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Soldiers in Sparta train 'overseas'

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Dan LoGrasso
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPARTA - What may look like normal semi-truck trailers are actually a portal into modern warfare giving Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers a chance to experience overseas before leaving the Midwest.

"Come to Sparta in the morning and we can take you to Iraq for lunch, Afghanistan for dinner, and have you home by bedtime," said Sgt. Edward Singletary of Sparta, range scheduling non commissioned officer at Sparta Training Area.

Singletary guided Soldiers from Company F, 634th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) in Mt. Vernon, through a new state-of-the-art training system Feb. 4. The Virtual Vehicle Trainer (VVT) is a combat simulator capable of putting over 25 Soldiers into the same massive virtual environment. Soldiers break into teams of three and man their "vehicles," - nearly identical mock-ups of a humvee interior, complete with gunner's turret - and don headsets or look into high-resolution screens to see past the trailer and into the digital world beyond.

Spc. Leo Stofferahn of Pekin with Company F, 634th BSB, a veteran of three deployments, said the simulator's terrain and movement were accurate and effective.

"The training was a good refresher for veterans and good for setting up accurate deployment expectations for new Soldiers," said Stofferahn.

Singletary controls the \$3.2 million VVT, which is the most-advanced system of its kind available, from a multi-screen command station. With the push of a button, he can change the weather, the terrain (which is based on actual satellite mapping), or zoom into any part of the 3D environment. No longer are Soldiers represented by blinking dots; every image interacts in real time. The digital representation of the gunner even swivels along

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Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Dan LoGrasso, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Staff Sgt. James Stanfield of Harrisburg with Company F, 634th Brigade Support Battalion in Mt. Vernon, mans the turret in Sparta Training Area's new Virtual Vehicle Simulator (VVT), a state-of-the-art combat simulator capable of putting more than 25 Soldiers into the same massive virtual environment. The VVT allows Stanfield to see into a custom-made scenario (his view is shown on the screen behind him) while still operating realistic equipment like vehicle controls and mock machine guns.

Illinois Guard wins Secretary of the Army environmental award



Photo submitted by Jon Casebeer, Department of Military Affairs

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jason Rassi with 2nd Battalion, 238th Aviation Support in Peoria and Maj. C.J. Pulcher with Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield, maneuvers a CH-47 Chinook inside the South Kickapoo Creek basin in Marseilles, Sept. 26. Fifty four beam sections were airlifted into the creek to control the natural erosion and regain equilibrium.

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Michael Camacho
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois National Guard was announced as the winner of the natural resources conversation small installation award Jan. 31 for the 2011 Secretary of the Army Environmental Awards Program.

Each year, the Army recognizes and rewards excellence for the development, management and transferability of environmental programs that increase environmental quality, enhance the mission and help make the Army sustainable.

The Illinois National Guard and the Department of Military Affairs has worked with Illinois conservation agencies including the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Division of Water, State Water Survey and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, to mitigate the erosion caused by the Kickapoo Creek which runs through the Marseilles Training Center (MTC) in Marseilles.

With the vested interest in MTC and its surroundings, the preservation of the land has become a top priority. MTC is a

primary training area for the Illinois Army National Guard and other agencies.

The labor for building the riffles came from the conservation groups, contractors as well as engineer units from the Illinois National Guard. When the riffles were put in place, the erosion process and the sediment being removed from the area would not go into the water system or Illinois River.

These riffles put in strategic areas would slow down the moving water and limit the progress of erosion similar to ways seen in nature.

In addition to the damage of infrastructure, this deterioration harmed water quality and aquatic habitat. The erosion had reached a catastrophic level and would affect more than just MTC training sites and the surrounding area. Addressing this issue has been a joint effort at MTC over the past few years and will continue to be.

While the riffles are a solution, they are not the final stage. As the plans to preserve the land continue in a new phase, there will be consistent maintenance and monitoring needed to ensure the riffles continue to be effective.

COMMAND FOCUS

Illinois Guard still gathers to defend our communities

May 9, 1723, Diron Dartaguiette, the French colonial inspector of troops, gathered the inhabitants of Kaskaskia together and formed a company of militia. This was the first muster of troops within the territory that would one day become the state of Illinois. And this company of troops, united for the common defense, was the first unit of what would become the Illinois National Guard.



Maj. Gen. William Enyart

Close to 290 years later, the Illinois National Guard is still gathering together to defend our local communities from either natural or manmade disasters as well as our country from enemies, foreign or domestic.

But there is a key difference between the Illinois National Guard today and our predecessors close to three centuries ago. Then, every able-bodied male was required to participate in the community's defense. Today, a very small percentage of young men and women – less than 1 percent – choose military service.

That makes you special. You are a member of a unique class of citizens who decided to put themselves on the line to protect everyone else. There are many reasons why people decide to join and stay in the Illinois National Guard, but in

every case the individual conscientiously decided to serve his or her fellow citizens. Thank-you.

Today the National Guard is in a unique position to communicate the value of military service to the rest of the nation. Unlike our active-duty counterparts, we are not sequestered on military bases in military communities.

We are in every community. In most cases, our friends and neighbors may only have a vague notion of what our military service is all about. They know we put on the uniform. In many cases, they may have seen us off on deployments. They certainly support us – the military remains among the most respected professions in our nation.

But, in most cases, they don't completely understand why we chose to

join and stay in the Illinois Guard.

Let's tell them. Get out in the community and talk about service. Talk about patriotism. Talk about the camaraderie with the fellow members of your unit. Talk about the challenges you've faced and overcome. Talk about the confidence you've gained.

Every month is a good month to communicate with our communities, but May is perfect. Memorial Day gives us a great opportunity to reach out to our schools, community organizations, towns, villages and cities.

By the way, this holiday to remember our fallen was established by fellow Illinois Guard member and Civil War veteran Maj. Gen. John A. Logan. Logan shared with you this legacy of service that binds us.

Gearing up for annual training

Summer is just around the corner. When it is summer time, it is annual training time.



Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti

At this point in the fiscal year, I am sure all your training plans are nearly complete and full of exciting and worth-while training. If not, now is the time to fine-tune those plans to ensure your Soldiers get the best training possible.

There are many different missions this summer from the NATO Summit in Chicago to XCTC at Camp Riley, Minn., to the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's mission in Africa. Regardless of the mission, I understand there will be plenty of things that have to get done. Along with all those mission-essential requirements, keep some things in mind.

Train to standard. We all know the Illinois Army National Guard is more than just one weekend a month and two weeks a year. We are always ready because we always train to standard. Annual training should not be a time to simply watch the clock. Fill the days with rigorous training. Don't base your training on how much time is left in the day. Base it off what your Soldiers need.

Back to basics. You have probably heard me say this in the past, but there is a reason I always go back to this simple phrase. Annual training is a time to go back to our roots and get our hands dirty. Don't hesitate to pick up the regulations or technical manuals to find the right answers. While you train to standard, remember the little things needed to get the job done right.

Safety. As leaders, the safety of your Soldiers should be number one. Safety is priority year-round, especially during annual training. During this time there is more opportunity for injuries as Soldiers are around more equipment and are working longer hours. While they're busy, they should be aware of all potential safety risks via composite risk management. Brief it every day before every training event.

Have fun. While there is plenty of training to be done, remember to keep it exciting and to try new things. You will have some quality time with your Soldiers. Get to know the Soldiers who are in your formations and let them get to know you, too. It's okay to have fun while you work. In fact, it's encouraged! We want these Soldiers to look back at annual training as an enjoyable time, not just a time when they earned a paycheck.

Have a good annual training season. I can't wait until I see you in the field and see the storyboards that will feature all the high-speed, safe and exciting training you accomplish.

LCA achieves outstanding results

In my previous position as director of staff for the Illinois Air National Guard, I was given the honor to serve as the federal program coordinator for the Lincoln's Challenge Academy (LCA) program. At that time I had some knowledge of Youth Challenge programs, but over the years I have learned a lot more. Across the nation, more than 7,000 young people drop out of school every day. Section 509 of Title 32, United States Code, provides authority for the Secretary of Defense to use the National Guard to conduct the National Guard Youth Challenge Program. The Governor, through the Adjutant General, hosts the Challenge Program in their respective state. Lincoln's Challenge Academy (LCA) was created in 1993 when the National Guard Youth Challenge Program was launched as a pilot program in 10 states to curb this epidemic of high school dropouts.

Lincoln's Challenge is an intervention based program that employs a quasi-military structure to develop positive attitudes and behaviors in at-risk youth. LCA is a 22-week in-residence GED based program focusing on standardized instruction in eight core objectives. Cadets must pass each of these components to qualify for graduation. During enrollment each cadet is also formally matched with an adult mentor who follows the cadet during a 12-month post-resident period. These mentors are there to provide guidance and support to cadets as they set out to achieve their goals. (Being a mentor for a graduate of LCA is a very fulfilling and rewarding experience. Mentors are needed in all 102 counties across Illinois. If you would like to volunteer or get more information about becoming a mentor please contact LCA at 1-217-892-1334 or visit our website <http://www.ngycp.org/site/state/il/>.)

Two 22-week Challenge classes are scheduled per year with a federal graduation goal for each class of 315 cadets. Since our beginning in 1993, Illinois has graduated more than 12,000 students. Out of the 33 Youth Challenge Programs in 27 states, our Rantoul campus is still the nation's single largest program. Our program has achieved outstanding results: more than 70 percent of our graduates receive their GED, about 10 percent join the military, cadets average a 2 year grade equivalent growth and cadets average 52 hours of community service. The average cost per student for our program is \$16,000. The funding model for the program is 75



Col. William Cobetto

See LCA page 11

Key positions being filled statewide

I would first like to begin by thanking all the participants in this year's Enlisted Promotion System (EPS) board process and special thanks to Master Sgt. Heather Blakeman, Sgt. 1st Class Aangi Mueller, Sgt. Sara Minder and Chief Warrant Officer 2 David Miller for professional conduct of the board and their overall preparation to ensure a successful board.

Through a deliberate effort, this year's board was unique because noncommissioned officers (NCO) from various major subordinate commands and subordinate units were selected by their commands because of being considered the best of the best from their perspective units.

Each board member had an opportunity to evaluate Soldiers using a new electronic system where board packets were viewed electronically. These NCOs also saw firsthand how packets were prepared at the individual and unit levels and how timely preparation of a Soldier's packet is the key to ensuring where that Soldier is placed

on the EPS list. In preparation for future promotion boards, it is important Soldiers understand career management is a shared



CSM Howard Robinson

responsibility between the Soldier and their unit. Units must ensure timely preparation of all packets and Soldiers have reviewed their packets before submission. Soldiers are responsible for ensuring all information is correct and up to date. Many of the packets reviewed were incomplete which included missing documents, poorly written NCOERs with little

or no substance and limited experience in position or time in grade.

These were just a few of the issues that confronted the board as they established parameters to evaluate each Soldier using the total Soldier concept. Each board member was impartial and allowed for a fair and equitable board process.

Through this process our 2012 promotion list will begin to fill key positions across the state. For the success of any process preparation is always the key.

Illinois AOY winners announced

On behalf of our Adjutant General and the Adjutant General-Air, it gives me great pleasure to announce the winners of the 2012 Illinois Air National Guard's Outstanding Airmen of the Year (OAY).

Our Airmen continue to accomplish unbelievable feats in all areas of service. Approximately 68 percent of today's Airmen have joined the military after Sept. 11, 2001, and with an average age of 21 years upon enlistment. These Airmen quickly get a different Air Force

experience than the pre-9/11 force. We have the most combat hardened force that we have ever had. All these factors made this year's OAY selection process one of the more difficult and competitive processes we have seen. All of this year's candidates were outstanding and worthy of earning their nomination which made the selection process extremely difficult. Nominees competed in six categories with the winners of each category moving on to compete at the national level against all Air National Guard winners. Those

winners move on to compete against U.S. Air Force total force Airmen.

The winners are as follows:

Outstanding Airmen: Senior Airman Evan Stevens, 183rd Security Forces Squadron, Outstanding NCO: Tech Sgt. Jacob Curtis, 126th Security Forces Squadron, Outstanding Senior NCO: Master Sgt. Kendrick Henry, 126th Security Forces Squadron, Outstanding First Sergeant: Master Sgt. Austin Dearing, 183rd Mission Support Group, Outstanding Honor Guard:

Master Sgt. James Bryan, 183rd Force Support Squadron, Outstanding Honor Guard Program Manager: Master Sgt. Sarah Jackson, 182nd Force Support Squadron.

These outstanding Airmen made incredible accomplishments from locations ranging from the Middle East to home station. No matter where these fine Airmen were serving, their dedication to duty and commitment to serving citizens made a positive difference and made us proud to call them one of our own.



CCMSgt. Aaron Gatterdam

Theater Gateway prepares for mobilization

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. David Turner
214th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORT DEVINS, Mass. - For the 633rd Theater Gateway, an Illinois Army National Guard unit based in Springfield, training to deploy overseas, the human resources annual training exercise Silver Scimitar 2012 represents important firsts.

Not only will they be the first Guard unit to operate a theater gateway for combat operations, they are the first to use the exercise as validation for their mobilization training.

As a Theater Gateway, the 633rd is one of three Army National Guard units with the mission of processing troops into and out of theater.

Until now, active duty and Army Reserve units have shared the task. The 633rd will be the first such unit from the Guard to take the mission.

To make their training as real and relevant as possible, Soldiers from the 9th Theater Gateway, an active-duty unit based at Fort Campbell, Ky., are instructing the Illinois National Guard Soldiers and serving as subject matter experts. The 9th is currently deployed to Kuwait operating the theater gateway.

"They're bringing their real-world experiences to us and then teaching us everything that's going on in theater right now, making sure we understand every element of the operation before we get there," said Lt. Col. Natalie Northern, 633rd commander.

Active Army units have used Silver Scimitar as an official validation exercise in the past, said Sgt. Maj. Wood Saunders, 9th Theater Gateway. This year, exercise directors will request that First Army validate the exercise for participating U.S. Army Reserve and Army National Guard units, he said.

Northern explained Army National



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Maj. Diane Rogers, 633rd Theater Gateway

Spc. John Tracy of Mason City, a transportation management coordinator with the 633rd Theater Gateway in Springfield, receives training at the annual Silver Scimitar 2012 exercise in Fort Devins, Mass., Jan. 29.

Guard units can spend up to a month or more in mobilization training before deploying. With most of that time focused on Soldier skills, she said, little remains to prepare for the specific mission in theater. During Silver Scimitar, Soldiers practice their mission, and get advice and help from units they replace.

The validation by First Army gets these Soldiers to theater more quickly while the valuable training is fresh.

After an intensive first week of classroom training, 633rd Soldiers set up a simulated theater gateway during the second week. Observer controllers bombard them with events and scenarios that simulate what they'll face on the job.

They process inbound and outbound Soldiers, coordinate their movements,

and provide accountability. To create the experience of working at the highest echelon, they interact with all other units at the exercise.

Sgt. 1st Class Tracey Horner has been with the 633rd for two years, and appreciates the experience she's gaining at Silver Scimitar.

"When you go through the first week it comes out fast and furious. You don't really see how it works together until you actually see the moving parts. Hands on, it's a little bit different," said Horner.

He explained working so closely with his active-duty counterparts is an added benefit, especially as the National Guard shares more missions with other components.

"If I went around right now, I couldn't tell you who were active duty units; who were guard units," he said. "They are all here for the same reason. They get the same training out of it as we do. That's the way it is overseas, too."

Maslar takes command of 183rd Medical Group

Story by U.S. Air Force Maj. Nancie Margetis
183rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD - March unit training assembly at the 183rd Fighter Wing, Springfield, marked another page in the unit's history. This time, the 183rd's Medical Group changed commanders.

The assumption of command for the 183rd Medical Group took place March 3, in the unit's auditorium. Col. Michael Meyer, 183rd Fighter Wing commander, ceremoniously received the medical groups' flag from Col. Patrick Durbin, and handed the flag to Col. Joseph P. Maslar, symbolizing the change of command from Durbin to Maslar.

Durbin, had been the group's commander for more than two years and has been with the 183rd a little more than five years. After 28 years serving his country in the Air National Guard, he is retiring.

Maslar, from Mt. Gilead, Ohio, has been with the unit for seven years and with the Air National Guard for a little more than 20 years. He was an F-16 pilot before becoming a medical doctor.



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Shelly Stark
183rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

(Right) Col. Joseph P. Maslar receives the 183rd Medical Group's squadron flag from Col. Michael Meyer, 183rd Wing commander, during the assumption of command ceremony at the 183rd's auditorium, March 3.

"They're bringing their real-world experiences to us..."

Lt. Col. Natalie Northern, 633rd Theater Gateway commander

2011 Outstanding Airmen winners



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jaime L. Witt, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The winners of the Illinois Air Guard Airmen of the Year were announced Jan. 7 at a ceremony at the Illinois State Military Museum at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. Winners for the different categories are pictured with Chief Master Sgt. Aaron F. Gatterdam, State Command Chief Master Sergeant for the Illinois Air National Guard (far left) and Brig. Gen. James Schroeder, Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard (far right). Winners from left to right: Honor Guard Member of the Year, Master Sgt. James Bryan of Springfield, with the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield; First Sergeant of the Year, Master Sgt. Austin Dearing of Springfield, with the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield; Airman of the Year, Senior Airman Evan Stevens with the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield; Honor Guard Program Manager of the Year, Master Sgt. Sarah Jackson of Pekin with the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria. Not shown is NCO of the Year Tech. Sgt. Jacob Curtis with the 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott AFB and Senior NCO of the Year Master Sgt. Kendrick Henry with the 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott AFB.

SPARTA

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with the Soldier in the turret.

The software is also very flexible. While it can run preset scenarios, Singletary has the somewhat God-like ability to drop in many kinds of enemies, obstacles, helicopters or other interactive set pieces.

The VVT also has a huge catalog of vehicles that it can run; almost every model of humvee, most models of the Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle, unmanned drones, and even a remote-controlled reconnaissance robot, the Talon, are available.

"This is the latest, greatest, most up-to-date system that we can train in," said Singletary. "We can put you into a theater-specific environment."

The control trailer also has benches and a projector, allowing units to conduct an immediate after-action review. Soldiers can watch the playback of the scenario on-screen and even hear their recorded radio traffic, allowing them to see what they did well and what needs improvement.

Sgt. 1st Class Greg Anselmet of Wayne City, a platoon sergeant with Company F, 634th BSB said the real-time cooperation required by the VVT scenarios was great for exposing shortfalls in teamwork for future training. He also said it would be difficult to get this training without the VVT.

In addition to the Virtual Vehicle Trainer, Sparta has virtual marksmanship training for rifles, machine guns and mortars, paintball gear for live maneuvers, and roughly 2,300 acres of open land available for field training exercises. Units interested in learning more about the Virtual Vehicle Trainer may contact Sgt. Ed Singletary at (217) 761-6813.

ILARNG training certifies Soldiers to drive the force

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Jesse Houk
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD - "You call, we haul," is uttered by many transportation company Soldiers throughout the state. Motor transport operators drive the force, hauling rolling stock, ammunition and other vital supplies.

The Illinois National Guard's 129th Regional Training Institute out of the Illinois Military Academy at Camp Lincoln has trained 11 Soldiers from various state and Army components at the Illinois State Police Training Area in Pawnee to be certified as motor transport operators (88M), March 18 to April 1.

The 129th operates, like many other military schools, with a crawl, walk, run course progression. The Soldiers start in the classroom learning everything from hand and arm signals to how to fill out a dispatch form.

Soldiers then move to hands-on practice backing up with a 5-ton cargo truck, a 915 with a tractor trailer and a LHS with

tractor trailer. They also practice driving in convoys and night vision driving.

The main emphasis of the training is to give Soldiers the skills they will need to be successful during future operations.

"The Illinois Military Academy has been described as the best Army school house in the nation," said Col. Thomas Weiss of Williamsville, the director of Training, Operations and Plans at Camp Lincoln. "It's important we support our Military Academy by enrolling in its courses before considering other sources of training."

Soldiers will receive quality training at the 88M course, the instructors said.

"The training that we put together is among the top in the country," said Sgt. 1st Class James R. Griffin of Riverton, a course manager in the 129th. "Back in July we received an accreditation from both United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and the 88M transportation proponent as an Institute of Excellence. We have had several best practices for things we have done, not just out here on the lanes, but also for our work

behind the scenes."

Several Soldiers from out of the state participated in the training as well.

"The quality of the training is good," said Pfc. Jason T. Snyder of Louisville, Ky., who drills with the 203rd Forward Support Company in Elizabethtown, Ky. "I am confident that I will be able to take a lot of these skills back to my unit and on a deployment if needed and will be able to utilize these skills."

"These skills are very applicable to real-mission scenarios," said Heap. "Overseas in theater they do have the line-haul missions. They are going to have to back up under all sorts of missions."

Several of the instructors have performed as 88Ms while in a deployment overseas and know the importance of transportation.

"An 88M is very essential to the overall mission of the Army," said Heap. "Without 88Ms units won't get their supplies. I consider 88M to be the main backbone of the Army because we haul the supplies including the food, water, fuel, ammunition. So without the 88M the

The next 88M Motor Transport Operator Course will be held
July 7, 2012
Contact your unit training NCO to enroll

Army can't run logistically."

Griffin agreed with Heap's assessment.

"I used to have a quote for the guys who would make fun of me for being a truck driver and it says that 'I may not be the pride of the Army, but without me your pride don't ride,'" said Griffin.

There is a great need for 88Ms. While there are more than 1,000 certified 88Ms in the Illinois Army National Guard, there are still 162 88M openings waiting to be filled. With that many openings new 88M Soldiers can expect a fast-tracked career and increased leadership opportunities.



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Jesse Houk, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Sgt. Lacy D. Snedigar III of Greenview, with the 1844th Transportation Company in Quincy, checks the trajectory of his trailer during driver training conducted by the 129th Regional Training Institute out of Camp Lincoln, March 18 at the Illinois State Police Training Area in Pawnee.



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Jesse Houk, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Sgt. 1st Class Dionisio Alvarez of Byron, an instructor with the 129th Regional Training Institute, gives advice to student Spc. Roosevelt T. Williams of Berkley of the 1244th Transportation Company in North Riverside, March 18 at the Illinois State Police Training Area in Pawnee.

St. Louis Rams training center opens doors for Soldiers

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Garibay
33rd IBCT Public Affairs

EARTH CITY, Mo. - Approximately 50 Soldiers from four companies within 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment in Marion played football, received raffled items and met players with the National Football League's St. Louis Rams March 10 at the Russell Training Center in Earth City, Mo.

The retention event aimed to encourage Soldiers to re-enlist in the Illinois National Guard.

The event allowed the Illinois Army National Guard's (ILARNG) Recruiting and Retention Command (RRC) to explain various opportunities the ILARNG has available as they conclude their military service. The presentations included opportunities for promotions and incentives to keep well-trained Soldiers in the ranks of the ILARNG.

The RRC developed a partnership with the Rams and the Chicago Bears to recruit new Soldiers as well as provide Soldiers who are enlisted a unique experience that may have otherwise been impossible to them, said Sgt. 1st Class Todd A. Diskey of Athens, marketing noncommissioned officer with the RRC.

"The intent was to provide meaningful career-progression training to the Soldiers, while also providing a unique opportunity

that wouldn't normally be possible without the Guard," said Diskey. "It's important for the Soldiers to see the system is concerned about their well-being and their leadership cares about them as individuals. This was just a fun way to bring it all together."

The St. Louis Rams and the ILARNG began the partnership about four years ago with the hopes of providing Soldiers a unique opportunity to get a behind-the-scenes look at playing fields and training facilities, while also encouraging their re-enlistment to the extended terms of service, said Diskey.

"These are the kind of events where we come to this facility and meet with players, coaches and assist [the ILARNG] with recruiting and retention events," said Maj. Stephen T. Kendall from Dunlap, regional commander of RRC. "It's an opportunity not done everyday where Soldiers can come back and say 'Hey I got to do something cool because I was in the National Guard.'"

Players like James Leauranitis voluntarily stuck around and took pictures with Soldiers. Additionally, the staff was very hospitable to the needs of Soldiers during their visit, said Kendall.

Soldiers also had the opportunity to meet the Rams' cheerleaders and play a couple games of football on a professional-sized turf field modeled after the actual field at the Edward Jones Stadium.



Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Garibay, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

Sgt. Scott W. Randall of Vandalia with Company B, 2nd Battalion 130th Infantry Regiment in Effingham holds a defensive position against an oncoming rush by opposing players during a touch-football game held at the Russell Training Center of the St. Louis Rams. The Rams organization opened its training facilities March 10 for Soldiers to tour and play a few games on their indoor field. Soldiers also met with players, cheerleaders and staff personnel with the Rams.

"With this partnership, we have it gives us the opportunity to say thank you for all you have done," said Kimberly D. Hale from Columbia, Mo., partnership support coordinator with the Rams. "We are hoping to find unique ways to help the Guard with recruiting and retention."

Hale said the partnership is personal to her. She said members of her family serve in the military and said she hoped to ensure

the Rams organization would provide continued support in the future.

"I learned a lot of valuable information about the National Guard and how to better my future in it," said Pvt. Jose Ochoa of Fairmont City, with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment in West Frankfort. "I would definitely suggest it for anyone who wants to come next year. It was a great event."

"It gives us the opportunity to say thank you for all you have done."

Kimberly D. Hale, partnership support coordinator with the Rams

Illinois Guard Soldiers fight, gain confidence

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Jesse Houk
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD— A group of spectators gathered staring intently, clenching their teeth, pumping their fists in the air, and yelling as they encircle two warriors standing toe to toe; knowing that it will soon be their turn to step inside the circle. Those gathered were cheering for their fellow Soldier to take down his/her attacker by successfully completing a clinch and ending the barrage of punches.

A total of 22 Soldiers from Iowa and Illinois National Guard units came to the Illinois Military Academy (IMA) at Camp Lincoln in Springfield Jan. 23 to 27 to receive instruction in one of the premier combatives locations in the country. The goal is to become level one certified within the Modern Army Combatives Program.

“We were the first National Guard site to hold a level-three combatives program class outside of United States Army Combatives School (USACS) at Fort Benning, Ga.,” said Staff Sgt. Thomas A. Luca of Carrollton with 935th Aviation Support Battalion in Chicago, working for the Modern Army Combatives Program. “No other National Guard unit has ever done that. I know not too many Regional Training Institutes have a combatives program.”

The Illinois Army National Guard Modern Army Combatives Program is conducted at the IMA and can provide housing, food, and combatives training at one site. In addition to the first-class facilities, the instructors, which include Staff Sgt. Steven Owen of Moline, Staff Sgt. Nick Grant of Caseyville, Sgt. First Class Robert Fehrholz of Springfield, Staff Sgt. Jae Russell of Springfield, Staff Sgt. Josh Lipa of Mount Zion, Sgt. Bernard Dickneite of Mount Vernon and Luca. Many of these Soldiers are award winning and have won several combatives tournaments themselves.

The Modern Army Combatives Program is in response to the ever-changing environment that Soldiers have found themselves in while in combat.

“We have found through reports that Soldiers go into a room and if their weapon misfires they don’t know what to do,” said Luca. “Or sometimes they are doing detainee operations and the detainee tries to go after them and they are not real sure what to do.”

Life on the battlefield changes, which means techniques used by our military must adapt.

“The old hand-to-hand that we used to learn is not



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Jesse Houk, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Staff Sgt. Thomas A. Luca of Carrollton, lands an uppercut to a student as Sgt. Bernard Dickneite of Mount Vernon, looks on during the clinch portion of the level-one training of the Modern Army Combatives Program, Jan. 25 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

conducive to what is going on in the battlefield,” said Fehrholz, a recruiter in the Recruiting and Retention Command and combatives instructor. “We are trying to teach them how to keep someone controlled, detain them, and get a dominant body position on them so they can hold them until backup shows up.”

This has become such an important initiative that the Army has made learning it mandatory.

“The Army demands that there will be a level-one certified Soldier in each platoon, one level- two certified Soldier in each company, one level-three certified Soldier in each battalion, and one level-four certified Soldier in each brigade,” said Luca. “It’s a pyramid training structure that guarantees that Soldiers are getting trained on combatives.”

With that structure in place the Army can validate that collective learning is taking place. This training ensures

that each Soldier can handle themselves in the midst of combat; ultimately instilling confidence.

“One of the things this combatives program does is instill confidence in Soldier; especially those who have never been punched or done ground grappling,” said Luca. “They have a sense of confidence when they come into those situations. They know that, in the instance where this might happen, they have these skills to rely on and are not just fighting blind.”

“It did give me confidence,” said Spc. Katie A. Kastel of Bourbonnais with Company E, 634th Brigade Support Battalion in Joliet. “I had all these big instructors telling me even though I was little that I did a really good job. It makes me want to go back to my unit and teach others what I learned. I encourage other smaller people out there not to be afraid. I think it’s something every Soldier needs to know.”

129th RTI earns highest accreditation level possible



Many courses are taught within the 129th Regional Training Institute in Springfield, including transportation, military police, signal, field artillery, combatives and officer candidate school.

For more information call
217-761-1226

Story by U.S. Army 1st Lt. April Hawes
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD —After months of preparation and an intensive inspection, the Illinois Army National Guard’s 129th Regional Training Institute (RTI) in Springfield was awarded a rating as an “Institution of Excellence” by U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). This is the highest accreditation level possible.

In the past, individual proponents or courses could be accredited, but this is the first time the entire 129th RTI was accredited as an institution.

“We are ensuring what we do is to provide the best experience for the students,” said Col. Richard Hayes of Buffalo Grove, 129th RTI commander. “This rating demonstrates we are in the league of the best of the best.”

RTI staff started preparations for this inspection in July 2010. Hayes said his staff looked across the RTI command and leadership along with Soldier and leader development

programs to prepare. Some of the staff also travelled to shadow different states that had been through similar inspections.

For example, Capt. Kira Crocker of Springfield, 129th RTI Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment commander, travelled to California to ask questions and get pointers on the accreditation process.

“I learned a lot more than what is in the regulations and actually had that ‘ah ha’ moment,” she said.

Hayes said he is proud of Crocker and his entire staff who all worked hard to prepare for the inspection. He said this hard work and excellence has led the 129th RTI to stand out not only in the National Guard and Reserve component, but also to the Active Component.

He explained, in the past, only National Guard and reserve institutions taught Guard and reserve Soldiers.

Now, with the advent of the One Army School System, active duty Soldiers attend courses taught by National Guard and reserve component institutions.

661st clears Salang Pass in Afghanistan

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Jared Crain
Task Force Muleskinne

PARWAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan — Record snow falls in Afghanistan have resulted in several fatal avalanches and left some vital travel corridors blocked by tons of snow. One of those critical routes, the Salang Pass, which connects northern and southern Afghanistan, became nearly unusable.

Local workers from the Ministry of Public Works already working to alleviate the effects of the natural disaster were joined by the 661st Engineer Company of the Illinois National Guard to clear the Salang Pass, which connects northern and southern Afghanistan.

U.S. Army Sgt. Shawn Carpenter, the unit’s quick reaction force non-commissioned officer in charge, stated that before their arrival the road was marginally passable with only one lane open.

After assessing the conditions and consulting with Afghan Lt. Gen. Mohammad Rajab, the Minister of Public Works for the Salang Pass, it was determined the Guardsmen could best assist by clearing 10 to 15 miles of

the road to open a second lane of traffic.

“The locals seemed agreeable to working with us and very happy that we were able to help,” said U.S. Army 1st Lt. Amanda Emerson, a platoon leader for the 661st area clearance platoon.

The combined removal effort of the engineers’ trucks and Afghan workers allowed the joint team to relieve much of the congestion caused by the heavy snowfall, added Carpenter.

“The Afghan workers were very proficient at removing the snow and operating their equipment which made our job a lot easier,” Carpenter said.

The combined effort permitted the Illinois Soldiers to pitch in elsewhere along the route, digging out vehicles from the side of the road and clearing areas for local shopkeepers to return to their businesses.

“It made me feel good knowing that we are doing something good for locals and rewarding to hear some of them say that they were happy to see us there,” said Carpenter.

“If they need our help again, we would be more than happy to assist them,” Emerson said.



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jared Crain, Task Force Muleskinne

Members of the 661st Engineer Company partner with the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Works to remove snow from Highway 1 near the Salang Pass, which connects northern and southern Afghanistan, March 14.

Polish bonds remain strong during BEST A9

Story by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Matthew Morris and 1st Lt. Nico Smith, Illinois Army National Guard BEST A9

WEDRYZN, Poland - The weather was frigid but not unfamiliar to the Illinois Soldiers with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Bilateral Embedded Support Team (BEST) A9 who arrived in Poland Feb. 3. The BEST A9 arrived in Wedryzn, Poland where they assisted the Polish 6th Airborne Brigade certify its two battalion task forces prior to their deployment to Afghanistan.

"I'm very impressed with the trust placed in their lower enlisted to do the right thing and the mentality they have

while they conduct training," said Sgt. 1st Class William Ingles of Steeleville, with BEST A9. "Their attitude is not 'why are we training' but 'when.' The design is very practical and a lot of fun to watch."

The primary focus of the Illinois National Guard Soldiers' training the past few weeks was to learn the customs and leadership style of their Polish counterparts.

This deployment is part of the State Partnership Program (SPP), which was created in 1993 to assist the Polish government and military transition into NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union. Co-deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan with Polish Forces began in 2003 where the partnership evolved from an advisory

role to an enabler of warfighting capacities.

The work schedule also allows time for the team to experience Polish culture and history. Illinois Soldiers have travelled to Ostwald, an area once occupied by Germany, to visit one part of an enormous structure of bunkers that spans from the Baltic Sea heading south underground for 400 kilometers. They also travelled to Sulecin, a small town a couple kilometers away from the training base.

With few English speaking natives, the team relies heavily on Sgt. Arthur Boruch of Orland Park, the only fluent Polish speaker on the team.

"It's been an interesting and challenging experience communicating the needs of 17

people," he said. "It can get exhausting but overall it's been great showing the guys the Polish culture I've known from growing up in a Polish speaking household."

The recent training was marked by a gesture of unity Feb. 17 when Brig. Gen. Bogdan Tworkowski, Commander of the Polish 6th Airborne Brigade, placed the unit's shoulder patch on each member of the BEST team while Col. Troy Phillips of Philo, BEST A9 commander, presented the Illinois colors to fly alongside the Polish National Flag.

"We are one team, one unit, and we are very glad to have the BEST team on board. I am sure that our efforts together will result in success," Tworkowski said.



Photo by Lt. Katarzyna Szal



Photo by Sgt. Mariusz Dulewicz

Col. Troy Phillips of Philo, and fellow BEST A9 Soldiers present the Illinois flag to their Polish counterpart, Brig. Gen. Bogdan Tworkowski, Feb. 17 in Poland before deploying together to Afghanistan. This deployment is part of the State Partnership Program, which was created in 1993.

Sgt. 1st Class William Ingles of Steeleville and Sgt. Arthur Boruch of Orland Park, conduct a buddy team shooting exercise with the Beryl Assault Rifle in Wedryzn, Poland, during mobilization training in February.

Special Forces holds readiness assessment Next assessment set for Sept. 15 to 16 in Marseilles



Photos by U.S. Army Spc. Jason Dorsey, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Chicago invited 36 Soldiers from units throughout the country to a Special Forces readiness assessment March 17 and 18 at the Marseilles Training Center in Marseilles. The assessment is the first of many initial tests in the process of becoming a member of the U.S. Special Forces Group. First, an assessment of a candidate's physical and mental capacity is tested with numerous drills and exercises. Upon successful completion of the first phase, candidates will continue to the Special Forces Assessment Selection course. Eight of the 36 Soldiers were recommended to advance to the Special Forces Assessment Selection course.

Pre-retirement briefing for M-day Soldiers

Intended for Soldiers with 18 or more years of creditable service as of August 31, 2011

Spouses are welcome and encouraged to attend

Briefings include:
TRICARE medical and dental options
Survivor Benefit Plan
ID cards/DEERS
Veterans Affairs
Education benefits and more

Next briefing is July 21 in Marion

Call 217-761-3009 for more information

Illinois competes at All Army Small Arms Championship

Story by U.S. Army Capt. Dustin Cammack
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois Army National Guard's Small Arms Team competed in the 2012 U.S. All Army Small Arms Championship at Fort Benning, Ga., March 1 to 10.

The five member team placed 8th out of 335 competitors – 55 teams total – and was the 4th ranked Army National Guard Team in the competition. The team took 1st place overall in the Rifle Team championship, and earned a total of 14 top three placements.

“As a team, this year’s competition was not as dramatic as last year, but we did very well in the individual competitions,” said team member Sgt. First Class David Perdew of Astoria.

Among the multiple awards the Illinois team won, two awards stand out in distinction. Staff Sgt. Tracy Mix of Marseilles earned the Distinguished Rifle Shot Badge, while Sgt. First Class Perdew earned the Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge. Perdew also earned the Silver Excellence in Rifle Competition Badge.

“The Distinguished Rifleman Badge was established in 1887, and the Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge in 1903,” said Perdew. “Only about 1600 servicemembers have either of them – it is a very distinguished and sought after award.”

The awards are presented to individuals who have earned 30 credit points while firing a service rifle or a service pistol in qualifying Excellence-in-Competition (EIC) matches.

Having precedence above the standard qualification badges, these awards are the most coveted marksmanship badges that can be earned and worn on a military



Photo submitted by U.S. Army Sgt. Terry Pody, 135th Chemical Company

Illinois National Guard small arms competition team – Sgt Terry Pody of Machesney Park, Chief Warrant Officer (2) Ryan Landon of Creal Springs, Staff Sgt. Tracy Mix of Marseilles, and Sgt. First Class David Perdew of Astoria – pose with the U.S. Army Service Rifle Team Trophy at Fort Benning, Ga., Mar. 10. The team took 1st place overall in the Rifle Team championship, and earned a total of 14 top three placements overall. The team member's names will be engraved on the trophy and displayed at the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit Headquarters. Not pictured, Sgt. Jeffrey Bugger of Athens.

uniform by Soldiers.

The competition is open to Soldiers of any rank and formation across the Army, including West Point and ROTC cadets, Army Reservists and National Guardsmen.

During the week-long event, servicemen and women fire military issued M-16/M-4

rifles at distances between 25 and 500 yards, and the M-9 pistol between seven and 35 yards on a variety of courses. They also compete in a combined-arms match – employing the rifle, pistol and shotgun in a number of different stages of fire.

The Illinois Team is comprised of Sgt

Terry Pody of Machesney Park (team coach), Chief Warrant Officer (2) Ryan Landon of Creal Springs, Staff Sgt. Tracy Mix of Marseilles, Sgt. First Class David Perdew of Astoria, and Sgt. Jeffrey Bugger of Athens.

Complete team results – Sgt. First Class David Perdew, HHD 44th Chem. Bn, Macomb: 1st Place U.S. Army Overall Small Arms Individual Champion, Open Class; 1st Place U.S. Army Service Pistol Champion, Open Class; 3rd Place U.S. Army Service Rifle Champion, Open Class; 2nd Place Match 1 (Pistol), Open Class; 1st Place, Match 3 (Pistol), Open Class; 2nd Place, Match 8 (Rifle), Open Class; 8 Pistol EIC Points, earning the Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge; 8 Rifle EIC Points, earning the Silver EIC Badge.

Staff Sgt. Tracy Mix, Co. A 33rd BSTB, Marseilles: 3rd Place U.S. Army Overall Small Arms Individual Champion, Open Class; 3rd Place U.S. Army Service Pistol Champion, Open Class; 1st Place U.S. Army Service Rifle Champion, Open Class; 1st Place, Match 5 (Pistol) Open Class; 1st Place, Match 7, (Rifle) Open Class; 8 Rifle EIC Points, earning the Distinguished Rifle Shot Badge; 6 Pistol EIC Points.

Chief Warrant Officer (2) Ryan Landon, 3637th FSMC, Springfield: 1st Place Match 7 (Rifle), Novice Class; 6th Place U.S. Army Service Rifle Championship, Novice Class; 8 Rifle EIC Points.

Sgt. Jeffrey Bugger, 1844th Trans. Co., Quincy: 2nd Place, Match 1 (Pistol) Novice Class; 3rd Place, Match 5 (Pistol) Novice Class; 4th Place U.S. Army Service Pistol Championship, Novice Class; 8 Pistol EIC Points.

Sgt Terry Pody (team coach), 135th Chem. Co., Machesney Park: 6 Rifle EIC Points.

Soldier develops online fitness tracking tool

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jaime L. Witt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

CHICAGO - Spring marks the beginning of the traditional Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) season. Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers now have a new tool to help track their personal progress, and their Soldiers, thanks to one Noncommissioned officer with the 135th Chemical Company in Machesney Park.



Sgt. Daniel Pitariu

Sgt. Daniel Pitariu of Sibiu, Romania, launched his website, www.apft-mentor.com, April 1, 2011. The 28-year-old wheeled vehicle mechanic, who now lives in Wheaton, said he initially wanted to increase his company’s overall APFT scores.

“My goal with this site is to create a virtual meeting place for Soldiers and NCOs, and to provide all the tools and information necessary for NCOs to mentor Soldiers toward improving their fitness,” he said.

Pitariu, who works as a civilian computer programmer, created the tracking website after Sgt. 1st Class Adam Abdul of Rockford, platoon sergeant with the 135th, developed a physical training plan for their unit. The plan focused on a well-rounded approach to improve APFT scores, while holding the entire unit accountable for its APFT failures. Although the plan sparked the creation of the website, Abdul credits Pitariu with the website’s successful launch.

“Sgt. Pitariu deserves the credit for the development of this program,” he said. “I did what I could to advance it through the leadership and monitor Soldiers’ progress.”

Pitariu said he developed the website with a leader’s needs in mind. He intended the website to be a place for NCOs to mentor their Soldiers while giving Soldiers a place to log daily workouts and to get information on ways to improve fitness.”

The site is designed to make it easy for leaders to communicate with all their Soldiers on a daily basis,” Pitariu said. “It can take as little as five to 10 minutes for NCOs to log their own physical training, check their Soldiers’ workouts and send each one a short message, which Soldiers receive as an email.”

It commits NCOs to helping their Soldiers be physically fit and allows them to monitor their progress outside of monthly drill days.

“It is the NCO’s job to make sure his Soldiers are passing the APFT, and that takes a lot of time during the month if it is going to be accomplished.”

Sgt. 1st Class Eleuterio Medina of Decatur, motor sergeant with the 135th, said the website helps Soldiers and their leaders make physical fitness a priority.

“It most definitely, if utilized correctly, will give Soldiers and leadership a sense of ownership of their own progression for their life, health, and well being,” he said. “It is kind of hard to stay on top of these issues when you can only interact with your Soldiers one weekend a month.”

As the website is still fairly new, only about 250 Soldiers have used it so far, but Pitariu said usage is increasing. The website was mentioned at a recent senior leader conference, which influenced more first sergeants to implement it as a tool to improve their companies’ APFT scores. Because the website is still fairly new, Pitariu said it is difficult to see if the website has contributed to improved APFT scores.

First Sgt. Richard T. Carroll of Mattoon, with the 233rd Military Police Company in Springfield, uses the website heavily.

“I saw this as an absolute opportunity for my NCOs to be able to track their Soldiers that are struggling with physical training,” he said.

Carroll recently implemented unit-wide use of the website, first educating his NCOs on mentoring Soldiers who struggle with physical fitness. Although he mandated only the APFT failures to track their workouts on the website, he encouraged everyone to use it. Carroll said the website enhances the ability of his NCOs to track daily progress and to keep their Soldiers accountable.

“It puts it into the lap of the Soldiers to log their workouts. The mentors can see almost a real-time feed of what the Soldiers are doing to improve APFT scores,” he said.

Carroll said NCOs can use the data logged on the website to gauge what their Soldiers are doing. This enables NCOs to tailor their workouts to address specific APFT needs, in addition to promoting overall health.

Although Pitariu designed the website for leadership, he also kept Soldiers’ needs in mind. Soldiers are able to view their peers’ workouts, ask fitness-related questions on the forum, and gain motivation from others.

“I think many Soldiers feel like they are on their own

during the month between drills,” Pitariu said. “I hope this site gives Soldiers a place to more easily stay connected to their peers and mentors.”

Carroll said his unit is still in the preliminary stage of using the website, but knows the signs of the website’s effectiveness will come once his unit completes the APFT.

“The big proof is going to be at the next APFT to see if we’ve improved scores,” he said. “If we haven’t, that’s fine, what we can do is look at it.”

Carroll said the feedback from the website will allow his NCOs to assist Soldiers in changing their daily workouts to be more effective.

“We see them that one weekend a month and that’s just not enough to fix that kind of problem,” he said. “This gives us that one tool to watch them while they’re at home, while we’re separated for that whole month, almost real-time and see what kind of workouts they’re doing daily and keep track of it.”

Pitariu hopes to implement new features in the future to encourage greater usage and enhance physical fitness improvement, including Smartphone applications, food logging, a way for leaders to develop progress reports, and integration with social media websites.



Photo illustration submitted by U.S. Army Sgt. Daniel Pitariu
135th Chemical Company

Sgt. Daniel Pitariu of Sibiu, Romania, launched his website, www.apft-mentor.com, April 1, 2011. The website is designed to motivate Soldiers to maintain and improve their physical training and Army physical fitness test scores.

Army Guard commissions 15 new lieutenants

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Cassidy L. Snyder
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD – Fifteen Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers were commissioned as second lieutenants during the winter accelerated Officer Candidate School (OCS) graduation ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy March 25 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

“This is the largest accelerated class we’ve graduated in years,” said Maj. Benjamin Shakman of Springfield, with the 129th Regional Training Institute at Camp Lincoln.

Brig. Gen. Johnny R. Miller, deputy commander of the Illinois Army National Guard was the guest speaker.

“You are the standard and the leader,” said Miller. “Don’t ever forget the fundamentals because they will serve you the rest of your career.”

Commissioning requires more than 500 hours of classroom and field instruction over a two-month period. Candidates are evaluated on leadership abilities and academics. Candidates must also successfully complete physical and mental tasks, such as road marches, tactical exercises and counseling sessions from the cadre.

Second Lt. Danny Mullane of Chicago, graduated from Western Washington University with a bachelor’s degree in human services and has spent 20 years in the field of social services. She entered the Illinois Army National Guard in January 2011 and is joining the 135th Chemical Company in Machesney Park.

“I think entering later in life was an advantage,” said Mullane. “Having the life experiences, I could see the big picture and focus on my goal.”

Each new lieutenant’s gold bars were pinned on by family members, friends and fellow Soldiers. Following the pinning, the officer received his or her first salute from a subordinate of his or her choosing.



Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Cassidy L. Snyder
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

(Left to right) Sgt. John Meyer of Springfield, with Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield pins his brother, 2nd Lt. Joshua Meyer of Springfield, with the 44th Chemical Battalion in Macomb, along with his brother Spc. Michael Meyer of Springfield, with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment in Litchfield during the Officer Candidate School graduation at the Illinois Military Academy March 25 in Springfield.

2nd Lt. Joshua Meyer of Springfield was pinned by his two brothers who are both serving in the Illinois Army National Guard and received his first salute from his sister, formerly a specialist in the Illinois Army Guard.

“I was motivated to join the Army and enroll in OCS based on my family roots in the Army,” said Meyer. “The positive experiences they have had during their careers

were inspiring to me.”

At the conclusion of the ceremony, 2,160 officers will have commissioned from the 129th.

The 15 newly commissioned officers are:

- 2nd Lt. Charles Auer of Peoria, with the 106th Aviation Regiment in Peoria
- 2nd Lt. Dale Boughton of Sycamore, with Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery in Sycamore
- 2nd Lt. James Brock of Shorewood, with Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery in Chicago
- 2nd Lt. Matthew Carlson of Chicago, with Company B, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment in Elgin
- 2nd Lt. Brian Fox of Hanover Park, with Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery in Galesburg
- 2nd Lt. Jorge Franch of Naperville, with the 1744th Transportation Company in Robbins
- 2nd Lt. Jason Hitch of Normal, with the Forward Support Company, 766th Engineer Battalion in Decatur
- 2nd Lt. Nathaniel Jungheim of Chicago, with the 1244th Transportation Company in North Riverside
- 2nd Lt. Joshua Mang of Hoffman Estates, with Company B, 405th Brigade Support Battalion in Crestwood
- 2nd Lt. Matthew Mechenes of Willowbrook, with the 433rd Signal Company in Robbins
- 2nd Lt. Joshua Meyer of Springfield, with the 444th Chemical Company in Galesburg
- 2nd Lt. Danny Mullane of Chicago, with the 135th Chemical Company in Machesney Park
- 2nd Lt. Aaron Reiterman of Springfield, with the 3637th Maintenance Company in Springfield
- 2nd Lt. Phillip Sanders of Clinton, with the 445th Chemical Company in Shiloh
- 2nd Lt. Michael Siudut of Hoffman Estates, with the 1744th Transportation Company in Crestwood

Soldier completes Air Assault School

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Jeffrey Granda
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

AURORA - Leaving for Air Assault School in the middle of winter may not sound like an ideal experience, but it’s just the kind of challenge Pfc. Aendri Decker of Aurora enjoys.

Assigned to Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment in Aurora, Decker enlisted into the Illinois Army National Guard in 2011 and has served as a police officer working in his community since 2009.

“Being a police officer reminds me of the military,” Decker said. “It’s rewarding and there’s a lot of freedom in it.”

Decker graduated Initial Entry Training or Basic Training as the distinguished honor graduate and achieved a score of 280 on the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). These accomplishments made him eligible to attend Air Assault School through a new program for Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers. He attended class Air Assault class 004-12 on Jan. 30 and graduated Feb. 10.

“When I first learned there was a chance I could attend Air Assault School, I was ecstatic. I did all I could to make sure I could attend,” said Decker. “My first thoughts were about how amazing it would be to learn how to repel out of helicopters. As I learned a little bit more about all the different parts of the school, I thought that it was going to be a great opportunity to learn some practical skills for a deployment.”

Decker was chosen because he has exceeded the standards.

“Pfc. Decker met all the criteria for air assault training – a superior APFT score, distinguished honor graduate, the ability to complete an obstacle course and finish a 12-mile road march in three hours or less,” said Staff Sgt. Brandon Patchett of Oaklawn, Troop C training non commissioned officer-in-charge. “He was chosen because he demonstrates proficiency and enthusiasm in everything he does. He has also been selected to be moved to the troop’s sniper section.”

Held at the National Guard Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning, Ga., Air Assault School is a 10-day course starting with Day Zero followed by three phases of rigorous training.

Day Zero includes a physical fitness test and obstacle course designed to assess a Soldier’s upper body strength, agility, endurance, confidence and ability to perform at heights without displaying fear or distress. These tests are critical in determining if students will be able to complete Air Assault School without becoming a safety risk during the demanding training.

In the remaining three phases, Soldiers are trained on the various types of missions performed by rotary wing



Photo submitted by Lightning Graphics, Columbus, Ga.

Pfc. Aendri Decker of Aurora practices the “three breaks” repelling drill at Air Assault School held at the Army National Guard Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning, Ga.

aircraft including aero-medical evacuation procedures, aircraft safety, principles and techniques of combat assaults, rappelling techniques, and sling-load operations.

“It was a great experience – it really matched my expectations,” said Decker. “It was both mentally and physically challenging. It was fast paced, but I didn’t let up. The obstacle courses and physical training definitely tested my limits.”

Out of 302 students in Decker’s class, only 191 successfully completed the air assault training.

“I can’t think of any better opportunity than to get this training,” Decker said. “Being familiar with air assault techniques and sling load procedures will help my fellow Soldiers, especially if I become a helicopter pilot. This school will only help to make me a more intelligent, experienced and better Soldier.”

Beck leads 33rd IBCT as new brigade CSM

Story by U.S. Army Pfc. Alisha D. Grezlik
33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

CHAMPAIGN – Soldiers with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), Headquarters and Headquarters Company in Urbana, held the brigade’s change of responsibility ceremony Jan. 7 at the Champaign Armory.

Soldiers witnessed outgoing brigade Command Sgt. Maj. Mark W. Bowman, of Plainfield, end his assignment as the brigade’s highest enlisted Soldier and welcomed Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy E. Beck, of Eagle, Wis., from Headquarters and Headquarters Troop 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment.

Bowman assumed responsibility of the 33rd IBCT in September 2007 and deployed with the brigade to Afghanistan in 2008, acting as both Task Force Phoenix command sergeant major and the 33rd IBCT command sergeant major.

“It has been an honor serving under the 33rd,” said Bowman. “I have enjoyed watching the brigade grow and believe we have the best Soldiers. I work for them. They don’t work for me. I am very proud of the brigade and will miss the Soldiers and their families.”

Bowman takes on a new responsibility serving as the Illinois land component command sergeant major, under Maj. Gen. Dennis L. Celletti, of Springfield, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard.

Beck said he was honored to take the position.

“I look forward to representing a brigade and being a role model for all the Soldiers,” said Beck. “We all have one mission and one goal and being together in this unit is not an obligation, but a place we all want to be.”



Photo by U.S. Army Pfc. Alisha D. Grezlik
33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs

(Left to right) Col. Paul C. Hastings of St. Charles, the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team commander, hands the noncommissioned officer sword to Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy Beck of Eagle, Wis. Beck assumes responsibility of the brigade continuing a 38-year military career.

126th Security Forces receives award

Story by U.S. Air Force Maj. Jennifer C. Howsare
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE – The 126th Security Forces Squadron (SFS) at Scott Air Force Base was awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for exceptionally meritorious service from Aug. 1, 2009 through Sept. 30, 2011.

During this period, the 126 SFS provided global coverage to continue the war fighting effort. Through numerous deployments and home-station efforts, the squadron embodied the Total Force concept.

“Our Security Forces Squadron continues to perform in an outstanding fashion,” said Col. Rick Nyalka, of Marine, 126th Mission Support Group commander. “Whether it is at Scott Air Force Base or while deployed, they always perform at the highest levels. I am very proud of our Security Forces members. They have demonstrated that they are truly deserving of this prestigious award!”

Members also served as true citizen-Airmen by volunteering countless hours in both local and deployed communities. In addition, squadron members were recognized with awards for home-station and deployment excellence.

“I could not be more proud of the men and women of the 126th Security Forces Squadron,” said Lt. Col. John Bryk, of Mokena, 126th Security Forces Squadron commander. “This is the finest group of non-commissioned officers and Airmen that I have had the opportunity to serve with during my 28-year career in the Air National Guard. The dedication and commitment they display on a daily basis is amazing.”

In addition to deployments and community support, the squadron was recognized during each of its most recent compliance and readiness inspections. The squadron received an excellent rating with zero findings during the Aug. 2009 Air Mobility Command Unit Compliance Inspection. Additionally, the squadron was most recently rated outstanding for providing flawless security during a June 2011 Nuclear Operational Readiness Inspection.

The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award was authorized by Department of the Air Force General Order 1, Jan. 6, 1954. It is awarded by the Secretary of the Air Force to units which are distinguished by exceptionally meritorious service or outstanding achievement that clearly sets the unit above and apart from similar units.

The services include: performance of exceptionally meritorious service, accomplishment of a specific outstanding achievement of national or international significance, combat operations against an armed enemy of the United States, or military operations involving conflict with or exposure to hostile actions by an opposing foreign force.

“The dedication and commitment they display on a daily basis is amazing.”

Lt. Col. John Bryk, 126th Security Forces Squadron commander



U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Ken Stephens, 126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

Airman 1st Class Leon Sanchez, 126th Security Forces Squadron security team member, holds his daughter, Tianna, after arriving back home from a six-month deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

244th deploys overseas

Story by Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

CHICAGO – Family, friends and fellow Soldiers said goodbye to the 16 member 244th Army Liaison Team (ALT) on March 8 at the North Riverside National Guard armory in North Riverside.

The 244th ALT deployed two different teams that will work as border coordination centers. They will work with their Afghan and Pakistani counterparts to decrease cross border incidents.

The Soldiers will train for a brief time at Camp Shelby, Miss., before deploying to Afghanistan for approximately nine months in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

There are only 11 units encompassing approximately 300 Soldiers with similar missions across the Army National Guard, Army Reserves and Active Duty forces. Their typical mission is to provide liaison capability to the Army Forces/Joint Task Force commander with major subordinate commands, Allied Coalition Force Commands Joint Task Force and other U.S. services.

The 244th has been part of the Illinois Army National Guard since 2000. During its most recent deployment to Iraq in 2006, Soldiers from the 244th were assigned to various agencies within the Iraq government. Members of the unit were liaison officers inside of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, Iraqi National Joint Operations Center and the Prime Minister’s Situation Room. Their job was to ensure the Strategic Operations Center of the Multi-National Forces-Iraq Headquarters, commanded by Gen. George Casey, had the same information and intelligence that was being passed on to the newly elected Iraqi government.

The unit will be mobilized for approximately one year, returning home in the winter of 2013.



Photo by U.S. Army Capt. Dustin Cammack
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Members of the 244th Army Liaison Team stand in formation at their deployment ceremony at the North Riverside National Guard armory in North Riverside, March 8. The 16-member unit deployed two different teams that will work as border coordination centers along the Afghan and Pakistani border.

Providing vital communications during an emergency

Story by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Dustin Clary and Maj. Jennifer C. Howsare
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE - Airmen assigned to the 126th Air Refueling Wing Communications Flight (CF) at Scott AFB keep the lines of communication open during an emergency.

The Contingency Response Communications System (CRCS) is one piece of next generation equipment in the 126th CF’s arsenal in the battle for reliable emergency communications. The CRCS is an Internet Protocol based, universal solution that allows first responders to communicate and exchange information with radio interoperability, live streaming video, wireless Internet, and voice over IP (VoIP) services.

Janet Napolitano, the Secretary of Homeland Security, said the next generation emergency communications equipment must be mobile, interoperable and easily operated and the CRCS fits the bill. The CRCS is mobile because all of its equipment is kept in a secure container attached to the rear of a Humvee. The equipment is capable of wireless Internet transmissions to make phone calls from remote areas. A surveillance camera attached to the exterior allows commanders to assess the scene and make decision using a real-time picture.

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Christopher Kruse of O’Fallon, Ill., with the 126th CF oversees CRCS training for CF personnel. His most recent class was conducted during the unit’s March Unit Training Assembly, and focused on set-up and initial start up procedures. Kruse said the system is easily set up within 30 minutes. Once set up is complete



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Franklin Hayes
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

Tech. Sgt. Brent Trame of Trenton, a client system technician with the 126th Communications Flight at Scott AFB, attaches cabling to a video camera March 3. The camera is part of a Contingency Response Communications System.

the CRCS allows emergency first responders to quickly communicate with military commanders through phone or Internet. This quick communication drastically decreases the gap between the front lines of a disaster to the critical decision-making authorities. Real-time decisions become possible and emergency/disaster relief efforts are precisely directed when and where they are needed.



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Ken Stephens
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

Tech. Sgt. Chris Kruse of O’Fallon, the wireless transmissions manager for the 126th Communications Flight at Scott AFB, raises an external video camera March 1.

Understanding your educational benefits

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jaime L. Witt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois National Guard (ILNG) is well-known for providing outstanding educational benefits to Soldiers and Airmen, but understanding what is available can sometimes overwhelm servicemembers.

All Soldiers and Airmen who serve in the National Guard have basic educational incentives available, said Capt. Mark Bermel of Springfield, state education officer for the Illinois National Guard.

“Basic benefits afforded to Soldiers and Airmen in the National Guard is the Illinois National Guard Grant, the Chapter 1606 GI Bill (MGIB-SR) through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA). The ILNG also provides funding for students to take college level examination program tests. The only benefit not offered to Air National Guardsmen is FTA,” said Bermel.

The ILNG Grant covers up to 120 units or semester hours of tuition and some fees at Illinois public universities and community colleges. It may be used at any time while a servicemember is still in uniform, said Bermel. In order to be eligible for the ILNG Grant, a Soldier or Airman must have at least one year of satisfactory performance from his or her enlistment date.

“MGIB-SR pays a monthly stipend to a student during the time in which he or she is attending class, for a total of 36 months. In order to be eligible, a servicemember must have a high school diploma or equivalent, completed initial entry training and contracted for a six-year obligation,” said Bermel.

According to the VA, a servicemember has 14 years after they complete advanced individual training to use the MGIB-SR.

“FTA is a federal benefit which may be used at any time while a servicemember is in uniform. It pays up to \$250 per semester hour with a limit of \$4,500 per fiscal year,” said Bermel.

Servicemembers who deployed overseas have additional benefits available to them, Bermel said. These Soldiers and Airmen are eligible to use the Illinois Veteran Grant (IVG), the Chapter 1607 GI Bill (REAP), and the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

The IVG is similar to the National Guard Grant; it covers tuition and certain fees at participating Illinois public institutions. Additionally, the IVG can be used once the servicemember leaves the National Guard. According to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), in order to be eligible, a servicemember must fulfill residency requirements and have served one year of active duty, or deployed in support of contingency operations.

REAP is the same as the MGIB-SR except it pays at a higher rate, which is prorated based on length of deployment. According to the VA, in order to be eligible for REAP a servicemember must have been activated after



Photo illustration by Sgt. Zachary Zimmerman
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

All Soldiers and Airmen who serve in the Illinois National Guard have basic educational incentives available. Servicemembers can contact the Education Office for additional help.

Sept. 11, 2001, in support of contingency operations.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is a new educational benefit for servicemembers who served on active duty after Sept. 11, 2001. According to the VA, the Post 9/11 GI Bill provides tuition and fees to any institution, a monthly housing allowance and a yearly stipend of up to \$1,000 for books and supplies. The servicemember receives a percentage of the benefits based on the length of active federal service.

Bermel said traditional degree-seeking students are not the only ones to benefit from educational incentives. Soldiers and Airmen acquiring education through vocational programs can use GI Bill benefits. Bermel said the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs' Educational Program Directory hosts a list of programs approved to receive GI Bill benefits (<https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/benefits/Pages/educational-programs-directory.aspx>).

Bermel said using benefits can be simple and requires little more than Internet access. In order to use benefits during a specific school year, an individual must submit online applications through self-service pages. Each benefit has its own due date for applications.

According to the GoArmyEd website, FTA must be requested prior to the course start date. According to ISAC, tuition grants must be requested by Oct. 1 of the academic year for which the service member is requesting assistance in order to receive full-year consideration. For

spring and summer terms, the deadline is March 1 and for summer-term only, the deadline is June 15.

The VA does not have a set deadline for submission of paperwork, but 2nd Lt. Leslie Durbin of Champaign suggests allowing about eight weeks before classes start due to the time it takes to process. Durbin, the battalion administrative officer with the 1144th Transportation Motor Transport Battalion in Delevan is using her educational benefits in pursuit of a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

“It's been easy and I have had minimal conflicts in using my benefits,” Durbin said. “I have used education benefits at two institutions and they have been well received by both schools. Both schools have veteran's centers and counselors available to help Soldiers receive and start using their benefits.”

Durbin uses REAP and the ILNG Grant. She said a representative from the VA helped explain the pros and cons of the benefits she had available to her. She said because she deployed to Afghanistan she had different options.

Determining which programs to use when eligible for multiple benefits depends on two questions, Bermel said.

“A student should ask themselves, ‘what's my goal?’ and ‘where am I going to go to school?’” Bermel said.

Each educational incentive has advantages depending on different factors such as attending a private versus public institution, or seeking a degree versus non-degree or vocational program. For example, Bermel said a student who deployed may gain more benefit from using REAP while attending a state-supported school. However, the same student may benefit more from using the Post 9/11 GI Bill if attending a private institution. The Post 9/11 GI Bill is also unique because it allows a servicemember's family to use his or her benefits.

When deciding which benefits to use, Soldiers and Airmen with questions can access several resources available. Bermel suggested starting with the Army National Guard Education homepage, which contains collective information on all the education benefits offered to Guardsmen. (<https://education.ng.mil>)

Soldiers and Airmen can also talk to their schools' financial aid offices, veteran services offices and student veteran groups, Bermel said.

Regardless of the benefits Soldiers and Airmen choose to use, they are encouraged to start the process with plenty of time to spare.

Soldiers and Airmen are encouraged to call the
State Education Office at (217) 761-3406
for further clarification and specific questions not answered at
<https://education.ng.mil>

Beyond bachelors: Illinois Guardsmen hold advanced degrees

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Jaime L. Witt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD - Despite the diversity of the force making up the Illinois Army National Guard, some might typify Soldiers as “blue collar” workers who serve to supplement their primary incomes. Beyond earning their bachelor degrees, more than 250 Soldiers serving in the Illinois Army National Guard have earned a master's degree or greater.

Maj. Troy G. Scott of Wood River, who earned his Executive Master of Business Administration from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign and his master's in disaster and emergency response from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Indiana, Penn., is one of those Soldiers.

“My livelihood doesn't come from my time in uniform,” he said. “I don't have to be here to have a job, but I really enjoy what I'm doing.”

Scott, who works full time for Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ) in Springfield as the Deputy Director of Joint and Domestic Operations, has served in the Illinois National Guard for more than 23 years.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Ladd of Seymour, an instructor with the 129th Regional Training Institute in Springfield, earned his master's in education from Eastern Illinois University.

“Deep down I am a guidance counselor,” he said. “The (Illinois Army National Guard) gives me the opportunity to do that when I mentor Soldiers.”

While a master's degree is not a prerequisite for most military professions, some Soldiers enjoy using their

advanced degrees in their military occupations. Scott used his business and accounting skills while he deployed to Afghanistan with Combined Task Force Currahee, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, out of Fort Campbell, Ky., where he acted as deputy commander for Task Force White Eagle. Even in jobs not related to the business field, Scott enjoys using his MBA skills as an additional duty.

“I enjoy domestic operations very much, but if I didn't get to deal with money and budgeting in some form in my day-to-day activities in uniform, it would have less appeal to me than it does,” said Scott.

Sgt. 1st Class Mark Ballard of Athens, earned his MBA from Lewis University in Romeoville. He said while he does not use his degree directly in his job as exercise designer with JFHQ, he does indirectly use things he learned while obtaining it, such as analytical thinking and research skills.

“You get that appreciation for understanding and being able to take things that you're learning and apply them,” he said. “I think from your experience going through your education you're able to identify things and research them a lot better. Sometimes things people talk about spark your interest, you do some research about it and you narrow the gap of understanding. Research is a big thing.”

Some individuals are driven to get their degrees in order to advance their careers, while others attain advanced degrees for their own personal advancement.

Regardless of the motivation, Lt. Col. Delbert Ford of Springfield, the state safety officer with JFHQ earned his master's in community health education, encourages Soldiers who are thinking about obtaining an advanced

degree to go for it, despite the hard work.

“If you're thinking about it, go for it,” he said. “Don't hesitate, go for it; because time is going to go by whether you want it to or not. Anything worth having, you have to work for. They don't give them away, you have to earn them.”

Scott also advised continuing on with school.

“I don't know anyone that gains energy as they get older,” he said. “I don't know anyone whose lives get less complicated as they get older.”

Sgt. Maj. Zarrod Beck of Chicago, who earned his master's in criminal justice from Chicago State University shares the message with his Soldiers that education will ultimately benefit them when they reach retirement age.

“If you don't use these benefits, then you're going to basically lose these benefits,” said Beck. “If you're serving your country for whatever reason, then you have to make sure you use all your benefits. When you retire 20 years later you're going to be very regretful that you didn't take advantage of all the benefits that the state has given.”

Ballard also emphasized that an advanced degree is a marketable skill. He said while sometimes an advanced degree may make a person seem over-qualified in the civilian market, the military does not view advanced education in that way. He said his master's degree played a key role in being selected for his current position.

Ladd continues to advise his Soldiers to better themselves through any educational outlet available. He said that continuous growth and development make a person a more attractive employee and a better person overall, whether it is structured higher education or learning from other people's experience in a certain field.

“As leaders, we need to be sending that message to our Soldiers – it doesn't matter whether you're going after your advanced degree or attending a (hazardous material handling) course,” he said. “As long as you're continuing to learn and grow yourself, that is what is important.”

“As long as you're continuing to learn and grow yourself, that is what is important.”

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Ladd, 129th Regional Training Institute instructor

Guardsmen launch product that benefits Soldiers, babies

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Cassidy Snyder
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD – After multiple overseas deployments, three Illinois Army National Guardsmen came together to build a product that benefits both Soldiers and babies. Having no prior business experience, the Soldiers used educational resources to create the EasyGo dispenser.

“Being a Soldier and small business owner shows you the complexity and depth the Guard has to offer,” said business co-founder Staff Sgt. Michael Pett of Chicago, with Recruiting and Retention Command. “Not only am I able to continue my service to the country, but can fulfill my dream of being a business owner.”

The Soldiers signed up for a program through the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign called Illinois’ Launch. Through the program, they attended small business workshops and seminars and made several connections to help them along the way, said Pett.

“We are not engineers, graphic designers, nor can we draw a family of stick figures between the three of us,” said Staff Sgt. Blake Schroedter of Newton, with Troop A, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment in Pontiac. “We are a group of common guys, but visionaries who saw an issue and decided to fix it.”

While deployed, Schroedter said he and other Soldiers had many frustrations with making an instant protein shake, a common



Photo submitted by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Tony Genovese, Illinois National Guard

(Left to right) Staff Sgt. Michael Pett of Chicago, with Recruiting and Retention, Staff Sgt. Blake Schroedter of Newton, with Troop A, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment in Pontiac and Staff Sgt. Tony Genovese of Naperville, with Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment in Aurora are the co-founders of the EasyGo Dispenser.

source of nutrition for combat Soldiers. They tried cutting the tops off water bottles to make a funnel and used Ziploc bags and Tupperware for storage.

What they needed was something portable and convenient to store, carry and

dispense protein powder.

After returning home from deployment, Schroedter along with Pett and Staff Sgt. Tony Genovese of Naperville, with Troop C, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment in Aurora developed a prototype

that evolved into the EasyGo Dispenser product lines.

“The evolution of the prototype lasted over a year with countless hours of phone conferences with our director of manufacturing, ensuring we accomplished our goals,” said Schroedter. “I am excited for the day when I am at an airport or gym and I see a complete stranger utilizing our product.”

After the initial prototype for the protein powder was created, the Soldiers developed a second dispenser to accommodate baby formula powder.

“Currently there are no military programs that promote entrepreneurship for Guardsmen that we are aware of,” said Genovese. “One of our major long-term business goals is to create a program designed to aid military personnel in ventures similar to ours.”

The Department of Defense launched a few programs that help disabled veterans and families of the wounded and fallen start businesses, but nothing specific for Guardsmen.

The Soldiers boast a young start-up company that offers a product durable enough for Soldiers to use on missions during war and gentle enough for parents to use for their babies at home. The product was launched March 11 in Chicago. The first shipment of EasyGo PRO and Baby dispensers is due to arrive in August. For more information please visit <http://easygodispenser.com/>.

Carter reaffirms effort in Afghanistan

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall Jr.
American Forces Press Service

GHAZNI PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Partnership has been essential to success in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this emphasis continued as Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter met with Polish and Illinois National Guard troops here today.

Carter met with Polish Brig. Gen. Piotr Blazeusz, commander of Task Force White Eagle, Polish Col. Jan Rydz, deputy commander, and U.S. Army Col. Thomas Purple, Rochester, Ill. native and coalition deputy commander, at Forward Operating Base Ghazni to reaffirm the U.S. partnership with nations contributing to the effort in Afghanistan.

“Thank you very much ... to the Polish contingent here,” Carter said. “You’ve been great partners right from the very beginning, and we are admiring of your professionalism and dedication.”

Polish military leaders told the secretary they are working very closely with coalition troops from other nations, and

there is a “very good partnership with U.S. forces in the area.”

The group talked about logistics, building capacity in the area, construction and other operational issues. Following their discussions, Carter re-emphasized that the union between U.S. forces and Polish troops serves as “a great, great partnership.”

Officials of the Illinois National Guard, which serves as part of Task Force White Eagle and has a state partnership with Poland, noted the partnership is extensive, as the Guard soldiers spend two months training in Poland before their six- to seven-and-a-half-month deployments.

“Chicago has the largest population of Polish in the world, superseding Warsaw,” noted Army Maj. Rhonda Petersen of Lindenhurst, Ill., a logistics officer with the Illinois National Guard.

Carter showed his appreciation as the leaders exchanged gifts, and he spoke of the appreciation for the Polish troops’ service.

“Thanks, once again,” he said. “It’s very clear this is a great partnership.”



Photo submitted by Col. Thomas Purple, Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A8

Col. Thomas Purple (left) of Rochester and the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A8 commander, greets Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter Feb. 23 in Afghanistan. Carter met with Polish and Illinois Soldiers to reaffirm the U.S. partnership with nations contributing to the effort in Afghanistan. BEST A8 deployed with the Polish Land Forces to Afghanistan last year as part of Illinois’ State Partnership Program.

Hammon appointed new Command Chief Warrant Officer for Illinois

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Kyle Combs
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



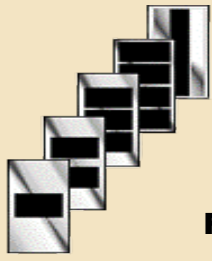
CW4 David Hammon

SPRINGFIELD – Chief Warrant Officer (4) David Hammon of Petersburg, was appointed to be the next Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois Army National Guard Mar. 8.

Hammon replaced retiring Chief Warrant Officer (5) Jim Gaddis of Springfield, at the end of March and will become the fifth Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois Army National Guard to serve in the position.

The Command Chief Warrant Officer is the senior ranking Illinois Army National Guard warrant officer. Hammon will serve as principle adviser on all matters pertaining to warrant officers to the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard.

He will be responsible for informing the Adjutant General and making recommendations in warrant officer accessions, training, education, promotion, and career management. As the lead for warrant officer affairs, he will work closely with the leadership of National Guard Bureau and the Departments of the Army Officer Branches throughout the United States.



**Want to become an
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Recently there has been an increase in Personally Identifiable Information (PII) incidents within the Army National Guard.

In the event of a PII breach, the individual who has signed for the equipment where the information was stored must contact the Administrative Services Branch (ASB) and the state Information Assurance Manager (IAM) to initiate the investigation process.

Questions or concerns about PII should be directed toward the ASB at 217-761-3529 or state IAM at 217-761-1704.

Two Chicago-based units compete for AAME

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Michael Camacho
108th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs

CHICAGO – Two Chicago-area Illinois Army National Guard units are competing at the national level for a prestigious award for excellence in maintenance.

Both the 108th Sustainment Brigade (Sust. Bde.) in Chicago and the 1244th Transportation Company (Trans. Co.) in North Riverside are semifinalists in the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence (AAME) competition. They recently received visits from AAME evaluators from Fort Lee, Va., for onsite supply and maintenance inspections in the final phase of this prestigious award.

The 108th is competing in the large-unit category. Evaluators visited its facilities in both North Riverside and the Northwest Armory near Humboldt Park Jan. 12. The 1244th is competing in the medium-unit category and hosted AAME evaluators Jan. 13 at its facility at North Riverside.

“The process is very thorough. It inspects a lot of different areas of the unit not just maintenance, but also supply, training and overall unit readiness,” said Chief Warrant Officer (4) Michael Kitts of New Castle Del., with the Delaware National Guard.

The AAME competition is divided into two phases. In the first phase, both units won maintenance competitions at the state, regional and National Guard Bureau levels. Each unit then won at the Department of the Army level to complete phase one and ranked as semifinalists for the award. The second-phase onsite evaluations now have the units competing against other National Guard units for top honors in the respective categories.

Competition categories are determined by the number of personnel assigned to a unit or command, said Chief Warrant Officer (4) Williams Lyles, of Fort Lee Va., leader of the AAME evaluation team from the U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM) in Fort Lee. Units with 300 or more compete in large category and units with less with compete in the small category.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Camacho, 108th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs

Spc. Anthony Cotto of Chicago, with the 1244th Transportation Company checks the bolts on a tire while performing a preventive maintenance and service check Jan. 13 during a an Army Award for Maintenance Excellence evaluation at North Riverside.

The 108th Sust. Bde. commands roughly 2,100 Illinois National Guard Soldiers in its subordinate units across the state, while its subordinate company the 1244th Trans. Co., commands roughly 170 Soldiers.

The 20-page narrative nomination packet required to enter the AAME competition captured a solid picture of the unit's maintenance programs and Soldier readiness, said Lt. Col. Drew Dukett, of Roodhouse, deputy commander of the 108th Sust. Bde. He said it was a great accomplishment for the Soldiers of 108th, 1244th and the Illinois National Guard to reach the AAME semifinals.

The 108th is the first unit in the Illinois National Guard to reach this stage in the large category since the 232nd Combat Support Battalion in Springfield in 2001.

While the AAME is just a competition,

the 108th as brigade is the largest combat service support unit in the state, making maintenance and unit readiness a must for both traditional and full-time Soldiers said Dukett.

“The AAME gives recognition and improves overall readiness,” said Dukett. “When you have a checklist of stuff and it's all regulatory you have maintain a high-level of readiness and maintenance. This is a competition that maintains the efforts and progress the 108th has already made in its stride toward efficiency.”

Several subordinate units in the 108th have received awards and citations for excellence in supply, maintenance and combat support operations over recent years. The 1244th is at the forefront of these marks of excellence, with several Supply Excellence awards, top finishes in

active duty competitions in Kuwait, and the Transportation Corps Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for 2010.

The 1244th compiled its achievements for entry into the AAME competition while deployed conducting convoy logistics missions for the drawdown of U.S. and coalition forces from Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn. The unit began preparation for the AAME's phase upon the unit's September homecoming.

Sgt. 1st Class Steven Richardson of Streator, with the 1244th Trans. Co., said reaching this level in the competition represents the efforts and mission focus of 1244th Soldiers showed during their deployment and since their return.

Capt. Shawn Nokes of Quincy, 1244th Commander, noted that while the unit compiled an outstanding record of maintenance initiatives and results that brought success in the AAME competition, more importantly the unit's efforts enabled the 1244th to efficiently and successfully complete 219 convoy missions covering more than 3.8 million miles and return all Soldiers home safely.

“That's what this is really all about: being prepared for the mission,” Nokes said.

Richardson said it was the team effort that brought the 1244th recognition while deployed and to the semifinals of the AAME.

“We had motor pool of the month six times against active duty units,” said Richardson.

While deployed, the 1244th shop raised the bar on maintenance throughout its Task Force and improved overall vehicle condition, mission readiness and safety and mitigating material waste.

“You got the standard and once you exceed that standard it just something you have to maintain. It's hard to do,” said Richardson.

Lyle said both units were very organized and did well during the evaluation. The official results will be published in April when the department of the Army announces the 2011 AAME winners.

Curtis named Air Guard's NCO of the Year

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Charles Helmholt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE – There may not be one perfect Guardsman in the United States, but there is one Illinois Guardsman who was recognized as the best noncommissioned officer (NCO) in the country by the Air National Guard.

Illinois Air National Guardsman Tech. Sgt. Jacob Curtis of Fairview Heights, with the 126th Security Forces Squadron at Scott Air Force Base was recently named the 2011 NCO of the Year for the entire National Guard.

Curtis discovered he won this award March 16 with a direct phone call from Maj. Gen. William L. Enyart of Belleville, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, who congratulated him on his nationally recognized award.

“It was so surreal at first,” said Curtis. “It felt like my head was floating.”

He won the highest national achievement the National Guard has to offer and now is in the running to be one of 12 Air Force-wide Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

Curtis won the NCO of the Quarter, third quarter 2011, Squadron NCO of the Year in 2008 and 2011, Mission Support Group NCO of the Year 2011, 126th Wing NCO of the Year 2011, and finally NCO of the year for the Air National Guard 2011.

“Technical Sgt. Jacob Curtis is a gifted and giving professional and is most deserving of this crowning achievement,” said Col. Peter Nezamis of Belleville, commander of the 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott Air Force Base.

“Technical Sergeant Curtis and his family have endured long and painful separations countless times in support



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Charles Helmholt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Tech. Sgt. Jacob Curtis of Fairview Heights, with the 126th Security Forces Squadron at Scott Air Force Base, was named the 2011 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for the entire Air National Guard.

of overseas operations. I couldn't be more pleased with the honor of having Curtis and his family represent the 126th as an Air National Guard Outstanding Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.”

Curtis is the noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) of the plans section for the Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Security Forces Squadron. He is also the information security officer and client support administrator, all while performing his primary job as a security forces officer.

“He is a go-getter,” said Tech. Sgt. Salvador Silva of Belleville, the 126th Security Forces' acting first sergeant. “He wants to be a part of everything and always wants more responsibility; this shows in his job here, and with his level of education.”

Curtis grew up a military child. His father James retired as a lieutenant colonel at Scott AFB and has called southern Illinois home since he was 15.

Staff Sgt. Steven J. Ask of Shiloh, NCOIC of combat arms for the 126th has known Curtis since high school, and now serves in the same unit with him.

“I've really gotten to know him since joining the unit,” said Ask. “He is one of the first people I call if I need something here, and one of the few people I feel I can talk to about anything. His work ethic is above and beyond most other peoples.”

Perhaps this quality might best be justified from an event that took place on Curtis' recent deployment to Afghanistan.

While serving as the battle NCO at the Joint Defense Operations Center at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, a nearby building was hit by indirect enemy rocket fire. The blast killed two local nationals and wounded three. In addition, two Airmen were also injured.

Noticing the closest Airmen to the blast had to retain security along the base's wall to guard against a follow up attack, Curtis sprang into action. He was among the first to reach the building and found one of the wounded Airman. The Airman had a broken leg that had lacerated his femoral artery.

Curtis administered aid by tying a tourniquet around the downed Airman's leg to help stop the bleeding, and waited to help carry him out until emergency medical technicians arrived. He was awarded a certificate of appreciation for his actions that day.

Curtis insists his entire unit should receive this award and that he just embodies his unit's commitment to excellence. And, although it may be true there are many great Airmen like Curtis, he has more than proven himself for this award to his peers, his friends and his superiors.

Illinois

Guardian

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DEADLINES – Submissions for 2012 are due by the last Wednesday of June.

Letters, articles and photographs are welcomed, but may be edited for clarity or brevity. Publication of any submission is at the discretion of the editor.

Views and opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs or the U.S. Department of Defense.

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Museum preserves past, present

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Kristi Goodin
Illinois National Guard Historian Assistant

SPRINGFIELD - The white brick castle walls of the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield surround the rich history of the Illinois National Guard. The dark wood floor and dim lights bring people to a quiet serenity and the original artifacts propel life to history. Patrons frequently ask how the museum began, but the beginning of the story barely covers the long road that led to the castle museum we know today.

The Illinois State Military Museum has a place on the National Register of Historical Places after years of uncertainty and emptiness. The castle was built between the years of 1903 and 1909 by Col. James Culver, owner of the Culver Stone Company and commander of the Illinois National Guard's 5th Illinois Infantry Regiment. The museum was to serve as a commissary and/or a quartermaster building.

"The National Guard was issued considerable quantities of federal property, such as weapons and ammunition, and it was important that this property be safeguarded and stored in a location that would protect it," said Lt. Col. Mark K. Whitlock, Carbondale native. Whitlock is Joint Force Headquarters chief historian and former director of the Illinois State Military Museum, both in Springfield.

The museum sat for years as a storage facility for artifacts of American Civil War veterans piled up since 1878. The artifacts came from generous donations of veterans, their families and from within the Army system, said Whitlock. The Illinois State Military Museum's greatest collection is the collection of more than 1,000 flags, guidons and regimental colors that are primarily from the Civil War.

For years, the artifacts were safeguarded by retired Warrant Officer Charles "Charlie" Munie from Decatur, who also initiated historical displays and reminded people the state of Illinois has a great collection of artifacts that should be preserved and someday exhibited in a proper museum.

The museum officially opened to the public in 2003 to become the note-worthy institution it is today. Whitlock said he took many steps to ensure it would be a success, such as developing a cooperative and productive relationship between the museum, and Illinois National Guard and Militia Historical Society, Inc.

"I think it is important that we give credit to the great Illinoisans who came before me and collected and documented the treasures that we are able to enjoy in the museum today," said Whitlock.

The director now has a curatorial staff including a



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Camacho
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Don Ferricks of Athens (right), a living historian and assistant curator at the Illinois State Military Museum, wearing a mock uniform of a World War I sergeant with the 33rd Infantry Division, speaks to Spc. Taylor Ring of Mattoon (middle) and Spc. Joseph Parkhurst of Louisville (left), both with Company A, 634th Brigade Support Battalion about equipment used by Soldiers in WWI during the downtown Springfield Holiday walk Jan. 14 in the Old State Capital building in Springfield.

museum curator, two assistant curators, an executive director and volunteers.

"The volunteers are invaluable," said retired Brig. Gen. Stewart Reeve of Springfield, director of the Illinois Military Museum. "They have a vast knowledge of different periods in Illinois history that they can relay in a clear fashion to visitors."

Recently, Reeve planned exhibits that emphasize the parts of history he feels are sadly forgotten and sometimes not even recognized by National Guard Soldiers, such as the State Partnership Program, peacekeeping missions and Eastern Europe. He said he feels the most important purpose of the museum is to tell the story of how the Illinois National Guard has contributed to supporting and protecting Illinois citizens and U.S. citizens nationwide, which are not limited to combat operations.

"In some ways, the general public doesn't know what the National Guard has done," said Reeve.

LCA, TAG recognized at Gala in Washington

Story by U.S. Army 1st Lt. April Hawes
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Dream. Believe. Achieve. It's the motto of the National Guard's Youth Foundation. It's also the motto recognized locally by the Illinois National Guard's Lincoln's Challenge Academy (LCA) in Rantoul.

LCA began in 1993, which creates a highly-structured environment using a military atmosphere to improve coping skills and employ the abilities of high school dropouts.



The motto was often repeated Feb. 28 at the 7th Annual ChalleNGe Champions Gala in Washington, D.C. Approximately 100 cadets were recognized for their achievements, including four cadets from Illinois.

Another Illinois native recognized at the event was Maj. Gen. William Enyart of Belleville, Illinois National Guard Adjutant General. Enyart was presented the ChalleNGe Champion Award for his contributions to the success of one of the largest ChalleNGe programs in the country.

"It was an honor to be recognized among the cadets, fellow Guardsmen and national Youth ChalleNGe supporters," Enyart said. "While I am truly humbled by the award, the real heroes of the evening were the cadets. These cadets have chosen a new path for their life by attending their local ChalleNGe academy, which will ultimately lead them to a promising future."

Enyart credited the hard-working staff in Rantoul to the success of the nationally-recognized program.

"The staff and the cadre genuinely believe in these cadets," he said. "They work long hours and stressful days because they are committed to the youth in Illinois."

Among the 100 cadets recognized at the gala was Cadet Lazeric Lott, Jr., 18 of Chicago.

Despite his nerves, he stood on stage in front of approximately 1,000 people in the crowd to introduce Enyart.

"I'm OK right now," he said, about an hour before the event. "But I'm sure I'll be nervous when I get up there."

Lott was chosen because the LCA staff said they felt he could articulate the best out of everyone in his 2012 graduating class.


After graduation, Lott plans to join the U.S. Army and then become a U.S. Marshall.

The other three Illinois cadets who attended the gala also plan to join the military upon graduation. All of the cadets participated in a board in front of LCA staff before they were chosen to travel to Washington, D.C.

Among the questions the cadets answered was "how do you feel about mistakes?"

"They're a reminder to learn from the mistakes I make and to never make the same mistakes twice," said Cadet Andy Arroyo, 16 of Chicago.

Along with Lott and Arroyo, Cadets Maria Ayala, 17 of Chicago, and Samantha Ashbaker, 16 of Kewanee, also



For more information contact the
Illinois State Military Museum at 217-761-3384
Illinois Militia Historical Society, Inc. at 217-761-3645

First Muster mirrors Illinois' state tree

Story by Adriana Schroeder
Illinois National Guard Historian

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois National Guard heritage is similar to the state tree, the white oak. The trunk is stout and strong much like the core of the Guard. Branches lead off one another comparable to the organizational heritage. Units have come and gone throughout the years due to reorganization, similar to limbs that need trimming from time to time. Although visibly removed, units remain forever linked to the trunk of history. Each leaf is unique, like the Soldiers, Airmen and civilians who are part of the Illinois Guard. Leaves bud, bloom, change color, and shed much like the ebb and flow of enlistments, career changes, and retirements. Acorns are unique to the white oak, just like the deployments that occupy some of the leaves or Soldiers. But what about the part that remains buried and forgotten, yet is the element that nourishes the rest of the tree?



White Oak Tree

The history of the roots of the Illinois National Guard began with the French. Jan. 1, 1718, businessman John Law obtained a charter from the French king who granted him monopoly of French trade in the area known as the Illinois Country. Royal orders dictated a provision for civil government be arranged for the new province of Illinois. During the summer of 1718, the green officials set out from Louisiana and journeyed to their new home. Among other governing associates, the party included Pierre Duque, Sieur de Boisebriant, Commandant; Captain Diron,

Dartaguiette; two second lieutenants and a company of 100 Soldiers.

Among the tall grasses of the Illinois prairie, rose the first resemblance of an organized militia, under the French regime. This small unit of French Soldiers had the responsibility of investigating the number of men capable of bearing arms in each village, determining the amount of powder and lead available, forming companies of militia and arranging a signal system from settlement to settlement. By 1721, Fort De Chartres became the first military structure dedicated to the protection of the community.

As the population of settlements grew, militia companies began popping up among each community, under the tutelage of the French. Looking back on his time in Illinois, the inspector of

troops, Dartaguiette wrote in his diary, "I called together all the inhabitants of this village [Kaskaskia] to whom I said that I had an order from the King to form a company of militia for the purpose of putting them in a position to defend themselves with greater facility against the incursions which the Indians, our enemies, might attempt, so I formed a company, after having selected four of the most worthy among them to put at the head. This company being under arms, I passed it in review the same day."

Under the shade of the white oak, the militia rested, having completed the first drill May 9, 1723. The first of many hundreds of thousands of drills, the Illinois National Guard will be 189 years old this May, not quite as old as the 500 year life span of the white oak.

LCA

■ From page 2

percent federal and 25 percent state match. National studies have identified the Youth ChalleNGe program as the lowest and most cost-effective program of its kind.

Results are only made possible with the efforts of more than 140 outstanding, dedicated, hard-working, caring employees at our Rantoul campus. In addition, many others to include recruiters, mentors, Advisory Board members, state and federal legislators, Illinois Army and Air National Guard members, and friends of LCA make our program such a success and one of the best in the nation. Last year the state legislature approved \$39 million to build new facilities at our Rantoul campus. Currently, designs for the new facility are being formalized. The projected completion date for the new campus is 2015.

Maj. Gen. Enyart and the senior leadership of the Illinois National Guard are committed to making the LCA Program the best in the nation. The "National Vision" of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program is "to be recognized as America's premier voluntary program for 16 to 18 year-old high school dropouts, serving all 54 states and territories." Although currently in 27 states only, the statistics are proving that the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Programs are achieving their mission and vision with Illinois leading the way! The program motto of Dream, Believe, Achieve is alive and well in Illinois. Thanks everyone for your continued support of the Lincoln's Challenge Program.

NEWS BRIEFS

Illinois Guard retirements

■ Col. Tracy Nelson

SPRINGFIELD – With every military memory and mission, Col. Tracy Nelson of Springfield, is not afraid to give credit to those who have shaped him into the commissioned officer and Soldier he is today. After 27 years in the Illinois Army National Guard, Nelson will retire April 30.

While Nelson credits many Soldiers throughout his career, he said it is the noncommissioned officers who taught him the most.

Nelson plans to spend time coaching his daughter Madeline and spend more time at the family's South Carolina home.

■ Lt. Col. John Tammes

SPRINGFIELD – Lt. Col. John Tammes of Elgin, a surface maintenance branch chief in logistics with the Joint Forces Headquarters in Springfield, joined the Illinois Army National Guard 27 years ago, after spending four years in the Army Reserve. He said it never occurred to him to do anything except join the military because he grew up around World War II veterans.

Tammes begins his retirement from the Illinois Army National Guard in July and plans to spend it with his family and friends.

■ CW5 James Gaddis

SPRINGFIELD – After 27 years, the Illinois National Guard is losing an experienced leader. Chief Warrant Officer 5, James J. Gaddis of Springfield, the 4th Command Chief Warrant Officer of the State of Illinois is retiring June 30. Gaddis is the youngest Soldier ever to serve as a Command Chief of the nation.

"The Guard is my family and I have nothing but great memories here," said Gaddis.

Gaddis is going to use this opportunity to be closer to his wife Annette and two daughters Cassy and Alyssa in Tennessee.

■ Maj. Keith E. Wallace

SPRINGFIELD – Maj. Keith E. Wallace of Martinsville, with the 1144th Transportation Battalion in Delavan, is hanging up his uniform for good after more than 20 years honorable service.

Wallace, a husband and father of two children said he can now focus more time on his family, who has supported him all of the way with his career.

"Family is critical to a Soldier's performance and mindset," said Wallace.

■ Sgt. Maj. Anthony Boster

SPRINGFIELD – After almost 25 years in service, Sgt. Maj. Anthony L. Boster of Auburn, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Illinois National Guard's Active Guard Reserve staffing with Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield will retire this spring.

Boster is looking forward to retirement but said he feels proud of the things he accomplished during his time in the military.

When he's not helping Soldiers, Boster can be found in another uniform, giving back in a different way. He officiates high school and college sports all across the state of Illinois and has been doing so almost as long as he has been in the military.

■ 1st Sgt. Chip Cormier

PALMYRA – 1st Sgt. Chip Cormier recently retired from the Illinois Army National Guard, completing a career that has sent him to Alaska, Norway, Germany, Italy, Korea and Honduras. He has also deployed to Iraq twice and assisted with the 1993 Mississippi River flooding.

Cormier said he thoroughly enjoyed his Army Guard career and one of the most memorable experiences was seeing an F-16 get refueled while aboard a KC-135.

■ Sgt. 1st Class Nichelle Harris

CHICAGO – 2011 marked the end of another chapter in the life of an Illinois Army National Guard Soldier and Chicago police officer. Sgt. 1st Class Nichelle Harris of Chicago is retiring from the Illinois Army National Guard.

Harris has spent the last 25 years in the military, with more than 15 of those years spent with the Illinois Army National Guard.

Harris carries on her tradition of service as an officer in the Chicago Police Department, where she has worked for nine years.

Counselors, ILNG gather for pilot program

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Dan LoGrasso
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

BELLEVILLE – Military counselors, Illinois National Guard members and counseling professionals from across central Illinois met at Lindenwood University in Belleville for the pilot program to help servicemembers following deployment. The Illinois National Guard partnered with the East St. Louis Vet Center and St. Louis Veterans Affairs Medical Center for the program.

The Jan. 13 workshop was designed by the National Guard's Service Member and Family Support Services to educate civilian counselors on the realities of mental health issues like post-traumatic stress and survivor's guilt affecting military members and their families.

The new workshop is part of Lindenwood University's Professional and School Counseling Continuing Education Program. Ken Kubicek, division chair of the Education and Counseling Division at Lindenwood and a Vietnam veteran, said professional counselors in Illinois must have continuous education to keep their licenses, and many have begun looking for military-specific education to meet the needs of returning veterans and their families.

"It was hard to believe that this presentation was a pilot program," said Kubicek. "It was very well-prepared and polished."

More than 1.9 million servicemembers have been deployed to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom and an estimated 30 percent have or will have psychological injuries.

Maj. Gen. William L. Enyart of Belleville, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, said the Department of Veterans Affairs needs assistance and educating civilian counselors and local communities will ensure help is rapidly available to servicemembers and their families.

"Many people ask me, 'What can I do to help?'" said Enyart. "And the fact that 40 professionals came [to the workshop] despite weather shows that this country values their veterans."

Eric Murray, chief of Service Member and Family Support Services for the Illinois National Guard, organized



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Dan LoGrasso, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Maggie Rosol, a Military Life Consultant, speaks to non-military counselors from across central Illinois about the emotional cycles of military deployments during a Professional and School Counseling Continuing Education Program workshop Jan. 13 at Lindenwood University in Belleville.

the workshop. He said he feels good about the pilot program and will follow up with the attendees to see how they are applying the workshop's material professionally and improve the program.

"The community reaching out to us to host shows how eager people are to help and support service members," said Murray. "They understand that being home from theater does not mean troops are done needing help."

During her lecture on post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor's guilt, Illinois National Guard Director of Psychological Health, Juliann Steinbeigle, described military mental health issues as injuries, not illnesses.

Guy Spooner, registered nurse and case manager at the St. Louis Veterans Affairs Medical Center, said working with veterans can be challenging because of the stigma attached to mental health issues, which the Department of Veterans Affairs is working to erase.

"[Mental health professionals] need to look [veterans] in the eye and tell them, 'You're normal. You're having a normal response to an abnormal problem.'" said Spooner.

Chaplains teach suicide intervention training

Story by U.S. Army Chaplain (Capt.) Mike Wakeland
Illinois National Guard Chaplain

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Army National Guard conducted its first two-day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training (ASIST), Feb. 18 to 19. Twenty four students graduated from the two-day course in Suicide First Aid.

The students were full-time Guard personnel present at Camp Lincoln for Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) training.

"The curriculum is designed to help Guard personnel connect with people considering suicide," stated Chaplain (Col.) Dan Krumrei, Joint Forces chaplain for the Illinois National Guard. "Too many Illinois Guard families and units have been touched by suicide. The class helps students understand what those who are desperate enough to contemplate suicide are going through. They learn to recognize the invitations that those at risk often issue to help them get back in touch with the reasons they have to live."

ASIST developed out of a Canadian suicide prevention program in the 1980s. Livingworks, the ASIST parent organization, began working with the U.S. Army in 1989. ASIST became the Army suicide prevention program in 2009.

One participant said, "Knowledge is power—the program encourages people to react with confidence when they recognize 'invitations' from people at risk."

When participants were asked if they would recommend the training to others, they responded affirmatively with an average of 9.2 on a 1 to 10 (high) scale.



U.S. Army photo by Chaplain (Capt.) Scott Andrews
1144th Transportation Company

Chaplain J. Kent Kroencke, an Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training trainer, models connecting with a person at risk, Feb 19 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.



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Soldiers honor the fallen as CNO or CAO

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Ryan Twist
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD – Soldiers assist each other every day, but the greatest honor servicemembers can give is helping the families of their fallen comrade and making sure they are afforded the respect and honor they deserve.

Those best equipped to do this are the Soldiers themselves, who know the sacrifices the families and servicemembers make every day.

Sgt. 1st Class Matthew A. Vocks, the casualty operations noncommissioned officer in charge with Joint Forces Headquarters in Springfield, said a Casualty Assistance Officer assists a fallen servicemember's next-of-kin through all the paperwork involved whenever someone passes away. Soldiers are also there to make sure the families get everything they are entitled to by law and regulation, said Vocks, a Taylorville, native.

Sgt. 1st Class Jason W. Newman of Robinson, with the 631st Engineer Company in Lawrenceville, said he hopes the Casualty Assistance Officer (CAO)/Casualty Notification Officer (CNO) program helps to alleviate some of the stress families can experience and also help them better understand and receive all their entitled benefits. Newman said he has experience being a CAO, but Soldiers are trained to do both CAO and CNO assignments.

"It is important for fellow Soldiers to be a CAO because (they) can understand the sacrifice the Soldier and family has made," said Newman, who assisted three families and is still helping one military family.

Vocks said within the last year, Illinois has assigned more than 10 CAOs for five different casualties. He said if the primary or secondary next-of-kin reside in Illinois, they will be assigned a CAO and CNO, even if the casualty is not from Illinois.

Chief Warrant Officer (2) Mariah S. Peterson of Virginia, Ill., and a casualty operations branch officer in charge, said all active duty sergeants first class and higher, chief warrant officers (2) and higher, and captains and higher have to take the CAO/CNO training, which is a two-day course. The program currently has four training dates scheduled for Fiscal Year 2012 and must be renewed every 12 months.

Vocks said ranks are chosen because of experience, knowledge and maturity. He said it is much more difficult



Photo illustration by Jaquelynn M. Tucker

Casualty notification officers have the job of informing the next-of-kin of their fallen Servicemember, while it is no light task fellow servicemembers volunteer for the assignment.

for a Soldier to help a senior-ranking member, when they may not have enough experience to understand the circumstances.

"It is a level playing field," he said. "We are going to give them someone in their peer group."

Vocks said when he was called upon to be a CAO, it was tough for him and his family. There is a shock factor that comes along with the job, he said. Sometimes there were days he had no idea what to say because someone just lost

a loved one and he was afraid his words would be taken the wrong way.

Eventually the families started to trust him more, said Vocks, and this helped for future situations. Sometimes a CAO can still be taking care of the family a year later, he said.

"You have to set aside time," said Vocks. "There were Cub Scout meetings, and basketball games and soccer games that I missed with my kids in order to take care of this family. You have to explain to your family what it is you were doing and why you were taking care of this other Soldier's family and ask your family to be patient in dealing with you."

Newman said he wondered if the families would accept him and if he would have the answers to their questions. He said after being a CAO he has a greater appreciation for his family, his children and everything most people take for granted.

"We owe it to the fallen Soldier and his or her family," said Newman. "Give them the same attention you wish your family would receive."

Vocks said the military could give families a binder of everything they need to do and points of contacts, but during such a difficult time they could easily miss extra benefits their Soldier earned. He said there are so many benefits the family might not know or understand even if they were all fully explained.

"We are the interpreter for that family," he said. "The thing is you never know when or how many will have to do it."

Vocks said many servicemembers do not think they could do the job of helping a fallen Soldier's family.

"I would do it for their family, so I fully expect them to do it for mine if they have gone through the training," said Vocks. "It's kind of a, 'treat your neighbor like you want to be treated' (situation)."

Peterson said these missions are never planned and all Soldiers need to be trained and ready just like every other job in the Army.

"Not every Soldier who attends our CNO/CAO training will be called upon," she said. "However, we (have to) give them the tools and resources to be successful and aid the families. It is our duty to take care of our fellow Soldiers and their families, (and) we will honor our fallen regardless of how they died."

Soldier killed off duty in Chicago neighborhood

Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

CHICAGO – The Illinois National Guard is mourning the loss of a Soldier murdered in Chicago, Feb. 11.

Pfc. Matthew Zavala, 20, of Chicago, was shot and killed in the 200 block of North Lorel Avenue while off duty at about 4:40 a.m. Feb. 11. Zavala was a member of Company B, 1-178th Infantry Battalion, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Illinois Army National Guard. He had recently returned from basic training at Fort Benning, Ga.

Zavala was approached by a, yet to be identified individual, who fired three shots at the victim and fled the scene to a vehicle waiting nearby. As the vehicle left the scene, it crashed in the 100 block of North Lorel. The offender then fled on foot. Zavala sustained a gunshot wound to the head and was pronounced at the scene.

"On behalf of the entire Illinois National Guard, I extend my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Pfc. Matthew Zavala," said Maj. Gen. William L. Enyart, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "The Soldiers of the 1-178th Infantry are assisting the Zavala family as they absorb the loss of this fine young man. Matthew chose military service during a time of war and his patriotism will be honored."

Enyart expressed confidence in the Chicago Police as they pursue Zavala's killer. "The Illinois National Guard often works and trains closely with the Chicago Police, so I have seen firsthand their professionalism and expertise. Many Chicago Police officers also serve in the Illinois National Guard, including in Matthew's own unit. The Chicago Police are among the finest law enforcement agencies in the world."

Col. Paul Hastings, commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, also extended his condolences to the Zavala family.



Pfc. Matthew Zavala

ILNG recognizes Gold Star Wives Day

Story by U.S. Army Capt. Dustin Cammack
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD - For only the third time since 2010 the country officially recognizes the contributions, dedication and sacrifices of military widows with "Gold Star Wives Day" April 5.

Passed in December 2010, a Senate resolution designated Dec. 18, 2010 as a day to honor and recognize the contributions of the members of the Gold Star Wives of America, an organization of widows and widowers whose spouses died while on active duty or as the result of military service. The day has been honored April 5 in both 2011 and 2012.

"It's nice to be recognized and remembered in that way, but I don't want to be put on a pedestal. Living in the small community I'm from, it's not just one day," said Larissa Melton of Germantown, and widow of Staff Sgt. Joshua Melton. "They know who I am and what he did. That's all I ask is for people to remember the sacrifice he made. It means a lot to me that people still remember his name."

Larissa said she felt it was important to give their daughter, Aubrey, who was 8 months old when Melton died, strong memories of him before his death.

"Every night after Joshua left for Afghanistan, I would show her a picture of the three of us and point to her dad. She would look at the picture and say 'good night daddy, I love you,'" Larissa said. "I would point out things to her like his favorite color, and still today she will see something and say 'that's what daddy likes'. She still remembers."

Melton, 26 and assigned to Illinois Army National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Marion, was killed in action June 19, 2009 in Afghanistan.

Rasa Stream of Mattoon, widow of Sgt. Scott Stream, has found being a Gold Star Wife challenging.

"My life changed completely. I moved here from Europe to be with Scott, and then he got deployed and was killed. I came here with a husband and then I was all by myself," Rasa said. "With Scott's family in Kentucky, me living in Illinois, and my family still in Europe, it's difficult for me because I don't want to be a burden on them – I know it's hard for everyone."

Their daughter Laura, who was 6 at the time of Scott's death, struggles even three years later.

"Laura is 9 years old now, but the more she grows, the more I think she suffers from the loss of her father. There

is an empty place where her daddy used to be," said Rasa. "We have a house full of pictures, and we talk about him a lot. But she sometime will say to me 'please tell me more about daddy, I feel like I'm forgetting.'"

Rasa, too, feels the importance of honoring Gold Star Wives.

"It is important to have this day. As time goes by, I think regular people forget about us and our struggle," she said.

Stream, 39 and assigned to Illinois Army National Guard's Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Effingham, was killed in action Feb. 24, 2009 in Afghanistan.

For Kim Smith of East Peoria, widow of Sgt. Paul Smith, the hardest part of being a Gold Star Wife is moving on with life.

"I have felt a lot of heartache going through the transition. It's an everyday struggle. Life continues, and there is some happiness, but it's just not the same," she said. "I was an older wife when I lost my husband of over 20 years. If I'm struggling how are the younger wives handling it?"

Kim also thinks honoring Gold Star Wives is important, but wishes more emphasis is given to the day in the future.

"It's a great honor, but I think the Gold Star Moms get more recognition, more so than the wives. I know the moms have lost a son, but we lost our husbands. I don't think there is as much attention given to the Gold Star Wives," she said.

Smith, 43 and assigned to Troop C, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Aurora, was killed in action June 19, 2009 in Afghanistan.

Maj. Gen. William Enyart of Belleville, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard shared his admiration of the Gold Star Wives.

"While these brave Soldiers gave the ultimate sacrifice while protecting our great nation, it is the wives they left behind who have endured the tragedy of losing a loved one to war," he said. "The Illinois Gold Star Wives hold a special place in my heart and will always be part of our military family."

Formed during World War II, the Gold Star Wives of America is a congressionally chartered, non-profit veteran's service organization that provides support for the spouses and children of those who lost their lives while serving in the Armed Forces. For more information on the Gold Star Wives of America visit <http://www.goldstarwives.org/>.

182nd Airmen return home from Afghanistan



Photos by U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Todd Pendleton, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

(Left) Tech. Sgt. Jason Schoen marshals a C-130H3 Hercules to parking as Staff Sgt. David Lis holds the United States flag out of the aircraft as it returns to Peoria from deployment in Afghanistan March 21. (Right) Lt. Col. D.K. Carpenter, commander of the 182nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, is reunited with his wife, Dana, upon returning from his deployment to Afghanistan March 2.

ILNG public website

www.il.ngb.army.mil

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662nd Engineer Fire Fighting Team, 444th Chemical Company deploy

Story by Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPARTA - A deployment ceremony was held for approximately 10 Soldiers who are deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The 662nd will provide fire department emergency response services for deployed forces in the Operation Enduring Freedom theater of operations. Potential missions include, but are not limited to: fire prevention and protection, structural and aircraft fire fighting, vehicle rescue, emergency medical and hazardous materials incident response.

“We are extremely excited for a chance to do a job we have been trained for,” said Staff Sgt. Chris Heiken of Mount Vernon. “This is a unique mission and we have a solid team of Soldiers prepared to help overseas and make Illinois proud.”

Additionally, the team will be involved in the Rescue Air Mobile Squad (RAMS) mission, providing personnel

rescue capabilities in tactical situations. During a RAMS mission, the team is transported via helicopter to a remote emergency incident and will perform rapid technical rescue and medical stabilization measures for U.S. and coalition personnel who are entrapped and/or otherwise injured as a result of enemy action.

GALESBURG - A deployment ceremony was held at the Galesburg armory for approximately 120 Soldiers with the 444th Chemical Company.

The Soldiers trained for a brief time at Camp Shelby, Miss. before deploying for approximately nine months.

Soldiers with the 444th Chemical Company will provide base security and command cell operations. The unit will provide support for other units stationed in the area and provide sustainment and command for a Michigan-based military police task force in northern Kuwait.

The unit will be mobilized for approximately one year, returning home in early 2013.

Illinois takes fourth at Combatives Tournament



Photo submitted by U.S. Army Maj. Jeffery Jiannoni, Joint Force Headquarters

Eleven members of the Illinois Army National Guard competed in the fifth annual National Guard Combatives Tournament March 17 and 18 at the Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning, Ga. Overall the team placed fourth out of 19 states with more than 130 competitors in the combatives tournament