

Camp Wright Servicemembers Honor Fallen Comrade, Remember 9/11

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Soldiers from Riverton, Villa Park Among Those Observing Solemn Day in Afghanistan

KUNAR PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN (09/16/2011)(readMedia)-- Servicemembers at Camp Wright in Kunar Province spent a solemn day commemorating the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and celebrating the life of a fallen comrade Sept. 11.

Members of the Kunar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), the Illinois National Guard's 1-14th Illinois Agribusiness Development Team, the 102nd Forward Surgical Team and the 744th Engineer Company, Route Clearance Patrol 46 were among the military units participating in the day's events.

At 23 years old, U.S. Army Spc. John Cowgill, of Riverton, a security force member for the 1-14th Illinois Agribusiness Development Team.

Those events of a decade ago had a deep impact on who he is and on the direction his life has taken.

"Ten years ago I never thought I would be spending this day in Afghanistan," said Cowgill. "I still feel anger over what happened, but I've learned that anger can be channeled toward helping people and making a difference. That is what I see today and that is what makes me proud to be here."

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A ceremony at the Camp Wright dining facility began the day of remembrance. Two members of the Kunar PRT, who were in New York on the day of the terrorist attacks, shared their experiences with those who had gathered.

U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Darlene Croston, of Binghamton, N.Y., an administrative specialist with the Kunar PRT, was working in New York as a nanny for a member of the New York Fire Department who was killed that day.

Croston said sharing those experiences was an important part of the occasion.

"Ten years [later], it might be easy to forget why we are here," she said. "Just as with any loss, time dulls the pain. It is important that we remember our goals so this country does not become an incubator for that type of terrorism again."

The ceremony concluded as an American flag, which was previously flown aboard the USS New York, was passed solemnly between enlisted servicemembers representing different units and branches of service.

The Cpl. Raphael Arruda Fitness Center in Afghanistan was dedicated during a separate ceremony later in the day.

U.S. Army Cpl. Raphael Arruda, of South Ogden, Utah, a combat engineer with the 744th Engineer Company, Route Clearance Patrol 46, was killed when his vehicle struck an improvised explosive device during a combat patrol June 16.

Members of the 744th spoke of Arruda's love of physical fitness and said the dedication was a fitting tribute to the Soldier who grew up in Brazil and had recently received his U.S. citizenship.

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U.S. Army Spc. Jonathan Hansen, of Layton, Utah, an operations specialist with the 744th, said his entire unit was behind the idea of the dedication.

"It started off as one person's idea, but everyone pitched in and it became a group effort," said Hansen. "All those who served with him will be happy to know his legacy is living on after we are gone. He would be very happy about this, but he would also be humbled. He would consider it a great honor."

A plaque bearing Arruda's name and the words "let's get swole" - a phrase he used to get others into the gym - was unveiled during the ceremony.

When night fell, residents of Camp Wright took to rooftops and high ground for an unobstructed view of the clear night sky. As illumination rounds lit the mountainside, someone spoke of those who lost their lives on 9/11 and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the ensuing War on Terrorism.

While many of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of Camp Wright were well into their military careers on Sept. 11, 2001, others were just beginning their careers as junior-high students.