

UPAR - your unit should never leave home without one

UPARs – they link their unit with the outside world. Does your unit have a UPAR? UPAR stands for Unit Public Affairs Representative and sometimes the UPAR is the only person who stands between your unit and the vast desert of untold stories.

In these days of 24-hour news operations and more media choices than you can shake a remote control at, it takes that much extra effort for your unit's message to be heard. UPARs make that happen.

The Joint Public Affairs Office has an energetic and vibrant public affairs branch, but only has enough Soldiers and officers to assign trained public affairs personnel to Joint Force Headquarters. So what's a major command and its subordinate units to do?

Assign a UPAR, that's what.

Both the Army and Air Force Public Affairs Handbook says, "Unit Public Affairs Representatives, or 'stringers,' are assigned through additional duty appointments to represent their units for PA functions." Sure, it's an additional duty, but few additional duties can have a greater impact on how your unit is seen by the outside world – OR be this much fun!

UPARs find the stories that a public affairs officer or Soldier in a higher headquarters might never become aware of. The UPAR can write a story and/or take a picture that could get theater-wide or even world-wide exposure.

The American public has a right to know how their tax money is being spent, including what the Tennessee National Guard is doing. What's more, your unit's family members, friends and community members want all the news of your unit they can get. A single UPAR can keep people informed on what their unit is doing while deployed and lift morale back home as well. UPARs can be any rank, officer or enlisted, have a lot of experience in journalism and photography or none at all. Training is available for UPARs, both online and in person. In 2015, the Tennessee National Guard Joint Public Affairs Office started a program to send public affairs Soldiers to their major commands to train the UPARs from smaller units.

Once a UPAR is identified and trained, higher headquarters public affairs offices are there to help. Assistance and advice are never more than a phone call or an email away. Being a UPAR can be a lot of fun, too. UPARs often get to go places they wouldn't normally get to go and talk to people they wouldn't normally get to meet and when covering events, they often have one of the best seats in the house. They have to be close to the action because they represent the eyes and ears of the entire outside world.

Attend an important event or discover a really cool story for yourself. Take a picture. Write an article. Tell your unit's story. Keep the folks back home informed. Tell the rest of the world about the great Soldiers and Airmen in your unit and the great things your unit is doing defending the cause of freedom. If this sounds good to you, ask your unit to contact the Joint Public Affairs Office and find out more about being a UPAR. You can write to us at tnpao@live.com. Just don't wait too long. There are great stories in your unit just waiting to be told.

If you're not going to tell them, who will?

For more information on the Tennessee National Guard UPAR Program contact:

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