

Up and Down the Hill

Serving the Fort A. P. Hill Community

Commander Bids Farewell; Heads to Pentagon

Story by Debra Bingham
Fort A.P. Hill Public Affairs Office

Change is a certainty in the military: Soldiers arrive only to move on to new assignments shortly after. Many perform their jobs and depart without much evidence of their stay.

Not so for Fort A.P. Hill's outgoing commander, Col. James Balocki, who passes the mantle of command in July. Balocki is headed for an assignment at the Pentagon, where he will serve as the Executive Officer for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. Post staff and local community members will remember Balocki as a friend, a leader and as a source of inspiration—both on and off the job.

Balocki's took command at Fort A.P. Hill August 9, 2001. He and his wife, Marie, have three sons; Daniel, Steven and Brian.

Lt. Col. James M. Mis will assume command of the garrison on July 12 during a change of command ceremony. Mis comes to the post from an assignment at the Joint Special Forces Command, Fort Bragg, N.C. He is accompanied by his wife, Mary and their three children; James Jr., Corrine and Meghan.

While some commanders might be apprehensive about taking an assignment at a post with so few military personnel, Balocki said it was a perfect fit.

"For about the last 13 or 14 years all the assignments I had have been predominantly around civilian's employees, so the new quirks that many people might refer to I have already seen," Balocki said.

Understanding people and what motivates them is important to Balocki. He said people don't like surprises on the job, but prefer a degree of predict-



U.S. Army Photo

Col. James Balocki, Fort A.P. Hill's commander, moves on to a new assignment as the Executive Officer for the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works in July.

ability. They want to know what's expected of them and feel their work is important and valued. Workers also want to be recognized for doing a good job, Balocki said.

"It doesn't matter if you wear a green suit or a purple suit. It is about the people in the organization and how strongly they feel. The one thing that stands out in my mind, more than anything else at Fort A.P. Hill, is the great folks that work here," he said.

While many departing commanders eagerly list their accomplishments, Balocki is quick to credit the staff and downplay his influence.

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“I don’t really feel like I fixed any problems, so much as tried to guide the staff to identify things that might be done differently,” he said.

Balocki feels his leadership role was to help members of the organization find new approaches and “to provide the tools to look at problems in a different light and solve them,” he said. That meant changing some perceptions and traditional responses to challenges.

His method of doing business sometimes moved people out of their comfort zone, according to Elias Hall, Director of Information Management.

“In over 30 years of service, I never met anyone quite like Colonel Balocki. He wasn’t bothered by the usual bureaucratic hindrances and was unfettered by any potential for failure or what other people thought. He always encouraged us to ‘Do what’s right,’ and ‘Challenge the assumptions,’”

Hall said.

Balocki also encouraged managers to be persistent, not letting anything rest until it reached the end state, according to Hall.

“Sometimes you have to say ‘By gosh it is more important to be effective than to be efficient and we have to do the right thing regardless of what it costs,’” Balocki said.

The process worked according to Hall. The staff at Fort A.P. Hill consistently developed new products, programs and innovations.

“His methods could be painful, but we enjoyed success in areas that would never have been touched without his guidance and involvement,” Hall said.

Some of those successes included refurbishment of the airfield and creation of the new convoy live fire and access control point ranges. Customers recognize the exceptional service Fort A.P. Hill’s staff provides, Balocki said.

“Those folks who are our customers are saying, ‘Here is an organization that is number one and is one of the leaders in some of the things that they do,’” Balocki said.

The commander speaks with pride when he talks about the caring and professionalism of the post’s military and civilian workforce. He said he saw those traits demonstrated in a memorable way when Hurricane Isabel struck the area.

“People didn’t even need to say what needed to be done. The staff just knew what they had to do, liter-

ally risking their lives to keep the property damage from affecting others,” he said.

Balocki felt an outpouring of support from the Fort A.P. Hill “family” when his son Daniel underwent treatment for cancer. Balocki’s strength and positive attitude became a source of inspiration for workers.

“I guess partly you do sit down and cry a little bit. You do ask yourself ‘Why me? Why us?’ But, as a family we draw inner strength from our relationship together and with a higher being,” Balocki said.

Balocki said not a day passes when he doesn’t think about his son’s illness; the surgeries and the recovery. However, he remains committed to honoring his responsibilities as a leader.

“It’s like someone throwing another stone in your rucksack--you just continue to drive on. You know there are 20 kilometers to go and, by God, you’re going to keep going. You have a mission to finish, whether there are problems with the family or not,” he said.

Balocki has the same sense of conviction when he calls Fort A.P. Hill the “best place on the East Coast.” He said the post has something that sets it apart: the people.

“Fort A.P. Hill is home to some of the best, most dedicated, most caring Department of Defense employees. They care more about the success of Soldiers than anywhere else,” he said.



PAO Archive Photo

Col. Balocki said one of his fondest memories of his time on post was having his family there for his promotion ceremony. Sons Steven (left) and Brian pinned on his colonel rank in February 2004.

Tailgate Delivery: Supply In The Sky

Story and Photos by Debra Bingham
Fort A.P. Hill Public Affairs Office

“You’re going to drop five bundles at 90 knots. How many bundles can you put out in three seconds? How much drop zone do you need?” the instructor asks.

Students begin calculating, juggling helmets and weapons and swatting black flies buzzing about their heads.

It’s not a conventional classroom and these are not typical students. A failing grade on this test could mean more than a suffering grade point average, it could be the difference between life and death for troops in the field.

The “students” are National Guard Soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division conducting annual training at Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia. Over one thousand of the division’s Soldiers spent two weeks in the field honing their combat and survival skills. They established and then “jumped” a tactical operations center, qualified with a variety of weapons systems, and completed a myriad of events ranging from rappelling to land navigation.

Soldiers from the division’s 429th Forward Support Battalion (FSB) work within the logistics field, according to Maj. Victor Parziale, Brigade Logistics Officer for 1st Brigade, 29th Infantry Division. They are familiar with “tailgate delivery” done on the ground. Delivering supplies by air is also a critical logistics tool for Soldiers operating in remote locations or in emergencies.

“We are trying to expand our horizons and participate with hands-on training in other means of delivering supplies. We’re going to do something different, something many of them have never done before—drop 10-15 cases of MRE’s (Meals Ready to Eat) to soldiers in the field,” said Parziale.

Soldiers listened intently as an instructor talked about setting up a Ground Marker Release System (GMRS) drop zone used during aerial supply operations.

“To convert the airspeed of the aircraft to ground speed you take the airspeed and multiply it by point five one. It takes three seconds to get a



Soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division move away after hooking a sling load of two vehicles onto a Blackhawk helicopter during training at Fort A.P. Hill.

bundle out the door, but you’re allowed a freebie on the first door because it’s already sitting right there. Multiply those two together to get 250 meters of drop zone,” said Sgt. 1st Class Todd McClain, an instructor from Headquarters Company, 116th Infantry Regiment.

Students had to determine the length of a drop zone and the time required to drop several bundles of MREs from a helicopter to troops on the ground. The math can be challenging, said 1st Sgt. Patrick Donnelly, from Alpha Company, 429th.

“There are a lot of mathematical calculations as far as wind speed, drop, drag, used to figure out where your load is going to land. It’s not really difficult math, but without a calculator it’s a little tough,” Donnelly said.

As one group of Soldiers worked on marking a drop zone, others learned how to prepare a simple door bundle for a parachute drop. Instructors from the U.S. Army’s Parachute Rigger School, Fort Lee, Va., packed a parachute and showed Soldiers how to prepare the load. The bundle consisted of several boxes of MREs stacked and bound them together with nylon straps attached to the parachute.

“The MREs are confined by an A-7A cargo strap assembly with a G-14 cargo parachute on top. The sling has four straps, each with a para-

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chute harness adapter and a floating d-ring. The deployment bag, the green bag that holds the parachute, is tied in place on top of the load,” explained Capt. Wesley Wright, chief of the Aerial Delivery Division, Quartermaster School.

Spec. Brook Smith, a water storage specialist, 222nd Combat Support Section, works as a nurse’s aid in a hospital in her hometown of Staunton, Va. She pushed an unruly strand of blond hair behind her ear as she threaded a fastening strap around a stack of two MRE boxes and through a friction adapter buckle. Smith tightened a strap, using her foot for additional leverage, and checked to make sure the buckle was in the right position and all of the straps were folded and tucked properly.

A watchful instructor reminded the Soldiers that such details could prevent the load from snagging when it’s pushed out of the aircraft.

“It’s really easier than I thought it would be, pretty dummy-proof really. You just have to remember all the parts and pieces to get it right, Smith said. Despite the heat, dust and bugs, Smith called her Army training “a good break from having to work inside all the time and a great way to learn new things.”

The drop zone, a grassy field surrounded by tall pine trees, is a flurry of activity. The Soldiers want the bundle to land along the centerline of the drop zone into the tree line, McClain said. That’s important since the unit is hovered down in the woods conducting an operation and wants to avoid going out into the open field, McClain said.

“The Soldiers determine if they have enough drop zone to release four bundles from a helicopter that’s flying at 80 knots at 500 feet. From the point of impact, they also have to determine the point of drift,” McClain said.

Using hand-held anemometers, Soldiers measured the wind speed and direction and calculated the distance the cargo would drift during its fall. The Soldiers then moved onto the field to the point of impact to pace off the drift distance to determine where the cargo should be released from the aircraft.

“Basically, you face the direction in which the aircraft is flying and for a U-860 the forward throw is half the airspeed. So if the aircraft is flying at 80 knots, the forward throw would be 40 meters, so you’d pace back into the direction from which the aircraft is flying that



Spec. Heather Sparks, 429th FSB, uses an anemometer to measure the wind speed and direction at the drop zone. Master Sgt. Bob Sanderlin, an instructor from the 20th Special Forces Group (A) based at Fort A.P. Hill, helps Sparks take the readings.



Spec. Brooke Smith, 429th FSB, prepares a load of MREs for a parachute drop. Spec. Heather Sparks (left) helps Smith secure the fastening straps.

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distance,” McClain said.

To help the pilot orient his aircraft along the drop zone, Soldiers set up a signaling device made of four nylon “VS-17” panels. The bright orange, 6-foot long panels are placed on the ground in the shape of an upside down “L.”

“The L is used to guide the aircraft in. The pilot comes in and lines up 100 meters to the right hand side of the panel. Once he’s aligned, the bundles are pushed out,” McClain said.

On the helicopter’s first pass, the bundle deployed and the parachute opened, but there was a problem with the rigging. A cascade of MRE boxes fell from the binding straps and tumbled to the ground, scattering in the woods below. The second load floated to the ground on target and intact.

The Soldiers also used a helicopter sling load to move a pair of small cargo vehicles used by light infantry units called “Gators.” During a sling load, cargo is suspended by hook from the underbelly of an aircraft and flow to its destination.

Lt. Col. Timothy Mantz, 429th Support Battalion commander, said the sling load allows cargo and equipment to be moved quickly and without surface obstruction. The helicopter’s ability fly a variety of routes and land in multiple locations enhances the security of ground troops, Mantz said.

“What we are doing today is jumping our brigade TOC forward. We’ll take all our cargo equipment and then sling the Gators in. Then crews will then put the equipment on the Gators and move to the new location,” Matz said.

Once the Gators are in the 8-legged sling, an instructor inspects the load. A team of Soldiers makes adjustments, tying down loose straps to prevent movement.

“The sling load inspector prepares a document and hands it to the aviation crew and they look it the sling legs and inspect all the hooks to make sure it meets the Army standard. Provided the aviation crew is satisfied with the sling, then we’ll have a successful operation if the weather holds,” Mantz said

A Blackhawk pilot, from the 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment, checked the sling and conferred with his crew before giving the “ok.”

Two Soldiers, called a hook-up team, moved on

top of the Gators to wait for the helicopter to fly overhead. The hovering aircraft created a torrent of wind and noise as one Soldier hooked the sling to the helicopter. The other Soldier operated a static discharge wand to prevent shock from static electricity during the hook-up. The Soldiers jumped from the load and ducked their heads as the helicopter effortlessly lifted the load and disappeared behind the tree line.

The Soldiers gathered their equipment and headed back to camp with the rest of the company. The division will train for another week before heading back to their homes across Va., Md., Mass.



Soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division (above) prepare a pair of “Gators” for movement by sling load. A Blackhawk helicopter carries the load of transport vehicles used by light infantry units.



DPW Cleans Up The Competition—Again

Story and Photos by Debra Bingham
Fort A.P. Hill Public Affairs Office

The staff of athletic enthusiasts from the Directorate of Public Works nabbed the Commander's Cup trophy during Organizational Day July 1. It's the fourth straight win for DPW in the annual post sports competition. Ben McBride, DPW's director, accepted the trophy.

It wasn't all smooth sailing for DPW though. Members of the Directorate of Public Safety and the Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security put up a fight and vow the outcome will be different next year.



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News Briefs

Baskets of Fun

Win a basket and help a worthy cause in the process. Join the Fort A.P. Hill Employee Morale Committee July 30 at 7 p.m. for an evening of fun and games at the Harrison Road Community Center. Call Shirley at 633-8422 for tickets and information.



Mandatory Training

All computer users on Fort A. P. Hill are required to complete an on-line training course to receive a log on ID and email account. To complete the course, log on to: <https://iaut.mdw.army.mil>



Entering The Fun Zone At Summer Camp

Story and Photos by Debra and Becky Bingham
Fort A.P. Hill Public Affairs Office

If success is measured by smiles, then the Summer Camp at Fort A.P. Hill has cornered the market, with 27 high-wattage, kid smiles.

The two-week camp is a Morale Welfare and Recreation youth program. It offered a variety of fun and educational activities for children ages 6-12. There were swimming lessons, canoe rides, arts and crafts. Campers also learned about the post's natural resources and had a chance to make new friends.

The highlight for many of the children was a visit to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

“Going to the zoo was the best ‘cause I got to see all the animals,” said 11-year old Amber Mountjoy, a first-time camper.

Mountjoy gives the camp her seal of approval. She said it was all fun, but “waking up to go is the hardest part,” she said.



At the Washington Zoo, Kristan Carter (standing) and Emma Tyree (sitting) make friends with a stone eagle, while a monkey keeps watch from his perch on a tree.

Campers learn about the inhabitants of Beaver Dam Lake, including a largemouth bass, from Brian “Scutter” Lee, a post fisheries biologist.

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