



# LOUISIANA DRUG GUARD

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## Bridging continents, forming friendships

by Suzanne Chaillot

The Louisiana National Guard's Ropes Challenge courses are well-known and accepted as positive avenues for effective development in the areas of leadership and cooperation.

When a request came through to facilitate a ropes course for Northern Irish youth, both Catholic and Protestant, this was an opportunity to showcase the outcomes such a program can have.

Ireland, a country separated by culture, politics and religion, has been at war with itself for eight centuries. Since 1921, there have been two political units: The Republic of Ireland, an independent nation, predominantly native Irish and Catholic; Northern Ireland, six counties of the province of Ulster, located in the northeast corner of the island, and still a part of the United Kingdom.

It is here that the polarization of the two factions comes most sharply into focus in the form of politically directed violence, tension, and self-isolation by cultural and religious communities.

Clearly, a need exists for the fostering of tolerance, understanding, and friendship between these groups. It is from this need the Ulster Project was formed, according to its website.

The Ulster Project is dedicated to promoting a peaceful parity of esteem between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. And how do they do this?

Every year, young leaders from Northern Ireland are brought to the United States and are paired with teenagers in chosen cities throughout the United States.

New Orleans is one of these chosen cities. In late June, sixteen teens from Northern Ireland and their chaperones were introduced to an equal number of teenagers and their American host families to spend a summer month of experiences, challenges and friendship.

One of the first activities for the New Orleans Ulster project was to take them on a Ropes Challenge course conducted by the Louisiana National Guard's Counter Drug Task Force.

Mark Morere, Ulster Project event director, explained why they take the teens on a ropes course right away. "A ropes course really meshes the kids, helps bring them together right away, they deal with problem solving, and forces them to get together to accomplish tasks."

The course consists of two days of events with challenges, setbacks, failures, and successes, much like life itself. The course structures resemble a hodge-podge



of poles and cables that at first appear puzzling, until a facilitator explains a scenario and assembles the players to carry out a plan or accomplish a task.

"This is the first event they have done together since arriving," said Johnny Harron, an Ulster Project chaperone from Northern Ireland. "Everyone is seeing it very favorable; this begins to build trust, one of the goals of the Ulster Project.

Trust takes on a whole new meaning when you are the one falling backward into the arms of your comrades, or depending on someone else to get you to the

other side of an obstacle. It's the skills of leadership, compromise and trust that emerge from the players.

They are placed in difficult scenarios with perceived danger and challenges to complete a group task to overcome obstacles, it is then



that facilitators highlight aspects of the experience to emphasize important lessons.

“This course is exceptional the facilitators are very good,” said Morere. “I have been on 14 ropes courses in 14 years and I have never been this impressed. The facilitators knew when to help and when to stand back. They gave the kids only enough information to get them started.”

The ropes challenge course continues to be one of the key tools the La. National Guard uses to help develop strong and confident young people, helping reduce the demand for drugs in the process.

“I run a lot of kids through the ropes leadership course,” said Tech. Sgt. Craig Juan, lead facilitator for the Ropes course located at Camp Villerie. “I have to say these are the best behaved teenagers I have ever seen, you don’t have to tell them twice what to do or call them down for misbehaving. This makes the experience easier for everyone involved.”

What wasn’t so easy was one of the more popular challenges, the Leap of Faith. One by one the teens would strap on a harness and



a helmet and, with the assistance of a facilitator and carefully placed foot holds, climb 25ft to balance themselves on the 10-inch circumference of the swaying pole. Suspended several feet in front of the top of the pole was a trapeze swing. The goal was to jump out and try to grab hold of the thin trapeze.

Zara Gillespie, a 15-year-old from Northern Ireland, steadied herself one leg at a time until she stood 25-feet above the ground. She eyed the trapeze swing as her group of comrades

coaxed her on. With one brave jump she hurled her body toward her goal and just barely clipped the edge of the swing. Her harness was attached to a human-powered pulley, which lowered her down gently toward the clapping and joy of her comrades. “I learned you can’t do anything without teamwork, cooperation and encouragement.” She said with rosy cheeks and pride in her eyes.

Bailey Crow, 14, a student at Ben Franklin in New Orleans liked all the elements but concurred with many the Leap of Faith was the scariest. “I don’t like heights and the pole was shaking,” she said. “I learn that I have determination, because I was ready to give up.”

Patrick Vicke, 15, a student at Jesuit in New Orleans really liked the Leap of Faith as well. “The jump was harder and more challenging than I thought it would be. What I learned was, the ability to do depends on how much you want to do it.”

There was one young man who wasn’t so keen on the Leap of Faith. Paddy Lunch, 14, a student of Drumragh in Northern Ireland, preferred the pole bridge challenge. “Aye,” he said in a distinct brogue. “I preferred the high walk.” This



A well-deserved hug

challenge was a slanted pole twenty feet in the air. The goal was to walk from one end to the other and then repel down which he did several times that day.

With the Ulster project promoting reconciliation between Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants by fostering tolerance, understanding, and friendship among teenage future leaders, and the National Guard’s Rope challenge course promoting strong and confident young people, this was a win-win situation for the participants of this unique pairing.

“This was an exceptional experience for the kids and an exceptional experience for the adults as well,” said Morere.

The National Guard Ropes facilitators were Master Sgt. Mike Miller, First Sgt. Yolanda Neal, Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Tony Icamena, Tech Sgt. Craig Juan, Tech. Sgt. Walter Castillo, Staff Sgt. Lance Robeaux, Sra Brandon Beaudoin and Sgt. Mark Hammet.

The Louisiana National Guard operates Ropes Challenge



hip hip hooray

Courses at Camp Villerie near Slidell, Gillis W. Long Center in Carville, Camp Beauregard in Pineville and Camp Minden near Shreveport.

*"Whatever else history may say about me when I'm gone, I hope it will record that I appealed to your best hopes, not your worst fears; to your confidence rather than your doubts."*

*"My dream is that you will travel the road ahead with liberty's lamp guiding your steps and opportunity's arm steadying your way."*

*President Ronald W. Reagan*

## RAID ON

After the 2 days of flying the Toledo Bend area on an eradication mission, more than 300 marijuana plants were seized and destroyed. On one instance RAID spotted eight marijuana plants in the woods, the Louisiana State Police then discovered an indoor garden inside a house that had a three-stage grow cultivation with more than 100 plants inside. The person responsible admitted to having the grow outside and tried to pull the plants while the helicopter was circling. After the helicopter pilot and the State Trooper discouraged the man from pulling the plants, he went inside his house and started pulling his indoor grow. At that moment the ground team arrived and knocked on his door. Admitting defeat, the cultivator let them in and revealed his well-manicured marijuana grow.

## CDTF supports Kids Camps

Tech Sgt Steve Haynes and Sgt John Carter supported the CADA Teen Institute Camp at Jackson Barracks. The camp is a three-and-a-half day program where teams of high school students, along with their adult advisors, share experiences, community issues and the solutions to pressures they face each day. They learn about leadership, community outreach, and peer-led prevention. The camp was a total success!

Capt. Donna Jones supported KIDS Annual Training 2004. She participated in the preparation, coordination and management of the camp. The Ropes Course was facilitated by Tech Sgt Craig Juan, Sgt 1st Class Melissa Vosburg and Sgt 1st Class Judith Merritt. First Sgt Yolanda Neal coordinated a drug dog demonstration given by Deputy Jason Jenkins of Rapides Parish Sheriff's Department. Kids Annual Training is a 4-day camp offered to 8-12 year old children of National Guard members. The camp is always looking for Volunteers and Jr. Counselors to join in the fun. It is a great opportunity for Guard kids to learn leadership, teamwork and social skills while having fun.

## Sniffing out offenders

Agents from Customs and Immigration Enforcement spearheaded an operation "Zero Tolerance," in late June. State and local agencies participated in the three-day, 24-hour operation that targeted areas on I-12, between I-55 and I-10. Louisiana National Guard Counter Drug Personnel, Staff Sgt Lance Robeaux and Staff Sgt Walter Castillo are assigned to ICE, along with Staff Sgt Richard Landry who is assigned to the Gulf Coast High Intensity Drug Trafficking

Area (GCHIDTA). They operated the Ion Scan to check all vehicles and their contents for traces of illegal narcotics. The expertise of the CDTF personnel running the Ion Scan confirmed the presence of narcotics in several vehicles searched by Federal, State and Local Agents. The seventy-two hour operation netted over 90 arrests ranging from illegal aliens to possession of illegal narcotics. Several vehicles were confiscated along with drug seizures.

## Dope comes ashore in Terrebonne

The Terrebonne Parish Narcotics Task Force recovered five bundles of marijuana from Lake Pelto near Wine Island, after receiving information from boaters in the area. The total weight was 52.50 pounds, estimated value \$73,500.00.

The Terrebonne Parish Narcotics Task Force recovered two bricks of suspected pure cocaine near Wine Island, after receiving information from boaters in the area. The total weight was five pounds. Estimated value \$50,000.00.

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Tech Sgt. John Fos supports the Terrebonne Parish Narcotics Task Force