



AIR FORCE STAFF SGT. MYLES D. CULLEN

Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, center, looks on as Kurt Busch lifts the trophy over his head after winning the NASCAR Pennsylvania 500 auto race at the Pocono Raceway in Long Pond, Pa., Sunday.

NASCAR drives home commitment to military

JOHN J. KRUZEL

American Forces Press Service

LONG POND, Pa. — NASCAR's commitment to U.S. troops fired on all cylinders at the Pocono International Raceway here Sunday.

During daylong events, NASCAR officials and fans on hand here to watch the Pennsylvania 500 welcomed Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, his family and scores of distinguished military guests. NASCAR donated 10,000 tickets to wounded servicemembers and their families and hosted a swearing-in ceremony for recruits from all five branches of the armed forces.

"The NASCAR fan, the NASCAR competitor and the industry in general is Americana, and I don't know anything more American than American Soldiers," NASCAR President Mike Helton said. "Whenever we have the opportunity to be associated with and honor the American military, we take advantage of that."

Inside the two-and-a-half-mile track before the race, as pit crews and drivers made last-minute engine calibrations and 11th-hour tune-ups, buzzing sounds from pneumatic tools mixed with the sharp smell of gasoline fumes. Walking on a tarmac-like strip of pavement between garages and sleek trailers that delivered the muscular stock cars, the chairman and his desert camouflage-clad entourage made frequent stops to shake hands with fans eager to voice their support for troops.

"Is that a four-star general? Would he take a picture with me?" a curious fan asked the chairman's wife, Lynne, whose husband complied and smiled widely for the camera.

"Thanks," the fan said. "My father's an ex-Marine."

"Former Marine," Lynne corrected her congenially. "There's no such thing as an ex-Marine." For Pace, who steps down as chairman Oct. 1 and retires from the military after serving 40 years, Sunday likely was one of the last times he will attend a NASCAR race in uniform.

"It's incredible, people walk by and they see a uniform, they don't know what your rank is — they don't know if you're a private or a general — they just stop and say 'thank you,'" he said. The Pace family initially paid attention to NASCAR in the mid-1990s when the general's nephew began working for the organization, daughter Tiffany Pace said. But like roughly 75 million Americans, the family is now hooked.

The chairman's wife said she and the general have attended seven NASCAR events, including a recent Memorial Day visit to Charlotte, N.C., for NASCAR's Coca-Cola 600.

But the scene was far from silent as starting time neared. The raceway revved with the sounds of an estimated 140,000 fans. Spectators were treated to performances by the Marine and Air Force drill teams and a fly-by from a C-17 Globemaster III. Before the race, Pace appeared on the victory circle stage to swear in about 150 fresh recruits from

the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and Marines. Standing on the elevated platform that rises above the black-and-white checkered section of concrete marking the finish line, Pace faced the rows of enlistees at attention between him and a sea of fans in bleachers.

"It's my great privilege and honor to equip the armed forces of the United States with these great young recruits here," Pace said. "I want to thank you for being willing to serve your country at a time when we deeply need your service."

At Pace's cue, the young servicemembers raised their right hands and vowed in unison to support and defend the U.S. Constitution against all enemies. "They'll remember this day for the rest of their lives," Dr. Joseph Mattioli, the Pocono International Raceway track owner, told Pace after the general swore in the recruits and shook each enlistee's hand.

Later, Pace would wave the ceremonial green flag, signaling drivers to open throttle and begin the race, and afterward he presented the trophy to Kyle Busch and his Bud Light-sponsored team following their dominating victory.

But before this, the chairman offered gratitude to NASCAR fans and officials who show steadfast support to U.S. servicemembers.

"I thank all of you fans for the incredible support NASCAR has provided to our armed forces over the years," Pace said.

Sports Briefs

Combatives post championship

The Modern Army Combatives Post Championship will be at 9 a.m. today at Stout Gym. This event is open to active-duty military stationed at Fort Bliss. For information, call Joe Fedak at 568-5995 or Sgt. Scott Kovanda at 568-5677.

Free Diablos tickets

Military Appreciation Night at the El Paso Diablos returns to Cohen Stadium at 7:05 p.m. Wednesday. Mark your calendar now. See the hometown Diablos play ball with teams from around the league. For information, call 568-4601.

Long drive championship

The George Underwood Golf Complex will host the MWR Long Drive Championship Aug. 17 at 6:30 p.m. This one-day event is an official Long Drivers of America qualifier. The cost is \$10 per try. Only active-duty servicemembers and Reserve and National Guard Components, both active and inactive, are eligible to compete. Women who enter the competition will be spotted 65 additional yards on their qualified drives. Official rules and registration forms are available on www.blissmwr.com. For more information, visit www.longdrivers.com or call 562-1273.

Memorial golf tournament

Isaac Camacho Chapter IX, Special Forces Association, is sponsoring the second annual John McLaughlin Golf Tournament to raise funds for their projected Thanksgiving and Christmas food and toy drives. The event is Aug. 18 at the Underwood Golf Course. Registration is 6:30 a.m. to 7:50 a.m. Shotgun starts at 8 a.m. Sponsors are welcome. For information call 591-1560; 525-4492; 526-6960; or 533-6511.

Mini golf championship

Ft. Bliss MWR-Sports will hold the Mini Golf Post Championships Aug. 21 at Kelly Park. Registration begins at 5 p.m. This team event is open to all active-duty military assigned to Ft. Bliss. For more information contact Joe Fedak at 568-5995.

Civilian fitness program

Applications are being accepted for Civilian Fitness Program No. 9. All packets must be complete and submitted no later than 4 p.m. Sept. 14. A packet may be downloaded from www.blissmwr.com or picked up from Stout Gym or Tennis Club. For more information call Doug Briggs at 568-6458 or Caitlin Smith at 568-5995.

Tennis lessons

Tennis lessons for adults are available every Monday for beginners and Wednesday for intermediate from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Fort Bliss Tennis Club and Fitness Zone. Cost is \$8 per session or \$35 for five sessions. To sign up, call Robert Jack at 539-7300.

Pool hours

The Community Pool, adjacent to the Officers' Club, is open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, including holidays. Replica Aquatic Center is open 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday and holidays.

Patrons may swim at either the Community or Replica pools at a cost of \$1 for adults, 75 cents for children 6 to 12 years and free for children younger than 5. Guests are \$2 per person. A swim card may be purchased for \$20 and is good for 30 visits at either pool.

Officers' Club members may show their MWR Membership Card at either pool for free admittance. Members' children may obtain a pool for the summer. For more information, call 568-7431.

Biggs Water Park

Biggs Water Park hours are Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 6 p.m. The park is closed Tuesdays. Biggs Water Park has slides, a mushroom waterfall and a patio area with umbrellas and lounge chairs. For more information, call 568-8087 or 569-7733.

Paintball team forming

Are you interested in playing on a beginner/rookie-level paintball team? We are looking to put together one or more teams for competitive play. Practices will begin at 10 a.m. Aug. 18 at Biggs Park Paintball Field. For more information, contact Coach Daniel Frisby at soldier_friz@yahoo.com or (931) 220-2468.