

# Editorial: AER -- Family taking care of family

*Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs Office*

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Private 1st Class Henry Johnson woke up at 3 a.m. to a phone call he hoped would never come. His mother, Janet, who had raised him as a single mother since birth, had passed away suddenly and the funeral was going to be in a few days.

Johnson knew he had to get home immediately but there was a problem. He was stationed at the U.S. Army Garrison in Daegu, Korea and needed to get on a plane to Iowa within the next two days. He had no idea how he was going to pay for it; he had no way of coming up with the \$2,000 to book a last-minute flight out the next day.

Enter Army Emergency Relief. Johnson went through his chain of command who helped him get the paperwork together to apply for aid and he was on a plane in time to attend the funeral.

What I've just told you is a story similar to those that have been told all over the Army for 68 years. Soldiers prefer to keep their stories quiet and there were 71,000 Soldiers and families who were helped in 2009 alone.

Since 1942 AER has been helping Soldiers with their financial emergency needs, but the money that goes to helping the Soldiers doesn't come from the governmental budget. The money comes from your donations. AER is one way that allows the Army family, both Soldiers and civilians, to help "pay it forward" and take care of others in their time of need.

Remember, the money that you donate will go to Soldiers and their families needing financial assistance with things such as food, rent, utilities, emergency transportation, essential vehicle repairs, funeral expenses, and medical and dental expenses.

Assistance can be interest-free loans, grants and even scholarships. Of the \$79 million in financial assistance provided last year by AER, more than \$12 million was in scholarships.

Locally, Carlisle Barracks assisted more than 80 Soldiers, family members, retirees and widows with more than \$84,000 in financial assistance last year.

One of those helped was a family of a Soldier who had only been deployed for two weeks when his wife and their four children woke up to a flooded apartment. They lost almost everything and had no renters insurance. Within 72 hours after going to AER, they were in a new apartment and had money to purchase the basics to get back on their feet. This helped the Soldier concentrate on his mission, knowing his family was being taken care of.

This year's campaign kicked off Feb. 25 with a luncheon featuring Lt. Col. Scott Perry who recently concluded a year-long tour of duty in Iraq with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard as the 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion commander.

"AER brings help to Soldiers and their families right when they need it," he said. "This is our family helping our family. It's about more than money, it's about giving help and hope."

In these times of extended conflict and deployments, AER is more important than ever. Families separated by thousands of miles now have somewhere to turn in their moment of need.

Will you help? The money you donate will help someone down the road or across the globe. Do your part call 245-3296 to make a donation. The campaign will run from March 1 to May 15.

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 04 March 2010