

Charles James Shaffer swims under the water during his first certification dive as part of the SUDS program. The program teaches disabled and recovering wounded veterans how to scuba dive.

Deep-down rehabilitation

**Navy Petty Officer 1st Class
Jayme Pastoric**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

For two years the Soldiers Undertaking Disabled Scuba (SUDS) have taught more than 100 injured veterans how to dive. The program is designed to assist returning veterans injured in Afghanistan and Iraq with their rehabilitation at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

The SUDS program uses the pools at Walter Reed for the initial training to the Soldiers and then completes the certification dives in open water.

Shane Heath is a member of the Wounded Warrior Project, a program that caters to severely injured service members during the time between active duty and their transition to civilian life.

Heath recently made his second trip to Guantanamo Bay with the SUDS SCUBA diving program and felt that this time around was much better.

"I love coming to Guantanamo and diving," Heath said. "I really enjoy diving with all of the guys and folks down here, everyone was awesome."

Heath earned his open water and

advanced open water SCUBA qualification during his first trip to Guantanamo, earlier this year in late February.

"I got into diving to explore," Heath said. "I wanted to see thing other people will never see."

Heath continued his SCUBA certification with certifications in mixed gas Nitrox diving and has recently finished the Rescue diver course.

"I had some challenges going through some of the dive programs, like weight compensating for the injuries on my left side," Heath said. "I enjoyed overcoming challenges and achieving the same standards as everyone else for my rescue diver program."

John Thompson, SUDS president and certified SCUBA instructor, has been with the program since its inception. He works with the students on their initial pool training at Walter Reed Medical Center prior to their open water.

"It's the most rewarding project I have ever been involved in," Thompson said. "Many things are just easier to do in the water with these types of injuries."

Thompson said the program does much more than assist with physical therapy alone.

"It's part rehabilitation, part confidence building, part adventure for these Wounded Warriors," he explains. "I'm really inspired by the Soldiers at Walter Reed."

Heath has plans to do a lot of diving in the future, with an ultimate goal of becoming a certified SCUBA diving instructor.

"I'm working on my Master Scuba Diving certification and getting all of the fun dives in that I can." ☆



Divers swim through the waters off of Blue beach.

Accused do about-face on pleas

Army Sgt. 1st Class
Vaughn R. Larson

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

The question Monday morning, Dec. 8, was whether the five defendants accused of war crimes related to the Sept. 11 terror attacks would confess to those crimes.

By Monday afternoon, the question became whether such a plea would prohibit the death penalty, as the pleas would have been offered without members of the military jury, or commission, present to render a verdict.

All five defendants – Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Walid Muhammed Salih Mubarak bin ‘Attash, Ramzi bin al Shibh, Ali Abdul Aziz Ali and Mustafa Ahmed Adam al Hawsawi – composed a letter dated Nov. 4 stating their intent to withdraw all previously filed motions on their behalf as well as their intent to confess immediately to the charges. They claimed this plan was of their own desire and free of intimidation or coercion.

But because the mental competence of bin al Shibh and al Hawsawi is in question pending a hearing to that effect, the other defendants decided not to enter pleas Monday afternoon.

“Our plea request was based on joint strategy,” Ali explained.

Military judge Army Col. Stephen Henley allowed Mohammed, bin ‘Attash and Ali to withdraw motions Monday morning in the first day of five scheduled to hear motions. Bin al Shibh and al Hawsawi were not allowed to withdraw their motions or dismiss their detailed counsel Monday due to pending questions about their mental competency. The issue of al Hawsawi’s competence was first raised at Monday morning’s court session.

Henley informed bin al Shibh and al Hawsawi that, if they are found to be competent following a hearing, they may at that time seek to withdraw motions and enter pleas.

“Unfortunately, this cannot occur today,” Henley explained.

All five defendants declined to challenge Henley for potential bias as the session opened. Henley replaced retiring Marine Col. Ralph Kohlmann in November.

This court session was the first attended by family members of Sept. 11 victims.



Alleged Sept. 11 co-conspirators (from top) Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Walid Muhammed Salih Mubarak bin ‘Attash, Ramzi bin al Shibh, Ali Abdul Aziz Ali and Mustafa Ahmed Adam al Hawsawi appeared before military judge Army Col. Stephen Henley on Dec. 8 in this courtroom sketch by



A video version...

of an old rivalry...

Army vs. Navy

Daniel Brown, representing Navy, and Frank Wooten, representing Army, duel it out during the final round of the NCAA Army vs. Navy video game challenge. The competition was organized by Guantanamo Bay's Morale, Welfare and Recreation program in spirit of the classic Army - Navy football game.

**Army Staff Sgt.
Gretel Sharpee**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

The Army - Navy football game took a virtual turn this year with the Morale, Welfare and Recreation program hosting a NCAA video game tournament. The tournament whittled away contenders for over three weeks until one Sailor and one Soldier remained.

The final video game took place at Cooper field before Guantanamo Bay's flag-football version of the Army vs. Navy football game.

The two players, Frank Wooten, representing Army, and Daniel Brown, representing Navy, arrived ready to play and ready to find a champion.

"I'm going to win for sure," said Wooten, who has been playing video games for about 10 years.

Wooten arrived at the field ready to go, but due to technical difficulties with the field's bright lights and the projection screen, the game was delayed slightly, also enabling Brown to arrive before going to work.

"I like the [NCAA] game and a lot of my buddies here play it so it is a way to get away from the routine," Brown said. "I don't know who is going to win, I haven't seen [Wooten] play before, so we'll see."

The game took off with a small lead by the Army; however the game stayed close and often tied as each player furiously managed his video game controller.

As both players stood up in the final minutes of the game, Navy pulled away and won, with Brown shaking his fist in a brief celebration.

Each player won a gift certificate to the Navy Exchange, and both had great things to say about Guantanamo's MWR program.

"MWR boosts morale," Wooten said. "What are your options - stay at home doing nothing or come out? It's simple."

"I tried to get a lot of my buddies to do this... it is a good way to get away from the routine," Brown said. ☆

NCAA football is a popular video game and for this occasion, offered the platform for all competition.



Epic in all the wrong ways

**Army Pfc.
Eric Liesse**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

If you were to look at the poster for Baz Luhrmann's newest film "Australia," you can tell it has sweeping helicopter shots of the countryside, multiple kisses between the leading lady and man, and a long running time. "Australia" does have all these things – and more – but it's mostly the running time you'll remember.

At a mind-numbingly unneeded 2 hours and 45 minutes, Luhrmann's postcard-set-to-film (more on that later) is excessively bipolar in tone and has entire scenes of unnecessary dialogue. This is not a dig on the dialogue itself or the actors; stars Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman deliver everything pitch-perfect. However, this film suffers with both an unfocused story and sporadic pacing. And when a film is (I repeat) 2 hours and 45 minutes, pacing is a big deal.

The film is set in World War II-era Australia with Kidman playing Lady Sarah Ashley, an English aristocrat who comes to force her husband to cut their losses and sell their cattle ranch property in the northern territory. However, her husband is killed shortly before she arrives, leaving her to decide the farm's fate.

Ashley quickly learns that the man who almost has a monopoly on Australian cattle, Lesley "King" Carney (Bryan Brown), is stealing her cattle to force the ranch out of business and take the land. So she decides to sell her remaining cattle to the Australian army and employs Jackman as the Drover – he isn't given an actual name – the man who leads the cattle herd across her land to the city of Darwin for sale.

Lady Ashley is also the boss of Nullah (Brandon Walters), a half-Aboriginal, half-Caucasian boy whom she attempts to mother because Nullah's actual mother dies early in the story. Nullah is the grandson of "King George" (David Gulpilil), the man framed as Ashley's husband's murderer. The real murderer – and Nullah's white father – is Neil Fletcher (David Wenham), the main antagonist who works for Carney trying to take Ashley's farm and repeatedly disrupts their herding.

At about 45 minutes in, we've seen the Drover in hilariously drunken bars fights, the murdering of a man from Nullah's perspective, the beating of a child and his mother, and the gruff Drover taking the dainty Lady Ashley across the Outback in a beaten-up truck. The opening goes from comically funny to near-disturbingly violent at the crack of a whip. Thankfully, the audience is mostly awake

to keep up at the start. Later on, however, these changes just confuse and distract viewers.

But wait! That's just the first half of the (again) 2 hours and 45 minutes! After summarizing an hour's worth of story into a short montage (i.e. plot device), Ashley and the Drover fight about Nullah. The Drover leaves and Ashley evacuates the ranch because of the outbreak of the war and the bombing of Darwin by Japanese planes. This, of course, all happens while Ashley deals with racist Australian aristocrats, Fletcher's continuing attempts to take the ranch, and the Drover dealing with his feelings for Ashley.

Saying this film has too many stories would be an understatement.

Thankfully, Kidman and Jackman do seem to be enjoying themselves in this almost mythological Australian uber-story. Both are veterans who keep on point for every scene and play wonderfully off each other. Both are actual Australians – as is Luhrmann himself and the rest of the main cast – so their parts are that much more believable.

Kidman switches from inept when her high-society ways clash with the Drover's ranching lifestyle to an impassioned bleeding heart when she sees white Australians shunning Nullah for being a "creamy" and "half-caste." Her acting chops do get a workout, but the movie suffers because of the story, not those delivering it.

Jackman – without any retractable knives in his hands – is the epitome of romanticized Outback machismo. He wears a perfectly trimmed beard, dons a hat cocked just slightly, dresses entirely in an overly tight wardrobe, and uses an accent that seems almost too Australian. The way he's filmed makes his Sexiest Man of the Year nomination from "People Magazine" seem like a movie release tie-in.

Throughout much of the film, the Outback takes center stage. The film's story is never told through these shots, but they're there sweeping the country, beautiful and epic. However, the actors supposedly riding



PG-13
2 hour, 45 minutes

Rating: ★★☆☆☆

through the countryside look cut out from a different movie due to the excessive and obvious use of green screens and special effects.

So yes, "Australia" has its good and even great aspects, maybe enough to be a good movie for some.

However, its ridiculous length (did I mention it was 2 hours and 45 minutes?), multiple dialogue-filled stories and break-neck changes in pace and tone just taint this billabong from being an otherwise refreshing epic. ☆

Electric Light Parade

Photos by Army Sgt. 1st Class Vaughn Larson



Members of the Guantanamo Bay community wave and throw candy to observers during the annual Electric Light Parade Saturday, Dec. 6. Twenty organizations, representing both the Naval Station and the Joint Task Force, entered floats in this year's parade, which concluded at the Downtown Lyceum with an awards ceremony and a concert by the band Mustang Sally. Each organization that entered a float in the parade received a trophy for participating. Three floats were given special awards by the Naval Station Command Master Chief, Executive Officer and Commanding Officer.



Navy Chief Petty Officer Ginamarie Doherty and Stephen Doherty locate their signature on an oversized holiday greeting card at the Downtown Lyceum Saturday following an awards ceremony for the Electric Light Parade.

Participants:

525 MP
 Boy Scouts
 Chapel
 Chief Petty Officers Association
 Cuban American Association
 Drug Education For Youth
 GEO/Migrant Operations
 Guantanamo Bay Jeep Club
 Guantanamo Bay Latino Family J-4
 MWR Food and Beverage Dept.
 MWR Liberty Program
 MWR Library
 Naval Hospital
 Naval Station Fire Department
 NEX
 OARDEC
 Self-Help Dept., Public Works
 U.S. Coast Guard
 W.T. Sampson Schools

Grand Marshalls:

Mustang Sally

Awards:

CMC Award
 Chapel

XO Award
 Cuban American Association

CO Award
 Guantanamo Bay Latino Family



The band Mustang Sally staged a performance Saturday, Dec. 6 at the Downtown Lyceum. The concert followed the annual Electric Light Parade, which concluded at the Lyceum

Hit the trails

Three bicyclists make their way along Ridgeline Trail during the Gitmo Ironman. Many of the hills are steep, often causing bikers to dismount and walk their bicycle up the hill. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Spc. Megan Burnham.

Army Staff Sgt. Emily J. Russell

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Kick up your heels or grab two wheels and make a plan to hit the trails around Guantanamo Bay. Whether a hiker, runner, biker, or just an outdoor enthusiast, the recreational trails offer scenic views, challenging hills and technical riding for those saddled on a bike.

Morale, Welfare and Recreation recently began coordinating group bike rides. The most recent organized ride took place on the Leeward side of base.

“The mountain biking trip was suggested by a patron,” said Becky Creed, Liberty events coordinator for MWR. “So far it’s been very successful. It’s a great event. You get exercise and it gives you a different look at the base.”

The trails around base offer varying levels of difficulty, from stretches of flat trail to steep hills. There are sections that travel along the coast as well as a nature trail at the marina. With 14 named sections such as the Hutia Highway, Ridgeline Trail and Pelican Pass, there is plenty of ground to cover.



Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Kate Morris and Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Edith Mitchem squeezed in a hike along Ridgeline Trail before the sun set.

“It’s a nice path along the Leeward coast,” Creed said. “It’s approximately four miles, and very scenic.”

If you don’t have a bike, rentals are available at the MWR Marina.

According to Creed, the next organized ride should take place sometime in January.

With heavy rains, especially during the hurricane season, Creed noted the trails occasionally close due to poor trail conditions.

On another organized ride – taking place on the Windward side – a section of trail was closed, so riders took on John Paul Jones hill instead and traveled the steep climb up to the wind-turbines.

When travelling the trails, it is important to be aware of your surroundings, plan your route and be respectful of wildlife and others enjoying the trail. Know the rules of the trail and abide by them and, most importantly, practice safety. The full list of trail rules can be found on the back of the MWR hiking and biking trail map.

Trail maps are available at the Deer Point Liberty Center. For more information on organized bike rides, call the Liberty Center at 2010. ☆

Brothers in arms



Above: Army Sgt. Pedro Pomales-Alverio (right) salutes older brother Army Capt. Pedro Pomales after being promoted from specialist to sergeant in a Dec. 8 promotion ceremony. Below: Pomales (left) and Pomales-Alverio normally serve in different units in Puerto Rico, but were given this opportunity to deploy to Guantanamo Bay together.

Army Spc. Megan Burnham

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Not often are siblings given the opportunity to deploy together, especially to such a unique place as U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, but it's even less likely for siblings to promote one another.

However, Army Capt. Pedro Pomales, commander of the Headquarters, Headquarters Service Battery 2-162nd Field Artillery unit, and younger brother Spc. Pedro Pomales-Alverio were given this opportunity during a promotion ceremony Dec. 8, when Pomales-Alverio was promoted to sergeant.

"It was a great honor to promote him," said Pomales. "It feels really good to see one of my loved ones go up in the non-commissioned officers corps."

Back in Puerto Rico, the brothers are in different units, but when Pomales became the commander and discovered that the unit was short on personnel, he asked Pomales-Alverio to be one of his riflemen.

"One day my brother asked me if I wanted to go with him to Cuba, and I said 'yes,'" said Pomales-Alverio. "This was going to be the first time I deployed with him and it sounded too good to miss."

Pomales-Alverio's name was on the promotion list back in Puerto Rico, but it was the dedication and knowledge for his job that got him promoted.

"It's feels great [to become a NCO]. I now have more responsibilities in taking

care of the younger Soldiers in my unit and setting a good example for them," said Pomales-Alverio.

Pomales-Alverio also commented on how he felt about being promoted by his brother.

"It's both an honor and a privilege, because it is kind of difficult to be in the same unit with a brother who is the commander," said Pomales-Alverio. "But then I think how this is going to be the first and last time this will happen because when we get back to Puerto Rico, we will go to different units."

The overriding factor for this opportunity to come in the Pomales family was the extensive family history with the military. It started when their grandfather joined the military followed by three uncles who also served. Their father was in the service for 42 years and constantly expressed the benefits and experiences of joining the military. This resulted in Pomales, Pomales-Alverio and their older brother joining the military and, later on, all serving their country in the global war on terrorism.



"Since I was a kid, I always said I wanted to be like my father when I grew up," said Pomales. "I used to wear his Battle Dress Uniforms and equipment around the house."

Pomales added, "I joined first just for the curiosity and also because my dad was asking me."

The deployment of HHSB 2-162 FA to Guantanamo Bay concludes soon. The unit will return to Puerto Rico, ending the brother's only deployment together.

"This has been an outstanding year," said Pomales. "My Soldiers are a group of professionals, no matter the rank. So I'm really thankful to be the commander of this unit for this deployment." 🇺🇸

Happy birthday, National Guard

**Army Staff Sgt.
Gretel Sharpee**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Happy 372nd birthday National Guard!
As Soldiers and Airmen celebrate the National Guard's 372nd birthday Dec. 12, a brief look into its inception demonstrates the Guard's long roots into United States history.

It is said that the National Guard is older than the United States since it begun as a militia force. The need for a militia force was recognized by the original 13 colonies, and its purpose to execute the laws of the "Union, suppress Insurrections, and repel Invasions."

Since those early days as a nation, the National Guard has gained strength through defense acts passed by Congress. The first one, passed in 1792, governed the fledgling militia for 111 years. But in 1903 the Militia Act of 1903 defined the modern National Guard that we are more familiar with today, and secured its place as a reserve military

force.

Today, National Guard members support both Federal and State missions. To accommodate the Federal mission, Air and Army National Guard members

maintain readiness for rapid mobilization for national emergencies. They can also be activated under Title 10 of the U.S. Code for Federal Mission operations.

For state missions, the Army and Air National Guard report to their respective state governor as their commander-in-chief. For state active duty, Guard members can be mobilized under Title 32 Active Duty in response to "man-made disasters" or Homeland defense missions.

The National Guard proudly states they have fought in every American war from the 1600s to present operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently, Army National Guard forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom have made up as much as 50 percent of the fighting force, an involvement that hasn't been reached since World War II. Yet, the National Guard has also maintained its readiness to respond to natural disasters, such as hurricane Katrina or more recently, hurricane Ike.

As the National Guard turns 372, its impact on U.S. history is felt in every chapter. ★



Guantanamo pilot stays on call for the mission

PILOT from 3

Riddle has been a Navy pilot just shy of seven years. Until his JTF deployment, however, he only flew helicopters – never traditional fixed-wing planes such as the C-12.

“That is pretty unusual for the Navy,” Riddle said of changing from helicopters to fixed-wing planes. “In the military, there are only a handful of people who ever get to do that. So that’s a huge deal.”

Although it was his first deployment piloting traditional planes, Riddle said he was “very impressed” by all the pilots working with NAVSTA.

The other pilots who man the C-12s controls all have backgrounds in fixed wing planes, giving Riddle added support for his change in aircraft as JTF’s sole pilot.

After finishing his time in Guantanamo, Riddle will teach Recruit Officer Training Corps college classes in New York, and although he isn’t certain, he doesn’t foresee ever flying again for the Navy.

“You can’t ever know what is going to happen. I may end up flying again, but you’ll never know in the Navy,” said Riddle.

“Not many people have gotten to see what I’ve seen on these deployments,” Riddle said of his time in the corps of Navy pilots. “The adventure of it [is what drew me to flying] – the challenge of putting yourself out there doing something that you couldn’t do before.” ☆



Navy Lt. Lucas Riddle shows off his office: Naval Station Guantanamo’s sole C-12 passenger airplane. Riddle is Joint Task Force Guantanamo’s only billeted pilot and works with NAVSTA’s five pilots to fly missions to and from the island. – Photo courtesy Navy Lt. Lucas Riddle

Boots on the Ground

by Army Spc. Megan Burnham

What unique Christmas or holiday tradition does your family do every year?

Air Force Tech. Sgt Tommy Jackson



“Every year, someone in the family will sponsor our holiday get-together and everyone will travel there.”

Coast Guard Master Chief Petty Officer Wayne Miesen



“I’ll pick up my daughter, go to my stepson’s and we’ll all go to the light display in Bedford, Va., which is also known as Christmas Town, USA.”

Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Cristina Lamboy



“We eat spanish food Christmas Day. We also open one gift Christmas Eve and the rest Christmas Day.”

Air Force Senior Airman Darnon Harper



“A few family members and I will eat chitlins with hot sauce both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.”

Faith doesn't make sense

**Army Capt.
Eric Bey**

Chaplain, 525th Military Police Battalion

Have you ever considered the fact that faith doesn't make sense?

It's true! It is the very definition of faith.

In the Bible, Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see." It is the perception of surety without any sensory proof. For example, I don't have to have faith that apple pie smells good if I can smell it; nor must I have blind faith that anything is real if I can see and touch it with my natural eyes and hands.

It is because of this very fact that there is no faith in heaven. It may come as a shock to some, but it also is true. In heaven you don't have to have faith in God because you can see, hear and know Him. That is the reason that angels can not be forgiven of sins when they transgress. When they sin, they do so full knowing that there is a God and a punishment for sin.

Anything that can be perceived with the senses requires no faith. That is why I say that faith doesn't make sense, it simply makes faith. Conversely, sense never makes faith. Every miracle of the Bible defies the senses. When Peter got out of the boat to walk to Jesus, it didn't make sense. It didn't make sense for Jesus to tell Peter to go catch a fish with a coin in its mouth to pay their taxes with. It didn't make sense to stop funeral processions to raise the dead, but when He did, the dead were raised.

It didn't make sense for Jesus to touch lepers but He did and they were healed. When the multitudes were fed with meager loaves and fishes it didn't make sense to sit them down and give them the hope and expectancy of a meal. But when they did, everyone got to eat till they were filled.

When Jesus turned water into wine, it made no sense to fill ceremonial stone jars with water. It made no sense for the servants to draw some out and take it to the master of ceremonies – but because they believed, in spite of the fact that it didn't satisfy any of the five senses, the benefit of their belief combined with an action produced the desired result.

That is how faith works.

James says that faith without works is dead. He is simply saying that if you believe so much that it compels you to action, you have great faith. I will remind you that faith, great or otherwise, is only as good as the object in which you place your faith.

Faith in an old rickety bridge might not be the best investment of belief, but a faith in God is never misplaced. The Psalmist says that some trust in chariots, and some in horses but we will trust in the name of the Lord. All that is required is the child-like faith to jump when He says that He will catch you. ★

JTF CHAPEL SCHEDULED PROGRAMS

Catholic Mass

Sunday: 7 a.m. Confession
7:30 Mass

Wednesday: 11 a.m. Mass

Protestant Worship

Sunday: 9 a.m.

Spanish Protestant Worship

Sunday: Noon

Vet returns for family, fun

**Army Pfc.
Eric Liesse**

JTF Guantanamo Public Affairs

Within Guantanamo Bay's community, scuba diving is a wildly popular activity. The Bay offers many unique opportunities for first-time and advanced divers. That is why the Soldiers Undertaking Disabled Scuba Diving Program, a non-profit organization out of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, came to Guantanamo – to get wounded veterans in the water.

The program, a chapter of Wounded Warriors and Disabled Sports Project, teaches disabled and wounded recovering veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom how to scuba dive, or helps them get certified on more advanced programs such as rescue diving.

One former Soldier, recovering from severe injuries sustained in Iraq, joined the program and came to Guantanamo with a special connection to the base: he used to live here.

"My mom is the banker, and my stepdad is a BRDC contractor," said Charles James Shaffer, a former private first class who was with the Army's 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, 1-A Infantry, E Company, 2nd Platoon in Mosul, Iraq when he was wounded.

On Sept. 1, 2008, Shaffer was in Mosul conducting route clearance in a procession of tactical vehicles.

"There a kid was with a shape charge," Shaffer said. "He detonated it on our vehicle, injuring [the four of us] in our vehicle. Then we were hit by a cratering explosive while we were decelerating."

The attack mangled and severed Shaffer's right leg and his lungs were badly burned.

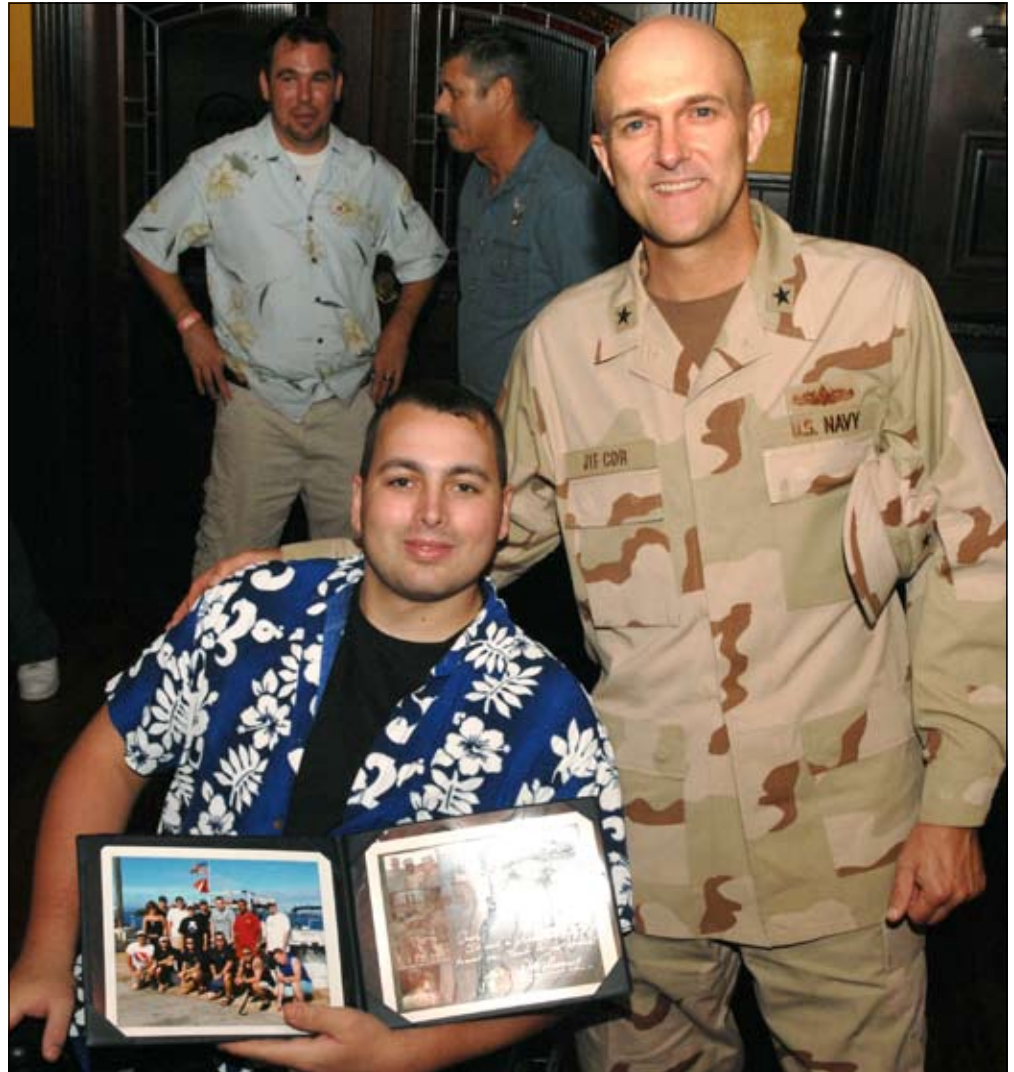
After treatment in Germany, where Shaffer's sister met with him, he was admitted to Walter Reed AMC on Sept. 5, and regained consciousness a few days later.

"My first question was 'How many died?'" Shaffer said. "My second question was 'Am I paralyzed?'"

He was happy to learn he still had use of his remaining limbs, though he knew the recovery would not be quick. Shaffer currently lives in Walter Reed's assisted living homes while he recovers.

Shaffer's activities with the SUDS Diving Program came at the suggestion of his mother.

"My mother told me about it, and she said it would be fun," said Shaffer. He joined the SUDS program, doing some work in pools at Walter Reed. In what he



Charles James Shaffer, a wounded Iraq war veteran, accepts a memento of his visit on Dec. 9, 2008 from Joint Task Force Guantanamo commander Navy Rear Adm. Dave Thomas, Jr. after Shaffer's weeklong scuba diving trip with the Soldiers Undertaking Disabled Scuba Diving Program. – JTF Guantanamo Photo by Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Jayme Pastoric

calls "coincidence," SUDS was planning a trip to come to Guantanamo Bay – just one of many dive sites the program has gone – so he made sure he was able to go.

Shaffer, a 24-year-old from O'Fallon, Ill., lived in Guantanamo as a child, from 1988 until 1992. His mother has been working on-island for about 20 years, while his stepfather has been here as a contractor for about 36 years.

The base is very different now according to Shaffer, especially with the Joint Task Force aboard. Shaffer's last visit to the base was July 2001, so he considered coming to finish his diving certification an excellent opportunity.

"They asked me if I could swim," said Shaffer. "I said, 'Well, I could try.' I used

be a really great swimmer, before the accident."

Now, he swims using webbed gloves to help propel him through the water, allowing him to swim almost as fast as before. After his five days here, Shaffer has logged eight dives between his time in Guantanamo Bay and in swimming pools back in the United States.

This Guantanamo trip is not the first for the SUDS diving program. They were here in February teaching wounded veterans the proper techniques of scuba diving.

Shaffer said he wishes to continue diving, hopefully sticking to the ocean. He also plans to see his unit come home when their deployment is scheduled to end in the spring. ★



Members of the Soldiers Undertaking Disabled Scuba (SUDS) program participate in a beach cleanup prior to diving. SUDS has taught over 100 injured veterans how to dive. The program is designed to assist returning veterans injured in Afghanistan and Iraq with their rehabilitation at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Jayme Pastoric



Army Capt. Shane Lauritzen, washes off a vehicle he used this weekend to transport Wounded Warriors visiting U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay to complete their dive certification. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Spc. Erica Isaacson



Army Staff Sgt. Brian Jopek and Spc. Erica Isaacson take time out of their morning to read to a second grade class at W.T. Sampson Elementary School. – JTF Guantanamo photo by Army Pfc. Carlynn M. Knaak

Around the

JTF