

State remains on high alert

By GEORGINA GUSTIN
Day Staff Writer

Fire, police and emergency officials in Connecticut remained on high alert Friday as U.S.-led forces began a heavy bombing campaign in the war against Iraq.

The national threat level has been on Code Orange since early this week, and Connecticut officials said they didn't foresee increasing that to Code Red. Many officials said they already were taking as many safety precautions as possible.

"We still have every measure in place, all precautions," said Sgt. J. Paul Vance, a state police spokesman. "Really, there's no specific threat against the state of Connecticut. We're just taking a defensive stance, so to speak."

Federal officials said Friday that the alert level remains the same and that officials around the country are maintaining high security measures.

"As soon as Code Orange went into effect, we put in many levels of protection," said Sandy Hays of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which runs the Plum Island animal disease testing laboratory. "We're in constant contact with state and federal officials. We're already basically at maximum security. We have so much security in place. We're very, very secure."

Officials at Electric Boat and the Coast Guard declined to give specifics on any new security measures but said they are doing everything possible to ensure the safety of surrounding towns.

EB spokesman Neil D. Ruenzel said nothing unexpected has happened since the war in Iraq began Wednesday. He said he wasn't aware of any protest held outside the site.

Coast Guard vessels and boarding teams have been conducting around-the-clock patrols of harbors and ports, said Ens. Robert Bilbo. He said special attention is being paid to bridges as well as ferries and their passengers.

Bilbo would not elaborate on how many vessels were put on patrol.

Area hospitals also have emergency preparation plans in place in the event of a disaster. Keith Fontaine, director of communications at The William W. Backus Hospital in Norwich, said that in January 2002 the hospital adopted its new emergency management plan, which tells staff how to deal with weather, chemical and bio-terrorism crises. ggustin@theday.com

Terror alert codes and what they mean

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has devised a color-coded system to inform citizens when there is an increased risk of a future attack. Here's what the codes mean:

GREEN (low condition) is declared when there is a low risk of terrorist attacks. Federal departments and agencies should assure that all facilities and regulated sectors are regularly assessed for vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks, and measures are taken to mitigate these vulnerabilities.

BLUE (guarded condition) is declared when there is a general risk of terrorist attacks. In addition to the protective measures taken in the previous threat condition, federal departments and agencies should check communications with command locations and provide the public with any information that would strengthen its ability to act appropriately.

YELLOW (elevated condition) is declared when there is a significant risk of terrorist attacks. In addition to the protective measures taken in the previous threat conditions, federal departments and agencies should increase surveillance of critical locations, coordinate emergency plans with nearby jurisdictions and implement contingency and emergency response plans.

ORANGE (high condition) is declared when there is a high risk of terrorist attacks. In addition to the previous protective measures, federal departments and agencies should take additional precautions at public events and possibly consider alternative venues or even cancellation and restrict threatened facility access to essential personnel only.

RED (severe condition) reflects a severe risk of terrorist attacks. Under most circumstances, the protective measures for a severe condition are not intended to be sustained for substantial periods of time. In addition to the above precautions, federal departments and agencies should increase or redirect personnel to address critical emergency needs, monitor, redirect or constrain transportation systems and close public and government facilities.

Source: Department of Homeland Security

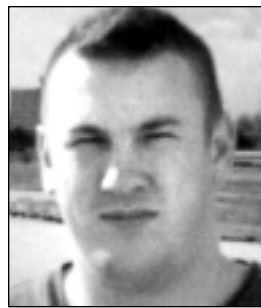
Families of men in war zone can only wait, hope



■ Patrick Wimmermark, 16, of Waterford, far left, and his brother, Ian Post, 19, who is with the Army's 82nd Airborne in Kuwait.



■ Left, Daniel Oakley reads a letter with his stepdaughter, Jessie Flamme, 7, that she wrote to Oakley's brother, Marine Cpl. James Doherty, above, who is stationed in Kuwait. Looking on is Oakley's wife, Dianna.



■ Kitty Carrier of Groton, left, holds a family album that includes photos of her son, Damian Michael, above, who is stationed in Kuwait with the U.S. Army.



■ Jane LoPresti, left, plants green pepper seedlings at the LoPresti Farm in Preston. Her son, Army Lt. Col. Thomas Rhatican, above, is also stationed in Kuwait.

From A1

will be gone. Damian is stationed in Kuwait, where he's setting up computer systems for the Army.

"Hey, Mum, it's me," Damian's voice says evenly. "I'm just calling to tell you I'm safe and I'm OK, just in case you're watching the news and you're worried. You have nothing to be worried about. I'm all right. Love you."

At family reunions, Damian gets his three brothers and two sisters involved in board games like Pictionary and chess. When his mother least expects it, he surprises her with trinkets, like the medallion he gave her after being stationed in Egypt.

"Damian is the one that always sends the flowers, tries to rally everyone together," Kitty Carrier said. "He gets it. He gets how important family is."

Damian first confronted the idea of death when the Army informed him he would have to carry a weapon and a gas mask and learn how to kill, even though his work involves networking databases.

A Catholic, he "jumped right into prayer every time he thought about it," his mother said.

"The first time he came home" from his base in Atlanta, she noted, "he said he was no longer a boy."

Patrick Wimmermark

Throughout the week, Patrick Wimmermark's thoughts were a contradiction of sorts. Nonchalantly the 16-year-old Waterford teenager would say he'd rather not think about the war, but in the same conversation he would express frustration that he didn't know exactly what was going on overseas.

His brother, Ian Post, 19, a private in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, is in Kuwait.

"I hope Ian is not there. I hope that he was back a little bit from where the bombs are," Wimmermark, a Waterford High School sophomore, would say. "They put him down in Kuwait. That's all I know. They really don't tell you that much."

"I don't like it. It just leaves me hanging."

Sandra and Richard Wimmermark said their son has been avoiding the issue, even though it weighs heavily on his mind.

Patrick had set the alarm on his wristwatch for 8 p.m. Wednesday to mark the end of Bush's 48-hour deadline. When the alarm went off, he was at school, working with the video club.

"He's very concerned about his brother," Sandra Wimmermark said. "As most teenage boys tend to do, they keep feelings to themselves. We try to talk to him about it."

The two brothers, the youngest of four children, are close. The last time they spoke was about a month ago, before Post was deployed.

"He was pretty scared. He really didn't want to tell me," Patrick recalled of his brother. "I think he was mostly scared of having to fight against... like women and children and injure them because it was something he didn't plan on doing."

Daniel Oakley

Putting pen to paper is not Daniel Oakley's way.

But war changes even the little things.

Oakley, a 38-year-old Navy supply storekeeper, practically raised his half-brother, Marine Cpl. James Edward Doherty, 23, as they traveled from base to base. He changed his diapers, got him into Boy Scouts, and silently accepted his brother's decision to reverse a proclaimed ban on the military and join the Marines.

"There's a lot of things you just don't say," Oakley reasoned.

Now that Doherty is in Kuwait, managing supplies for F-18 fighter jets, Oakley has decided to write him a letter from New London. A kind of diary. A letter he still hasn't sent.

"I'm just talking about my everyday doings," he said. "Our new bird, Joker. I'm not a real good letter writer, but I'm trying."

Doherty was calling until Bush delivered his final ultimatum. The last call came when Oakley was out. All that was left on the voice mail was static.

"Been sitting here for three days waiting for him to call," Oakley said.

Global phone calls aren't cheap. Doherty will save the next one for their mother, Oakley said. But she is not the only one who worries. For the oldest son, waking up nights and smoking too much has become routine.

Jane LoPresti

She won't go out of her way to watch news of the war, but Jane LoPresti will watch a bit of it if others have the television on. She doesn't like the thought of catching a glimpse of her 41-year-old son, Army Lt. Col. Thomas Rhatican.

"I don't know (that) I'd want to see him right up front," LoPresti said Friday as she took a break from replanting peppers inside the greenhouse at the LoPresti Farm on Route 164 in Preston.

The 67-year-old mother of four and grandmother of 11 spoke to her son this past Monday, when he called from Michigan en route to Kuwait. Rhatican, her oldest child, serves as the commander of an Army Reserves helicopter unit based in Wisconsin.

She last saw him earlier this month, when she and two of her three daughters visited Wisconsin. At that time, Rhatican, a lawyer, reassured her, "Things will be fine... and not to worry."

"That was easy for him to say. LoPresti said. She hasn't spoken to him since Monday, but if she could she would tell him about her love, support and pride of what he's doing.

She's hoping and praying Rhatican will come home safely to his wife and four children.

"I pray a lot throughout the day. I talk to God, speak to Jesus," she said. "I'll say to Him, 'Look at how your mother suffered when you were carrying the cross in Calvary. Think of me...'"

"I ask him to watch over our troops, especially Tom and his unit. And I pray, too, for the Iraqi people, the innocent people," she said.

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Providence and its crew deliver blow against Iraq

From A3

watch a videotape of the launch that was recorded off the periscope.

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For the first time, the Providence has been able to receive GBS or Global Broadcast Service during this deployment. The station, which originates at the Commander of Naval Submarine Forces office in Norfolk, Va., allowed the crew to receive President Bush's Monday night address to the nation live, though it was the early morning of Tuesday in the Red Sea.

"When I saw the president's speech live, and later read his words, I was sure we were going forward with this operation, and going forward with a great deal of confidence that we were doing the right thing," Kan said after the strike. "I think that message was important, not only for the sailors on the USS Providence, but for the American public. You just can't take the use of force lightly."

During World War II, bombers flew in formation at 20,000 feet and saw only puffs of smoke from their bombs hitting the ground. Flying in formation, there was no hint as to

which plane hit any particular target, and often no intelligence as to whether a target had been hit at all, Kan said.

Now, military commanders know quickly whether a target was destroyed, and given the precision-guided munitions that are used, there is no question as to who delivered the blow.

"When you get this kind of information this quickly, it really changes your perspective," the captain said softly. "You need to be satisfied in your own mind that you're doing the right thing before you go to it."

And Kan said he is completely convinced that the United States is following the proper course.

"I think procrastination could kill us, as a people," he said. "There are some people who are really out to do us harm, and have the weapons to do it if we give them the time."

In addition, he said, as part of the force paving the way for an invasion of Iraq, he realizes how important it is that the early strikes mitigate any danger the follow-on forces might face.

"Now that we're committed," he said, "there are a lot of airmen and soldiers depending on us to do our job."

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