

MILITARY KNIGHTS IN ACTION

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Reports from K of C units providing aid to members of the armed forces



Chief Warrant Officer 4 James McCormick (kneeling center) and Catholic soldiers serving at Joint Base Balad in Iraq display the kneelers they received from St. Edward Council 14404 in Lake Odessa, Mich. With only a concrete floor in the room used to celebrate Mass, McCormick made an appeal home to purchase kneelers from a Catholic supply company. Instead, his stepfather Bob Stadel, who is a member of Council 14404, constructed the kneelers from scratch with help from fellow council members. Once complete, the 45 kneelers were then shipped overseas.



John DeSanto Sr. holds a book of prayers for a priest to read during the dedication of a monument in Prague to mark the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Czech Republic from Nazi Germany. DeSanto, who is a member of Hyde Park (N.Y.) Council 6111, served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was present for the liberation in 1945. He has attended the independence day ceremony in Prague every year since 1998.

VA Bus Update

In our [February issue](#), we reported on the handicapped-accessible bus that Knights were instrumental in purchasing for the West Haven (Conn.) Veterans Affairs Health Center. The response to this initiative was so great that on June 3, Knights presented approximately \$13,000 in leftover donation funds to the facility to aid with bus maintenance and to provide recreational and educational activities for the veterans there.

Repaying Heroes

St. Jude Assembly in Port Charlotte, Fla., provides ongoing assistance to patients at the Douglas T. Jacobson State Veterans' Nursing Home. Under the direction of Bruce Wood, Knights collect toiletries and care items for patients, and the assembly provides a monthly stipend for gift cards so the veterans can enjoy a dinner out.

Phone Cards

The Knights of Columbus Essex County (N.J.) Federation donated \$250 to the USO to purchase phone cards for U.S. troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Help While Away

Msgr. Thomas F. Neary Council 13637 in Auburn adopted the family of a council member who is currently serving with the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq. When the council member's wife injured herself in a fall last winter, Knights hired a professional cleaning company to help care for the household. Council members also paired the Knight's son with a mentor while his father is away.

Chapel Furnished

Father Joseph F. Bumann Assembly in Hope Mills, N.C., donated a wall crucifix and holy water font to the chapel at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center. Previously, Good Shepherd Council 8857 donated the chapel's kneelers and altar.

Rosaries & Lip Balm

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen Council 7444 in Milford, Mich., and Father John W. Howard Council 8500 in Highland collected 477 rosaries and 1,333 sticks of lip balm for U.S. soldiers serving overseas.



Cadet Brian Louis (right) of Msgr. Cornelius George O'Keefe Council 8250 at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., helps a World War II veteran off his bus while visiting the Culinary Institute of America (CIA). Knights assisted veterans from the Hudson Valley Health Care System who had come to CIA to celebrate the PT Phone Home Program, which implemented telephone service in the hospital rooms of veterans.

UPPER LEFT: Photo by Jim McCormick

Membership in the Knights of Columbus is open to men 18 years of age or older who are practical (that is, practicing) Catholics in union with the Holy See. This means that an applicant or member accepts the teaching authority of the Catholic Church on matters of faith and morals, aspires to live in accord with the precepts of the Catholic Church, and is in good standing in the Catholic Church.



Knights Celebrate Memorial Day and Flag Day

Knights in the United States celebrated two patriotic holidays recently: Memorial Day on May 31 (after the last issue of *Military Knights in Action* had gone to press) and Flag Day on June 14. Both occasions provided Knights with ample opportunities to honor veterans and the men and women currently serving in all branches of the Armed Forces. Here's a sample from around the country:

- Members of Father James F. O'Reilly Assembly in Birmingham, Ala., placed U.S. flags on the graves of veterans at Jefferson Memorial Gardens in Hoover.
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Assembly in East San Diego County, Calif., provided an honor guard for the Memorial Day service at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery.
- Walter Pollard Council 5480 and Father Michael J. Bader Assembly, both in Newport News, Va., sponsored a service in honor of the USS *Scorpion*, which sank in 1968 with 99 crewmen aboard. Knights honored each of the sailors individually before presenting a wreath for burial at sea to the captain of the USS *Newport News*.
- Members of East Hanover (N.J.) Council 6504 participated in their community's annual Memorial Day Parade. Knights designed and rode a float during the parade with the theme, "One Nation Under God."
- St. Dominic Council 3729 in New Orleans hosted a Flag Day ceremony at its council hall that featured a talk by Calvin Moret, a member of the Tuskegee Airmen.
- Fourth Degree Knights from in and around Laredo, Texas, provided an honor guard for a Flag Day ceremony that included participation from local, county, state and federal law enforcement officials.



Master Sgt. Patrick Narango, Lt. Jerrod Smith and Master Sgt. Randy Revell of the Kandahar Airfield Round Table in Afghanistan bow their heads while Father Marion Rosario blesses a prayer garden at the base's Friase Chapel. Knights built the rock garden in honor of Sgt. Maj. John K. Laborde, a member of the round table who died in Afghanistan April 22. The round table is sponsored by St. Vincent de Paul Council 12191 in Berkeley Springs, W. Va.

Heroism Honored

Rear Admiral Tyrone Pile of the Canadian Forces presented Cpl. Yance Sheehan of Langford Council 9384 in Victoria, B.C., with the Canadian Navy's Certificate of Achievement. Sheehan applied first aid and CPR to a family friend, Sasha Cumby, after she collapsed at Disneyland in California. Sheehan also sponsored a charity event to support the Cumby family while Sasha undergoes medical treatment.

Operation Gratitude

Msgr. Corr Council 3571 in Pasadena, Calif., sponsored a drive at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Church to assemble care packages for U.S. troops serving overseas. Knights and parishioners collected care items and \$1,000 in cash donations and as part of Operation Gratitude.

Flag of Appreciation

In appreciation for the council's efforts to send \$500 worth of pre-paid phone cards to U.S. troops serving in Kabul, Afghanistan, John Paul I Council 7165 in Woodbridge, Va., received a U.S. flag that flew over the military base in Kabul, along with a certificate of honor. Over the past two years, Knights have made several shipments of phone cards and calendars to soldiers serving in the Middle East.

Victory for Veterans

Members of Msgr. Richard C. Madden Assembly in Summerville, S.C., and their wives visited the Veterans' Victory House in Walterboro to serve lunch to patients and to distribute a number of donations. Volunteers served sandwiches and dessert to about 100 nursing home residents and staff before handing out U.S. flag pins, hats, t-shirts, books, DVDs and televisions.

Boot Camp Breakfast

St. John Neumann Council 14457 in Sunbury, Ohio, sponsored a Boot Camp Breakfast for all Delaware County veterans and their families. Guests were invited share their experiences and camaraderie in support of troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Jerry Jodry of the VFW delivered the event's keynote address, and all branches of the Armed Forces were represented.

Quiet Comfort

Father J. A. Nieuwland Assembly in South Bend, Ind., donated \$155 to Operation Quiet Comfort, an organization that provides aid to sick and wounded soldiers. The funds will help Operation Quiet Comfort send quilts and care packages to military men and women who are recovering at their bases or have been evacuated to higher-level care facilities.



Knight Rebuilding, Seeing Faith in Afghanistan

by Ed Langlois

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Catholic Sentinel (Archdiocese of Portland, Ore.) Jan. 14 and is reprinted here with permission.

During the last days of 2009, Art Kunigel of Mid-Columbia Council 7292 in Hood River, Ore., was sitting in a Catholic adult education class at Bagram Air Base in eastern Afghanistan. When the power blipped off, 30 faithful soldiers, engineers, airmen, pilots and nurses grabbed flashlights to continue their reflections. As the group headed out onto the chapel steps to pray the rosary, the moon came out to shine on the snowy mountains. It was so bright that no one needed lights.

"Tell me there isn't a God, and that Catholicism and Christianity aren't alive in Afghanistan," said Kunigel, 60, a Vietnam veteran who now works for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Most of the time, Kunigel is a structural crew supervisor at The Dalles Dam in Oregon. But until Jan. 8, he was deployed in Afghanistan, where the Corps is charged with rebuilding the country's infrastructure.

Kunigel's job — he's called a construction officer representative — is to supervise and mentor local workers and contractors. This ensures that buildings, roads and bridges get done right and will provide a better future for the Afghan building industry.

It's an understatement to say that construction work is more dangerous in Afghanistan than in North America. During his time at Bagram, Kunigel and his fellow workers were often close to rocket strikes or fighting. The engineers wore flak vests and never went out on a project without two soldiers as bodyguards.

Why would a man at retirement age — not to mention a married father of two — consider such risky work?

"I love my God and my country and

the freedoms we have," Kunigel explained. "We are able to worship because we are a free nation, and sacrifices have to be made in order for us to keep it this way."

In addition to fighting in Vietnam as a young man in the Air Force, Kunigel took part in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In 2008, he worked in and around Kabul, the rough-and-tumble city southeast of Bagram.

"I have seen the worst many times, and I have also witnessed things that only our Lord could have done," said Kunigel.

While stationed in Afghanistan, Kunigel didn't have to be far from his brother Knights. In fact, Bagram Air Base is home to a Knights of Columbus round table that is sponsored by Msgr. Robert D. Goodill and St. Luke Council 11229 in Erie, Pa. The round table sponsors daily Mass, weekly Catholic history sessions and the rosary.

In addition, Bagram Air Base is home to a very large military hospital. Seriously wounded soldiers are transported there before being flown to Germany. Often, their clothes are cut off during emergency procedures, and the wounded make the flight to Europe in nothing but hospital gowns. During his visits with injured troops, Kunigel discovered that what they wanted most was simply a pair of sweat pants.

While on leave in October 2009, Kunigel contacted his fellow Knights in Hood River and White Salmon, Wash., to help. With help from Wal-Mart of Hood River and individual donors,



Art Kunigel (third from right) and fellow soldiers at Bagram Air Base in eastern Afghanistan display some of the sweat pants that were collected for wounded soldiers by Oregon Knights.

Knights collected more than 160 pairs of pants — enough for each wounded soldier that left the base over the course of a month.

Art Carroll, who is also a member of Council 7292, admires Kunigel's service and took a lead in the sweat pants project. "Kunigel was so excited when the boxes arrived, he called me right then," Carroll said.

Although Kunigel's current deployment ended in January, he said that he would be willing to return to Afghanistan again if needed.

"We as a free country have so many things to be thankful for that are so distant and not even realized by the Afghan people and may never be realized," he said. "God has blessed America, and I hope we continue to learn and live his greatest teaching — 'Love one another as I have loved you.'" ♦

ED LANGLOIS, a reporter with the *Catholic Sentinel* of Portland, Ore., since 1993, focuses on parish life and the ways that church and government meet in Oregon. He has written regularly about assisted suicide, anti-Catholic movements and vocations.