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**VIDEO**
**By Sgt. Kevin McSwain**

LSA ANACONDA, Iraq—Servicemembers now have the opportunity to become stars as well as heroes to their loved ones.

The Morale, Welfare, and Recreation East and the Mayor Cell are giving Soldiers the opportunity to make a video of themselves to send home to their families.

"The 'Day in the life' program was created so servicemembers could show people back at home what a day for a Soldier is like here on Camp Anaconda," said Sgt. John Gumataotao, Garrison MWR noncommissioned officer in charge with the 657th Area Support Group.

Gumataotao, the creator of the program, said he got the idea from the "Read to me" program in which servicemembers sit in front of a stationary camera and record themselves reading a book for their children.

"I wanted to give servicemembers the opportunity to do more than just sit and read a story," Gumataotao said. "I wanted them to be able to tell their story."

The program provides servicemembers with a digital camcorder and as many blank digital video disks as they require.

"We have 28 camcorders and more than 23,000 disks," he said. "We received these supplies from the Adopt-a-Soldier Platoon. Without them this would not have been possible."

Servicemembers on LSA Anaconda have already begun to take advantage of the program and feel it is a good way to communicate with family and friends back home.

"When I heard about the program I thought it was an excellent way for Soldiers to interact with their loved ones," said Sgt. 1st Class Kelly L. Stitzel, platoon sergeant for A Company, 67th Signal Battalion "Cable Dawgs."

Stitzel said the program gave servicemembers a way to send a more personalized message to those at home.

"Soldiers are not able to talk to their loved ones as frequently as they would like," he said. "But with this program, they are able to send something back home to show everyone they are doing well and make it more personal than an email."

Gumataotao said equipment will be signed out to units for a maximum of 30 days.

“Soldiers can record a message the way they would like as long as it doesn’t violate operational security or General Order One,” he said. “Each person who uses the camera must sign a waiver before operating the camera.”

Gumataotao said this is not the first time the New Jersey-based organization has made a donation to the servicemembers of Anaconda. The organization has been donating to servicemembers for more than three years, and is focused on improving the morale of every servicemember fighting the war on terrorism.

“This is the second year the organization has donated blank disks, but the first time they have donated so many digital camcorders,” he said. “They have been donating sporting equipment and other supplies to servicemembers here for more than two years.”

Gumataotao said the program, which began Jan. 2, will run for six months.

“Soldiers will have the opportunity to record their own shout-outs for the different holidays throughout the year,” he said.

Gumataotao said they have already signed equipment out to five different units and are looking to have more units come in soon and take advantage of the program.

“We have already loaned out more than ten cameras and over 1,000 discs within the first week,” he said. “And for people who want to read to their children, we have books donated by elementary schools in Hawaii that servicemembers can use.”

Gumataotao said the program has taken a while to get underway for the year but he feels it will allow more Soldiers to participate.

“Due to certain issues, we were not able to receive the equipment before the holiday season,” he said. “But with efforts of Adopt-a-Soldier Platoon and servicemembers, we were able to have it available at the beginning of the year.”

Gumataotao said, while finalizing the program, he received help from several servicemembers from the 22nd Personnel Services Battalion.

“Command Sgt. Maj. Earlene Y. Lavender created the waiver and Spc. Edwin A. Moloy designed the flyer that we are using to inform servicemembers about the program,” he said. “Many other Soldiers from the unit helped and everyone’s contribution was greatly appreciated.”

Gumataotao said he plans to do a video shout-out thanking the Adopt-a-Soldier Platoon organization.

“This is an excellent way for Soldiers to communicate to friends and family back home and the people responsible for this program deserve our thanks.”

Those with questions can contact Gumataotao at DSN: 829-3015 or by email at john.gumataotao@balad.iraq.centcom.mil.

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