



## JOINT HOMETOWN NEWS SERVICE

# Reaching for home

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Joint Hometown  
News Service

While we like to consider ourselves one big Army family, we're really a cross section made up of men and women from all walks of life. But, whether we're struggling through the mental and physical rigors of basic or advanced individual training, manning a lonely outpost in Macedonia, snaking through tank trails at Fort Hood or training in the jungles of Panama, we all share a common bond. We are normally from somewhere else - a special place we call home.

There's a link to bridge the gap between the isolation of duty in a far off land and family and friends at home. It's called the Joint Hometown News Service, a free service designed to highlight the accomplishments of men and women serving the military to an audience back home.

More than 700,000 news releases last year recognized accomplishments such as promotions, awards, arrival to new duty stations, graduation from Army schools, reenlistments, deployments, etc., in close to 11,000 daily and weekly newspapers throughout the nation. Most papers publish an "in the service" column weekly highlighting these accomplishments. Even a large number of radio and television stations use the releases on the air during weekly military news programs or as part of their regular news programming.

The form that turns information such as name, rank, next-of-kin tie and event into an actual news release is the DD Form 2266. This form can be found in any unit public affairs office, and allows hometown news composers to merge a soldier's hometown next-of-kin information with one of more than 1,000 stock stories to produce the final news release. Each hometown news release form generates, on an average of 4.5 releases.

To make sure each soldier's story reaches the right newspaper, Hometown News has, over the years, developed one of the most complete and fine-targeted marketing media databases in existence. Each newspaper has been queried to determine what type of releases it would like to receive, as well as which zip codes it would like to include in its coverage area. So there's little left to chance when a soldier's next-of-kin zip code is entered into the system. With this system, we're able to market the right product to the right customer.

But, as with most things in life, the final news release will only be as informative and thorough as the form used to compose the story. The DD Form 2266 is the universal hometown news release form used by both the Army and Air Force. The program is normally managed through each unit's public affairs office, although the form itself can be found in most orderly rooms and personnel offices.

Filling out a hometown news release form isn't that difficult, but there are a few important points that can make the difference between a solid news release and one that ends

up in an editor's trash can.

One of the most important elements on the form is one that never gets seen by the newspaper. We ask for the social security number as a way of tracking each form through the system. Should someone be unfortunate enough to become a casualty between the time a form is submitted and when it is published in the hometown newspaper, we will get a casualty list by name and social security number. This list is merged with our database daily to determine whether we have any casualties in the system. The following are a few areas on the form that, if left out or incorrectly completed, may result in either an incomplete release or no release at all.

**Event block:** Be as specific as possible. Spell out acronyms and don't use abbreviations. If it's an award submission or a special event not normally covered, attach a citation or provide more detailed information about the event.

**Next-of-kin:** This block is one of the most critical on the form. The most detailed release is useless if it has no place to go. Make sure to include both parents' first and last names and provide a street address rather than a post office box. If the street number is not known, simply writing the name of the street will suffice. And make sure we know the relationship of the people listed. Don't be discouraged if the zip code is not known or left off. With a solid address, we can research zip code information.

**Signature:** Signing the form tells us you've read the privacy act statement, and will allow us to

publish information on the form, except for the social security number. If we receive a form unsigned, it will not be processed as a news release. While most people think of the DD Form 2266 as the hometown news program, there are other areas that provide soldiers with even greater and more dramatic exposure to family and friends back home.

The print features program offers in-depth feature stories normally three to four typewritten

pages in length with a close up photograph of each individual and four or five "stock" photos depicting the overall story.

A television branch produces 90-second to two minute news feature video releases marketed to each person's hometown TV station.

Most of the things we do in the military, whether it's getting promoted, receiving an award, moving to a new duty station or graduating from a military school,

we often take for granted. But, the folks back home, who many times haven't kept up with our accomplishments for several years, find what we do interesting and exciting stuff.

After the next promotion, award, deployment or permanent change of station move, take a few minutes to fill out a hometown news release. It not only provides a morale pick-me-up, it also brightens up the day of family and friends back home.