

# SCANG chaplain ministers to injured in Germany

Chaplain (Capt.) Brian Bohlman's unique ministry, "Operation Thank You," went worldwide recently when he had a chance to spend some time working with wounded Guard soldiers in Germany. He is currently deployed to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center for about 90 days and is scheduled to return this month.

Before leaving, he collected 5,000 'Operation Thank You' postcards signed from people in South Carolina and addressed to servicemen and women overseas. He said the cards offer encouragement.

"Whenever I make the rounds and visit, I always take some of the cards and give them out to the people. It kind of helps me [break the ice]. A lot of them really enjoy them. It's kind of a highlight. The reaction has been very positive," Bohlman said.

"The cards let you see that there are people out there who care about what we're doing," said Cpl. Brandon Schavrie (with Bohlman in photo), who received a card recently while recuperating with a foot injury at Landstuhl.

Bohlman said he gives the cards to soldiers heading back downrange so they can be distributed there too. He has about 1,000 cards left and anticipates handing them out before he leaves. Bohlman volunteered for this duty in January 2005. He said, "Chaplain Evans encouraged me to come over here since I used to work at the trauma center at Richland Memorial Hospital." Bohlman submitted his name and waited for

a slot to open up. After a year and a half, he got his orders and deployed in late July.

Bohlman is the Protestant National Guard chaplain at Landstuhl. He is primarily responsible for providing ministry support to all National Guard soldiers who arrive from Iraq and Afghanistan to receive treatment at the hospital. In addition, there is a Roman Catholic chaplain and two chaplain assistants on his team. He is also responsible for the mental health ward, assists in the intensive care unit, and is on call at all times.

"I followed the chaplain from the Indiana Air National Guard, Chaplain Greg Clapper," Bohlman said. He hit the ground running and arrived at a very busy time for the hospital.

"In August, they had 778 people come in from down range. That's just people coming in on medevac flights and that's the most this calendar year so far," Bohlman said.

On a typical day, Bohlman and his team start the day with a short devotional and prayer time. Then they review the report on the day's incoming flights and the injured soldiers on those flights. "There are three different categories. BI is battle injury, D is disease, and NBI is non-battle injury. They highlight the people who are in the National Guard. We also get a patient list of all those patients in the hospital according to their religious preference. Our primary responsibility is to meet and greet every guardsman who comes through here," he said.

In a typical week Bohlman usually interacts with about 25 guard members. "When the plane comes in, we help with the off load-

field. "We hear a lot of war stories. One that I will always remember was from a soldier who was Roman Catholic. He had been away from his faith for awhile. He had been given a rosary. He was a gunner on a tank. One day, he had his rosary and was praying and it fell out of his hand. So he went down to pick it up and as he did, a sniper fired and the bullet whizzed right over his head. I heard that story and was amazed," Bohlman said.

There have also been some especially difficult moments for Bohlman. The loss of a fellow guardsman never is easy. "There was a guardsman from Nebraska who we lost. His HUMVEE went into a canal and he was under water for quite some time. His family flew over and we ministered to them for a day and half while they were here. There are all different kinds of emotions people have when they experience grief. I don't think the

full weight of it hits them until [later]. We didn't have his personal effects, because they were sent on another flight. All we had to give to the family was his ID card and the blanket that was on his bed. When we gave his wife his effects, she fell apart because it was kind of like that was left of her husband," he said.

He said chaplains and the staff there have to guard against 'compassion fatigue' setting in. That's why, for example, tours for the chaplains at Landstuhl cannot exceed 90 days. "The senior chaplain leads a program to combat against compassion fatigue. It

covers things like, are you taking leave? Do you have an outlet? Are you separating yourself from the things here? Where do you draw your strength from?"

Bohlman has kept in close contact with his wife Shelley and their daughter Mary Ellen via an internet web camera once a week. "That's helped a lot and they are doing really well. It helps the time go by very fast," he said. Bohlman has also kept in close contact with the Chaplain's office at McEntire. "The SCANG Chaplains staff has been great. They sent me some resources I needed for the small groups I lead," he said.

(by Maj. Jim St.Clair HQ SCANG/PA)



ing of the litters. When I meet a Guard soldier I might say something like, "Hi. I am Chaplain Bohlman. Welcome to Germany. You're safe now and we're here to take good care of you. God be with you," he said. Soldiers also receive a packet which includes such items as a phone card and information about the chaplain's clothes closet.

"We had a guy who came in last week that was from the South Carolina Guard. I believe he was with their signal battalion. I had an opportunity to visit with him a little bit. We talked about the Gamecocks," Bohlman said.

During his time in Germany, Bohlman said he has come across some soldiers who relayed some chilling stories from the battle-