



Pablo Martinez Monsivais/Associated Press

An Army carry team carries the transfer case containing the remains of Sgt. Brandon E. Maggart, of Kirksville, Mo., Monday, Aug. 23, 2010. Penn State students have accounted for more than 800 military deployments since fall 2001. Some veterans who attend Penn State said transitioning to college life after a tour of duty can be difficult.

Students reflect on time in Iraq

By Casey McDermott
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

When most people think of soldiers, former Navy corpsman Maggie Kwok said their minds usually turn to images of "killing, killing, killing."

But as the final string of combat troops come home from Iraq this week, Kwok (senior-international politics) — who now serves as President of the Penn State Veterans Organization (PSUVO) — said it's important for citizens to avoid projecting "combat-oriented" stereotypes on veterans who are transitioning back to civilian life.

About 70 to 80 percent of PSUVO's current members have been to Iraq or Afghanistan, Kwok said, and she anticipates that the latest withdrawal of troops will increase the number of student veterans on campus even more.

Since fall 2001, Penn State students have accounted for 878 military deployments — according to the Office of the Registrar, 37 occurred in 2010 alone.

Those figures include students who have been called to military service multiple times, which might distort the number of individuals who have been deployed, said Kaye Keith, administrative support coordinator with the Office of the Registrar.

College Democrats President Rob Ghormoz (senior-political science) and College Republicans Vice Chairman Anthony Christina (sophomore-political science and history) praised the government's decision to

withdraw combat troops, saying it marks an important point where the Iraqi citizens can attempt to achieve stability without U.S. assistance for the first time since the war began in 2003.

John Hench, an Iraq War veteran, Class of 2010, said he hopes President Obama's decision to withdraw troops was made for the right reasons, and not to avoid tarnishing his political image.

Still, Hench said there's been much improvement made throughout the United States' occupation of the country.

By the time he finished his tour in Iraq, which lasted from 2004 to 2006, Hench saw a "huge difference" between the country he first laid eyes on and the country he left.

Part of Hench's responsibilities included providing Iraqi citizens with basic utilities, like water and electricity — no easy feat for a country with such a limited infrastructure.

"Consider when America became a country how long it took to become organized," he said. "In Iraq, we did it in a couple of years."

When veterans return to civilian life, Kwok said it's important for the public to keep an open mind and refrain from pre-judging the soldiers who served overseas.

The process of adjusting to life on campus varies from student to student, Kwok said — some are able to assimilate effortlessly, while others find it difficult to relate to their often-younger peers or face more serious issues like posttraumatic stress disorder.

When Kevin Geisel came to Penn State in 2008 after serving two tours in Iraq, he said he was more mature and responsible as a result of his service.

But Geisel (sophomore-crime, law and justice) said the military experience and age difference he held over many of his peers made it difficult to connect with a majority of the students on campus.

"All of my friends I went to high school with have 'real person jobs,' nine to five," Geisel said. "It's more difficult to connect with the average college student. They can't always relate to what I've been through."

Hench said he also experienced a similar disconnect when he came to Penn State after his tour in Iraq.

"You go from building a nation and relying on the guy beside you to college," Hench said. "Being able to find a veterans' group on campus and link up with other vets was a major benefit and probably kept me from going nuts."

Part of these misconceptions stem from depictions of Iraq in the media, Hench said, which often neglect to report the less violent aspects of the war — such as building homes and schools for Iraqi citizens, working with local officials or establishing infrastructure.

"The media is looking for something blowing up and they want to put another number up that some guy died," Hench said. read it on paper, and it's only a very, very small part of it."

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Greeks4Kids seeks recognition

By Megan Rogers
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Greeks4Kids officials are working to gain university recognition and to determine their role within the Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon.

Acting Executive Director Ali Ingersoll said the Interfraternity Council (IFC), Panhellenic Council (PHC) and THON overall committee do not agree on the organization's ideal role. Greeks4Kids is now working with the three groups to define that.

In 2009, the THON overall committee removed the two greek associate vice president (AVP) positions from the overall committee and allowed the IFC and PHC to have a say in who their communications captains were, IFC President Max Wendkos said. The positions already existed — greeks were just given input in choosing who would fill the roles, he said.

After that switch, the IFC and PHC executive boards created Phi Tau Kappa, a greek organization formed to assist the greek communication captions that morphed into Greeks4Kids last year, he said.

Now the organization is focused on gaining university recognition — which consists of creating bylaws and a mission statement, among other steps — and figuring out what its role should be, Ingersoll (junior-broadcast journalism and communication arts and sciences) said.

Mike Lombardi, executive director of Greeks4Kids, said the group is now in the midst of the approval process.

Lombardi (senior-supply chain) said he could not comment on details of the group's plans for structure and events. This year, IFC, PHC and Greeks4Kids were not asked to be a part of the selection process for their communication liaisons, a change from past years.

Overall THON Chairwoman Kirsten Kelly (senior-marketing) said Greeks4Kids doesn't have enough direction yet to warrant input in selecting greek liaisons to the communication committees. But Wendkos (senior-marketing and psychology) said Greeks4Kids gave input last year, though it didn't have Penn State approval.

Wendkos said Greeks4Kids did not seek approval last year because they were under the umbrella of the IFC and PHC. When Greeks4Kids became a stand-alone organization, the group began the process of gaining university recognition, Wendkos said.

Jony Rommel, overall public relations chairwoman for THON, said the committee would like to see what the role of the communication captions in Greeks4Kids is, so they can decide how it will best benefit THON.

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