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www.OperationFirstResponse.org
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OPERATION FIRST RESPONSE

SOLDIERS ATTENDING GRAND STRAND FREEDOM FEST

Musicians/Performers

SFC Sean Bennett

SFC Sean Bennett is a member of the US Army, Field Artillery Branch and Airborne Community in Fort Richardson Alaska. He has a beautiful 13 year old daughter named Makenzee Rose that is in Oklahoma with her mom. He has been in the military just shy of 15 years and planned to make a career out of his choice in life. While in the US Army, he has been deployed to Cuba and Iraq. His injuries occurred as he was ambushed with a small portion of his platoon in Karbala Iraq. The insurgents bought American Army Combat Uniforms and made their way thru Iraq Army and Police check points into his command center. They were then engaged with a 15 to 20 insurgent element for about 45 minutes at close range. He was shot in the left Bicep and received some grenade damage as well. he has been awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Combat Action Badge, Airborne Wings, Air Assault Wings, Pathfinder Badge and Drill Sergeant Badge. Since he has been home, he completed Casualty Affairs for my Brigade and helped render honors to over 40 Soldiers that have given the ultimate sacrifice for the country. He was sent to Norfolk Virginia, where he sang with Billy Ray Cyrus and will have a CD come out later this year. In his off time, he runs a boat out of Ninilchik, Alaska; where he, himself, has put many a wounded warrior into some great fishing and outdoor living.

For Additional Information: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW_zfspjs44
<http://www.etonline.com/index.html?tag=sean-bennett>

Dan Jens

The journey began with Dan returning home safely to his wife and family after a 15-month tour in Iraq. Dan continues to reflect on the adversity he faced, yet he is also thankful for the opportunities he was given to glorify God in the midst of war. With Jesus as his strength, Daniel committed his talents to do the Lord's work as much as his military duty allowed him. He accomplished this by playing and singing at church services, prayer breakfasts and the US Embassy. The highlights of his performances came when he played for fellow soldiers to help boost morale. Daniel not only received a Certificate of Appreciation for "bringing a touch of class to the battalion" during his tour in Iraq, but he also won the 10-week Blackjack Idol competition, held by Blackjack, the 1st Cavalry Division's 2nd Brigade. Daniel's most notable accomplishment to date is his appearance on NBC's America's Got Talent Season 3. Months of exposure on this live talent show helped Daniel gain an enormous increase in his fan base.

For Additional Information: <http://www.danieljens.com/>

SGT Vicki Golding

SGT Golding came to the US from Australia in 2002, and joined her current unit in 2005 as a percussionist and lead vocalist. After winning the Military Idol competition in 2006, SGT Golding has been asked to perform in a number of high profile events. These include sporting events such as Nationals, DC United, and Capitals games as well as the season opener for the Redskins in 2008. Other performances include Radio City Music Hall, the 2007 Army Birthday Ball, the 2008 Cherry Blossom Parade, the 2008 Independence Day parade, and many more performances for the USO and throughout the DC Area.

For Additional Information: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/avatar1/3693923341/>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TOflhwLygM>

Wounded American Soldiers

Cpl Kevin "Andrew" Smith

Cpl Smith was injured in Iraq September 20, 2003. "I was in infantry," Cpl Smith said. "I was with the 10th Mountain Division, and we were on a mounted patrol in Fallujah, Iraq. I was driving a Humvee when we got hit by a roadside bomb. I took shrapnel in my left knee and left leg." Cpl Smith's injuries were not life-threatening, and he was able to finish the mission. Still, when he returned to civilian life, his financial needs became severe because it can take a year or more for VA benefits to kick in.

Mean while, one of his Army buddies was deployed to Afghanistan where he died on duty. "His mom requested that we – a bunch of his Army friends – come to be pallbearers," Cpl Smith said. "We wanted to go, but we didn't have the funds to get there. I was living in Georgia, and the funeral was in Wisconsin." Cpl Smith learned about OFR and contacted Baker. OFR made sure that any of the slain soldier's friends who wanted to attend the funeral were able to do so.

PFC. Richard Kolath

PFC Kolath of the 82nd Airborne's Bravo Company lost his right leg to a roadside bomb in Iraq. An improvised-explosive device went off while PFC Kolath was traveling in a convoy in Iraq's Anbar Province on Jan. 11, 2008. PFC Kolath was severely injured, and doctors had to amputate most of his right leg.

SPC Henry "Austin" Phillips

SPC Phillips of Charlie Company of the 153rd Infantry, 39th Brigade out of DeQueen, Arkansas lost a leg from a grenade attack in Iraq. On May 19, 2004, while on a mission in Baghdad, Iraq, SPC Phillips and five others were hit by the blast of an improvised explosive device, causing the loss of a portion of SPC Phillips's right leg; and following the blast, insurgents began throwing grenades and shooting at SPC Phillips and his comrades. Despite the loss of a portion of his right leg, SPC Phillips received a weapon from a fellow soldier and returned fire to help secure the area; and as a representation of his valorous acts of heroism, SPC Phillips received the Bronze Star with a "V" for valor; and SPC Phillips has also been awarded the Purple Heart in recognition of the injury he suffered.

SGT. Ian Newland

On the morning of Dec. 4, SPC. McGinnis was riding atop a Humvee, manning a 50-caliber machine gun as the truck rolled through the violent Baghdad neighborhood of Adhamiyah. An insurgent on a rooftop threw a grenade at the Humvee. SPC. McGinnis tried to bat it away, but the explosive dropped into the Humvee, where the other four soldiers essentially were trapped. SPC. McGinnis shouted a warning to them, and then jumped back inside the vehicle. "An average man would have leapt out of the gunner's cupola to safety," the Army said in its official account. "McGinnis decided to stay with his crew. Unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his own life ... he threw his back over the grenade." The explosion was so powerful that it ripped through SPC. McGinnis' body armor and blew the doors off the

Humvee. He died in front of the four men he saved -- Sgt. Ian Newland, Sgt. 1st Class Cedric Thomas, Sgt. Lyle Buehler and Pfc. Sean "Doc" Lawson. Of them, only SGT Newland was injured seriously. Now 27, he lives in Colorado with his wife and two children. SGT Newland's injuries from the incident in Adamayiah were mild traumatic brain injury and severe shrapnel injuries. Some of the shrapnel was impossible to remove by doctors and remains in his body with painful consequences.

PFC Paul Skarinka

PFC Skarinka was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in Iraq while serving with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. PFC Skarinka received a Purple Heart, among many other accolades, for his service in the US Army while deployed in the Sadr City area of Baghdad under Operation Iraqi Freedom. PFC Skarinka endured several surgeries at Walter Reed AMC for the multiple injuries he sustained after a rocket-propelled grenade struck his outfit. PFC Skarinka served as a Whitman call firefighter before joining the Army and being injured in the rocket-propelled-grenade attack in Iraq.

1st Sgt Peter Lara

1st Sgt Lara was three months into a deployment to Iraq on Nov 19, 2005, when he and fellow soldiers of the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team's 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry, were engaged in a fight in Mosul, Iraq, and under heavy fire in close combat. He had been designated a platoon leader. Under close enemy fire, Lara was shot through the jaw and shots disabled his weapon and pierced his arm. A bullet lodged in his head, but he didn't realize it at the time. He was sure he would die. "I could hear my jawbone crunching away in there and my teeth were broken, 1st Sgt Lara said, He reached into his mouth to clear the teeth and bone from his airway and kept fighting, pulling another soldier out of the enemy fire. 1st Sgt Lara was losing blood but refused help even as reinforcements arrived, fearing other soldiers would be in danger. For actions in the battle members of his platoon received six Silver Star medals and one Distinguished Service Cross. 1st SGT Lara received one of those Silver Stars. Since then 1st Sgt Lara has had over 35 surgeries, one of them to remove the bullet from, his head.

SSG Ricardo Perez

SSG Perez was severely injured by hostile fire while clearing a dwelling in Iraq. He is partially paralyzed and needs the assistance of a wheel chair. He is also married to a Service Member.

Operation First Response Soldiers

Sgt Michael Marrero

During his deployment to Tal Afar, Iraq Sgt Marrero assisted coalition forces with several IED incidents that resulted in the loss of US Soldiers and Iraqi citizens. He also assisting in the relief efforts after a bombing of a market in Tal Afar, Iraq which resulted in the injuries of over 72 children.

Cpt. Joseph Amos

CPT Amos deployed to Iraq with the 6250th USAH, Ft. Lewis, WA. He now works with our Wounded Heroes at the Warrior Transition Clinic in Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg, NC.