

Second graders salute Goodland ensign

By Kathryn Burke

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A second-grade class at West Elementary keeps in touch with a Goodland serviceman, boosting his moral and learning geography, social studies and writing in the process.

Susan McCall's 7- and 8-year-old students glow with excitement at the mention of their pen pal, Navy Ensign Craig Townsend.

The class at West got in touch with Townsend through his niece, first grader Saige Vandiver, and his grandmother, Vernice Leslie, who volunteers at the school. They have followed his travels to the Persian Gulf on a seven-month tour.

"I thought it would be fun for the kids to write Craig," said McCall, adding that she saw the applications to school subjects, including map work and social studies. "They really have enjoyed writing because of it."

The students practiced writing skills by composing letters for Townsend at Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day and Christmas.

The letters include questions and information the kids wanted to share with him, along with coloring pictures of hula dancers, student's pets and the ocean.

The students have seen Townsend twice when he visited the classroom, once when he was home on leave and another time around Christmas.

Townsend is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

"It's a big honor to be chosen to go to Annapolis," said McCall, adding that he had to be referred by a member of Congress.

Townsend's sister, Sonya Vandiver said Rep. Jerry Moran appointed Townsend after he spent a year at Fort Hays State University.

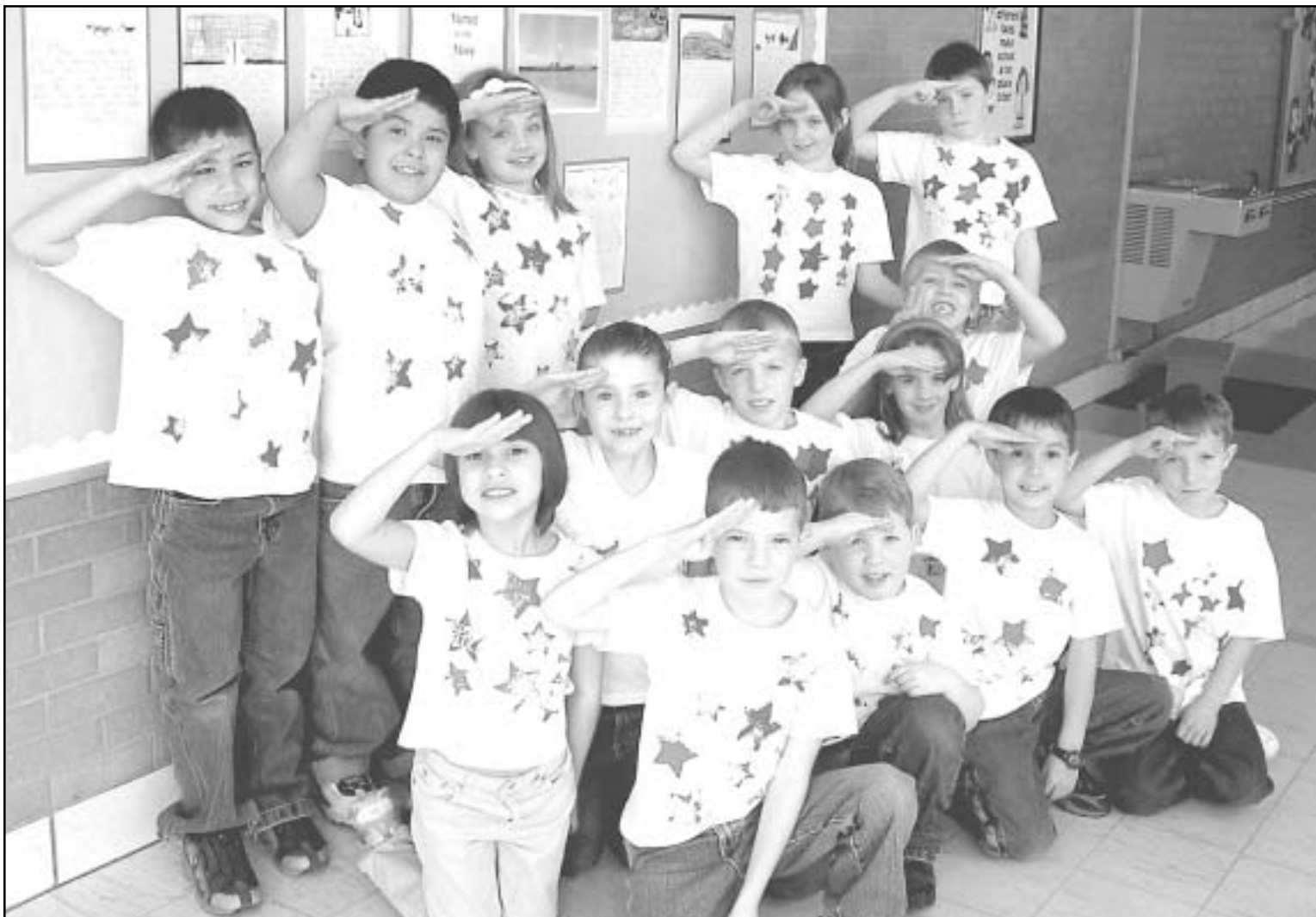
After graduation, he was assigned to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, with the USS O'Kane, a guided missile destroyer.

The students started to study his position in Hawaii, looking up the state on a map.

Townsend started training in October, heading to Rhode Island for classes. McCall said after returning to Hawaii, the entire ship went to San Diego next for more training.

In January, he told the students in an e-mail that on the way to California, they did drills, detecting and tracking submarines, planes and other surface ships.

"From fire to torpedo attacks, they keep us on our toes," he said.



Susan McCall's second-grade class saluted their pen pal, Navy Ensign Craig Townsend, while standing in front of a display of letters they sent him. From left, they are Cameron Mouchette (back row), Gabriel Ledesma, Hannah Sanderson, Davada Pummer, Hunter Williams, (middle row) Paetyn Barricklow, Sophia Thompson, Coy Johnson, Makala Fogg, Jonathan Stevens, (front row) Ty Hageman, Tanner Helton, Kameron Synder and Tyler Jones. The students have a photo of Townsend's ship, the destroyer USS O'Kane, hanging outside in the hall next to copies of the letters. Townsend sent students pictures of his "Flat Cowboy" – a 12 inch paper cutout sent to him by his niece Saige Vandiver – steering the O'Kane.

Photo from Susan McCall and Craig Townsend



nia, they did drills, detecting and tracking submarines, planes and other surface ships.

"From fire to torpedo attacks, they keep us on our toes," he said.

He said for the drills, they take sides and one group plays good guys while the other plays the bad guys.

As one of his jobs for the drill,

Townsend said, he took a team of 12 on a ship to check it out.

"While my team searched the ship for any illegal material," he wrote, "I was questioning the cap-



tain and making sure his paperwork was in good order."

In late February, Townsend sent an e-mail saying the ship had been in Tumon Bay, Guam, visiting for

Students share letters, pictures, learn lessons

Each student in Susan McCall's second-grade class at West Elementary wrote a letter to Navy Ensign Craig Townsend, a Goodland native. Here is a sample:

Dear Craig,
I like to clean my room. Where do you sleep Craig? I go to my grandma and grandpa Noffinger's House. I ride Horses.
My Family has dog's. I take medicine every day. I am getting better.
Your friend
Makala Fogg Lean

Dear Craig
I lived in San Diego before and I saw a ship with a big red cross. Today I will play cards. My dad and mom will be in the South for the whole week.
I am studying history since last year. Have you ever seen the ship with the red cross? For lunch, have you ever eat shrimp?
Your friend
Silem Lopez



Townsend

Dear Craig,
I got a new dog it is a pitbull it is my rotweiler's girlfriend. I like my dogs very much
Your friend
Jonathan Stevens

Dear Craig
I have a boston terrier puppie he

plays a lot. I have a doxsen she is not very playful. My sister is sick. She mite have the flu. She is getting better. She has wite and pink medicine. Have you seen a dolphin
Your friend
Brooke Fairchild

Dear Craig,
How are you doing? I love to draw pictures. I have a TV in my room. I got a new book from The library. I have a teddy bear and it is ript in the back.
Your friend
Paetyn Barricklow

Dear Craig,
My mom got a new job at the Sheriff's office. She is the secretary. She just started two weeks ago. The first secretary was Juanita. Her boss is Kevin Butts. He has a lot to do. I liked your letter.
your friend,
Tyler Hageman

The students said by writing to Townsend, they learned about other

countries and where they are on the map.

"I didn't know that Rhode Island was by the ocean," said Lopez.

Some students said they play with military toys that remind them of Townsend.

The kids said they want to travel more after hearing about Townsend's adventures.

Some want to visit the hotel he stayed in while visiting Guam because he is pictured next to big pool slide.

"I spent a majority of my time there poolside, as they had a miniature waterpark," Townsend said to the students in an e-mail.

Other students said they plan to go on trips this summer.

"I want to go to Singapore because they have chop sticks," said one.

The class learned writing, map and social studies skills through keeping contact with Townsend, McCall said.

"I'm glad that I learned so much from him," said one student.

Officer enjoys support from second-grade class

Writing back and forth to students at West Elementary has helped Navy Ensign Craig Townsend navigate the Pacific Ocean through some difficult times.

"I think that helps him so much," said Sonya Vandiver, Townsend's sister and a secretary at Goodland High School.

Townsend, a 1998 Goodland graduate, went out on his first tour of duty in October, and Susan McCall's second-grade class has tracked his progress.

Communicating through e-mails and letters, the students look up to Townsend. Vandiver said he enjoys the support.

She said he graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., two years ago, around the time his father, Gary Townsend, died from leukemia.

Townsend has had trouble with his military choices, deciding which

four days. He sent a few postcards from the island.

"My visit to Guam was very relaxing," he told the class, adding that he got to visit his favorite restaurant, Lone Star. "I went there my first night out and had a juicy T-bone."

Townsend told the class there was a wedding chapel overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

"I saw several Japanese weddings," he wrote, "strangely very similar to an American wedding."

Next Townsend visited the former British colony of Singapore, a country he said is very beautiful.

"I never ran into anything that I would call dirty the entire time I was in Singapore," he wrote. "Definitely would not mind returning there one day."

Along with writing, McCall said, the students are learning more about the world map and other countries. She said showing the students how Townsend went west from Hawaii, on one side of the map, and ended up on the other side was a tricky lesson.

"I think they're learning how far and how long it takes to go on a ship," she said.

Along with the e-mails, Townsend has sent the students money from Singapore and Guam. He sent postcards, snapshots of himself, his ship and numerous e-mails.

Some of the pictures include ones of Townsend with the "Flat Cowboy" sent to him by Vandiver.

The "Flat Cowboy" is a project first graders at West do where they send a twelve-inch piece of paper dressed up like a cowboy to someone they know from another state or country.

The students learned a little bit about the Navy fleet, too, McCall said.

One of the things she said they found interesting was that an aircraft carrier can actually go faster than a destroyer.

"It seems amazing," she said.

McCall said her students really enjoy writing to Townsend.

"They're pretty much in awe of him," she said.

The project has been so much fun for the class, she plans to continue next year if Townsend agrees, she said.

"I think it was a very good experience," she said.

branch to join and what to do in the service, she said. Today, she is sure he is headed in the right direction.

On the ship, the USS O'Kane, a destroyer, Townsend is one of the weapons officers.

He completed training to qualify as a surface warfare officer in January.

"This is what my dad always wanted," Vandiver said. "I think he made the right choice."

Townsend's father was in the Colorado Army National Guard out of Colorado Springs.

Vandiver said her brother enjoys spending time with the kids at West when he is home, and has gotten a kick out of the "Flat Cowboy" – a folded-up 12 inch paper man his niece, first-grader Saige Vandiver, sent to him as a class project.

She said Townsend likes to speak to the class.

"He's so good with them," she said. "I think that helps him a lot."

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