

Wounded Warriors Get Heroes' Welcome at Andrews - *Continued From Page 14*

as comfortable and relaxed as possible as they're transferred to their follow-on treatment facilities.

Army and Marine Corps liaisons greet patients from their services to resolve service-specific questions and issues.

"We're representing the entire Army in welcoming them back," said Army Col. James Conaway, who leads a three-person Army medical evacuation team that greets every arriving flight. The team offers the comfort of familiar-looking uniforms to the arrivals, 80 to 85 percent of them typically from the Army.

"We're here to make sure every Army Soldier gets a proper greeting, gets proper care and gets an opportunity to bounce information off of us as we prepare to hand them off to the warrior transition units," Conaway said.

He presents all arriving patients, regardless of their service, pre-paid phone cards, funded through the Army Emergency Relief Fund. Battle-wounded soldiers get a \$200 gift card to cover incidental expenses.

Non-critical-care patients who remain overnight at Andrews get the red-carpet treatment as they arrive at the 779th Aeromedical Staging Facility.

"When our wounded warriors come through the doors, they are greeted with the hero's welcome they deserve," said Air Force Col. Robert Miller, the 779th Medical Group commander. "We feel this facility is like a five-star hotel for them to rest and recuperate before they continue on with their journey home."

The ASF staff, augmented by a cadre of Red Cross volunteers, lives up to Miller's pledge from the minute they walk or roll patients in their wheelchairs or gurneys to their rooms and help them settle in. Each room holds two to four patients, and each bed has its own medical equipment, television and phone.

Air Force Lt. Col. (Dr.) Constance Jackson, the facility's medical director, and her team tend to the patients' medical needs and offer them assurance that they're in good hands.

"I want them to know we appreciate where they have been, and go the extra mile to take care of whatever it is they need," she said.

After settling into their rooms and getting their immediate medical needs tended to, most patients who physically are able prefer to move into the facility's common areas to relax. There, they can stretch out in oversized leather chairs enjoying a large-screen TV, or they can telephone home, check e-mail or access computer game stations.

Red Cross volunteers circulate with kind words and a cart of soft drinks and snacks. They check to ensure the patients have everything... **Continued Page 16**

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headed south, hauling 125,000 gallons of fuel to Baghdad International Airport some 80 miles away. The convoy commander was in the lead HMMWV, or "Vehicle 1." Second in command, Sergeant Robert Groff, was in the passenger seat of an up-armored HMMWV, "Vehicle 21," at the rear of the convoy. For the first 50 minutes the convoy moved at a normal speed. Groff observed that civilians were out in the streets and traffic was moderate. The weather was clear. It was just another day in Iraq.

WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE?

Then, 10 minutes later as the giant convoy rolled through the northern part of Baghdad, toward the airport, Groff observed that the civilians in the streets were thinning out and traffic had all but disappeared.

When there are no kids out playing or farmers farming, we knew to be alert...

Soon Groff received a radio report from his commander that the front of the convoy was taking small arms fire. Nearly two miles behind at the rear of the convoy, Groff kept moving and maintained radio communications.

With guardrails on both sides of the six-lane highway, there was no place to turn a huge tanker around. Groff's vehicle soon passed a burning tanker spewing black smoke across the highway. As they pushed through the smoke they saw chunks of concrete and guardrails... **Continued Page 16**



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