

BMC



Pen Pal Project

Many young Americans are in Afghanistan and Iraq facing the challenge of their lives.

Please take a moment to reach out to someone who is a long way from home.

It would mean a lot to them to hear from you.

Who are we reaching out to?

The Bryn Mawr College (BMC) Pen Pal Project is reaching out to the American servicemen of the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, currently deployed to Afghanistan. Through letters and care packages, we hope to boost the morale of American soldiers during a very difficult time.

Why are there Americans in Afghanistan?

There are about 8,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan pursuing soldiers of the former Taliban regime and the al Qaeda network blamed for the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Our soldiers are also in Afghanistan to patrol the border with Pakistan to prevent weapons from entering into Afghanistan.

What can I do?

1. You can write a letter of support and send it to the address below. Please include your name and return address. Your letter will be delivered directly to a soldier in Afghanistan who may not be getting a lot of mail.
2. You can also contribute \$25 to have a care package delivered on your behalf directly to a soldier. Each care package will contain an assortment of items specifically requested by the military such as prepaid international calling cards, stationery, disposable cameras, toiletries, and snack items. Please make checks payable to Neighbors Helping Neighbors (a community service organization that has partnered with us for this project), and write on the check "for care package". Feel free to include a personal message to be included with the care package.

The address to send letters and donations to is:

The Pen Pal Project
Box 1553, Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

News update:

On April 1, 2003, the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division deployed to Afghanistan were informed that they will not be returning home in June as expected. Due to the current situation in the world, their deployment has been extended indefinitely.

For more information, please contact The Bryn Mawr College (BMC) Pen Pal Project at:
penpalproject@brynmaur.edu.

The Bi-College News

The student newspaper of Bryn Mawr and Haverford colleges | www.biconews.com | Vol. 35 | No. 18 | 03.04.2003

Post-bac brings realities of war to Mawrters and moral support to troops overseas through letter-writing campaign

Sarah Friedman

News Editor

Nick Cohen, a Bryn Mawr post-bac, was surprised at the reaction he got from Bryn Mawr undergrads when they encountered him soliciting letters for U.S. paratroopers stationed in Afghanistan. "I was worried that students would not want to participate because they do not agree with current U.S. foreign policy," explains Cohen.

This concern has lessened as, over the past four weeks, Cohen has received over 200 letters, which he has sent to the 82nd Airborne Division. Cohen attributes this success to his emphasis. "I tried to make it clear from the start that this is not about politics, it is about caring about people who feel homesick and perhaps forgotten."

Cohen does not believe that students must be pro-war to support soldiers. But he does caution that tone is important when addressing and questioning U.S. policy issues in letters. "It is not appropriate to begin your letter with 'I don't think the U.S. should have men in Afghanistan.'" He adds that the letters that students have shared with him have focused on school, interests, and questions aimed at getting to know the soldier.

Student Christine Bohanak, BMC '04, who participated in Cohen's campaign, explained how her political views relate to her pen pal involvement. "I believe that war is inevitable, and whether I agree or disagree with military action, I respect and admire anyone who serves our country."

Letters have been sent out in groups, with

the first package arriving on Feb. 14th, and a response package due in the next few weeks.

Through email correspondence last week, Cohen was notified that a fire cleared the camp's pharmacy and barbershop and that water and smoke damage put the computer/phone center out of service. Cohen requested



Sarah Friedman

Nick Cohen, BMC post-bac, recruits students to write letters to U.S. paratroopers stationed in Afghanistan.

that students and post-bacs donate soap, toothpaste and razors, which he sent to Afghanistan. A second email from Afghanistan indicated that the package was "a huge hit" with the soldiers.

In addition to receiving support from undergraduate and post-bac students, Cohen has received a mini-grant from the Community Service Office and envelopes from the Post-

bac office.

Since January, Cohen has been talking with students, asking them to write. At a table he sets up on Friday and Sunday morning at Erdman and Halfner, Cohen displays pictures of the troops in Afghanistan who the students can correspond with. He has a large map of

Afghanistan that points out where the 82nd Airborne Division is stationed, and a sheet of information describing their living conditions and the dangers that they face.

He plans to continue to ask students for letters for the remainder of the semester.

alternating between the two dining halls, and occasionally at the Campus Center at lunch. He also has an email account to receive questions from students, and encourages students to send letters to soldiers to his campus box, Box 1553, which he forwards to Afghanistan.

Student Kirbi Krisfalusi, BMC '05, contributed to Cohen's letter writing campaign.

She said of her motivation, "I have a lot of friends who are over seas at this time, and not only are they morally discouraged, but they tell me that almost everyone else is as well."

"I do not want the men and women who are protecting our country to feel like this. I might or might not support the reason they are overseas, but that does not mean that I do not support them, because I do, whole heartedly no matter what they are doing."

Cohen is also motivated by personal connections. Until the summer of '02, when he became a post-bac, he was second in command for a Company of paratroopers in the 82nd Airborne Division. After graduating from Wesleyan University in 1997 with a degree in philosophy, he enlisted in the U.S. army.

"I was looking for a challenge. I wanted to do something adventurous. When guys my age ask me why I joined the army, I ask them why they didn't." When he heard that his old unit was preparing to go to Afghanistan, Cohen arranged to spend New Years in Fort Bragg North Carolina, where they were stationed.

The inspiration for the pen pal project came then, when the soldiers asked Cohen to ask students to write to them.

Bohanak appreciates the educational possibilities of having a pen pal. "Honestly, I hope to make a new friend while possibly finding out what current conditions are like in Afghanistan. It is easy for us to sit back in our plush dorm rooms and forget that there are men and women OUR AGE, out serving our country."

Gramercy soldier's letters of support

By Heather Klopfer

A Gramercy Park soldier has launched a drive to show support and love for American men and women serving with his former unit in Afghanistan.

Nick Cohen, 28, is asking residents to write letters to the troops of the Parachute Infantry Regiment's 82nd Airborne Division.

"The campaign is about caring for people who feel homesick and, perhaps, forgotten," said Nick.

"This is a chance to reach out to another human being. It is not about support for US foreign policy and it is not a vote for President Bush, nor is it a dating service."

Nick — son of Gramercy Park Block Association President, Arlene Harrison — served as a Ranger with the 82nd Airborne Division from 1997-2002, after graduating from Wesleyan College with a degree in philosophy.

It was while serving with the US Special Forces that Nick said he heard his real calling — to become a doctor.

"I knew I wanted to become a doctor after serving as second-in-command for a company of paratroopers in the 82nd Airborne Division," he explained.

"I have jumped out of airplanes many times and it can be very nerve-wracking.

"Sometimes, a doctor would jump with you and then, all of a sudden, there was this palpable calm. It was comforting

to know that if something went wrong, you would have someone right there that would be able to help you. That was the role I was meant to play."

The 82nd Airborne Division is the largest parachute force in the free world and is ready to deploy anywhere, at any time.

"It is important that we, as American citizens, recognize their efforts," said Cohen, who is now studying medicine at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

It was at Bryn Mawr that he decided to launch his letter writing campaign last month.

Nick began asking fellow students to get involved by sending a loving message that Americans at home were thinking of the soldiers as they embarked on their brave missions.

Continued on Page 10.



GOOD DEED — Nick Cohen.

Town & Village

Nick explained, "The first letter written is anonymous. Once it reaches a soldier, they will then have the opportunity to reply and start a back-and-forth pen pal arrangement."

"All the letters are

the letter distribution was not random, adding, "Sgt. Cottrell looks for soldiers who are not getting a lot of mail. As a morale booster, he looks for soldiers that maybe need the extra support and possibly are down and feeling lonely."

Just last week, Sgt. Cottrell wrote to Nick saying, "We got your package and thank you so much for your thoughts, time and effort. It was such a morale booster for the soldiers. I am grateful that there is so much support for us at your college."

"I am encouraging all of the guys here to write back immediately. Thank you so much for what you have done for our soldiers. It is extremely appreciated. You have done so much, and gone out of your way to make a difference in the soldier's morale."

Nick has advised people taking part to keep their letters on a personal level and not to include their views on the actions of the military or the government. He explained,

managed by my former Platoon sergeant, Sgt. Richard Cottrell. He is a key leader of this program and is in charge of the mail that comes in and goes out of Kandahar [Afghanistan]."

Nick explained how

"My general recommendation is to tell the person who you are and what's going on in your life, in order to open up a conversation on a personal level. I tell them not to mention the war and whether or not you support the idea."

"Those letters that are the most personal make it easy to start a friendship. Someone who is writing a letter is in turn going to be supportive of the human being over there, not necessarily the politics. So, ultimately, one who is writing should never pass judgment on their volunteered services of doing what their country has asked them to do."

Jen Nansteel, a student at Bryn Mawr, explained how Nick helped her develop a pen pal relationship with a soldier saying, "Military life is so far removed from my experience that it never occurred to me that the recipient of my letter would be a regular person, just like me."

"It turns out that he is a regular guy with whom I have a great deal in

common — college, hobbies, a future career in medicine.

"I'm not sure where I stand on this war, but I do know that I stand behind our military personnel. And even though I don't really know this young man with whom I correspond, every single night I say a prayer for him."

Jamie Bessich, another student at Bryn Mawr involved in the project, ex-

plained how she was continuing a family tradition of support for our military.

"When I was in grade school, my mother had my sister and I involved in 'Dear Abby's' letter writing to soldiers campaign. It was something I did for many years, and it was a dear part of my life. When I met Nick, I decided to get involved once again, doing something I had much experience with."

The troops of the 82nd Airborne Division are part of a major military presence in Afghanistan since the US ousted

the Taliban from power and sent terror lord Osama Bin Laden running for the hills. As part of an international peacekeeping force, their aim is to help the country make the transition to a democracy.

For details on how to become involved in Nick's letter-writing campaign, residents should contact pen pal project @brynmawr.edu.

All letters should be addressed to Nick Cohen for shipment overseas at c/o Nick Cohen, Box 1553 Bryn Mawr College Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.

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FRONT LINE — The T&V community has been quick to organize support for the men and women of the armed forces, such as the soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, who sent us this picture from Afghanistan.

Honoring America's heroes

By **Linda Barr**

Neighborhood residents have been rallying to support the men and women of the armed forces and emergency services on the front lines of the War on Terror both here and abroad.

Once again, big-hearted East Siders have organized in a massive show of support for the heroes, co-ordinating activities ranging from letter-writing campaigns to feeding hungry cops working round the clock as part of the city's Operation Altas.

Gramercy Park resident and former 82nd Airborne Ranger, Nick Cohen, is running a campaign to support his former army buddies by inviting local residents to send them letters.

"These letters can be such morale boosters," said Nick, who is now studying medicine at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

At backOfficenyc on East 18th Street, owner Mardy Sitzer is helping the families of servicemen and women wishing to ship mail and packages to their loved ones serving in the Middle East.

Mardy has also generously offered a free box and packing services to anyone sending items to a soldier on a military installation from backOfficenyc and she will post any letter weighing an ounce or less to any soldier.

"It is the least we can do to support our troops," she said. "I just hope they all come home safe and soon."

And, Gramercy Park's Neighbors Helping Neighbors project has renewed an appeal to provide meals for the officers of the New York Police Department Emergency Service Unit on East 21st Street.

"These officers are once again working around-the-clock serving at the forefront of our city's counter-terrorism efforts and our aim is to show that we continue to care," said Arlene Harrison, one of the co-ordinators.

Town and Village would also like to pay tribute to the men and women from the neighborhood who are serving the nation in a special Honor Roll.

We'd like to hear from the families in the area who have loved ones serving in the Gulf

and, in upcoming editions, we hope to bring their stories to readers and list their names and service in our Honor Roll.

Please write with details and, if possible, photographs, to: T&V Honor Roll, 30 East 23rd Street, Third Floor, New York, NY 10010 or fax: 212-777-1535.

HONORING OUR HEROES * HONORING OUR HEROES * HONORING OUR HEROES * HONO

Penpal program brings soldiers a little love from home

By Heather Klopfer

Residents who would like to correspond with members of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division serving in Iraq and Afghanistan can do so, thanks to Gramercy soldier, Nick Cohen.

Last week, T&V featured a report on the 28-year-old former 82nd Airborne Ranger's campaign to support his former army buddies.

Nick — now training as a doctor at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania — hopes these letters will be a morale booster to the soldiers overseas.

Nick is asking his fellow Bryn Mawr students, and any interested area residents, to write "personalized" letters to the soldiers. He explained, "My

general recommendation is that you tell the person who you are and what's going on in your life, in order to open up a conversation on a personal level. I tell writers not to mention the war or their political position."

Nick has advised people taking part to keep their letters free from governmental opinions or views.

"Those letters that are the most personal make it easy to start a friendship. Someone who is writing a letter is in turn going to be supportive of the individual over there, not necessarily the politics.

"The letters are distributed among soldiers who don't get a lot of mail and we have already been

told they give them great support."

For details on getting involved in Nick's campaign, email him directly at penpalprojects@brynmawr.edu.

All letters should be addressed to Nick Cohen for shipment overseas at c/o Nick Cohen, Box 1553 Bryn Mawr College Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.



NICK COHEN

Troop care packages

By Heather Klopfer

Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a community organization co-ordinated by Arlene Harrison of the Gramercy Block Association, has come up with a way to enable residents to send care packages containing an assortment of items to troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Through the organization's channels of communication, Harrison and her son, Nick Cohen, a Ranger with the 82nd Airborne Division of the US Army, have already initiated the project and hope for a great deal of feedback.

"As a mother, I think of these young men and women who have been sent by our government to Afghanistan and Iraq as children. Many of them are in their late teens and early twenties and many are my son's friends and I want to help.

"Nick and I want to use our abilities to show as much support as we can," said Harrison.

"For weeks, these young people have seen demonstrations of anti-war all over the world. We want them to know that we are proud of them and that they have our full support."

Because of Nick's position in the military, he has direct contact with his former Platoon Sergeant, Richard Cottrell, who has the ability to direct the care packages to soldiers.

Inside the care packages will be an assortment of wish-list items, such as toiletries, pre-paid global calling cards, disposable cameras, sunscreens and snack items.

Anyone who wishes to participate can send a \$25 donation — checks payable to Neighbors Helping Neighbors — To Care Packages, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, c/o Arlene S. Harrison, 34 Gramercy Park East, New York, NY 10003.

Pen pal project gathers steam in Gramercy Park

By Heather Klopfer

An army pen pal project initiated by Gramercy Park native and Airborne Ranger, Nick Cohen, has sparked a flood of letters from his former neighbors to American servicemen of the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, currently deployed to Afghanistan.

Nick, a medical student at Bryn Mawr College (BMC), launched the BMC Pen Pal Project last month and invited his fellow students to write to his buddies from his old unit.

When he extended the invitation to Gramercy Park residents, they delighted him with their response.

"I have already re-

ceived a lot of letters in response to recent T&V coverage of our project," said Nick. "I'm coming to the end of my academic year and it is good to know I can find residents in my neighborhood that want to continue this effort."

Through personalized pen pal letters from residents here in the States, Nick hopes to help boost the morale of American soldiers.

Anyone who wishes to participate can write a letter of support and begin a lifelong friendship with a soldier who is stationed overseas.

The letter will be delivered directly to a soldier in Afghanistan who may not be getting a lot of mail. The personalized note of support will show one brave and honorable service man or woman how much Americans at home care about them.

Nick explained that the American families of deployed soldiers in the 82nd Airborne Division have been notified that their loved ones will not be returning home just yet, as originally ex-

pected. "That means the letters they receive are more vital than ever," said Nick.

He added, "People who choose to write should keep in mind that there is a six week turn-around period in the mail that is being brought

back from Afghanistan, so not to be discouraged if they don't hear back right away."

All letters should be sent to: The Pen Pal Project, c/o Nick Cohen, Box 1553, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.

Send troops a care package

The Neighbors Helping Neighbors Project is calling on residents to help support troops overseas by making a \$25 donation to create individual care packages.

Led by Gramercy Block Association President, Arlene Harrison, and her son, Nick Cohen, (see story above) the community group has organized a way to send personal letters of support to soldiers deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a way to have care packages delivered directly to the soldiers.

Residents can contribute a \$25 donation to have a care package delivered on their behalf. Each package will contain an assortment of items specifically requested by the military, such as prepaid calling cards, stationery, disposable cameras, toiletries and snack items.

Anyone who wishes to send a package can send donations c/o Arlene Harrison, 34 Gramercy Park East, New York, NY 10003 with checks payable to 'Neighbors Helping Neighbors.' Residents should note that they are to write in the check's memo space the words "care package."

It is encouraged that anyone who sends a package, send a personal note of support as well to include their return address to make it as personalized as possible.

Residents remember America's heroes

By Heather Klopfer

As the US government came under criticism for placing the crisis in Afghanistan on the back burner while it concentrates on Iraq, a Gramercy Park soldier has brought the reality of the situation there home.

Nick Cohen, 28, a former Ranger in the 82nd Airborne Division of the 504th Parachute Infantry currently deployed in Afghanistan, was devastated to hear one of his former colleagues had been killed and seven wounded during a firefight on April 25.

"I was shocked to



NICK COHEN

hear the news. I can't really believe it," said Nick. "I realize now that I thought they were invincible."

Several hundred US troops continue to serve in Afghanistan to help build a new government, one year after the US and coalition forces successfully ousted the Taliban and sent Al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden underground.

Nick explained how US Forces operating out of Shkin Firebase in eastern Afghanistan were involved in a firefight with anti-coalition militants on the morning of April 25 when the soldier was killed.

The news came as Democratic presidential

candidate, Senator Bob Graham, (D- Florida,) accused President George W. Bush of abandoning the situation in Afghanistan to concentrate on the war in Iraq.

Graham claimed that Al-Qaeda had been allowed to re-group and said it was vital other nations be brought in to help rebuild Iraq and thus enable the US to carry out effective foreign policy throughout the region.

However, while the politicians argue, Cohen is determined not to forget the men and women serving in Afghanistan.

Last month, he launched a letter writing campaign and invited his Gramercy Park neighbors to write to servicemen and women in Afghanistan as a way to boost their morale.

"I have been receiving tons of letters in response to T&V's coverage," said Cohen, who is currently studying medicine at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.

"It's great to see my neighbors willing to help and get involved."

The soldier's mother, Arlene Harrison,



RED LETTER DAY — Soldiers serving in Afghanistan welcome Gramercy mail.

Gramercy Block Association President, is also helping him coordinate a care package program.

The packages are personal gifts that contain items such as sun block, snacks, pre-paid phone cards and other toiletries with a friendly letter of recognition and friendship.

Harrison said, "The people of Gramercy Park, Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village

have responded overwhelmingly.

"Hundreds of youngsters from our schools have sent us cards to be forwarded to the troops and members of the local churches and synagogues have also helped tremendously. We are very grateful for all this support."

Anyone interested in contributing to the care package program should send a \$25 check to 34

Gramercy Park, New York, NY 10003. All checks should be made payable to "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" and the words "care package" written in the check memo space.

Residents interested in writing letters to servicemen and women of the 82nd Airborne Division should address their letters to Nick directly at Box 1553, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.