

Desert Storm roll

Schools compile names of those serving in Gulf

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Drexel Kleber flies a KC-10 tanker plane that refuels the B-52s. Roy Bierwirth is with the Tiger Brigade at Kuwait International Airport. Brad Fisher is a medic in the 82nd Airborne. Kevin Bowen is a Harrier pilot who trains other pilots.

The soldiers have a couple things in common. The Persian Gulf and their connections to the Farmington area.

The Persian Gulf War may have been fought thousands of miles away, but the lives of Farmington and Farmington Hills families and employees in the community have been touched as sons and daughters — many former district graduates — were sent to the region to do their part.

Finding out whose sons and daughters have been serving in the Desert Storm campaign — at home and abroad — has been an important job for Libby Panetta, a Farmington Public Schools computer technician in the district's central office.

"I made the list and many of the families who called with their children's names wanted to talk. People are anxious," said Panetta, whose son, Michael, is a first lieutenant in air defense at Fort Benning, Ga.

THE IDEA OF compiling a list began when Don Cowan, the school district's director of building and student services, was driving to work one day and listening to news about Desert Storm. Students in the Farmington schools were in the back of his mind.

"The thing that really pushed me was how we could get the kids (students) positively involved. I

THE GULF WAR Hitting Home

had visions of the late '60s and early '70s," Cowan said.

The idea was that with a list of names, given to each school building, students could either write to the men and women in the military, or honor them in one way or another, such as making a display case of names and photos.

Panetta began the list by sending out a memo to the district's schools, asking for the names of former graduates in the military, as well as sons and daughters of employees. Letters also went out to churches.

"The rest of it was more or less word of mouth," she said. But it worked. Calls began coming in. And today, Panetta has a substantial list of former graduates, relatives of students, employees' children, and other names gleaned from newspapers and other sources.

Panetta found parents eager to talk. And she found that troops with Farmington-area links are doing some interesting work in the Gulf. "These people are doing some pretty neat things," she said.

Panetta tells the story of a mother who called with her son's name. The soldier told his mother he drove a dump truck. While watching the news

one day, the mother realized that the dump truck her son was driving was the type that follows tanks into battle. "She said, 'I (then) knew what he did,'" Panetta recalled.

PARENTS, FRIENDS and relatives, Panetta said, are no doubt worried. "There's always worry. But there's a different attitude with a voluntary army," she said, adding parents recognize their children chose to do what they are doing. Panetta found when her son, Michael, enlisted, that "they (Army personnel) were really the most forthright people we have dealt with."

Also with her son's experience, Panetta has had full confidence in the American troops. "Our Michael has always said, 'Mom, you have no idea how good our army is.'"

While compiling the list, Panetta discovered that there's quite a few district graduates who went on to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the Air Force Academy.

Besides providing a list for information, Panetta found that "it's a way of pulling people out of their own concerns." The list will probably find itself on Channel 10, the educational cable access channel.

Panetta and Cowan have no intentions of forgetting the list in light of a cease fire, followed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's order Tuesday for his troops to pull out of Kuwait.

"I still think there's a lot more (troops) out there (not on the list)," Cowan said.

Panetta will continue to take people's calls with names and addresses of troops. "It's so new. We may do some follow up."



Longacre Elementary second graders Mindy Deacon (left) and Sarah Goetzke recite the Pledge of Allegiance with classmates during a school assembly Friday commemorating the recent cease fire in the Persian Gulf. Longacre was one of many schools in Farmington with activities relating to actions overseas.



The East Middle School eighth grade choir has sent this class picture along with an audio tape with a "coming home" theme to some 30 service people in the Persian Gulf. They plan to continue their mailings, despite the recent cease fire.

Gregory York, NPH, 1983; 3rd Engineer Battalion, 1987 West Point Graduate.

Christopher Basso, U.S. Marines, son of school district employee.

Robert Carey, flies A-6 from carrier. Operation Desert Storm, relative of school district employee.

Scott C. Fletcher, Operation Desert Storm, son of school district employee.

John Gay, U.S. Navy, Operation Desert Storm, relative of school district employee.

Drexel Kleber, flies KC10 tanker plane, Operation Desert Storm, son of school district employee.

Drew B. Miller, 2nd Marine Division, supplies and equipment, Operation Desert Storm, son of school district employee.

Michael Panetta, air defense Fort Benning, Ga., son of school district employee.

Ruben Torres, 1st Armored Division, sent from Germany to Operation Desert Storm, son of school district employee.

Thomas Kingdom, 2nd Armored Division, Operation Desert Storm, brother of a Power Middle School student.

Richard McFarland, pharmacist, Operation Desert Storm, has a link to Hillside Elementary.

Nikki Newman, nurse, Operation Desert Storm, mother of Power Middle School eighth grader.

The Observer did not include ranks with this list.

List started with school connections

This is the list of some of the Farmington-area military personnel associated with Desert Storm at home and abroad — that has been compiled by Libby Panetta, a computer technician with the Farmington Public Schools.

The list includes graduates of the district's three high schools, children and relatives of school district employees and others who have links to the Farmington community. Where available, high schools and graduation dates are included as are links to the community:

Stephen P. Akin, Farmington High School, 1985; stationed in Germany.

John T. Bailey III, FHS, 1967; helicopter pilot, Operation Desert Storm.

Robyn Dierkes, FHS, 1977; U.S. Navy, part of support troops not in Persian Gulf. Relative of school district employee.

Chuck Dierkes Jr., FHS, 1980; part of support troops not in Persian Gulf.

Patrick C. Imus, FHS, 1987; Marine Corps, dragon. Relative of school district employee.

Patrick Lekovich, FHS, 1981; fire control, Operation Desert Storm.

Julie Lekovich-Wilson, FHS (no graduation date available). Patrick Lekovich and Julie Lekovich-Wilson are brother and sister and children of school district counselor Bob Lekovich.

Clifford Lush, FHS, 1972; on a tanker in the Persian Gulf, son of school district employee.

Jeffrey L. Parker, FHS, 1975; drill instructor at Fort Benning, Ga.

Andrew O. Strelczuk, FHS, 1987; drives truck and repairs heavy equipment, Operation Desert Storm.

Michael Sulek, FHS, 1983; satellite-space operations, son of school district employee.

Roy Bierwirth, Harrison High School, 1973; with Tiger Brigade at Kuwait International Airport.

James Bierwirth, HHS, 1971; with the 3rd Armored Division; battle at Baza.

Jeffrey D. Bolla, HHS, 1988; Marine Corps, relieved marines sent to Saudi Arabia.

Denise Hoffman-Valentine, HHS, 1977; Army reserves, Operation Desert Storm.

Jason Norris, HHS, 1989; U.S. Navy, ship is being repaired in Norfolk, Va.

Michael Rebtov, HHS, 1987; 11th Aviation Brigade. He is a mechanic/crew chief/scout helicopter. Operation Desert Storm.

Brian Ross, HHS, 1990; 3rd Field Artillery, Operation Desert Storm.

Brad Fisher, NPH, 1982; U.S. Army, medic in 82nd Airborne.

Michael A. Gallina, NFH, 1988; Operation Desert Storm.

Janice Higuera, NFH, 1980; 20th Army Brigade, company commander.

Scott Serda, HHS, 1990; support

Kids give troops a musical tribute

Continued From Page 1

THE MUSICAL exercise has given students a feeling they have contributed, somehow. The war has brought home to them in everyday lessons. "We took up a whole hour talking about it," said Leah Bollen, referring to a social studies class discussion. "We compared it to the Vietnam War, since Saddam (Hussein) had said it would be another Vietnam."

The war has touched these students in different ways.

Erin Zyllic thought about the war as she vacationed recently in Key West, where she heard the roar of military craft overhead. "I guess that's what it sounds like over there," she said.

Christine Sandor said she has an uncle serving there, and said she is "excited to bring our people home."

Heather Yakes said her father's best

friend is serving on a ship in the Gulf, and they have not been able to reach him.

Another classmate is waiting for her father to return.

Upon completing the tape, one of the first mailings was to U.S. Air Force 1st Lt. Drexel Kleber, the son of East Middle School teacher Marsha Kleber. He is responsible for flying aircraft used to refuel bombers and transport personnel and equipment, and she expects him to fly a few non-combat missions before coming home for good. "He can carry up to 300 soldiers" on his aircraft, she said. "He's going to be doing a lot of ferrying back and forth."

"I'm delighted, needless to say," she added, discussing the cease fire. "I've been glued to CNN, (Cable News Network) since the war began."



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