

Rent-to-own

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"I have noticed that people actually start opening folders and writing down what I'm talking about," she said. "I'm expecting that now that I'm educating people about the program and more people know about the program, more people will start asking for their coupons."

While 15 percent might not seem like a lot at first glance, Jackson said it can add up quickly. For example, a private stationed at Fort Lewis for three years can earn more than \$5,000 toward a new home through the Rent-to-Own program. A 1st Lt. can earn more than \$6,000. The coupon can go a long way toward a new home, Jackson said, Soldiers just need to remember to ask for it when they check out of housing.

"They would get the maximum amount of money because they're going to collect the maximum amount of BAH at that point," she said.

Even if Soldiers don't have immediate plans to purchase a home, it could still come in handy if plans change, Jackson said. The coupons are valid for 120 days and the amount that can be applied to a new home varies depending on the builder.

While buying a home takes time and careful decision making, Jackson said she hopes the Rent-to-Own coupons help Fort Lewis residents start planning toward that goal.

"I have hardly made out any of those (Rent-to-Own coupons)," Jackson said. "And the last one I made out, it was for a lot of money."

"Unfortunately, we have very few residents from the greater Seattle area,

including Fort Lewis, who use their credits to purchase a home," she wrote in an e-mail. "Equity tries to partner with builders who offer a range of price points and locations in a given market, but we cannot guarantee that our participating builders will always have the product our residents are looking to purchase."

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Jason Kaye

Soldiers from 4-23 Inf. breach a door while conducting a live-fire exercise on Range 26. "We're going to continue to build on (the basics through) September/October and into 2008 with squad-level collective training," said 4-23 Inf. commander, Lt. Col. Burton Shields.

Training

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Not only was the live-fire exercise a chance to review techniques, but also an opportunity for new leaders to network and learn from each other.

"This is the first real leadership training to get everybody on the same sheet of music," said Staff Sgt. Matt Wood, acting 1st Platoon sergeant of C Company. "We take the stuff that we've learned from watching other units train."

Though the leaders are new, they're not all green. The battalion boasts somewhat more experience among its junior leaders than associated with their ranks.

Wood said he was sharing his background as an observer/controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La. Smith brought enlisted experience from the 101st Airborne, the 82nd Airborne and the 10th Mountain divisions.

"Every job a private's done, I've done a couple times," Smith, an Officer Candidate School graduate

said, "everything from ammo bearer, machine gunner, SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon) gunner, team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant."

He noted a trend away from the Army cliché of the raw lieutenant toward more experience in company grade officers, which he said adds value to the mix of new arrivals.

"A lot of lieutenants are prior service and that's what they want," he said, "guys with experience."

Another seasoned leader was the new 1st Platoon leader from B Company. Sergeant 1st Class Andrew Payeur arrived in the battalion three days before, but was already sharing his 13 years of experience learned with organizations like the 7th Infantry Division, the 10th Mountain Division and most recently, the 172nd Infantry Brigade from Alaska.

"I've been through this experience before up in Alaska of standing up a brand new unit," Payeur said.

A primary challenge is in the unit's not having its full strength at the outset of training.

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After three months training on individual tasks, the battalion moved on and will shift gears again in the fall.

"We're going to continue to build on (the basics through) September/October and into 2008 with squad-level collective training, some squad exercises," said 4-23 Inf. commander, Lt. Col. Burton Shields, who led his subordinate

leaders last week in multiple rotations through shoot houses. "Because of that, we need to up the proficiency level of the staff to plan those events."

Though a smattering of his junior leaders has solid experience, Shields still looks forward to the help higher ranks will bring.

Personnel demands of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom have slowed not only the arrivals of Soldiers and junior noncommissioned officers, but also of officers. Nevertheless, early in 2007 the battalion moved forward planning and executing training with Soldiers working in positions well

above their ranks. Company grade officers throughout the brigade have put together most of the current training schedules.

"The lieutenants have done a great job, stepping up and working three levels above their pay grade," Shields said. "But we're getting to the point we're planning more complicated training and starting to integrate different assets into training."

Shields, who has commanded the Tomahawks for three months, welcomed two new majors this week to take over as his battalion executive and operations officers.

Meanwhile, 4-23 Inf. trained and shared information "to level the bubbles," Shields said. "We have Stryker experience coming from Alaska, 10 to 12 NCOs, one platoon sergeant, three E-7s and a handful of E-5s and -6s. We're spreading that experience evenly around the battalion."

That experience was busy throughout the day, coaching and teaching the basics. Violence, surprise, control.

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MP unit

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The Fort Lewis-based MPs will detain terrorists and war criminals, said Col. Katherine Miller, commander of 42nd MP Bde. and Fort Lewis provost marshal, as well as safeguard non-Iraqi refugees unable to return to their homes in the region because of the conflict, providing security to "protected persons" and (the) surrounding area.

"Protected Persons" is a status the Army puts on individuals that we secure but are not interned," said Maj. Curtis

Schroeder, operations officer of the 42nd MP Bde., "basically making sure that they are not harmed by anti-Iraqi Forces; we do not feed and clothe (them), just (provide) security."

Elements of the battalion returned from Iraq and Afghanistan to Fort Lewis throughout 2006. Some of those Soldiers are returning with the detachment.

"They have been continuously engaged over the last six years," said Miller, herself a past commander of the 504th MP Battalion from 2002 to 2004. "Most of our veterans have multiple deployments."

Part of the battalion deployed with forces within a week of the 2001 attack

on the World Trade Center, she said.

Battalion commander, Lt. Col. James H. Mullen, commended the Soldiers of the headquarters for their ability to multi-task, to assist other 504th MP Battalion units prepare for deployment while simultaneously preparing themselves.

"I've watched you fall, walk and run," Mullen said, "in staff exercises, battle drills, convoy live fire exercises and your hard work was recognized in your highly successful external evaluation conducted by the 542nd Military Police Brigade. I am certain you will not fail to uphold the brave traditions of the most-decorated

MP battalion in the Army today."

The 504th MP Battalion was activated at Fort Sam Houston, Texas in 1941, seven months before the December 7 attack on Pearl Harbor. It fought in World War II and Vietnam and over the years since, deployed to a variety of additional trouble spots, including Panama, Haiti, Kosovo and Egypt. Its companies have been chosen for some of the nation's highest-priority security assignments, including performing detainee operations at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and force protection to the Pentagon and the National Capitol region.

Though the Dragon Fighters returned

from Iraq just one year ago, their brigade commander said she had full confidence in their abilities to rise to their newest test.

"Anyone who knows the 504th knows they will succeed regardless of mission," Miller said. "These are certainly times of great challenge. The fate of the Middle East will have a profound effect on American security. And in these times of challenge, there you stand, shouldering the burden ... standing together to protect our nation's vital interests."

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Reports

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Specifically, the call will come from the Wounded in Action Cell of the Casualty and Memorial Operations Center in Army Human Resources Command, said Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Clark, NCOIC of Personnel Operations at Fort Lewis Casualty Affairs.

The wounded Soldier may call also, if

he or she is able, Patricia George, Casualty Assistance Center chief, said in an interview last September. But, even so, the family will still hear from the Department of the Army.

"Even if the Soldier has called home, we still have a requirement from Department of the Army, and from our general, that the Department of the Army still make that notification to that family via telephone," Clark said.

A phony call can be spotted by the

kind of information the caller requests. For example, a recent scam involved a caller claiming to be from the American Red Cross stating that the spouse's Soldier had been wounded. The caller asked the spouse to verify the Soldier's Social Security number and date of birth. These questions would not be included in a real casualty notification.

"Department of the Army already has the Soldier's Social," Clark said. There should not be any reason for Department

of the Army to be asking for that kind of information, he said.

The only time that information would be asked for from the family member is if the doctor has requested that the spouse travel to the Soldier's bedside. In that case, the notifier will ask for a 45-day address and the best phone number to reach the spouse because Department of the Army will be coordinating travel arrangements, George said.

A real notification also includes a toll-

free number for the spouse to call back. But the spouse can also call the rear detachment chain of command if uncertain about the authenticity of a casualty call.

If a spouse receives a suspicious phone call, it should be reported to Force Protection at 966-7303, 966-7320 or 966-8909 or e-mail DESfusioncell@lewis.army.mil.

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