

# *Pacific Crossings*

December 2008

The Official Newsletter of the 624th Regional Support Group



**PLAY BALL!**  
...See Page 7



Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr., (right) jokes with Lt. Col. David Condit, 731st Airlift Squadron navigator, during a visit to Peterson Air Force Base, Colo. on Nov. 12, 2008. (Photo by Ann Skarban)

# Remembering those serving far from home

by Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr.  
Commander, Air Force Reserve Command

As we look forward to this Holiday Season and the start of 2009, I want to express my gratitude to each of you, your families and employers for the sacrifices you make for our great country each and every day.

Much has been asked and each reservist and family member has given of themselves for their country. You've stepped up to the challenge smartly, without hesitation.

For those who are able to celebrate this Holiday Season with friends and family at home, I ask that you remember our

brave men and women who are serving around the world far from family and friends.

About 2,000 of our Air Force Reserve warriors are serving overseas with incredible distinction in global operations every day by saving lives and thwarting terrorism. The entire Air Force Reserve family has you in our hearts and looks forward to your safe return.

The holiday season provides an opportunity to remind us all to set aside time for friends and family who share and support those sacrifices.

Dee and I wish you and your families the very best this Holiday Season and for 2009!

## Pacific Crossings

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### Action Line

The Action line is your direct line to the 624th Regional Support Group Commander. If you have worked through normal channels and are not satisfied with the answer, the Action Line is your opportunity to ask questions or make suggestions about the subjects of concern to the 624th RSG community.

You may contact the action line at [jennifer.chamberlin@us.af.mil](mailto:jennifer.chamberlin@us.af.mil).

Please include your name and phone number in case additional information is required. Action lines of general interest will be published in Pacific Crossings, and others will be answered by phone.

### On the Cover

Senior Master Sgt. Mark, Avery, 48th Aerial Port Squadron, along with representatives of the four other uniformed services threw out a ceremonial first pitch for the Hawaii Winter Baseball League Nov. 9 at the Hans L'Orange Field, Waipahu, Hawaii.

(Photo by Master Sgt. Daniel Nathaniel)

# Reservists plan premier PACOM conference

By Staff Sgt. Jennie Chamberlin  
624th Regional Support Group

NUSA DUA, Bali, Indonesia -- A year's worth of planning by a team of reservists and a guardsman culminated in a three-day conference for the Chiefs of Defense from 26 Asia-Pacific nations.

The 2008 Chiefs of Defense conference was held November 11 - 13 in Bali, Indonesia. This year, the annual conference was co-hosted by United States Pacific Command and the Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or Indonesian Defense Forces.

The conference is a forum for Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff or their equivalents in the Asia-Pacific region and other nations who have an active military presence in the area, said 2nd Lt. Kenny Ruggles, CHOD conference coordinator.

Behind such a large mission is the planning that makes such a forum possible. Lieutenant Ruggles, a reservist with the 624th Regional Support Group, served as the conference coordinator and was responsible for overseeing the planning and execution

of the conference.

While the conference is only three days, many details must be attended to and coordinated throughout the whole year, said Lieutenant Ruggles. Conference facilities, lodging, and support staff for the distinguished visitors must be managed seamlessly.

Part of the difficulty in planning such a large event is dealing with people globally, said Chief Master Sgt. Art Gragasin, deputy conference coordinator and an Individual Mobilization Augmentee with Pacific Air Forces. Working through time differences and differing priorities can be challenging, he said.

With challenges come rewards, and Lieutenant Ruggles said he found his in working with the Indonesian military to overcome obstacles that came up along the way.

"It was rewarding to work through hurdles with another country to execute a successful conference," he said. "It's an example of two countries working together successfully."

The end result is a place where leaders can come to talk and work collectively, said Chief Gragasin. The

military leaders discussed common issues such as energy, piracy, disaster response and the environment, he said.

General Djoko Santoso, Commander-in-Chief of the Indonesian Defense Forces and co-host of the conference, also said he felt the conference was an important forum for bringing Asia-Pacific and other military leaders together.

"From such positive discussions and presentations, all the participating Chiefs of Defense Forces gained lessons learned in how to keep up with the dynamic development in the region and how to get a common perception on various crucial issues of mutual concern."

The year-long planning is all to ensure that the conference attendees can have a productive and pleasant conference, said Chief Gragasin.

"It's nice when people come back to you and tell you how they appreciate the effort you've provided. When the people that you work with are happy, I think that gives you the biggest sense of accomplishment," he said.



2nd Lt. Kenny Ruggles, Senior Master Sgt. Tim Vail and Chief Master Sgt. Art Gragasin all receive a coin from Navy Admiral Timothy J. Keating, Commander, United States Pacific Command, in recognition of their efforts planning the 2008 Chiefs of Defense Conference in Bali, Indonesia, November 13, 2008. Lieutenant Ruggles and Sergeant Vail are members of the 624th Regional Support Group, and Chief Gragasin is a former 624th RSG member now serving as an Individual Mobilization Augmentee with Pacific Air Forces. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Elisia Gonzales)

# Hill of Sacrifice:

**Cemetery caretaker  
lays to rest those  
who have served**

When he's not upholding his commitment to 624th Civil Engineer Squadron as a heavy construction equipment operator, Tech. Sgt. Jonathan Bussey can be found caring for America's fallen veterans as a caretaker at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, otherwise known as the Punchbowl cemetery. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Bennie J. Davis III)

# Feature

by Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.  
*Airman Magazine*

The eruption of hot lava through the cracks in old coral reefs more than 75,000 years ago in Honolulu created a sight many enjoy visiting and even more want to be their final resting place, a place known as the "Punchbowl" cemetery.

When Senior Master Sgt. Jvanne Hoelscher visited the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, she fell in love with the "Punchbowl."

Under the shade of trees that line a road, she saw that on plot D 109 lay to rest the noted World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle.

On either side of him are buried two unknown Soldiers. She noticed that in that place of reverence, the famous are laid to rest next to the unknown.

The indiscriminate cemetery is nestled in central Honolulu inside the pocket of a volcano's crater. It's as if the Koolau Mountain Range had cupped its stone hands to form a place for the cemetery. Its ancient trees, lush grass and manicured shrubs provide a carpet of greenery that masks the lava foundation.

It exudes a feeling of peacefulness and security. It was exactly what Sergeant Hoelscher was looking for because she was dying of breast cancer and seeking a final resting place.

She told very few people about her condition, not even those in her Air Force Reserve Unit, members of the 624th Regional Support Group at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii.

But, coworker Tech. Sgt. Jonathan Bussey knew.

## Room in the cemetery

She told Sergeant Bussey of her condition because she needed his help. He's a cemetery caretaker at the Punchbowl when he's not pulling Reserve duty as a heavy construction equipment operator.

"She asked about the Punchbowl and how to get interred there," Sergeant Bussey said. "Sergeant Hoelscher was curious about how veterans and families are still being interred at the Punchbowl when it's considered to be a closed cemetery."

"Closed" means that although no room remains in the cemetery to bury people in caskets -- except when a husband, wife and their children can be buried at the same gravesite -- cremated remains are still accepted. Unlike other national cemeteries that sprawl out over a countryside, allowing room for headstones as far as the eye can see, the inside of the crater is only 111.5 acres. So far, nearly 50,000 people are laid to rest at the Punchbowl, where a funeral is held almost every day.

Sergeant Bussey explained to her about all the burial rights for veterans and their families.

"Sergeant Hoelscher was always telling me that Punchbowl cemetery was a beautiful place and that she'd like to be interred there," Sergeant Bussey said.

On April 4, 2004, her wish came true. At 3 p.m. that day, she was interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. At age 51, she died of a disease that claims the lives of 40,000 women in the United States each year.

Her untimely death shocked her Reserve unit because so few knew of her illness, said Sergeant Bussey, who reacted differently. Although saddened by her death, he knew more needed to be done.

"I assisted the family with additional arrangements to make the interment less stressful for the family," Sergeant Bussey said.

## The Committal Service

It was another beautiful day in Honolulu when Henry Hoelscher first stepped foot into the Punchbowl for his sister's funeral. Right away, he noticed the cemetery's rainforest lushness. While his hometown in Stillwater, Minn., was still recovering from a bleak winter, the cemetery was alive with colorful flowers, buzzing bees and chirping birds.

"I've been to a number of military cemeteries, and while they are places that move the heart by the sight of honored graves, the Punchbowl is much more," Mr. Hoelscher said. "The walls seem to wrap around you and provide a sense of seclusion and peace."

A small group of family members attended Sergeant Hoelscher's funeral -- including her father, mother and brother.

The cemetery staff requested an honor guard who presented an American flag to the parents. After the ceremony ended, the small group strolled to the interment wall, Sergeant Hoelscher's final resting place.

For Mr. Hoelscher, that was the most memorable part of the funeral.

"The walk from the pavilion to the interment committal court was peaceful," he said. "We were surrounded by family and friends in a warm, loving and beautiful space."

Although her unit had provided a formal ceremony in her honor, Sergeant Hoelscher's family felt that the Punchbowl's simple ceremony still remains as a special tribute to their daughter and sister, thanks, in part, to the efforts of Sergeant Bussey.

## The caretaker

When some people discover what Sergeant Bussey does for a profession, they sometimes make fun of him by calling him an undertaker or a gravedigger. He takes it all in stride, because he knows what he does is important.

"When I tell them what I do, I also encourage them to come out to the Punchbowl for a visit. When they do, the place gives them a different outlook on life," Sergeant Bussey said.

He said working at the national shrine in the Pacific theater gives him a humble sense of dignity that can never be replaced.

Many who work at the Punchbowl have a connection with the military. James Messner was a reporter for the Pacific Stars and Stripes and retired after 30 years of naval service. Alan Sumitomo recently retired from the Air Force. Sergeant Bussey was once on active duty, having been deployed to Southwest Asia from April 2005 to January 2006.

## Hill of sacrifice

The Punchbowl's Hawaiian name is "Puowaina," translated as the "Hill of Sacrifice." The first known use was as an altar where Hawaiians offered human sacrifices to pagan gods and killed those who violated ancient laws and taboos. Later, during the reign of Kamehameha the Great, a battery of two cannons was mounted at the rim of the crater to salute distinguished arrivals and signify important occasions. Early in the 1880s, leasehold land on the slopes of the Punchbowl opened for settlement and in the 1930s,

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## **SACRIFICE** continued from page 5

the crater was used as a rifle range for the Hawaii National Guard. Toward the end of World War II, tunnels were dug through the rim of the crater for the placement of shore batteries to guard Honolulu Harbor and the south edge of Pearl Harbor.

During the late 1890s, a committee recommended the Punchbowl become the site for a new cemetery to accommodate the growing population of Honolulu. The idea was rejected for the emotional aversion to creating a "city of the dead" above a "city of the living." Fifty years later, Congress authorized a small appropriation to establish a national cemetery in Honolulu with two provisions: the location be acceptable to the War Department, and the site would be donated.

Prior to the opening of the cemetery for the recently deceased, the remains of Soldiers from locations around the Pacific Theater – including Wake Island and Japanese prisoner-of-war camps – were transported to Hawaii for final interment. The first interment was made Jan. 4, 1949. More than 13,000 Soldiers and Sailors who died during World War II were laid to rest in the Punchbowl.

The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific contains a memorial pathway that is lined with a variety of memorials that honor America's veterans from various organizations. Sergeant Bussey has taken this path many times. Not only has he had the honor of helping inter heroes, but he has met a few living ones as well.

### **Most memorable moment**

Sergeant Bussey has observed visits of VIPs such as Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, former combatant commander of the U.S. Central Command; and former U.S. presidents William J. Clinton and George H. W. Bush.

However, Sergeant Bussey's interment of Sergeant Hoelscher affected him the most.

"The most difficult aspect of the job is to know that you have to inter a fellow employee or their family member," Sergeant Bussey said.

For Sergeant Bussey, some of his rewarding moments are when he provides assistance to cemetery patrons.

"In my mind, I have a mental picture of some of them when I provided a helping hand over the years," he said. "Overall, I know those individuals who were laid to rest have served this country well and with honors. My job involved doing one final thing – providing compassionate direction, advice, guidance and assistance in all operational aspects. I also ensure the dignified and timely delivery of burial benefits to our nation's veterans."

Sergeant Bussey said his work at the cemetery has changed his life.

"I know that the 49,102 – as of Aug. 19, 2008 – interred here all made sacrifices so that everyone can have the freedom we strive for daily," Sergeant Bussey said. "And, let's not forget those who are still in Southwest Asia, putting their lives on the line to validate our cause for freedom. Working here has made me realize that freedom is not free."

### **Remembering a sister**

What Mr. Hoelscher remembers most about his sister was her



For Senior Master Sgt. Jvanne Hoelscher, 624th Civil Engineer Squadron, being interred at the National Memorial of the Pacific was an honor. She fell in love with the beauty of the cemetery and requested "Punchbowl" to be her final resting place under the Pacific starry nights. (Courtesy photo)

love of flying, her work with the Air Force and being a pilot for a local airline company.

"Lynn enjoyed the flying, the people, the mission, the travel, the experience and the sense that she was part of a meaningful organization," Mr. Hoelscher said. "She always talked about the camaraderie in the Air Force."

He also remembers the assistance his family received from the Punchbowl staff.

"It would sound too simple to say that they took care of everything and our every need, but they did," Mr. Hoelscher said.

To this day, the Hoelscher family continues to take trips to the cemetery, which receives more than 5 million visitors a year.

Those who knew Sergeant Hoelscher realize the words engraved on her memorial marker are apropos. They are, "Fly with the Wind."

Unlike most of the people interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Sergeant Hoelscher knew of her impending death and realized she needed to select a final resting place.

Her love of Hawaii, her involvement with the Air Force and help from Sergeant Bussey, her coworker, ultimately led to her interment into the Punchbowl – to her, an island of beauty; a place where she chose to spend eternity.

# Aerial porter throws out ceremonial first pitch

By Master Sgt. Daniel Nathaniel  
624th Regional Support Group

A Reservist with the 48th Aerial Port Squadron, along with representatives of the four other uniformed services, threw out a ceremonial first pitch for the Hawaii Winter Baseball League Nov. 9 at the Hans L'Orange Field, Waipahu, Hawaii.

Senior Master Sgt. Mark Avery was chosen to represent the United States Air Force as part of the league's annual Veteran's Day remembrance. Selecting him was an easy choice for management.

"Sergeant Avery is a regular fan," said Merv Yoshimoto, general manager HLB West Division. "He's a season ticket holder and we wanted to give him this opportunity."

Sergeant Avery, originally from Cahokia, Ill., has been living in Hawaii since coming here in 1987 on active duty and has been supporting the local league for the past three years.

"It's an honor," he said. "My commander told me not to bounce the ball and I didn't."



Senior Master Sgt. Mark Avery, 48th Aerial Port Squadron throws out a ceremonial first pitch for the Hawaii Winter Baseball League Nov. 9 at the Hans L'Orange Field, Waipahu, Hawaii. (Photo by Master Sgt. Daniel Nathaniel)

Sergeant Avery has served for 22 years and says he plans to stay longer.

"I've deployed to the Middle East

twice and will be going again next year," said Sergeant Avery.

## Tricare Reserve Select premiums decrease in 2009

Air Force reservists and their families will soon be able to buy more affordable Tricare health care coverage.

Effective Jan. 1, 2009, Tricare will reduce monthly Tricare Reserve Select premiums for individuals by 44 percent, from \$81 to \$47.51, and TRS family coverage will drop 29 percent, from \$253 to \$180.17.

The 2009 National Defense Authorization Act directed Tricare to analyze TRS costs from 2006 and 2007, and to set new rates for 2009.

"Now that TRS has been in place for several years, we were able to calculate premiums for 2009 from actual cost data obtained in earlier years," said Army Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, deputy

director of Tricare Management Activity. "It is important to provide high quality and affordable healthcare coverage for our National Guard and Reserve families."

Established in 2005, TRS is a premium-based health plan that members of the Selected Reserve can purchase if they are not eligible for or enrolled in Federal Employee Health Benefit plans.

The plan provides a health care option for Selected Reserve members when they are not on active duty status. The plan delivers coverage similar to Tricare Standard and Extra to eligible members who purchase the coverage and pay monthly premiums.

It also features continuously open enrollment.

"It's an excellent health care option we are proud to offer," said General Granger.

Reservists can determine their eligibility, qualify for, or purchase the TRS through the Guard and Reserve Web Portal or by logging onto <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/esgr/logonAction.do> and selecting the "Tricare Reserve Select Website" link.

More information about TRS is available on the Tricare Web site at <http://www.tricare.mil>

(Air Force Reserve Command News Service)



# Measuring up

Master Sgt. Rodney Ricafort, Tech. Sgt. Douglas Parish and Senior Airman Ryan Kanagusuku conduct a joint inspection on a vehicle to be loaded on a C-17 during an exercise held by the 48th Aerial Port Squadron November drill weekend.

All members are put through the test to ensure they are more than ready when called upon. The 48 APS has been conducting numerous exercises to evaluate proficiency in every section of the aerial port in preparation for their upcoming Functional Area Visit and Operational Readiness Inspection

Exercise scenarios are intricately developed to incorporate each process of the aerial port.

(Photo by Tech. Sgt. Peter Rieta)

## UTA Schedule

### Hickam

December 6-7  
January 10-11  
February 7-8  
March 7-8

### Andersen

December 13-14  
January 17-18  
February 21-22  
March 21-22



*By Master Sgt. Leony Macapagal  
48th Aerial Port Squadron  
First Sergeant*

Cell phones, pagers and personal digital assistants must be solid or covered in black, silver, dark blue or gray and must be conservative.

They may be clipped to the left side of waist band or purse or carried in left hand. Only one may be worn on the uniform belt. Members should not walk in uniform while using cell phones, radios or hands-free headsets unless it is required in the performance of official duties and they are using a government issued device.