



# Trusted

# Link *Guardsmen down range know who to look for if they are ever sent to Landstuhl Medical Center*

**T**he gray hair and the easy-going bearing of Arkansas National Guard Master Sgt. George Russell are fixtures around Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC) in Germany, as common as the coming and going of buses delivering patients.

For more than two years, he has been the Guard patient liaison at the hospital, a tireless source of reassurance for any Guardsman wounded, injured in an

accident or taken ill in the war zones of the Middle East.

"I think it's the best job I've had in the 36 years I've been in the Army," says Russell, 55, from Hoxic, Ark.

Nearly every day, airplanes arriving at nearby Ramstein Air Base drop off patients for LRMC from the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan.

And nearly every plane carries at least one Guardsmen.

"It's very rare that I actually have a flight come in that has absolutely no National Guard on it," Russell says. "Up until just a couple months ago, probably one-third to one-half of every flight that came in was National Guard."

Guardsmen unlucky enough to be sent to Landstuhl are fortunate, however, in one respect: they have Russell to look out for them.

He'll find clothes if they need them.

He'll get them a new ID card if the old one is lost or damaged.

He straightens out pay problems, helps them contact their families or just listens if they want to talk. No request is either too small or too large.

"I want to lift their spirits if I can," he says. "I want to make sure that during the time they are here, they enjoy it."

He has seen it all—soldiers missing limbs or suffering from serious abdominal wounds. Some come with traumatic head injuries.

Russell may be uniquely suited for the job. As a former Army medic and a licensed practical nurse, he is comfortable at the bedside of even the most severely ill or wounded patient.

"That's what I've been doing for 36 years," he says. "I'm kind of lucky because I've got experience in hospitals."

Days can be long and unpredictable. Flights sometimes come unannounced in the middle of the night. Russell remembers going to work one Monday morning and not returning home to bed until after midnight Wednesday.

The hospital usually has about 50

liaisons at any one time. But none have served in the position longer than Russell. Because of that and his proficiency at the task, his reputation long ago reached the desert.

Russell says it is not uncommon for a Guardsman to arrive at the hospital, glance around and say, "I'm looking for a Master Sgt. Russell."

Although Russell's main responsibility is the Guard, he's not particular. If there are no Guard patients to care for at the moment, he will offer a helping hand to anyone in need of one.

"If I can help them, it doesn't matter to me whether they are a Marine, Navy or whatever," he says.

And there is no shortage of patients. The hospital has treated nearly 46,000 people from the twin wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, everything from serious battle wounds to troubling illnesses.

Because of this important role, LPMC frequently hosts dignitaries and the press. Col. (Dr.) Brian Lein, the hospital commander, has made a visit with Russell a frequent stop on any tour he guides.

"We're extremely fortunate to have

someone with the compassion and experience of Master Sgt. Russell among our team of dedicated patient liaisons," he says in an e-mail response to a request for comment. "The Guard can be proud of the huge impact he's made the past two-and-a-half years in the lives of their soldiers and family members. Following in his footsteps will be one tough act to follow."

Russell was helping Arkansas Guardsmen arriving at Fort Sill, Okla., from the war zones back in early 2005 when he realized this type of work was up his alley. He was looking for a similar job when he shipped out to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the fall of that year.

He was still there when he was contacted about the job in Germany. He jumped at the offer and has never looked back.

His current orders expire in September.

"But the last couple sets of orders I've had always ended at the end of September," he says.

If he leaves this time, it will be because of the family he misses back in Arkansas—a wife and two children.

"If I could get them over here, I'd stay on this job as long as the Guard would let me," he says. "I just love what I'm doing here."

Russell's next comment is something that could come from the Guardsmen he has helped: "I got very lucky."

—By Ron Jensen

### Arizona Guard Infantrymen Rescue U.S. Senators in Afghanistan

A tough day didn't become even rougher for three U.S. senators in Afghanistan last month thanks to some Arizona Army National Guard soldiers.

Sens. Joseph Biden, D-Del., Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., and John Kerry, D-Mass., were visiting forward bases when a blizzard forced the military helicopters they were aboard to make emergency landings in some remote mountains Feb. 23.

A helicopter crew radioed Bagram



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