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THEIR MAMAS (AND DADDIES) WEAR ARMY BOOTS, AND NOW THEY DO, TOO: YOUNG FAMILY MEMBERS GET TO 'PLAY ARMY'

Two stories:

V CORPS INFANTRY BATTALION GIVES SOLDIERS YOUNGSTERS CHANCE TO EARN 'WEE-IB'

YOUNG FAMILY MEMBERS EXPERIENCE 'BASIC,' COURTESY OF V CORPS SIGNAL BATTALION (Click headline to jump to story)

By Margot Cornelius

Staff journalist for the 98th Area Support Group newspaper, "The Point"

ANSBACH, Germany — Walking in daddy's boots was quite a feat for the children of V Corps' 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry who took part in the battalion's recent "wee-infantry badge" obstacle course.

The day was a fun version of the course the kids' infantry dads take to earn an Expert Infantry Badge, a highly prized decoration that can only be earned by an infantryman. In their pursuit for their own 'Wee-IB," children learned their fathers' boots are big ones to fill.



MARGOT CORNELIUS

Diandra Quashie (left) and Alicia Ackley try on their fathers' oversized Army boots in preparation for the 'Wee-IB' obstacle course organized by V Corps' 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry.

To prepare for the 'grueling' fun ahead, children were issued ID tags and field gear and smeared their faces in camouflage paint.

"I know they like playing Army, I did when I was a kid!" said Sgt. Robert Curtis, of Company C, 1/26th.

The children negotiated the obstacle course through a tire run, wall climb, a 12-yard sprint and a "search and rescue finale" that had kids bandaging the injured with mounds of toilet paper.

In the real EIB course, infantrymen are allowed only two mistakes which have to be corrected within 30 minutes. Not so on this day, mistakes were part of the fun. Dropping a water grenade generated a giggle rather than alarm.

Although they might not be ready to enlist in the infantry, the children learned something about the challenges their Soldier-fathers face, and provided some inspiration in return.

"Our kids are doing a great job holding it together. They are our humor, they're our batteries, they keep us going," said Tammy Ricci, a family member with Company C, 1/26th.

YOUNG FAMILY MEMBERS EXPERIENCE 'BASIC,' COURTESY OF V CORPS SIGNAL BATTALION

By Richard Henricks
1st Infantry Division

KITZINGEN, Germany — Military formations, push-ups and operations orders were the order of the day for kids when the rear detachment of the 121st Signal Battalion

here recently decided to give their deployed troops' children a taste of what their Soldier-parents experienced during basic training.

First item of business for the day of basic training was to enlist the new Soldiers. Fifty-seven sons and daughters of deployed Soldiers, ranging from 11-month-old Lane Nethery to 20-year-old Stephanie Garrison, raised their right hands took the oath of enlistment, vowing to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

After the ceremonial formalities, the real training began.

"The first thing we did was physical training. Then we camouflaged [the young family members] and put them in formation for a squad forced march. The march was about three-and-a-half kilometers and some of the kids had rucksacks; a pretty rough schedule," said Sgt. 1st Class Prince Young, the 121st's rear detachment sergeant major.



CLAUDETTE ROULO

Sgt. Suzanne Versie of V Corps' 121st Signal Battalion forms up young "Soldiers" for PT and a road march during a day of 'basic training' for the unit's young family members.

After pounding the ground, the kids fired Super Nintendo laser training weapons until they could put several shots into a dime-sized area. Then they inspected a static weapons display and manned the turret in an M-2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle.

Finally, their orders arrived in a "top secret message from the president," so they could conduct the mission they had been training for. The orders assigned two phased operations to "Task Force Lightning." Phase 1 required the smaller kids to

clear the way for the bigger kids by clearing simulated land mines and booby traps. Phase 2 called on the elder "Soldiers" to rescuing a hostage.

The remainder of the day included a talk about fighting crime from McGruff the Crime Dog and a basic training graduation, complete with certificates presented by 1st Lt. Angela Lamborn, the 121st's rear detachment commander. Three "Soldiers" who had the best showing on the "firing range" received expert marksmanship badges.

The day was a lot of serious fun, Lamborn said, and a true community effort.

"We had lots of help putting the program together. Sgt. 1st Class Laurie Bozkir handled the wargaming. Sgt. Victoria Gardner posed as opposing force. Bruce Witherf and Beverly Hobbs donated money. Local military police assisted with traffic control; 4th Battalion, 3rd Air Defense Artillery provided the Bradley, and 17th Signal Battalion provided communications equipment," said Lamborn.

"It was nice to do something for the kids so they could see what their moms and dads do downrange. I think the kids really enjoyed it, which was important," she added.

