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National Guard

MAGAZINE

Winter 2009



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On the Cover: Staff Sgt. John Essman, a combat-tested mechanic with the N.H. Army Guard, talks about his challenges after returning home from war. See page 14 for story. Photo: Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

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N.H. Guard showcases full range of capabilities

By Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO

FORT DRUM, N.Y. – The New Hampshire National Guard treated more than 20 state legislators and about a dozen business owners to the ultimate showcase of air and ground capabilities Sept. 22 during a day-long trip to Fort Drum, N.Y., that culminated in the first ever live fire of a high mobility rocket system.

“It was very impressive,” said Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-Exeter. “It was helpful to see how current our National Guard is and how fast the world that we’re asking them to take care of is changing.”

Education was half the story. It was also a chance for New Hampshire’s citizen-soldiers and airmen, many of whom are preparing for their second or third overseas deployment, to engage a willing audience. In total, more than 80 people – including nine reporters from five different media outlets – were on the trip.

It was the largest turnout of state leadership for a N.H. Guard orientation event in recent memory.

“By bringing civilians and the councilors and state representatives, it shows (our Guardsmen) that they do have the support,” said Maj. Gen. William Reddel, the Adjutant General of the New Hampshire National Guard. “They have big smiles on their faces. They like showing off.”

The N.H. Air Guard’s 157th Air Refueling Wing flew the group on two of its KC-135 tankers, refueling a C-5A Galaxy on the way up to Fort Drum. Nearly every passenger had a chance to sit in the boom pod during the mid-flight fill up.

“It’s amazing what technology has done,” said State Sen. Lou D’Allesandro, D-Manchester. “I was in the service years ago, and it was much different than it is today.”



3rd Battalion, 197th FA, launches the first of several rockets during a live fire demonstration of the unit’s new HIMARS at Fort Drum, N.Y., Sept. 22.

Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Alexander Thurston, NHNG

D’Allesandro, a senior legislator, noted the Guard’s stellar record of performance over the past eight years with its overseas deployments as well its response to several state disasters and Hurricane Katrina.

“The Guard is highly regarded throughout the country,” he said. “It has a wonderful record of achievement and I think it’s totally appropriate that when you deploy a new weapons system you bring it to the people who have been successful in the past. It’s very important that New Hampshire has this.”

The HIMARS unit, 3rd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery, is preparing to deploy to the Middle East next year with the 197th Fires Brigade. More than 1,100 N.H. citizen-soldiers will be mobilized, making it the largest, single deployment since World War II. ❖



Lt. Col. Thomas Spencer, commander of 3rd Battalion, 197th FA, explains HIMARS to a group of state and civic leaders prior to a live fire at Fort Drum, N.Y., Sept. 22.

Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA



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National awards cap banner year for 157th ARW

By Staff Sgt. Aaron McCarthy, 157 ARW-PA

The 157th Air Refueling Wing earned three national awards for outstanding service and performance in 2009.

It won the Maj. Gen. Stanley F.H. Newman Award, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, and the Maj. Gen. John J. Pesch Flight Safety Trophy.

For the inaugural presentation of the Newman Award, the 157th was selected as the year's outstanding Air National Guard Mobility Wing. The 157th was chosen over many other units to win this honor, and was officially recognized at the Airlift/Tanker Association Conference in late October.

"This caps off one of our most successful years," said Col. Richard Martell, commander of the 157th. "It's a credit to the men and women who are working harder and longer than ever before. I am proud of them and humbled by their dedication."

Members of the 157th also contributed to the Wing's winning the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for the fourth time in eight years. The award is given to units that have "distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service or outstanding achievement that clearly sets the unit above and apart from similar units."

To win it numerous times shows the continuous effort that every member puts forth not to just complete the mission but to excel, Martell said.

The Pesch Flight Safety Trophy is awarded annually to the two Air National Guard wings with the highest standards of flying safety. The honor

was presented at the National Guard Association of the United States conference. ♦

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From left, 1st Sgt. Glen Drewniak and Capt. Daniel Newman, first sergeant and commander of Mountain Company, check in with each other as their soldiers board a jet bound for Camp Atterbury, Ind., Dec. 8, at Manchester airport. The soldiers were traveling to their mobilization station in preparation for a deployment to Afghanistan in early 2010.

A memorable send-off for Mountain Company

By Maj. Greg Heilshorn, State PAO

MILFORD – For one night on Dec. 1, the center of the universe for New Hampshire and the rest of New England was inside the Milford Middle School gymnasium.

More than 1,200 people crammed onto the hardwood floor, into the bleachers and along walls draped with championship banners to wish Mountain Company a safe and successful deployment to Afghanistan.

Thanks in part to President Barack Obama, who announced later that evening at West Point the mobilization of an additional 30,000 troops, every Boston-based news outlet was anchored here to report live on the dubious timing of the two events.

Eleven different news organizations covered the send-off of C Company, 3rd of the 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), which was not directly related to the President's call-up but nevertheless provided an attractive storyline for his national address.

"He's got more information than I do," said Capt. Daniel Newman, the Mountain Company commander, when asked by one reporter what he thought of the President's announcement. "We know that we are going to Afghanistan, so it's not going to change our mission right now."

A Merrimack firefighter and father of five, Newman delivered the most poignant remarks of the ceremony in which he told the 140 infantrymen under his watch "he wouldn't ask them to do anything that he wouldn't do."

Newman pointed out that his unit was a true cross section of citizen-soldiers, who are among 3,000 from across New England deploying as part of Vermont's 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

"I have infantrymen, vertical engineers, cooks and military policemen," he said. "I even got two guys from the band."

Among the group was the only female soldier, Sgt. Mandy Neveu, who is deploying with the 86th as an administrative specialist.



Mountain Company soldiers stand for the playing of the National Anthem during their departure ceremony at Milford Middle School on Dec. 1. More than 1,200 people gathered in the school's gymnasium to wish them a safe and successful mission. Photo: Courtesy of Bob LaPree



Gov. John Lynch, commander in chief of the NHNG, shares a moment with Capt. Daniel Newman and his family during Mountain Company's deployment ceremony Dec. 1 at Milford Middle School. Newman is commander of the infantry unit. Photo courtesy of Bob LaPree

They will train at Camp Atterbury, Ind., for two months before departing to Afghanistan in early February. There, Mountain Company will patrol directly with their Afghan counterparts to help defeat the Taliban and create lasting stability in a country that has been at war for the last eight years.

"Your history traces back to the first militia men, 1623 for New Hampshire, who, with rifle in hand, answered the call to protect family, homeland and a way of life," said Maj. Gen. William Reddel, the Adjutant General of the N.H. Guard, in his remarks. "You are the most persuasive fighting system in our military arsenal and, as history has shown us, indispensable in victory." ♦



One of several Rangers in Mountain Company reads "Rogers Rules" during the unit departure ceremony at Milford High School on Dec. 1. Maj. Robert Rogers, a colonial frontiersman considered the godfather of the modern day Rangers, created the rules as part of his manual on guerrilla tactics during the French and Indian War. Photo: Courtesy of Bob LaPree

Irish pastime helps Guardsmen stay connected

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

A stopover in Ireland by a group of war-weary N.H. citizen-soldiers in 2005 sparked the idea of using the country's national pastime as a way for returning Guardsmen to stay connected with each other.

Maj. Ray Valas was traveling home with the Mountain Infantry Company following its yearlong combat tour in Iraq, and while waiting for the next flight during a layover in Ireland, the commander watched a game of hurling on television.

His unit had experienced a tough deployment, and Valas figured his soldiers would need a healthy outlet that could draw them together again once they returned home and went their separate ways. A game originally used by Celtic chieftains to train and prepare their warriors for battle intrigued Valas.

"We all felt really blessed that everyone was making it home alive," Valas said. "But I knew once we got home, the guys would go to the four winds. Some would finish their military service, and others would go to different units. We wanted a rallying point for anyone who wanted to keep in touch, something beyond a drinking club or going out to the bars."

Four years later, the Barley House Wolves is not only the first hurling team in the state, but it boasts a roster of 34 players who are gearing up for a spring trip to Ireland to train with the Irish Army's hurling team. What started as a group of soldiers who deployed together has grown to include airmen and civilians. The team has corporate sponsorship, uniforms and its success in recruiting players has been rooted in an effective word-of-mouth campaign.

"We thought this would be a really positive thing," said Valas, who is both coach and player. "It's a unique way to get together and have fun. It's athletic and it's focused on a healthy outlet."

What made the prospect of starting a hurling team especially attractive was the fact that no one had ever played it before, Valas said.

"It was kind of a morale thing," said Sgt. 1st Class Eddie Clements. "It was new to us and exciting and interesting."

Hurling is thought to be the fastest game on grass, Clements said. It's a stick and ball game, in which the ball – called the sliotar – can travel at almost 100 miles per hour. It looks a bit like a few other sports – players use sticks as in hockey;



Spc. Jason Burpee, a member of the Barley House Wolves hurling team, splits two defenders during a match last year. Photo: Courtesy of Sean Noonan

the goals are H-shaped as in rugby; and they have a net hanging from the crossbar as in football.

"It's got the appeal of what Americans want in a sport," Valas said. "It's fast paced, it's high scoring, it's challenging, and it's intense competition."

There are two teams with 15 players each. The object of the game is for players to use a wooden stick called a hurley to hit the sliotar between the opponents' goalposts, either over the crossbar or into a net guarded by a goalkeeper, for the goal, good for three points.

"There's something just so authentic about it," said 1st Sgt. Lore Ford who was named 2009 Most Valuable Player. "It dates back at least 2,000 years. It's a fairly brutal sport, but it's respectable, too. It's a fun game, and it's a fast game. If you watch guys who've been playing a long time, the ball stays up in the air the entire game."

Hurling is played on a field, or pitch, approximately 150 yards long and 90 yards wide. By comparison, the standard football field is 100 yards long by 53 yards wide. A game is divided into two halves of 30 minutes each.

Though the game has been around for thousands of years, the first recorded set of rules was not written until 1884.

"This is the oldest sport documented in history," said Valas.

Many sports have their rudiments in hurling. The game looks like a roll-up of lacrosse, field hockey, soccer, rugby, baseball and hockey, Clements said.

People who have played those sports tend to pick up the concept of hurling faster, he said. "But people's athletic ability doesn't matter. We use the crawl-walk-run method to develop skill. This is a chance to be a part of something really fun."

Dennis Trainor started out just watching the game on the sidelines. But then his friend Clements talked him into trying it out.

"I played just about every other type of sport there is. But I haven't played organized sports in I don't know how many years," Trainor said. "But they were looking for guys so I told them I'd come out for a practice and just see what happens. I'm 40 years old. I didn't know if I could even physically go out there and do it anymore."

One of the challenges the team faced originally was there were only a handful of other hurling teams in the region.

Oftentimes, the Wolves practiced against the Portland Marauders of Portland, Me. However, since the formation of the Wolves, the sport has taken root and more hurling teams are being established throughout New England as well as one in Montreal. By now, the Wolves have played teams all across the country.

In 2008, the Wolves competed in the North American County Board championship tournament held on Labor Day in Canton, Mass., with about a dozen teams. They were 6-3 for the 2009 season and made it to the quarterfinals in the North American tournament.

This April, they will spend a week in Ireland.

“We’re looking to build relationships and develop our skills,” Clements said. “Maybe see what (the Irish Army team) does during their practices and learn things we can bring home to work on ourselves.”

While in Ireland, the team will also visit Croke Park, where all the major hurling games are played. They’ll also visit an authentic hurling maker.

Sponsors of the team include North American Equipment Upfitters Inc., Barley House Restaurant and Tavern, Irish Electric, and Sean T. Noonan Photography. Hurling is administered by the Gaelic Athletic Association of Boston.

“Right now we’re in a huge recruiting blitz,” Clements said. “A lot of our players will be deploying next year, and we’re looking for people. We invite anyone to come out for just one practice. I guarantee you’ll want to learn it and play.”

The hurling season typically runs from April through September. During off-season, the team practices indoors. Upcoming practices are Jan. 14 and 28, Feb. 11 and 18, March 11 and 25, all from 9-10 p.m. at the Concord Sports Complex in Concord. Outdoor practices begin in May every Tuesday and Thursday, with the first scheduled for May 4 and 6. The team is also marching in the Manchester St. Patrick’s Day parade March 28.

For more information on the Barley House Wolves, go online and check out www.hurlingnh.com, or e-mail us at barleyhousewolves@gmail.com. ❖

Sgt. 1st Class Eddie Clements, a member of the Barley House Wolves hurling team, eyes the ball during a match last year. Photo: Courtesy of Sean Noonan



Are You A Player?

Be it softball or basketball, biking, fishing or golf, there are plenty of sports to go around for N.H. Guardsmen, their families and retirees. What better time to get your groove on and join one of many teams affiliated with the N.H. Guard. The following is a partial list with points of contacts. The teams are open to both soldiers and airmen. If we missed your team, please drop us a line and we’ll include it in a more comprehensive posting on the NHNG Web site.

N.H. National Guard Bicycling – Kevin McElroy at (603) 225-1332

N.H. Army Guard Co-Ed Softball – Steve Dyment at (603) 227-1584

N.H. Air Guard Co-Ed Softball – Michelle Mercier at (603) 430-2411

N.H. Air Guard Golf League – Michael Paquin at (603) 430-2436

N.H. Air Guard Basketball & Fishing – Shane Hutchins at (603) 430-3186



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A look back at Afghanistan

In the last year, we have sent more than 240 citizen-soldiers and airmen to Afghanistan. Below is a quick reference to some of the stories we've run in the past year about our service members and their experiences.



157th Security Forces defend Bagram Air Base

NHNG Magazine, Winter 2008

The 157th Security Forces deployed roughly 75 service members to Bagram Airfield, a vital hub in eastern Afghanistan. During their deployment, they provided security for \$3 billion in aircraft and equipment in addition to ensuring general law and order. Members from the 157th discuss their experiences and observations, and the challenges of being away from home and family.

NH Guard soldiers mistaken for Russians

NHNG Magazine, Spring 2009

Capt. Tyler Chamberlain from the Army Guard's Embedded Training Team describes arriving at Ghab, a small, isolated community that last saw foreign soldiers when the Russians moved through in the 1980s. Chamberlain describes the challenges of working with NATO forces, learning to use an interpreter, and battling the weather while working to train the Afghan National Army.



In a Remote Outpost in Afghanistan

NHNG Magazine, Summer 2009

Operating in the remote northwest of Afghanistan, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Filiault learned to juggle being a soldier, a teacher and a diplomat. As part of the Embedded Training Team with Chamberlain and 14 other soldiers, Filiault writes about his experiences in one of the most desolate and undeveloped areas of Afghanistan.

Mountain Company hones tactics for Afghan deployment

NHNG Magazine, Fall 2009

In the past eight years, soldiers have learned a great deal about fighting insurgents. As the Army has learned, pre-mobilization training has grown more robust, carefully recreating the challenges soldiers are likely to face in theater. Charlie Company, now on their way to Afghanistan, experienced this intense training in preparation for their deployment.



To read the full articles, download our magazine from <http://www.nh.ngb.army.mil> or grab one from the Public Affairs Office in Concord. ❖

Spike in DWIs prompts stand down

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

In less than a two-month span last summer, nine members of the N.H. National Army Guard were arrested for driving while intoxicated.

During the same timeframe, a soldier was cited for operating a piece of military equipment while under the influence; and another at annual training consumed so much alcohol he had to be rushed to the hospital for emergency care. Later reports showed the man had almost drunk himself to death.

"I don't have an explanation for why there were that many incidents in such a short period of time," said Brig. Gen. Stephen Burritt, commander of the N.H. Army Guard. "But I'm disappointed. I'm disappointed in the soldier who has gotten himself into that situation and hasn't yet reached out, and I'm disappointed in our organization that we haven't been able to see when we have a soldier in need of help. This is an indication to me that we have people who are hurting, and we need to get that fixed. I don't believe people take drugs or abuse alcohol because they're bad. People who are abusing substances are trying to escape life, or mask the symptoms of their pain."

It's not just an Army problem. A recent group of post-deployment health risk assessments completed by N.H. Air Guardsmen showed a pattern of increased post-traumatic stress, risky behaviors and increased alcohol consumption.

In 2007, two airmen were involved in an alcohol-related automobile crash that left one seriously injured and the other facing two felonies for driving while intoxicated and leaving the scene of an accident.

At a time when more than 1,000 citizen-soldiers are preparing for their second or third deployment to the Middle East, many in the organization point to the related stress as a primary reason for what they all agree to be an uptick in substance abuse among N.H. Guardsmen.

"Clearly we have seen increases in the use of alcohol; there's no question about that," said Col. Rick Greenwood, director of personnel, who oversees the organization's reunion and reintegration program. "But one of the standing questions in all instances of substance abuse whether it be illegal drugs or alcohol, really becomes why people are abusing. Is it because of some other disease or injury or affliction they have, whether it is a depression or some physical injury? Maybe even mild to moderate traumatic brain injury? Maybe post-traumatic stress? Are they using to try to take the pain away if you will? Or, is it that using these substances is causing some of those other problems like the depression?"

What's occurring in N.H. Guard is proportionately similar to what's been found across the military by the Defense Lifestyle Assessment Program, which studies health-related behaviors among military personnel. Recent surveys analyzed by the DLAP show a significant increase in heavy alcohol use in the Army from 1998 to 2005, and a slight rise particularly from 2002 to 2005. The report indicated there were statistically no significant changes in other branches of service between 2002 and 2005.

Personnel who had deployed within the past three years reported higher percentages of work and family stress; mental health symptoms and suicide attempts; heavy alcohol use and dependence; illicit drug use; and tobacco use and dependence as compared to those who had not deployed, the report cited.

For those who had deployed within the previous year, almost 14 percent reported they began or increased their alcohol use since deployment.

There's a lot of visibility on impact on outside connections, Greenwood said, like families, children and even the workplace.

"We have about three years' worth of statistics now that show a marked increase in domestic violence, marked increases in divorce rates, and alarming rates of potential suicide issues," Greenwood said. "There's driving too fast, leaving the scene, criminal activity, all kinds of things. I wouldn't be surprised that people are correlating this directly with Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom, and multiple deployments, that kind of thing. It's very clear there's a nexus there. But the jury is still out with the definitive causes because the studies are still ongoing."

Not everyone with mental health and substance abuse issues has been deployed, commanders emphasized.

The spate of alcohol-related events this past summer surprised one commander, who had soldiers among those charged.

"Something so pervasive had caused this bubble, that I knew we as leaders had to stop and address this immediately," said Lt. Col. Dan Wilson, then commander of the 3643rd Support Battalion. He called for an immediate stand down of his battalion.

"I looked case by case, and I could not find any common contributing factor across the board," said Wilson. "It involved every sort, from young kids up through their 30s, all different units and jobs, people who had deployed and people who hadn't, those who were married and those who weren't. This was very frustrating to me. And this really is something that hurts everyone."

Staff Sgt. Carolina Compton, coordinator for the N.H. Guards' Prevention, Training and Outreach program, was summoned, along with outside counselors. The day after Wilson called the stand down, four soldiers from his unit approached Compton for help.

"We started those difficult conversations with people," Wilson said. "I've had some very frank conversations with a lot of people about cause and effect. In a lot of these cases, I do see a lot of people handling life situations inappropriately."

"I'll tell you, I sat down and assessed myself: how was I doing, did I have a problem? Sometimes it's painful to take a look at yourself, but we all need to do it. This is something that everyone is vulnerable to, no matter who you are or what rank you are."

Wilson encouraged the buddy system, also called the bystander program, which holds soldiers accountable for looking after one another.

"I don't know if we got through to everyone. The cynic in me said a lot of people probably took the brochures and other materials and threw them in the nearest trash can," Wilson said. "But if we can help a dozen, or one, or two, then it's a start. I will tell you, after the stand down, there was an increase in self-referrals."

The N.H. Guard has a zero-tolerance policy. However, if someone self-refers before they know of a urinalysis test, there is more leniency, Compton said. They can get help and have protection under the limited-use policy while they're enrolled in the program. They cannot be discharged, and if the urinalysis

yields positive results it becomes “protected evidence,” meaning it can’t be used against the individual in a court martial or administrative actions.

Those who self-refer and get better will likely be able to stay in the military, as opposed to those who are found out through random urinalysis who have tried to hide their issues, Compton said. In all likelihood, those in the latter group will not be retained – even though they will still be afforded help through the program.

In 2008, there were 11 self-referrals, said Compton. Eight completed treatment and three were considered rehab failures and discharged. For fiscal year 2009, there were 16 self-referrals. Seven completed treatment, six are still receiving treatment and three were discharged. Some of those who are rehabilitated, Compton said, will be deploying next year or have already left for deployment with other units in the state.

“Not all of them are success stories,” Compton said. “But the people we do help get better through the self-referral program are usually going on to be great soldiers, great assets to their units.”

The person in treatment gets one chance, Compton said. If they don’t follow the counselor’s recommendations or down the road after being released from the program they have a subsequent positive urinalysis or relapse, they are considered a rehab failure and will be discharged.

“It’s important to note no one will be turned away,” she said. “We want to help everyone who wants to help themselves. But on the other hand, this isn’t a get-out-of-jail-free card. It takes a lot of work to detox and get better, and usually with substance abuse, there are other issues going on, too. People have to work to get better; they have to want it.”

The N.H. Guard has built partnerships with outside organizations like Easter Seals, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the N.H. Disaster Behavioral Health Response Team, the Department of Health and Human Services, and community-based mental health centers. Soldiers also have access to the VA Medical Center and the Vet Center, where all the counselors are combat vets.

“I’m not a counselor, not a clinician, but I’m a liaison,” Compton said. “I listen to people, and establish that rapport with them so they know I really care about them. For example, they may be struggling with alcohol but have a problem with post-traumatic stress – you can’t treat one without treating the other. So I’ll coordinate all the help they need. Sometimes people are very early in their addictions and that early intervention is enough. Other times it’s more time-consuming.”

For Compton, who first started her military service in the active-duty Army in 1989, the job of outreach coordinator seems like a natural fit. A native of Nicaragua, she grew up since age eight in what she called a typical Hispanic upbringing in a hard-working Los Angeles, Calif., neighborhood. Her mother, a single parent, worked three jobs – but when she was not working, she was home drinking heavily. Compton said she and her five siblings learned early on to take care of each other. Later, the family struggled as two brothers-in-law used and sold drugs.

“Growing up, seeing all that, it did something to me,” she said. “I know what drugs can do to a family. I’ve always felt lucky, like I had the momentum to overcome all that. But I know some people can’t do it by themselves. So when I originally saw this job announcement, it really spoke to me. I’m a people person, and I want to give back and help people. I believe in



For more information about the N.H. Guard’s self-referral process, contact Staff Sgt. Carolina Compton at 227-5086 or 853-6442. The program is available to all N.H. Guardsmen.

the military – sometimes people think they can’t make anything of themselves, and the military is what proves them wrong.”

When Compton sits down with a soldier for the first time, they’re often scared, angry, embarrassed or defensive, she said. She tries to instill hope and shares a new outlook.

“I tell them it’s like a clean house which is what they have presented to everyone,” she said. “But there’s one closet in the back where they’ve kept shoving stuff inside until it gets more and more messy and unmanageable. Sooner or later, the day comes when for whatever reason that closet door gets opened and everything comes crashing down. So now the mess is out in the open; but now, you’ve got someone to come in and help you organize and clean up.”

Although paying for the help is either out of pocket or through private health insurance, there are various programs which provide financial assistance at little or no cost, Compton said. There is a federally-funded grant, Access to Recovery, used in 13 states though it’s not yet funded in New Hampshire. So far here, Compton said, Easter Seals has been the primary source of financial relief.

The cost of an initial evaluation can run around \$350 to \$400, Compton said. If a determination is made the individual should receive outpatient care, with visits one to two times per week, the cost is typically \$80 to \$120 per session; and usually treatment runs four to six weeks. For residential programs, the cost can be more than \$6,000 per month.

“This isn’t a military problem, it’s a societal problem,” Compton said. “And I feel if we can help someone during this hard time in their life and rehabilitate them so they can go on to be productive members of society and assets to the National Guard, why wouldn’t we?”

For more information about the PTO program or to contact Staff Sgt. Compton, call 227- 5086 or 853-6442. ❖

The toughest mission of their lives

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

Substance abuse has a face. It's the new soldier who starts using at a party with his old high school buddies. It's the young spouse who tries to expunge her loneliness in a bottle of wine. It's a hard-shelled first sergeant who can't stand the thought of losing one more soldier to war, and the devoted officer who is slammed by panic attacks every time he thinks about the approaching deployment.

The fact of the matter is substance abuse is an indiscriminate foe that can snake into anyone's life. Old stereotypes no longer fit. It's a complex issue; one where

there are no easy answers. In the military, the problem is on the rise, officials agree.

Two N.H. Army Guardsmen, Staff Sgt. John Essman and Pfc. Jeffrey Beane, agreed to tell their stories about alcohol and drug abuse and share how they found themselves in the pit of this very issue.

One is a seasoned veteran of three combat tours. The other is a new soldier facing a possible discharge. They both hope that by telling their story, others who are dealing with similar trials will seek help.



Staff Sgt. John Essman

The day after Staff Sgt. John Essman was arrested for driving drunk this past summer, his phone rang.

"Hey. Heard you had a tough weekend." It was his first sergeant.

In actuality, it had been a tough few years. Essman, 46, divorced and a full-time maintenance worker, had managed to hide his deep troubles from everyone. He considered himself a very private person. But now he was at his lowest point.

"It was horrible," Essman said. "It was embarrassing and humiliating."

He opened up a bit to his first sergeant, who reminded him of the Guard's self-referral program. At that moment, he said, he felt a small sense of relief. He finally realized he really didn't have to face his problems alone.

Eventually, the headstrong New Yorker reached out to the N.H. Guard's reintegration team. "I need help," he said. He spoke with Staff Sgt. Carolina Compton, the Guard's prevention, treatment and outreach coordinator.

Essman has been in treatment with a licensed substance abuse counselor ever since.

It's not easy, he said. Not a day goes by that he doesn't think about having a drink. Even watching a football game, he'd really like just one beer. But he knows he can't. He tells himself, "Not today."

With more than 26 years of military service, Essman returned from his third deployment in May 2008. Right off, he knew he was a train wreck. Greeted with a hero's welcome and exuberant slaps on the back, he was reaching for a bottle and longing to be back in theater where at least, he felt, he fit in.

In retrospect, Essman said the deployments changed him. His first was with the 197th Field Artillery Brigade in 2004.

"The first one was a fantastic deployment," he remembered. "We did good things, and we really contributed to the greater good. We were out; we were doing missions. I did a boatload of missions myself. From our maintenance perspective, we were the guys they all came to in order to make (their vehicles) run.

"And we pulled off some miracles, nothing short of it. Being able to pull parts out of nowhere and get trucks that were dead-lined the previous day out on mission for first thing the next morning, using inadequate tools for the job."

There were days when Essman and the other mechanics worked 24 hours straight.

"There you are, lying in motor oil with antifreeze dripping all over you; you're sweating your ass off, the cargo pallet is 102 degrees so you're burning on top of it, and when you're done, and you see that finished product rolling out the gate, you're like, not bad, not bad. Good stuff. And you feel great."

When he redeployed, something wasn't quite right. Essman found himself struggling at home. "I had a desire, a need, to go back. I had to go back," he said. Essman returned to Iraq with the 3643rd Maintenance Company.

"There was unfinished business that had to be tended to," he said. "Don't ask me what it was. But I had to go back."

He expected the deployment, in support of another maintenance mission, to be as satisfying as the first one.

“Three days before we deployed to theater we got the rug got pulled out from under us, and we were told we had a detainee operations mission,” Essman said. “It was an enormous kick in the stomach. Everyone was geared up for something else. It was a horrible deployment. Not because of the people, but because of the mission. We had a battalion command that just left us scratching our heads.”

Still, nearing the end of his second deployment, Essman felt an insatiable drive to stay.

“You can become hooked,” he said. “There’s such a thing as a war junkie. A part of it is listening to the rhetoric that comes out of the media and the politicians. You have these people calling the war a mess. And you’re sitting there thinking, ‘I’m the idiot on the ground, dude. What are you telling me? That we’re not doing our job?’ And it pisses you off, it makes you angry. You take it personally. So that’s part of it.”

Essman said he had post traumatic stress from the first deployment, but didn’t know enough about it to realize it.

“I kept thinking, ‘I feel good, I feel fine. There’s nothing wrong with me.’ Looking back, you better believe there was stuff going on,” Essman said.

Essman did not return home with the 3643rd, volunteering to stay on for another tour. He said goodbye to his son, Sgt. Jordan Essman, who served with him in the 3643rd. A promise Essman had made to his youngest child, a daughter, to come home for good, was broken.

Attached to the 82nd Airborne, Essman worked in the motor pool in Tallil. He took personally the safety of soldiers who rode out into combat every day.

“You have a moral and ethical responsibility to those crews – they’re your guys too,” he said.

The tempo of the mission was intense. IEDs were commonplace, as were EFPs, explosively formed penetrators designed to pierce armored vehicles and cause the greatest damage.

“What a terror weapon,” Essman said. “We had bunches of guys killed from EFPs.”

Every three days, Essman went outside the wire.

“Here’s the way it worked for me,” he said. “When I was out on mission, there was such a feeling of invincibility and power. I was indestructible. You couldn’t kill me. You feel bold.”

“There’s that certain comfort in knowing there’s someone on your right and left. And you know them, and you’re tight with them. There’s that camaraderie – ‘I know you guys are good, and you know I’d do anything for you, and I know you’d do anything for me.’ We’re good, we’ve got good equipment, we pay attention to detail, we look like bad asses going down the road, and we even have a reputation among the insurgents as bad asses. We were the guys you didn’t mess with. They knew if we had to drive off the road to chase them, to hunt them down and kill them, that’s what we were going to do. And it happened.”

“But by the same token,” Essman continued, “and this is hard to convey,

when you’re driving down the road at 35, 40, 45 miles per hour, because speed is not the thing anymore – it’s slow will get you there – and you know your next movement, your next breath, your next blink could be your last one. When you have that passing thought, you just shake it out of your head, you can’t think about that.

“I’ve seen enough of these EFPs just shredding vehicles. I remember one, a Romanian armored personnel carrier, that hit an EFP and it killed all five crew. I mean, it’s devastating. And not to mention just the roadside bombs themselves. Once, one went off right behind me. That will wake you up.”

It is then, Essman said, that it starts playing in his head, not out on mission, but when he is back in garrison and has time to think about it.

“That’s when the night terrors come,” he said. “I had one dream in particular. I couldn’t get my crew out of a burning truck. Even though that never happened, I dreamt it. And it messed with me.”

Essman was half way through the deployment, and the nightmares were becoming more frequent. A few times, Essman recalled, his roommate had to wake him from screaming in his sleep.

“I thought, ‘Well that ain’t right,’” Essman said. “That’s out of the norm for me. But I still knew I could deal with it. Suck it up. This will be over soon. That may not be the right answer, but that was the answer. And I’m telling you, that happens constantly.”

The mind, Essman said, will try to rationalize everything.

“It’s not an overt thing,” Essman said. “You forget about it, then you pick it up again here or there. It’s not like it’s constant. But the night before every mission, I used to make my peace. And I’d fall asleep apprehensive, and the next morning, wake up and say, ‘Let’s go. Let’s get it done.’ And you put the game face on, and you go right into it.”

According to Essman, the combat stress clinics in theater were the most under-utilized resource in the Army. No way was he going to be caught entering that building.

“Imagine – you go to them and say you’re having troubles, the first thing they do is yank your weapon,” Essman said. “Now here you are walking around without a weapon. In an environment where everyone’s packing, you’ve got nothing. Everybody’s looking at you. ‘That guy’s got no weapon – he’s crazy.’ Instant stigma. Very few guys, almost no one, went to combat stress. And if they did, they wanted the drugs. Pure and simple. Can’t sleep. It’s a quick way to get a handful of Ambien.”

Back home, nothing was the same for Essman. There was tension between him and his kids. It was surreal moving around in places where not everyone wore a uniform and didn’t speak the same lingo. His friends were now in many way strangers. And they always introduced him as “John Essman, who’s been deployed three times.” A lot of people asked questions about his experiences, many probing and unintentionally insensitive. At the same time, people loved to buy him drinks.

He started feeling hit from all different directions from memories the questions

*“It’s hard.
Now I have to cope
with it all differently.
You have to find
other mechanisms
to cope with the thoughts
without succumbing
to the trap.
I’m working on it.
I’m taking it day by day.”*

– Staff Sgt. John Essman

raised, and it was so easy to accept the drinks. In that place, it didn't feel so dark anymore.

"People misunderstand post traumatic stress," Essman said. "Part of it isn't always about the horrible things you've seen. I've seen some pretty horrible things, but it's not always about that. In Iraq, I'm around my guys, my platoon, my company, I know these guys like the back of my hand, and they know me. We're comfortable together.

"Then you come home, you step off that plane, and it's gone. All of that is taken away. Now it's just me. And I don't have anyone. Now it's me against the world. Suddenly I don't have that perceived protection. I'm not in physical danger. It's the loss of – I guess it's emotional safety."

The drinking helped Essman go back to his missions overseas, back to his friends where he felt the most comfortable and safe.

"A lot of the times, that was all I thought about," he said.

On some level, he knew all along he was drinking to self-medicate. At one point, he worked up the nerve to go to the VA hospital. He talked about his drinking. And not sleeping. The panic attacks. And the way he drove.

"They wanted to hand me a bottle of Zoloft," Essman said. "I didn't want that crap. Don't give me a mind-numbing drug and think everything is going to be OK now. I'm not trying to

disparage the VA, but it's just not what I needed. I didn't need a treatment, I needed tools. Give me the weapons, and I'll take the fight."

Essman returned to denial of his problems. He was still getting up and going to work each day. It wasn't interfering. He was fine until the news came he would be deploying again.

"Now I have that hanging over my head," Essman said. "The feelings of insecurity, coupled with the feelings of 'Oh my God, another year of loneliness,' that's enough to push anyone over the edge. Inside I'm going, 'I don't have this one left in me. I just don't. Not now. It's going to take too much out of me.' I was still keyed up from the last one, and now here I am getting ready to go back again. It was just too much. And it just pushed me deeper and deeper into that abyss."

After his arrest for DUI, Essman was taken off the deployment. Because he self-referred, his career can be salvaged. But he will be dealing with the fallout for years to come. He is working on his family relationships, and he knows he must follow through with his treatment.

"It's hard. Now I have to cope with it all differently," Essman said. "You have to find other mechanisms to cope with the thoughts without succumbing to the trap. I'm working on it. I'm taking it day by day."

Pfc. Jeffrey Beane

Pfc. Jeffrey Beane knew he was an alcoholic when he joined the N.H. Army National Guard. But he'd been sober for eight months when he enlisted, and he deceived himself to believe this time, it was under control. Besides, he always wanted to join the military – a career that wasn't about money or power, but to serve a higher purpose. Some day, he envisioned himself becoming an officer.

Beane loved being a soldier. When an ice storm slammed local communities in December 2008 and N.H. Guard units were activated, he was one of the first to volunteer. It felt great to help.

By then he was drinking again – during the heavy times, on a daily basis. But still, everything was under control, he kept telling himself.

"I was very proud of myself, minus the drinking," Beane said.

But one day, in May 2009, less than two years after he entered service, his commanding officer told him he was being discharged for misconduct. A urinalysis showed he had tested hot for cocaine. He recalled feeling confused and indignant.

Beane was directed to see Staff Sgt. Carolina Compton, the prevention, training and outreach coordinator. During those early conversations, he was upset, scared and irate. It must be the amoxicillin he was taking at the time, he proclaimed. This had to have been some kind of mistake.

Still, he paid \$400 out of pocket for an evaluation by a licensed substance abuse counselor at Compton's suggestion. The counselor said he would need residential

help, as his problems seemed to be bigger than even he knew at the time.

In July, Beane admitted himself to the Webster Place Recovery Center in Franklin. He stayed for 90 days, at the rate of \$200 per day or \$6,000 per month. It was here where he began to face his problems.

He now owns the fact that he used cocaine, despite not remembering as it happened, he said, during an alcoholic blackout while he celebrated his 26th birthday.

Beane is an alcoholic in recovery, and as he told his story, he was at times defensive, choked up and always somewhat guarded.

"I like to think growing up was pretty good," Beane said. "I came from a very wealthy family, and we were privileged. I was never abused, and I pretty much got everything I wanted."

Beane's dad founded an engineering company, but was seldom around. His mom suffered from depression and was often times withdrawn. He had two older sisters, whom he described as "very intelligent, very successful."

His problems began in high school. His dad's business started deteriorating. His parents were not getting along. Meanwhile, Beane was trying to fit in at high school. He was a little overweight. While it seemed the other guys were getting all the girls, Beane was left feeling alone and unpopular. He didn't share his insecurities with anyone. His family was too absorbed in their own problems.

He found a group of kids who partied hard. And they befriended him. He quickly found alcohol gave him confidence.

"Maybe I wasn't as successful as I thought I should be; maybe I didn't like

*"I've never had a
second chance at anything.
But today
I'm a stronger man,
I'm a better man.
I'm more balanced
than I ever was,
I'm well into my recovery,
and I think I can be a
future asset to the Army."*

– Pfc. Jeffrey Beane

being me,” Beane said. “But I found this mind-altering substance and with it I didn’t have to feel pain, and I didn’t have to be me. When I drank, I got a little crazy and did stupid things that people thought were funny. So I was accepted. It’s just that it went from good to bad real fast.”

Beane’s parents took notice of his heavy drinking. They sent him to a rehab center in Vermont, where he spent 28 days.

“I was sober one week,” he says. “Later that same year, I ended up going back for me this time. The first time didn’t work because I had only gone because my parents made me.”

Again, he was released after almost a month. Things were good, until a bad relationship caused him to drink again.

“I ended up really struggling with heavy drinking over the next four years,” he said. “The ironic thing is the only time I felt depressed is when I was drinking.”

By then, his parents had divorced. There were legal battles with the father’s business. During that time, he met an Army National Guard recruiter. He decided to clean himself up on his own and soon raised his hand to take the oath of enlistment.

But two weeks before he shipped to basic training, his father attempted suicide.

So he traveled to Florida with his sisters to be with his dad. Beane recalled going from the hospital to a nearby bar each day. “It was horrible. I really can’t describe the feeling. I was very, very upset. For about three weeks straight, I remember going from hospital to bar, hospital to bar, hospital to bar.”

He returned to New Hampshire to embark on his initial training.

“I went to basic training at Fort Jackson and that’s where I detoxed,” he says. “My dad was in the hospital; we weren’t allowed to use the phones; and I was detoxing. I wouldn’t recommend that to anyone.”

About halfway through basic, he stormed out of a briefing on suicide where other trainees traded jokes and laughs. He told his drill sergeants about his father, and they allowed him weekly phone calls home. For the next several weeks in that controlled training environment, Beane stayed sober.

After seven weeks of advanced individual training at Fort Eustis, Va., Beane returned home and enrolled at Plymouth State University to finish his bachelor’s degree. He stopped going to recovery meetings and stopped calling his sponsor. Even with a full workload and busy social schedule, he began getting immersed in the college scene and before he knew it, the drinking was taking over again.

“For a while, I was maintaining and it wasn’t that bad,” said Beane. “I was a functioning alcoholic. I had a full schedule, and I was able to maintain like a normal person, so I thought I was OK. Plus I had a higher purpose. I wanted to be a better person, and a good soldier. I was only drinking heavily when school got hard, or when I got stressed.”

Soon it got to the point where he would have to drink a shot of vodka or a beer every morning with breakfast to keep from getting sick.

“That sounds crazy to the average person, but that’s what a day was like to me,” Beane said. “I would wake up and have whatever was left over in the fridge or freezer. I knew when all the liquor stores in the state of New Hampshire opened. During the bad times I’d be at the store at 9 a.m.”

Beane spent up to \$400 a night in a bar on alcohol. It was nothing for him to pick up a handle of vodka a day, which he said equals 750 milliliters. He drank while he studied, and spiked drinks to bring with him in Dunkin’ Donuts cups to take tests. If he didn’t drink, he would get bad shakes and cold sweats.

“I don’t remember most weekends,” Beane said. “When I was drinking heavily, I wouldn’t stop until I blacked out. I would wake up and not remember anything from the night before. And I’d ask my friends, ‘Hey man, what’d we do last night?’ And if someone put something in front of me, I would do it. I’ve been told I’ve done drugs before when I’ve been drinking.”

During this time, Beane was seeing a psychologist who recommended that he might need a recovery facility.

“I was committed to getting treatment, I just wanted to wait until the summer to tell my unit because the Army was paying my tuition,” Beane said. “I planned to wait until then to tell them I needed help because my life was unmanageable, and I was an alcoholic. But I never got that opportunity, because I ended up with a positive urinalysis before then.”

After three months at Webster Place, Beane said he has done a lot of healing. “I did really well there. I experienced a significant change. But I’m working hard at it. I’m working every day toward my recovery.”

As of December, he was awaiting word on whether he will be discharged from the N.H. Guard. A final determination rests with the Adjutant General, who will review his record, which includes letters of support and a recommendation from Beane’s legal counsel, a Guard attorney, that he be retained.

“It is my belief he has worked hard to reestablish his value system and live by a high moral code that allows for spiritual growth,” wrote John Knowles, executive director of Webster Place Recovery Center. “His commitment to abstinence from mood- and mind-altering substances is genuine and sincere, and I believe he has an excellent prognosis for living a life free of drug use, allowing him to be a productive citizen and role model to others.”

For Beane’s part, he said he is approaching life one day at a time. He works consciously toward staying sober and helps mentor others in the Webster Place program as a senior resident. He is strong enough now to ask for help if he wavers.

“I’ve never had a second chance at anything,” Beane said. “But today I’m a stronger man, I’m a better man. I’m more balanced than I ever was, I’m well into my recovery, and I think I can be a future asset to the Army.” ♦

YOU NEVER HEAR, "SNAP OUT OF IT, IT'S JUST DIABETES."

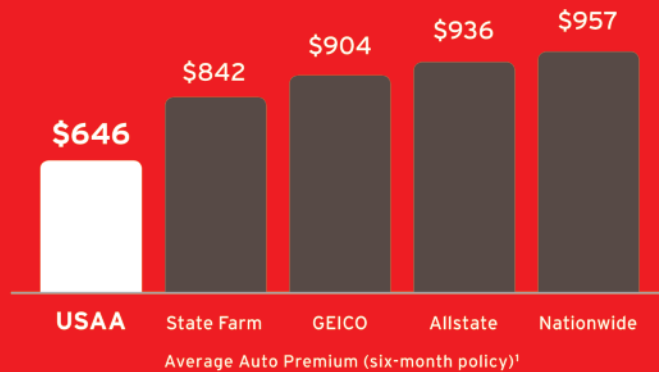
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All-female MEDEVAC crew makes history

Story and photo by Sgt. Neil Gussman,
Pennsylvania National Guard

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE ADDER, Iraq – Four soldiers serving here with the New Hampshire National Guard earned a special distinction in November when they became their company’s first all-female medical evacuation crew.

In the three days before Thanksgiving, Capt. Trish Barker, Chief Warrant Officer Andrea Galatian, Staff Sgt. Misty Seward and Sgt. Debra Lukan, all of the 3/238th MEDEVAC, C Company, constituted one of the on-alert crews for Task Force Keystone.

Officials aren’t sure how rare the all-female MEDEVAC crew is, but it is a rarity the company is proud of.

“There must have been another all-female MEDEVAC crew somewhere, but I haven’t seen one,” said Galatian, the crew’s pilot.

The odds are slim for such a crew to come up on rotation, said N.H. Guard Maj. David Mattimore, commander of C Company, 3/238th MEDEVAC, from Hampton.

“It would not have been possible until one of our avionics sergeants became a crew chief,” he said.

That crew chief also is the newest name on the flight roster. Lukan, 43, of Keene, enlisted following 9/11. “I just barely made the age cutoff,” she said.

Lukan trained as an avionics mechanic and just recently switched from the shop to flight crew. She deployed to Camp Speicher and Tikrit from 2005 to 2006 and served in the avionics field. She’s happy to be on the flight rotation this time, she said.

“My family doesn’t know I’m flying,” she said. “They worry a lot, but I suppose I’ll have to tell them eventually.”

In the civilian world, Lukan is a federal technician in avionics for the New Hampshire National Guard.

Seward, 30, of Owosso, Mich., agreed with Galatian on the uniqueness of the crew. “Same for me,” she said. “Never flew with an all-girl crew.”

In fact, with a total of nine deployments among them and between eight and 12 years of service each, this still is a first-time experience for the entire crew, Barker, the operations officer, said.

Seward enlisted in 1998 and has served as a medic for 11 years. She has four years as a flight medic and seven on the ground. She deployed to Kuwait from 2001 to



From left, Sgt. Debra Lukan, Capt. Trish Barker, Staff Sgt. Misty Seward and Chief Warrant Officer Andrea Galatian, of the New Hampshire Army National Guard’s 3/238th MEDEVAC, C Company, became the company’s first all-female crew just before Thanksgiving. They are serving in Iraq as part of Task Force Keystone.

2002 and to Baghdad from 2006 to 2007, both tours as a ground medic.

When she returns from her current tour, Seward will resume her job as a security officer at a level-one trauma clinic in Lansing, Mich., part of Sparrow Health Systems.

Galatian enlisted in 1997 and served five years as an administrative clerk before going to flight school in 2002. She has served seven years as a pilot, including a deployment to Bosnia in 2005.

As a civilian, Galatian is the business analyst for the real estate division of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Barker, 30, enlisted in 1999 as an aircraft fueller. She went to Officer Candidate School in 2003 and Flight School in 2004.

A native of Menominee, Mich., she was deployed to Bosnia in 2005 as a MEDEVAC section leader.

When she returns from this deployment, she will resume her job as the state occupational health specialist for the Michigan Army National Guard.

“It may be months before this crew comes up in the rotation again,” said Mattimore. “We only have nine female flight crew members, and everyone rotates to our remote bases, so the odds of them being back together again are low.”

Still, the crew is happy to have had the experience. “I’m glad we got a chance to be first,” Barker said, “even if it is just first for us.” ♦



Grandmont and Stewart earn Soldier, Airman of Year honors

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

Pfc. Kyle Grandmont of 54th Troop Command and Airman 1st Class Joshua Stewart of the 157th Air Refueling Wing's Communication Squadron were named the N.H. National Guard's Soldier and Airman of the Year for 2009.

Grandmont was among 15 N.H. Guard soldiers who competed for top honors during a grueling weekend-long competition held at the Regional Training Site and Fort Devens last September.

The contest include a written test, an appearance before a board, a physical fitness test, rifle qualification, day and night land navigation, a 10-K road march with a 35-pound rucksack, as well as eight other warrior tasks.

Stewart competed Wing-wide and was judged tops for his record of academic accomplishments and stellar record of community service throughout the year. He was a honor graduate of his basic training class and scored 100 percent on his physical fitness test. He scored a 98 percent in his career field of communications and computer systems operations, which earned him the distinguished graduate certificate.

Stewart was also lauded for his membership in the Blazing Turtles running team, which raises money for nonprofit organizations. He co-founded the Farmington Hay Day Road Race, which raised \$2,000 for community and scholastic sports teams and also volunteered for a Special Olympics event and the United Way Day of Caring.

The 2009 NCO of the Year for the N.H. Army Guard was Sgt. Jeremy Chaisson of B Company, 3643rd Brigade Support Battalion.

Overall leaders of the Army competition in each battalion were Spc. Brittany Cooper, HHB 197th Fires Brigade; Sgt. 1st Class Sage Ladieu of Recruiting and Retention Command; Spc. Melissa Davis, B Co. 3643rd BSB; Pvt.2 Ryan Keane of Battery C, 3rd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery; and Sgt. Sean Bean of Battery C, 3/197th FA.

Grandmont and Chaisson will continue on to the regional competition scheduled for May at Camp Smith, N.Y. ❖



Airman 1st Class Joshua Stewart, above, and Pfc. Kyle Grandmont, left, were named the N.H. National Guard's 2009 Airman and Soldier of the Year.



Spc. Brittany Cooper keeps pace during the 10K ruck-march portion of the NHARNG Soldier of the Year competition held last September.





A NHARNG soldier cuts a determined figure during the 10K ruck-march portion of the NHARNG Soldier of the Year competition held last September.

Spc. Melissa Davis gets a hand with her ruck after completing a 10K road march during the NHARNG Soldier of the Year competition held last September.



A select group of NHARNG soldiers distinguished themselves during the 2009 Soldier of the Year competition held last September.



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- Bala Murghab – Embedded Training Team

Air National Guard

Army National Guard

Sharing lessons: Salvadoran teachers visit N.H.

BOW – Marielos Gomez Vasques, a teacher from the San Jose Villanueva school in El Salvador, works with students on a science experiment at Bow High School on Dec. 1.

Vasques was one of four teachers from El Salvador who spent a week with teachers from Bow Elementary, Memorial and High School sharing ideas and exploring new teaching techniques.

This visit was the second phase of the NHNG's State Partnership Program's effort to build a lasting partnership with teachers in New Hampshire and teachers in El Salvador.

The initial phase, completed this summer, sent five teachers from New Hampshire to San Jose Villanueva to learn about the teaching environment in El Salvador.

Photo: 2nd Lt. Andrew Schwab, NHNG-PA



A better way of doing business

By Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

A newly created think tank is energizing efforts to assess and improve the way the N.H. National Guard does business.

Spurred by the reality of a work force cut in half next year due to the deployment of more than 1,000 N.H. citizen-soldiers, the N.H. Guard Army and Air leadership has formed a Continuous Process Improvement team.

"The number one objective is to formalize joint operational practices, and the number one associated project is to identify and leverage similar functional area expertise," said Col. Carolyn Protzmann, director of Joint Force Headquarters. "This is a critical project in light of our state mission and in light of our upcoming Army and Air mobilizations. The scope of this project is enormous.

"The CPI philosophy centers on aligning an organization with its strategic objectives. Drawing from a number of different corporate improvement philosophies, the initiative focuses on employees at all levels, not just the organizational leaders. Success is measured not in end points, but in milestones," members of the team said.

For a military force, this can equate to doing more, and doing it better, with less, members of the team said. The N.H. Guard is one of the first in the nation to embrace the concept, which is being employed at the national level.

Last fall, N.H. Guard leaders as well as civilians from a wide range of employment levels and backgrounds attended a four-day introductory seminar on CPI. It was facilitated by IBM, which has been contracted to help states implement CPI.

The group focused on four specific areas: training, joint operations, human resources and communications. From there,

10 strategic improvement areas were analyzed linked by their relationship to the four strategic goals.

Though it seems like a cumbersome process, breaking it down like this will yield quantifiable, measurable landmarks, Protzmann said.

For example, when more than half of the Army force is deployed next year, Air Guardsmen will likely be called on more to respond to state emergencies and cover down on traditionally Army missions.

"At the end of the day, we may run into stumbling blocks," Protzmann said. "But across the spectrum of Army and Air, many processes are the same. There may be different regulatory distinctions or methodology, but there is also some redundancy and duplication in our processes."

"If there are ways to collaboratively work together, to become interoperable, now is the time to do it with the large mobilization looming," Protzmann added.

Bruce Butler of IBM, the project manager and who is known as a "Master Black Belt," will help the NHNG CPI team facilitate the process.

"This is about keeping up with the demands of the world today," Butler said. "Part of what is unique about this process is the work force gets to help define the best way to get the job done. CPI is going to be very beneficial for states like New Hampshire who have big mobilizations coming up. That makes a perfect catalyst for change. There is a more open-minded mindset to change when things are painful as opposed to when things are running smoothly." ♦

64th Air Refueling Squadron activated

By 1st Lt. Sherri Pierce, 157th ARW PAO

NEWINGTON – An activation and assumption of command ceremony took place Oct. 2, 2009, at Pease Air National Guard Base, officially recognizing the 64th Air Refueling Squadron and its new commander, Lt. Col. Christopher Leist.

“This is a very momentous day for the Air National Guard and the Air Force,” said 157th Air Refueling Wing Commander Col. Richard Martell.

The 64th ARS is a part of the 22nd Operations Group of McConnell Air Force Base but is now operationally assigned to the 157th Air Refueling Wing. The partnership was formed as part of the Active Associate concept where active-duty airmen are assigned to an Air National Guard unit and work side by side with their Guard counterparts.

“This is a day to celebrate the beginnings of a new way to capitalize on America’s and New Hampshire’s investment in both the active-duty Air Force and the Air National Guard,” said Leist. “The next greatest generation is standing before you in formation today.”

Col. Billy Langford, 22nd Operations Group commander, said this association will bring together the proud tradition of three renowned units and “set the course for a hugely successful partnership for years to come.”

After the activation order was read, the 64th ARS guidon was unfurled and raised. Langford passed the guidon to Leist as a symbol of Leist’s assumption of command of the 64th ARS. Leist was presented with the United States Air Force Commander’s Badge and also received his first salute from the 64th ARS.



From left, Col. Billy Langford, commander of the 22nd Operations Group based at McConnell AFB, presents the 64th Air Refueling Squadron’s guidon to Lt. Col. Christopher Leist, symbolizing Leist’s assumption of command on Oct. 2, 2009. Leist’s command coincided with the activation of the 64th ARS at Pease Air National Guard Base. Photo: Staff Sgt. Curtis J. Lenz, 157 ARW-PA

“When the call came to nominate a squadron commander for the 64th, for me there was no deliberation necessary,” said Langford. “I knew I had the perfect fit in Lt. Col. Leist.” ❖



Members of the 157th Air Refueling Wing stand at parade rest during a ceremony activating the 64th Air Refueling Squadron at Pease, Oct. 2, 2009.

Photo: Staff Sgt. Amanda Currier, 157 ARW-PA



Some final thoughts after a year in Afghanistan

By Capt. Tyler Chamberlain

“Welcome home!” they said. Yellow ribbons abound; young children slightly confused about where daddy was for the past year, and a teary-eyed wife assault the returning soldiers’ senses as they enter the arrival terminal. The general and sergeant major shake our hands after we embrace our loved ones and then we are released to our families’ loving grasps and smiles that forgave all the phone calls and handwritten letters that were ever so yearned for but were not always delivered.

The weather is noticeably cooler in New Hampshire than the 110- to 120-degree temperatures we just faced, but comforting all the same. Although we had just traveled across nine time zones via bus and plane, we were more than ready to do some more traveling, knowing that our next destination was our final one. The absence of our body armor, rifle, pistol, hand grenades, smoke grenades, machine guns, night vision goggles, personal locator beacon, enough ammo to make Rambo blush, and armor-plated 10,000-pound vehicle were noticed, but not missed. We didn’t have to receive an approval from higher headquarters for our mission to drive from the airport back to our home. Not this time. This time the warmth of our wives, girlfriends and kids were all the approval we needed.

There is undoubtedly going to be an adjustment period for everyone. How couldn’t there be? New routines had been formed by members on both continents, and the world didn’t stop rotating while we were away; in fact it seemed like things moved faster while we were gone. With compromises and time, routines would change, and we could get back to enjoying a normal life, except with everything being one year older. Many of us had spent the past year sleeping in a dirt bunker and eating pasta for every meal. A little time at home with the kids and significant others, plus a nice long hot shower, would start the reintegration period off nicely.

You truly have to get away from America to appreciate everything we have in this great country of ours. America is great for so many reasons, and after being in Afghanistan for a year, you can trace a lot of our country’s instilled values back to what everyone was taught at a young age. Share with your friends. Be patient. Be respectful. Put things back where you found them. Be honest. Show up on time; even better, show up on time with the right attitude. Be yourself. Work as a team. Give credit where credit is due. Give it your all.

Over the past year, many of the team members fell back on the values we learned at an early age as teaching points for the Afghans. Most of the team members can probably remember past conversations with New Hampshire Guardsmen who had completed a tour to Afghanistan as combat advisors. We had been told that we were going to have to use several different means of communication to get our point across to our Afghan counterparts. Those means ranged from flattering, to rational, to appealing to their emotions, to near insult. Sometimes all of the above had to be used just to get one point across, the hardest point being that the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police must work as a team to overcome the challenges that plague Afghanistan. The conflict is not going to be solved by an individual entity; it will be a team effort.

Nearly all of us took our two weeks of leave to come home, visit our families and friends, have a beer or two, and simply relax. It’s strange to think that as often as we thought about home while we were in Afghanistan, we thought of Afghanistan just as much when we were home. How are my buddies doing in Afghanistan? What’s changed in Afghanistan since I’ve been gone? I’m going to turn on the news for just a moment to see what’s happening over there. Maybe I’ll check my Facebook and see how the guys are doing. All of those thoughts went through most of our minds. Although we were home enjoying our families and friends company, we couldn’t help but let a stray thought turn toward Afghanistan and our friends who were still there.

When we came to Afghanistan we came over with several other teams from several other states. I believe each team as a whole gained a reputation. I had been told by several other teams the overall impression the New Hampshire team made on them was that we are silent professionals. We came to do a job and we did exactly that, in most cases lacking proper resources and almost always undermanned, given a particularly difficult assignment on a very remote Forward Operating Base in Afghanistan in the second-poorest province, and a population that was controlled by the Taliban and drug smugglers.

Now for what some of you have been waiting for. We got in a few firefights with the bad guys. Some of our team members incurred minor injuries. The ANA and ANP took casualties as well. Our medical team did what they could for everyone, but with medical evacuation assets being farther away than most were comfortable with, not everyone could be saved, and that was something our medical team came prepared to handle. The ANA and ANP had men captured and ransomed. They had Taliban infiltrate their ranks, and they had soldiers leave their posts due to the harsh conditions. For a few weeks we spent a couple hours a night inside the bunkers as rockets and mortars were fired at the FOB, one hitting our fuel station, another setting the field just outside the FOB on fire, and one missed so completely it hit a village away from our FOB, injuring the daughter of a Taliban leader. Needless to say, our medical team never saw that patient, which is too bad because she would have received unbiased care.

The medical team, consisting of one Air Force nurse and one Navy Corpsman (medic for those more familiar with Army lingo), at our FOB was absolutely critical to the success of our mission. Not only did they take care of us, but they also served as a force multiplier to the humanitarian aid mission. The nurse at our FOB actually delivered an Afghan baby. The parents gave our nurse the option to name the baby. Zeba, meaning “beautiful” in Pashto, is now 5 months old.

One memorable patient our medical team saw was not only a patient, but a cultural experience for everyone on the FOB. An older gentleman showed up one day in the back of an ANA Ford Ranger pickup truck. He was carrying his granddaughter, who was maybe 1 year old. The top of her head had been badly scraped, but she was not bleeding profusely. Our medical team sanitized the wound, applied stitches, and properly dressed the wound to keep it from becoming infected. The question had been posed as to how exactly the injury was inflicted. The grandfather was holding to the story that the baby fell down a well. Don't ask how they retrieved the baby, or what the baby was doing that close to the well, as we all have our theories, most of which are saddening.

The medical team told the grandfather we could request a MEDEVAC helicopter. The grandfather agreed to have his granddaughter MEDEVACed to Herat. However, his tone changed upon being told a family member would be required to escort the baby to Herat. Everyone on the FOB was bewildered by the thought this man thought it an inconvenience he would have to go to Herat to get the proper medical care for his granddaughter. Sadly, it took an offer of 50 Euros to get him to escort his granddaughter. Yes, you read it correctly. He had to be paid to take care of his family. You're all probably wondering the same thing we wondered. Would it have taken less persuasion if his granddaughter had been a grandson?

Afghanistan is a very complex country. The root of the problem: uneducated population and a lack of infrastructure.

*You truly have to
get away from
America to appreciate
everything we have
in this great
country of ours.*

– Capt. Tyler Chamberlain

Currently, the ANA has a program in place to educate their soldiers. The goal is to get their soldiers up to the eighth grade level, a hefty order for a demographic that has an 80 percent illiteracy rate. The program will be a success if the ANA leadership really gets behind it. It will fail if the ANA leadership perceives their soldiers' education as a threat to their authority. Educated soldiers are more able to make decisions in the absence of their leaders, but they also ask more questions.

With the addition of more soldiers recently arriving in Afghanistan, other government agencies are also sending people to help out. Some of the additional U.S. government civilians being sent to Afghanistan are coming to help build new roads and infrastructure. The ring road, which connects the four major cities of Afghanistan in each cardinal corner of the country, is nearing completion. Bala Morghab is in the middle of the incomplete section of the ring road and that made our experience very different. Poor roads equal slower speeds, an increase of maintenance, difficulty in resupply, and xenophobia among the locals.

Although the recently returned New Hampshire Embedded Training Team still thinks of Afghanistan, and our ears perk up whenever we hear about it on the radio or the TV, our attention is now solely directed at getting our lives back together. The whole team, and our family members, planned to get together for the first time in more than two months on Oct. 24. Inside jokes formed by a close-knit group would be laughed at again by both spouses and soldiers, and we'd all be one step farther away from being in Afghanistan. ❖

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Guard Elves Show Spirit of Christmas



Members of the N.H. National Guard and 64th Air Refueling Squadron load Christmas presents during Operation Santa Claus on Dec. 17 in Concord. The statewide effort, sponsored by the State Employees Association of New Hampshire, serves more than 3,000 needy children. The N.H. Guard supports the annual drive with personnel and vehicles to transport the gifts. Photo: Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

Army Promotions & Awards

Sergeant

Joshua Hebert
Adam Labonte
Stephen Thomas
Dennis Fitton
Pia Towlekimball
Jason Westcott
David Burris
Keith Hatch
Anthony Schettino
Benjamin Hamel
Daniel Mooney
Matthew Adams
Erik Gelinas

Staff Sergeant

Michael Yurek
Andrew Quigley
Joseph Myers
Douglas Benton
Craig Wike
Jason Wood
John Petro
Cynthia Thompson
Seth Williams
Tara Hoxie
Michael Ricard

Sergeant First Class

Carol Molina

Master Sergeant

Ricky Pinette

Command Sergeant

Major
Jerry Rouleau

Chief Warrant Officer 2

Russell Cox
Paul Montminy
Craig Lavallee

Chief Warrant Officer 4

Spiro Davis

First Lieutenant

Allen Corey
Barry Emmert

Captain

Philip Meher
Richard Brown
Christopher Thompson
Samuel Weber
Megan Kettinger
Jason Lore

Colonel

Christopher Conley

Air Promotions & Awards

Senior Airman

Samuel Duval
Adam Thorne
Alyssa Stansfield
Alax Souphakhot
John Pepper III
Joseph Lombardozi
Richard Smith II
Dana Carpenter
Max Tibbetts
Rebecca York
Julio Gleske Jr.

Staff Sergeant

Siddhartha Sosa-Rodriguez
Michael Tower
Marc Coleman
Robert Hauck
Jacob Ricciotti

Technical Sergeant

David Andrews
Donald Colcord
Seth Dougherty
Mike Toth

Scott Eagan
Kevin Weller
Saul Davidson

Master Sergeant

Brent Nagele

Senior Master Sergeant

Eric Pelkey
Daniel Daley

Chief Master Sergeant

Carol Domingue

Captain

Joshua Pierce

Major

Alyn Theriault

Lieutenant Colonel

Jed French
Sean Mooney

Colonel

Nicole Bixler



Getting Better With Age

Gov. John Lynch, commander in chief of the NHNG, shares a laugh with his citizen-soldiers and airmen during a celebration to commemorate the National Guard's 373rd birthday at the State House, Dec. 11. Photo: Staff Sgt. Ginger Dempsey, NHNG-PA

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