at Soldiers Field House.