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Illinois

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Special Forces unit assess readiness of potential members

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Editor's note: Some names and specific training events have been omitted for unit and individual security.

MARSEILLES -- It's 26 degrees Fahrenheit. A team of 10 Special Forces candidates are navigating through a dark, tree-filled terrain on a gravel path with 55-pound rucksacks attached to their bodies while toting an object of an unknown weight.

Their dirt-smudged faces grimaced as a member of the cadre yelled "You're on a convoy and you have no security at the rear?! Drop the pole, drop your rucksacks, get on your backs and start counting-off flutter kicks!"

The team members searched for the energy to carry out the command and hustled to adhere to the instructions as a cadre member lectured them on the importance of security in the field.

Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) invited active and reserve service members from units throughout the country to a Special Forces readiness assessment, March 26 and 27 at Marseilles Training Center. Nineteen service members attended.

"This is a readiness assessment, not a selection," explained a sergeant first class in the unit.

"We are assessing their readiness. We



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Thompson, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Staff Sgt. Albert Parr performs flutter kicks while being "smoked" by the cadre during a team exercise at Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group's readiness assessment March 26 at Marseilles Training Center in Illinois.

want to see if they can stand the rigors that they will face if they go to selection."

The assessment is just one step in the multi-step process of earning a green beret. First, a Special Forces candidate must

attend a readiness assessment.

The purpose is to assess the probability of a service member's success during the

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Air Guard supports UN in Libya

By Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SCOTT AFB -- Aircraft and crews from the Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing deployed to Libya late March 22 night and more are expected to be deployed. The unit was notified that they would deploy to a forward operating location in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn.

"In the Air National Guard we mirror our active duty components," said Col. Peter Nezamis of Belleville, commander of the 126th Air Refueling Wing. "So we are ready to go. We have to be deployed and in theater and ready to fly the missions within 72 hours of notification."

The 126th has supported operations in nearly every American conflict since World War II.

The 126th flies the KC-135R Stratotanker. The aircraft is a military version of the Boeing 707, and is capable of offloading approximately 200,000 pounds of fuel to receiver aircraft. The offload takes place in mid-air at air speeds in excess of 500 miles per hour. The tanker is only 20 feet above the nose of the receiver aircraft during fuel transfer.

"We control the boom from the back of the plane," said Tech Sgt. Mark Buzenski of Sugar Grove, a member of the 126th who

See LIBYA page 4

Guard answers Governor's call for emergency aid



Photo by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Soldiers with the 13637th Maintenance Company based in Springfield load their humvees before moving out to provide road-side assistance to stranded motorists on Illinois interstate highways. More than 500 members of the Illinois National Guard were activated on Feb. 1 to assist stranded motorists on Illinois roadways. Troops stationed along the road carried supplies such as water, snack bars and roadside safety kits.

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

CHICAGO -- Gov. Pat Quinn thanked Illinois National Guardsmen and first responders who assisted more than 4,000 motorists during this week's major snowstorm in Illinois at an Illinois Department of Transportation facility during a press conference Feb. 4 in Chicago.

"We have the best National Guard in the United States of America," said Quinn.

Feb. 1, Quinn activated more than 500 troops to assist stranded motorists during the storm from the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment based in Kewanee, with subordinate units from Galva, Dixon and Pontiac; the 766th Engineer Battalion based in Decatur; the 1844th Transportation Company based in Quincy; the 3637th Field Support Maintenance Company based in Springfield; the 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Sullivan; and the 233rd Military Police Company based in Springfield; and a Joint Task Force command from the 65th Troop

Command Brigade and 183rd Fighter Wing, both from Springfield.

"Even though we have 450 Soldiers currently deployed in the (Sinai Peninsula), Soldiers serving with the Polish battery in the Ghazni Province in Afghanistan, as well as Soldiers and Airmen serving in Iraq, the National Guard was able to stand up and serve the state in this crisis," said Maj. Gen. William Enyart of Belleville, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard during the press conference.

The storm, which affected the majority of the state, resulted in 20.2 inches of snow in Chicago, shut down schools throughout the state, knocked out power to hundreds of households and left hundreds stranded on highways.

It was the third biggest snowstorm on record in the Chicago area, behind blizzards in 1967 (23 inches of snow) and 1999 (21.6 inches of snow).

The servicemembers, who were stationed at rest areas along Illinois Interstates 80, 57, 55 and 290, provided food, water and

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COMMAND FOCUS

National victories of the Illinois Guard



Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti

The month of March ushered in our annual State of the State visit to Washington, D.C. Once again, we stand tall and proud of our major accomplishments within the nation. Our attrition rate is fifteen percent, which is the most successful Illinois has ever been in that area, and to that we add our end strength being one-hundred and two percent over authorized making us a stand-out state.

Illinois has purely qualified Soldiers in boots in formation and never has been as solid a formation as we are now, which is all due to our dedicated Soldiers and strong leadership maintaining the standards.

The Illinois Army National Guard

is a growth state. We have major deployments coming again and need to continue working diligently to achieve our outstanding performance standards for mission accomplishment.

I commend each and every one of you for your participation, ensuring Illinois maintains its stellar position nationwide.

As we look into the next several months, let us remember Memorial Day and keep in the forefront those who bravely went before us serving their country, and those who continue to fight the fight to ensure we can continue to enjoy the freedoms and lifestyles we Americans are so blessed to live.

The separation of the deployed Soldier from their family is a sacrifice for all, and as we near Mother's Day and Father's Day, we also must remember to thank our Gold Star Families and our Fallen Heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers. We must never forget the price of freedom!

Protecting Our Most Valuable Asset



Brig. Gen. James Schroeder

As we reflect back over the winter months, many things come to mind. In addition to routine duties, we've again went above and beyond in areas that helped protect and make a difference to our citizens.

During the record snowfall in February, we mobilized over 525 Soldiers and Airmen in short order. It took great coordination to get the help where it was needed. Working with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and the Illinois State Police was a true example of how military and civil organizations can work together to solve an issue. Our help was certainly

appreciated by the Governor and those traveling our roads during the storm.

Recently we were called again when the United Nations passed Resolution 1973 authorizing the no-fly-zone over Libya. In short order, the 126th Air Refueling Wing deployed people and equipment forward.

Many others stand by to deploy on scheduled American Expeditionary Force missions or handle further contingencies and routine matters as they come up. In addition to those who actually deploy, there are many more behind the scenes to ensure it all works.

Outside of these big newsworthy stories, several smaller scale deployments are taking place that involve all three wings. As you read this column, our Airmen are on duty literally in every corner of the globe.

It takes an entire team before we can even turn a wheel toward our assigned missions. No matter what the task, your fellow Airmen

See *PROTECT* page 12

Requirements of the noncommissioned officer

Command Sgt. Major Richard J. Burch, the Army National Guard Command Sergeant Major, has put out guidance that we leaders must ensure that our noncommissioned officers (NCO) are scheduled to attend noncommissioned officer education system (NCOES) in a timely manner.

The different levels of NCOES are designed to prepare NCO leaders to operate at specific levels.

We should not confuse promotion eligibility with professional development requirements. It is our responsibility as leaders to ensure that NCO Education is a priority for all of our NCOs. The Army National Guard has more than 66,000 sergeants and of those, only 31,000 have completed the Warrior Leader Course. This means about forty-six percent of our sergeants are trained and ready to perform all assigned duties as a sergeant.

The Army National Guard has more than 40,000 staff sergeants and of them, only



CSM John Starbody

13,242 have completed the Advanced Leader Course. This means about thirty-three percent of our staff sergeants are trained and ready to perform all assigned duties as a staff sergeant.

We have more than 22,000 sergeants first class in the Army National Guard and of them, only 10,065 have completed the Senior Leader Course. This means about forty-five percent of our sergeants

first class are trained and ready to perform all assigned duties as a sergeant first class.

In the Illinois Army National Guard we have 1,918 Soldiers E-5 through E-8 who meet time in service and time in grade requirements for promotion. Of those, 570 or roughly thirty percent do not have the required NCOES.

In the Illinois Army National Guard twenty-seven of our E-5s do not have the Warrior

See *REQUIREMENTS* page 12

Illinois Air Guard's Outstanding Airmen of the Year announced

It gives me great pleasure to announce the winners of the 2011 Illinois Air National Guard's Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

All of this year's nominees were outstanding in their own right, 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 State winners.

Those winners eventually compete against all U.S. Air Force members.

Our Outstanding Airmen were



CCMSGT. Aaron Gatterdam

brought to Camp Lincoln Jan. 7 and 8 for a dinner reception and selection board.

This year's board was held on Jan. 8 at the Illinois Military Museum, which provided an excellent backdrop full of history and artifacts.

The Board consisted of the three Wing Command

Chiefs, Chief Master Sgt. Karen Stevens, 126th Air Refueling Wing; Chief Master Sgt. Steve Eakle 182nd Airlift Wing; Chief Master Sgt. Tom Hergenrother 183rd Fighter Wing; and myself, Chief Master Sgt. Aaron Gatterdam, State Command Chief.

See *OUTSTANDING* page 12 for list of winners

Guard reaches out to educators for military children

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

GENEVA -- When Illinois Soldiers and Airmen deploy, they are not the only people who are faced with a battle. In many circumstances, family members – especially children – fight with the emotional and mental turmoil caused by the departure of their loved ones.

Members of the Illinois National Guard and representatives from programs designed to support Guardsmen and their families met with staff members, including teachers, counselors and psychologists of the Kane County Regional Board of Education during the county's teacher institute day Feb. 25 in Geneva. They discussed how military schoolchildren can be affected when their parents or loved ones are deployed.

"The purpose of this meeting is to help educators become more aware of how the separation of a parent due to a deployment can affect a military child," said Maj. Rhonda Petersen of Lindenhurst, Education Outreach officer of the northern region for the Illinois National Guard. "We are trying to help educators understand the signs and symptoms that the distress of the loss of a parent can cause so that the educators can mitigate those issues."

To provide the attendees with insight into the psyche of these children, there were numerous presentations.

During a presentation on the sociopsychological effects deployments have on military schoolchildren, Julianne Steinbeigle of Springfield, director of psychological health

for the Illinois National Guard, explained that military children of those deployed can suffer from a multitude of disorders including anxiety, stress disorder, pediatric behavioral disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

"When there is chaos with a child's safety net, it can have an effect on how they behave in school which in turn can have an effect on their grades and on their future," said Steinbeigle. "Teachers help by providing support and stability and by identifying issues."

The day included a role-playing exercise in which attendees recited scripts of the thought processes of various family members of a deployed servicemember.

Jim Frazier of Lake in the Hills, Survivor Outreach Services coordinator of the northern region for the Illinois National Guard, spoke about the challenges family members are burdened with when they lose a loved one in the line of duty. He spoke about what he went through when he lost his son during a deployment, and the impact it has on families. He also provided the attendees with information on the resources available to families of fallen servicemembers.

William Troka of Joliet, a psychologist with Elgin school district U-46, said the conference provided him with valuable information he can use in his professional and personal lives.



Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Jim Frazier of Lake in the Hills, Survivor Outreach Services coordinator of the northern region for the Illinois National Guard, speaks about the challenges family members face when they lose a loved-one during the Kane County Teacher Institute Day Feb. 25 in Geneva.

"The information was very timely and relevant because not only am I a psychologist, I am person who has military members with children in my family," said Troka. "We are the second largest district in the state of Illinois and I'm sure we have military children in our district that we can use this information to help."

An iconic photograph is worth more than words



Maj. Gen. William Enyart

There are photographs and then there are iconic photographs. Everyone knows an iconic photograph. There's the photograph of the sailor kissing a nurse

at Times Square on V-E Day. There's the photograph of the Air Force pilot returning to freedom from the Hanoi Hilton with his daughter running across the runway to greet him. There's the photo of the World Trade Center being struck by a terrorist -hijacked flight.

I nominate the photograph of a young girl with a statue of her daddy shown to the right of this column for iconic status.

There are photographs that acquire iconic status because they show important people or historic events. I don't suppose that 3-year-old Aubrey Melton qualifies as an important person, other than to the family that loves her very much. And the unveiling of a statue of her daddy, Staff Sgt. Josh Melton in rural Clinton County, Ill., probably doesn't qualify as an historic occasion to many folks outside the 650 people who gathered for the unveiling on a sunny April day this spring. But iconic photographs are photographs that convey much more than the mere image depicted. They are photographs that carry a deeply profound message to the human heart.

When I opened the Illinois National Guard Facebook page and saw the photograph of Aubrey seated at the knee of her Daddy's statue it stopped my heart. When Sgt. Charlie Helmholt of the 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment took that photograph he created, for me, an icon of America at its best.

It was the kind of spring day that we get occasionally in Southern Illinois, 87 degrees, not a cloud in the sky, trees budding, tulips waving, friends gathering. Hidden Valley Winery, whose president is an eight-year Navy veteran, and the O'Fallon, Ill., Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) sponsored a Military Appreciation Day weekend on April 8 and 9. The centerpiece of the weekend was the unveiling of a Memorial Wall to the servicemembers lost in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. It is anchored by a statue of Staff Sgt. Josh Melton, Headquarters Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Illinois Army National Guard, who was killed in action on June 19, 2009 in Afghanistan. It was his second deployment.

It was a long afternoon for a little girl sitting in the front row with her mom, Larissa. Sitting in the front row in the Gold Star Family section with other families who'd lost sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, patriots all. An afternoon that began with the Carlyle High School band playing the Star-Spangled Banner, speeches, memories of the fallen, a reading of the names of all the fallen, a 21 gun salute by the American Legion and VFW, Taps and dedication of the Memorial Wall and



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

Staff Sgt. Joshua Melton's daughter , 3-year-old Aubrey, climbs on a life-size sculpture of Melton at Hidden Lake Winery in Aviston April 9. Melton was killed when his vehicle hit an improvised explosive device while he was serving in Afghanistan in 2009.

Statue. Like I said, a very long time for a very little girl. But it was for her Daddy and for the other fallen that she was there.

She was there with the Patriot Guard, with the Illinois National Guard Honor Guard, with members of the 445th Chemical Company from Shiloh, with the high school marching band, with the VFW and the American Legion, with

farmers and townsfolk, with the Carlyle Fire Department laddertruck, its ladder extended displaying a huge American flag. All in all, 650 Americans were there to honor our losses. Americans who could have been watching the ball game, mowing the grass, riding the ride of their choice. Who could have been doing anything that beautiful spring day but who

chose to spend it honoring Josh Melton and the other 245 Illinoisans who gave up all of their tomorrows for all of us.

At 3 years old I doubt that Aubrey will long remember that day but I will always remember the photograph... and all that it stands for... the people of Illinois standing up for one of ours, no, make that for all of ours.

Fallen 33rd IBCT Soldier remembered

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Charlie Helmholt
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

AVISTON -- Amidst the Midwest's many country roads and corn fields, there is a unique place that sits just outside of the southern Illinois town of Aviston. There, tucked away seemingly in the middle of nowhere, is the aptly named Hidden Lake Winery.

The winery, which opened in 2005,

has played host to many ceremonies that exploit the establishments natural beauty, its elegance and charm. Recently this business sent a message to local military and civilians that they are all about red, white and blue.

April 8 and running three days through April 10, winery owner Dale Holbrook and general manager Missy Shirley decided to host a Military Appreciation Weekend and a dedication service to pay homage to

Illinois' fallen warriors.

The event centered around Saturday's ceremony when a memorial to honor those veterans who have given their lives was unveiled. A tribute wall adorned with plaques, engraved with the various names and ranks of the fallen.

In the corner of the wall lies the memorials' main attraction, a life-size statue sculpted by Holbrook in the image of Clinton County's own Staff Sgt. Joshua

Melton of Carlyle.

"I want this to honor Josh as both a dedicated Soldier and a man who loved his life, his family and his friends," said Holbrook.

Many people in Clinton County remember the tragic death of Melton, an Illinois Army National Guard Soldier from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment in

ASSESS

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second step of the process, Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS). Doing this not only allows the unit to save the National Guard money by identifying unprepared service members before they attend SFAS, it allows the servicemembers to take a realistic look at their physical fitness and their ability to perform in a extremely stressful environment.

"The training that they will receive over the two days of the assessment is a replica of what they will experience over the three weeks they attend [SFAS] if they are chosen to go," said the sergeant first class.

The readiness assessment began with an Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), but instead of scoring the minimal 180 necessary for the average Soldier, they are expected to score no less than 240. Unlike other APFTs, during this test graders refrained from counting the repetitions of the trainees' pushups and sit-ups aloud, leaving the trainees in the dark about how well or poor they were doing.

After the APFT, the candidates were given minutes to change into their Army Combat Uniforms, fill their rucksacks with 55 pounds of equipment – not including food and water, then head over to the obstacle course to do various physical tests.

Immediately following was a ruck march was conducted. Carrying gear that weighed more than a quarter of their body weight, the trainees embarked on a journey of unknown distance.

Two candidates sustained injuries that prevented them from completing the assessment, four voluntarily withdrew and three were removed by the cadre after taking too long to complete the ruck march.

One of the service members pulled from the ruck march was Spc. Clifton Washington of Algonquin, a mechanic with the 1144th Transportation Motor Transport Battalion in Delevan.

"It was pretty rough," said Washington. "Rougher than I thought it was going to be. I thought I was physically prepared for this, but honestly I wasn't. For the next one, I will definitely prepare by training with my ruck. I think everyone puts a lot into their [APFT], but training with the rucksack is where it's at. It's the event that takes the most out of you."

On the other end of the spectrum, a second lieutenant impressed the cadre from the start. He completed the run portion of the APFT in 13 minutes and 40 seconds, the fastest in the group, and was the third to complete the ruck march.

"I'm a professional athlete," said the second lieutenant. "I do a lot of jiu jitsu and mixed martial arts. I trained pretty much every day. This is a life-long dream of mine that I've always wanted to fulfill."

The second lieutenant said he would have enlisted in the Army and joined the Infantry straight out of high school if it wasn't for a college scholarship he earned. Instead of enlisting, he participated in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps at his university and commissioned in the Army National Guard upon graduation six months ago.

Less than an hour after the completion of the ruck march, the 10 remaining candidates formed up and headed off for a team exercise.

Their mission was to transport a "gift" through the wilderness to a tribal leader in Afghanistan in exchange for the leader's favors to the United States.

After the long march and into a night filled with low crawls and physical exercises, the team arrived at a fire-lit campsite. They hugged the tribal leader, held hands with him and engaged in other cultural customs, only to offend him. The leader ceased their business, banned the team from his camp, and the team continued its mission.

Physically exhausted after 13 hours of hard physical and mental work, the candidates traveled back to their barracks only to be met with a land navigation test. The next morning was a run of an unknown distance and then "the smoke session."

The cadre led the group through a multitude of exercises most said they had only seen in the movies. Steam rose from the candidates, sweat rolled down their brows, snot traveled down their lips, and their legs and arms uncontrollably shook as they struggled through the "smoke."

After more than an hour of physical assessment, the training finally came to an end. The candidates were released to their barracks to prepare for the board to determine if the Special Forces unit would provide them with a recommendation to attend SFAS.

During the board, the commander, who observed the weekend's training undetected, along with the cadre, provided the candidates with feedback.

They also discussed the emotional toll joining a unit like this could have on their personal lives. The board asked about their relationships, their families and their financial situations, explaining to them that they and their families must be OK with them leaving home for two to four years for training and accept the possibility of deploying frequently into the future.

Nineteen service members attended the assessment, but only six were chosen. The second lieutenant didn't make the cut. Not because of his performance, but because of his lack of experience as an officer.

"He's only been a second lieutenant for six months," said the commander of the unit. "Think about how different a Soldier is when they graduate from basic than they are a year or two after their



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Thompson, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

A second lieutenant and other candidates struggle while carrying a telephone pole during a team exercise at Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group's readiness assessment March 26 at Marseilles Training Center in Illinois.

graduation. You're a completely different Soldier. I can't put a Soldier with such little experience as a leader in a position to lead a team of [noncommissioned officers] who have been on multiple tours. If he was a specialist or a sergeant, I would take him without a second thought."

During the second lieutenant's time with the board, the commander of the unit commended him for his exceptional performance, but suggested that he get a bit more experience leading a platoon before he goes to SFAS. The commander

gave him his personal telephone number and asked the lieutenant to contact him if he needed any help in the meantime.

A sergeant was one of the six participants chosen to go to SFAS. He said he is optimistic about his upcoming journey and looks forward to the day that he can wear a green beret with pride.

"Green Berets are the most highly skilled and trained Soldiers in the entire world," said the sergeant. "To be part of that and to know that you're one of the top Soldiers in the world is quite an accomplishment."

Attend a Special Forces readiness assessment

Everyone who meets the minimum requirements is welcome and encouraged to attend the next readiness assessment.

Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) are always looking for the right Soldiers to join their unit. They expect candidates to show the initiative required to prepare themselves. Candidates should show up to the event ready for SFAS, based off the training plan in the information packet provided by Company A, 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Those interested in attending the readiness assessment on Sept. 10 and 11 are asked to call (708)824-5817/5823 or e-mail NGILSpecialForces@ng.army.mil.

LIBYA

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operates the refueling boom. "We manipulate it and the fighters or bombers position themselves real steady. We will make contact and offload the fuel they need to accomplish their mission."

Many of the Airmen supporting the mission are excited for the opportunity.

"They gave us the best tools and we will do the best we can," said Maj. Tom

Ratkovich of Houston, Texas, aircraft commander for the 126th. "We're trained for this and happy to do our job."

Nezamis said his Airmen work hard to stay ready for missions like this.

"The 126th Air Refueling Wing always stands ready to respond at a moment's notice," said Nezamis. "We have very highly trained and highly motivated Airmen. I'm proud of their passion, professionalism and willingness to help our country and state."

STORM

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roadside assistance to motorists in the wake of the storm. Later, Guardsmen from the southern part of the state were shifted to the most severely affected northern communities to relieve the northern troops and to transport the Illinois State Police as they assisted stranded motorists and citizens in need. The mission lasted three days.

"I just want to point out that our National Guard, and all of our military, are volunteers," said Quinn. "These are citizen-Soldiers. They have civilian jobs. They were called to active duty, obviously in a

moment's notice, this week and they did a heroic job. We owe them all a permanent debt of gratitude."

In addition to providing manpower, the Illinois National Guard provided 156 vehicles for this mission, including 114 Humvees that were used in the harsh conditions to reach stranded motorists.

"The Illinois National Guard answered the call when their communities were in need and assisted more than 200 stranded motorists," said Enyart. "The Illinois National Guard continues to demonstrate they are 'Always Ready, Always There' and will keep protecting the citizens of Illinois any way it can."

Undercover and overhead: Soldier, police officer serves in two jobs

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Nathan Hastings
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

DECATUR -- Lt. Col. Randy Sikowski of Decatur was a shadow on the tough streets - blending into the grit, the dirt, the scum - of drug dealers and gangs. He was immersed in the underworld of crack cocaine, heroin, amphetamines, Special K, and meth.

"Working undercover is a difficult job," Sikowski said. "You are always at the beckon call of criminals who maintain no normal schedules and who possess no moral character."

As an Illinois National Guard Soldier, Sikowski would trade in the street clothes of his job as an undercover narcotics sergeant with the Decatur Police Department to don the flight suit of a Blackhawk pilot in the 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment. His service included a tour in Iraq.

The company he keeps with the Illinois National Guard is far better than on the city streets.

"My fondest memories in Iraq are of serving with the professional Soldiers of the National Guard," said Sikowski, who is now on leave from the Decatur police to serve as the Illinois Army Guard's full-time State Aviation Officer and Commander of the 1-106th in Peoria. The performance of National Guard aviators was unparalleled in theater, he said.

Sikowski has been serving in the Army National Guard for 26 years. He enlisted with the Minnesota Army National Guard, before moving to Illinois and transferring to the Illinois Army National Guard in 1988.

He has been an officer with the Decatur Police Department for 22 years while serving in the military. He worked his way through the department eventually becoming an undercover narcotics sergeant. He was in charge of a 12-man multi-jurisdictional narcotics task force.

Sikowski said it would take months, sometimes years, to watch cases come full circle. The objective was to build a strong case that would hold up in court. Although associating with the dregs of society was tough, undercover work had its rewards.

"I was able to see the effects of illegal



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

Lt. Col. Randy Sikowski, a member of the Illinois Army National Guard, has spent more than two decades in civilian law enforcement. His careers in the military and civilian law enforcement have been dedicated to serving the citizens of Illinois.

drugs on both individuals and society as a whole," Sikowski said. "To be capable of enforcing the drug laws and actually putting people in jail who preyed upon society as drug dealers was very rewarding."

As an Army aviator, Sikowski has been part of several different missions. He was deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in January 2004. He was the training and operations officer of Task Force Eagle which consisted of approximately 500 Soldiers and 44 aircraft. He planned all movements and deployments of the task force. Sikowski was also responsible for mobilization preparation for the Soldiers in the task force.

Sikowski has also been part of several two-week missions to different countries during his time in a military uniform. Some memorable missions include Honduras, Iceland and El Salvador. He has also responded in relief of many recent hurricanes and other natural events.

"During the floods we were able to rescue people and get them to safety," Sikowski said. "During the hurricanes, we were able to transport people out of

the path of destruction. During the oil spill, we were able to transport sand bags to protected areas to keep the oil from destroying wetlands. During the war, we provided much needed air transportation to both combat forces actively seeking the enemy, and support forces that needed to safely traverse the battle space."

In some ways, Sikowski's jobs as a police officer and Army aviator aren't all that different. Both focus on protecting people. And, as the Illinois Guard's State Aviation Officer, Sikowski oversees Detachment 1 of C Co., 1st Battalion, 376th Aviation Battalion, which works with law enforcement on counterdrug operations.

With his two different careers, Sikowski has had one mission: serving others. He is scheduled to deploy again with approximately 350 Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, in support of Operation New Dawn, formerly Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2012.

"I am excited about the next deployment," Sikowski said. "Illinois aviation is a strong professional community with some of the best aviators in the country."

DADT training underway

By U.S. Army 2nd Lt. April Hawes
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD -- Since the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy was signed three months ago by President Barack Obama, Illinois National Guard Soldiers have started the required training to prepare for the implementation of the repeal later this year.

The three-tier training is required to be completed by all Army National Guard Soldiers no later than Aug. 15. While training is completed by the Military Services, the Department of Defense is drafting new policies and regulations so that repeal is consistent with the standards of military readiness, military effectiveness, unit cohesion, and recruiting and retention of the Armed Forces. Once president, the secretary of defense and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff certify that has been done, implementation will occur 60 days later. Until that specific date is determined, current DADT policies remain in effect.

The Illinois National Guard is in the middle of the first tier of training with state leaders working with their National Guard Bureau counterparts in preparation to train their subordinates. Those who have completed the training agree not much will change in the Illinois Army National Guard.

"We will continue to do what we have been doing...treat all people respectfully, honestly (and) fairly," said Chaplain (Col.) Daniel Krumrei of Springfield, Illinois joint force headquarters chaplain and ILARNG command chaplain.

Krumrei said this is not a new concept since the Army has handled similar issues before with race and gender.

Maj. Michael Hough of Petersburg, acting director of military personnel for the Illinois Army National Guard, admitted he wondered how the Army would react to the DADT repeal, but once he completed the training he also said he felt there will not be much change to current policy.

"Bottom line is we have to have good order and discipline and that isn't a change," he said. "We're already supposed to treat people with dignity and respect."

Hough explained this policy will not enforce separate living or shower conditions, however if specific situations should arise when separate conditions are requested, it will be up to the commander of those Soldiers affected to implement that plan.

Once key personnel in Illinois complete tier one of the training, tier-two training will occur at the end of April for commanders, sergeants major, first sergeants and civilian supervisors. From there, those who complete tier-two training will train the remaining Illinois Soldiers and interested family members, who make up the third and final tier of the training.

Col. Mark VanUs of Chatham, Illinois command inspector general, was one of the first in the state to complete the training in February so he and the rest of his team of inspectors were prepared to answer questions from fellow tier-one leaders. VanUs said the bottom line is Soldiers still need to be professional and uphold the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage.

"We are still a professional force (and) have to ensure decisions are sexual orientation neutral," he said.

Overall, VanUs said Illinois is ready to move forward and support the repeal once it is in effect.

"Illinois is postured to fully support the president and the decision to repeal (DADT)," he said. "The Army is taking the right steps by getting out in front of the decision to implement the repeal."

Soldiers reenlist while deployed to Egypt

Story by Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SANAI, Egypt – Two Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers recently reenlisted for three more years while their unit was deployed to Sinai, Egypt.

Approximately 440 Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment in Milan, Galesburg and Macomb mobilized in May for a one-year deployment to Sinai, Egypt. The unit is expected to return home around Memorial Day.

The Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers are part of the Multinational Force and Observers. The international peacekeeping force oversees the terms of the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Aleah Castrejon, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion 123rd Field Artillery



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Aleah Castrejon, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion 123rd Field Artillery

A reenlistment ceremony is held in Egypt Jan. 10, for Spc. Eric Fowler of Lansing, Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion 123rd Field Artillery while deployed in Sinai, Egypt. Fowler, who deployed once before, has reenlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard for three more years.

Spc. Benjamin Konie of Galva, Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion 123rd Field Artillery reenlists while deployed in Sinai, Egypt on Jan. 10. Konie reenlisted for three more years with the Illinois Army National Guard.

Specialized response team earns validation

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

CAMP BLANDING, Fla. -- A specialized domestic response team of Illinois National Guard members earned its certification at Camp Blanding, Fla. Jan. 13.

The Illinois National Guard's 5th Chemical, Biological, Radiological/Nuclear and High Explosive Response Force Package (CERFP) team received its validation during the National Guard Bureau sponsored 5th CERFP external evaluation in Florida. The validation means Illinois' team maintains its status as one of five CERFP teams qualified in the country to respond to any manmade or natural disaster. Each CERFP team has up to two years to recertify. There has been 17 CERFPs validated. The unit was evaluated by the Joint Interagency Training and Education Center (JITEC) to test the readiness and training of the Illinois National Guard in the event of an attack or natural disaster.

"CERFP tests the capabilities of search and extraction, decontamination, medical treatment, fatality, communications and leadership," said Capt. Christian Pedersen of Springfield, the officer-in-charge of Illinois National Guard's 5th CERFP. "Our Soldiers can accomplish these tasks in a dirty and contaminated environment outfitted in fully protective chemical decontamination suits."

Under the 44th Chemical Battalion based in Macomb, Soldiers of the 444th Chemical Company, based in Galesburg, who specialize in search and extraction, are thrown into a hazardous environment. There they must rescue injured and exposed casualties from a contaminated rubble pile.

They first assess the casualties' condition and apply first aid. The Soldiers then must determine the correct method of transport and rush the casualties to the decontamination site. The 444th Soldiers drop the casualties off at the decontamination site to the 135th Chemical Company based in Machesney Park and 445th Chemical Company based in Shiloh. Ambulatory and non-ambulatory lines



Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Adam Fischman, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

(Left to Right) Staff Sgt. Stephanie McCurry of Peoria and 1st Sgt. Robert Heck of Edwardsville, both with the 444th Chemical Company based in Galesburg, transport an injured casualty from a contaminated rubble pile to the decontamination line Jan. 13 during the Illinois National Guard Chemical, Biological, Radiological/Nuclear, and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) evaluation by Joint Interagency Training and Education Center at Camp Blanding, Fla.

then separate casualties by a walk through or assisted decontamination process. Similar to an E.T. movie scene, casualties in the tunnel of plastic are treated for possible chemical or biological exposure. Casualties are then provided medical evaluation and treatment by the medical groups with the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing based in Peoria, 183rd Fighter Wing based in Springfield and 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base.

Electronic smoke foggers, debris, battered vehicles and sirens also add to the realism of the CERFP training. The training environment is made to be as realistic as possible, using an immense amount of live actors who appear to have suffered real wounds.

Each scenario is engineered to force the Soldiers to think. A victim may be trapped or suffer wounds that require a specialized

extraction technique to save them. Soldiers must also identify which casualties need to be treated and moved first based on their condition.

"This is an awesome place to train," said Staff Sgt. Michael Markham of Glenarm, the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of Illinois National Guard's 5th CERFP. "This is as realistic as it gets without working a live scene. That is what we are here for, to work out the problems before a real-life incident occurs."

The CERFP demands a mastered level of training and physical stamina in an environment that tests mental and emotional skills as well. The instructors implement a specific number of casualties into each exercise. If a team comes up short on a casualty accountability report, they will fail the mission. High angle rescue extraction is sometimes required to lift and lower casualties from a roof or danger area.

In other situations, breaking and breaching techniques using high-powered hydraulic tools may be required to rescue a casualty trapped behind concrete and metal.

"You do not get good overnight with search and extraction," said Pedersen. "Because of the danger quotient, it takes a lot of training to get people certified and competent. There is a wide scope and a depth to the tactics, techniques and procedures these Soldiers use."

Although search and extraction is a key element to mission success, the job cannot be accomplished without the management of the command and control, decontamination and medical teams. The command and control team brings in and sends out critical information on locations, casualty reports and hazard information. The Illinois Air National Guard provides all of the critical care elements, evaluating the readiness of the doctors and nurses on the medical staff.

"So far they are doing outstanding work," said Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti of Springfield, Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard-Army. "They have met the timeline; it usually takes 90 minutes to set up the entire line for search and extraction, decontamination, medical and command and control. They had it all set up within 74 minutes. So we exceeded those standards. It makes me proud to see these Soldiers doing what they are doing."

Behind the fully donned suits, screams, radio interference, debris and rubble, all the elements of the CERFP team must work in a harmonious balance to accomplish the mission. Certification is the derivative to unit cohesion and readiness. High stress environments put Illinois National Guard servicemembers to the test to work together and rise to the challenges of becoming a validated CERFP team. The real life challenges the training environment implemented, sustained a certified Illinois CERFP team to be ready in the event of a real life hazard.

"Good hard training drives Soldiers," said Pedersen. "These Soldiers are ready, they are going through the best training, for their community and for their state, and they are professionals. They are important to Illinois and to our citizens."

Officer school digs deep to help Soldiers go gold

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Daniel Stinson
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD -- The Illinois National Guard Officer Candidate School (OCS) is changing the way it recruits, mentors and trains future leaders by making officer recruiting and training a state-wide priority.

Most Soldiers are familiar with the term Gold Rush, a program where all Soldiers who have at least 60 hours of college are required to attend a two-day program for officer recruiting. These weekends were often far from home and Soldiers were required to attend even if they had no desire to become an officer.

The OCS program has grown through recent change; involving more unit level communication and raising the number candidates in training with Soldiers interested in a career as an officer.

"We are on pace to have 178% increase in the number of officers we commission this year over last year," said Maj. Benjamin Shakman of Springfield, the 129th Regional Training Institute's (RTI) training officer. "Our 56-11 class is track to be one of the biggest in recent memory."

Seventy-four candidates are in the phase 0 program with the possibility of six more Soldiers coming into the program.

The new program allows commanders to identify Soldiers in their units they feel will make good officers. This lets units take ownership in the people they send off to the program.

"When units know they will see these Soldiers again, and they are able to maintain visibility of the Soldier

throughout the length of program it motivates them to really take the time to find qualified candidates to send through the process" said

Under the old system once a Soldier enrolled in OCS they often did not know what their unit of assignment or basic branch would be until they were close to graduating from the program.

"(Now) when a Soldier leaves for OCS, the company, battalion, brigade and state are all tracking the same thing. They will know when the Soldier will complete the program, where he is going and when he will be at drill. This is a great help to commanders in the field, so they know and will not have to hope or guess when their needs will be met for leadership within their unit."

This transparency is not only limited to tracking of Soldiers going through the program, and what their basic branch and assignments will be, but it also includes regular updates after drills on what the candidates are doing in training.

"The main reason I am interested in the program now is, I am able to pick the branch I want, and I will know where and what I will be doing before I commit a year to the program, and that is very important to me," said Sgt. Catherine Sanagursky of Springfield, a prospective officer candidate.

Shakman said the driving force behind the changes was due to the decline of Soldiers in OCS.

"Maj. Seth Hible, the OCS commander and I, who are both OCS graduates, tried to look at the program and figure out where



Submitted photo

Candidates with the Illinois National Guard Officer Candidate School (OCS) conduct a road march at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. OCS is changing the way it recruits, mentors and trains future leaders by making officer training a state-wide priority.

we needed to improve and what will work best to train Soldiers and successfully get them through the program."

One of the problems they found was making Soldiers wait until March to start the program. By making people wait to start the program it often created conflicts with starting the program.

Soldiers can now sign up for OCS at any time and start preparing for the program as soon as they make the commitment. There is now a three-section program for Soldiers to prepare them for the stress of phase 1 of training.

"We have found that land navigation

and (physical training) to be the biggest stumbling blocks for potential candidates," said Shakman.

The time Soldiers spend in the program is now put to good use. Soldiers spend time focusing on land navigation, physical training and leadership training. The sections are not dependent on each other and a Soldier can come in any time to start training for the future.

"This gives us time to evaluate Soldiers strengths and their challenges, and it will give the Soldiers time to brush up on any weaknesses they have before leaving for phase 1."

Voice of a Guardsman: Soldier shares her song

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. James Sims
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD -- The little girl climbed the stairs to her room, shut the door and the world faded away as she grabbed her hairbrush and took the stage before an imaginary audience of thousands of screaming fans.

For as long as she can remember, Staff Sgt. Jennifer Kohany of Chicago, an intelligence analyst with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Brigade Support Battalion in Champaign, has been singing in front of the mirror in her room growing up in Valhalla, New York or a stadium filled with thousands of people before various military functions and sporting events.

"I can't remember not hearing Jenny sing," said Debbie Kohany of Oak Lawn, Jennifer's mother. "She was in chorus from first grade all the way through graduation of high school. I would so love hearing her sing at home when she was in her room, whether it was opera, country or rock. When Jen sings her face lights up and her eyes sparkle. You can see how much she loves to sing."

Kohany continued her passion into college while attending Columbia College in Chicago.

"In college I was involved with Columbia College's chorus, and considered a major in vocal performance, but decided instead to major in American Sign Language interpretation," said Kohany.

Almost 200 years ago, after witnessing the bombardment of Fort McHenry, Francis Scott Key penned the words to a poem called "Defense of Fort McHenry." The poem was later set to the tune of "The Anacreotic Song" a British drinking song written by John Stafford Smith, a tune already popular in the United States.

The combination of the two would soon become a well-known American patriotic song. It was not until 1931, by congressional resolution, that the Star-Spangled Banner became the national anthem.

"When I was in basic training, one of the drill sergeants in my platoon emphasized the importance of knowing patriotic staples, to include the Pledge of Allegiance, 'God Bless America,' and 'The Star Spangled Banner,' in addition to the basic warrior skills," said Kohany.

While in basic training, Kohany was randomly chosen and asked if she knew the National Anthem. Having grown up in a patriotic family, in addition to participating in choir, she did.

"They called me to the front of the 'war room,' and called everyone to attention while I sang," said Kohany. "The drill sergeants stood there in shock that not only did I know the words, but I actually knew how to sing as well."

From that moment Kohany has been called out by her fellow Soldiers who have knowledge of her ability, and has been asked to sing at different events.

Kohany was part of the Illinois Army National Guard's largest call-up since World War II and deployed with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) to Afghanistan in 2008.

While deployed the control, communications and computer systems section hosted a contest called Phoenix Idol showcasing the talent of Soldiers serving overseas as part of Task Force Phoenix VIII.

"A good friend of mine, Staff Sergeant Adam Gordon, was the emcee of Phoenix Idol and asked if I would come out on New Year's Eve and participate," said Kohany, "I obliged, with no intention of entering the competition because I had a pretty hectic schedule and didn't really have the time to learn and practice music for each weeks category."

Kohany did not win the contest but was noticed by several Soldiers on Camp Phoenix and it was through this that she was introduced to Tom Negovan, a reporter for WGN Chicago, while he was visiting Camp Phoenix to do a three-part series on Afghanistan, said Kohany.

"(Negovan) interviewed me, and asked if I would have any interest in singing at a Cubs game when I returned back to the states," said Kohany. "Sure enough, we stayed in touch, and as soon as I had a number to call, I was receiving a call from a Cubs publicist, asking if I'd be available to sing for the opening."

Although growing up a Yankee fan, Kohany said she is also a Chicago Cubs fan. She said singing in front of 40,000 people, with her friends and family present, was amazing.

Patriotic songs have always held a deeper meaning to veterans and servicemembers in the U.S. military and their loved ones, said Staff Sgt. John Robinson of Champaign, who served as a chaplain assistant for the 33rd IBCT while in Afghanistan with Kohany.

"Listening to someone who has given their blood, sweat and tears for this country and then so passionately sings our National Anthem, gives me chills, every time," said Robinson "I believe every time someone



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. James Sims, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Staff Sgt. Jennifer Kohany of Chicago sings the National Anthem at the retirement ceremony for Brig. Gen. Ronald Morrow, the deputy commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, Jan. 22 at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel and Conference Center in Springfield.

like Jen sings it, she does it as an honor to our Nation and for those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice."

The most meaningful performance came in June of 2005, though not on the happiest note, said Kohany.

"My mom had been engaged to one of the most incredible people I've ever met, Eamonn," said Kohany. "They had put off getting married while I was in college, but because of the closeness of our relationship, I referred to him as my stepdad. My mom manages a small Irish Bar on the south side of Chicago. Every so often, I would stop in on a Friday night when Eamonn could persuade me to sing on karaoke night. He was really the only person who could charm me into singing there, and always asked me to sing 'Angel' by Sarah McLaughlin; both mine and his favorite song."

That January, a friend of Eamonn's had passed away and he asked Kohany to sing a couple of songs at the wake. After the church ceremony, someone approached Eamonn, and complimented the voice of his 'daughter.'

"He acknowledged his pride, and it was

one of the prouder moments in my own life," said Kohany. "Little did I know that only six months later, Eamonn would pass away, while at work, at 1 o'clock in the morning."

"It was one of the hardest things that I've ever had to do, but I knew it would mean the world to my mom and family," she said. "So at his memorial ceremony, I sang 'Angel.' That certainly wasn't my favorite performance, but it was the most monumental. It was hard, and I knew that if I could get through the song that I could do nearly anything and I know that he would've been proud."

Kohany said she has always loved singing; from singing in her car, at school, in church or at a karaoke bar.

Kohany's mother has encouraged her to pursue a career in singing, but Kohany said she sings for the love of singing, not the love of fame.

"I do it because I enjoy it, not because I'm trying to get discovered or anything like that," said Kohany. "Since high school, she has urged me to pursue a singing career, but I've found my niche with the military, and I'm pretty happy with that."

Airmen serve their country by playing music

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

PEORIA -- As the old adage goes, 'music has charms to sooth a savage beast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.'

With the title Airman, many may envision a pilot and flight crew, but there are many other ways Airmen serve their country with a double bassoon instead of a fighter jet.

With more than 150 different occupations in the National Guard, there is only one job that allows a servicemember to utilize an instrument instead of a weapon.

That group of talented citizen-Airmen is part of the Air National Guard Band of the Midwest.

"Each time I sing the armed forces melody while the band plays, it's such an honor to see the veterans stand to their feet," said Air Force Tech. Sgt. Keisha Gwin-Goodin of Chicago, a vocalist with the U.S. Air Force Band of Mid-America.

The mission of the Illinois Air National Guard's 566th Air Force Band is unique among military units.

The Airmen's skills reflect both art and dedication to service in patriotic performance.

"Our mission is multi-faceted," said



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

The Illinois Air National Guard's 566th Air Force Band plays during a performance. The band performs all over the globe, but has had recent concentrations on morale boosting concerts and memorial services in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Air Force Maj. Bryan Miller, commander and conductor of the Illinois Air National Guard's 566th Air Force Band.

"We are a powerful resource, everything from morale, welfare and recreation to recruiting internally, to improving community relations and portraying a positive image for our nation's military."

The band performs all over the globe, but

has had recent concentrations on morale boosting concerts and memorial services in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"With so many military missions in action, we will construct and deploy the most appropriate ensemble needed for the mission," said Miller.

"We accomplish this with any number of products to include ceremonial and concert

bands, jazz and rock bands, vocalists, buglers and anything else that could best serve a specific mission."

Alongside performing for deployed troop operations, the 566th Air National Guard Band also lifts the spirits of civilians by performing locally at schools, nursing homes and surrounding organizations.

"The 566th Air National Guard Band is an essential column to the military public affairs structure," said Tech. Sgt. Jack Kinsella of Mahattan, Ill.

"Performing not only inspires patriotism, but it most importantly strengthens relationships with a variety of publics to enhance the reputation of the fighting forces of America."

With 11 Air National Guard bands located in the continental United States, each band is accountable for supporting units in a multi-state area of responsibility.

While performing a diverse line up of patriotic ensembles, the Illinois Air National Guard band has established and maintained an integral root within military history.

Miller said, "I do believe in our mission, whether it's performing for deployed troops in theatre, stateside or for the citizenry, we have the unique opportunity to reach out and touch people."

ILNG troops shoot, fight, run, s

Shooters excel at All-Army marksmanship com

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman
Illinois National Guard Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

FORT BENNING, Ga. -- Tension split the early morning fog as Soldiers' voices and crunching footsteps in the darkness guided the way to the All-Army Small Arms and Long Range (Sniper) Championships, March 20 to 27 at Fort Benning, Ga.

The Illinois National Guard Competitive Marksmanship Team used its training, discipline and drive to place third among all 48 teams with one Soldier taking first-place overall in the small arms event and winning first-place in both sniper events with the highest aggregate score.

"There is no other Army event that brings together so many military occupational specialties, branches and components into one place," said Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Hardy, the senior enlisted advisor of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit. "The skills you have demonstrated here during this competition are the skills you will

take back to your units to raise the Army's standards in marksmanship and battlefield readiness."

The Illinois National Guard Competitive Marksmanship Team includes five Soldiers, who at their first championship showed Illinois has some of the best marksmen in the military. The "A" team consisted of Warrant Officer Candidate Kyle Gleason of Lincoln, team captain and assigned to Marseilles Training Site Detachment in Marseilles; Sgt. 1st Class David Perdeu of Astoria, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 44th Chemical Battalion in Macomb; Staff Sgt. Tracy Mix of Marseilles, Company A, 33rd Brigade Support Troop Battalion; Staff Sgt. Bill Thorpe of Millstadt, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Battalion in Marion and Sgt. Terry Pody, team coach of Machesney Park, Marseilles Training Site Detachment.

Soldiers from across the country were invited to perform in two back-to-back championships. The first is the six-day small-arms championship of 12 individual and

eight team matches. The second tournament is the two-day, long-range (sniper) championship, governed by two separate matches shot from 800, 900 and 1,000 yards with M-24 sniper rifles.

"For a competitive marksman, consistently applying the fundamentals and achieving success on the range translates to achieving success in anything you do whether on the battlefield or other walks of life," said Hardy.

Prior to the All-Army championships, the Illinois National Guard Competitive Marksmanship team started with a five-day training session in Quincy on a 500-yard known-distance range followed by an additional three-day train-up in Tullahoma, Tenn., with 64 other National Guard Soldiers from various states.

"These are some of the best guys I've ever worked with," said Pody. "It is a privilege to coach Soldiers that set the standard for leadership and marksmanship wherever we go. They all devote personal time and resources into this team and their level of dedication and desire to win is unmatched."

Each tournament offers a series of scenarios that are not found in other military marksmanship events. Combined arms lanes required competitors to crawl in sand under barbed wire and fire upon a variety of different targets while running. Each event is choreographed to present a stress level paralleled to a true combat scenario.

Rather than paper targets simulating various distances, known-distance range scenarios are used to provide the actual distance between shooters and targets. Shooters must adapt to factors that come into play at actual distances such as wind fluctuation and change in bullet trajectory.

"Pure combat stress is the purpose of these scenarios," said Gleason. "You have to run two miles in all your gear, rush to get on the firing line, then you need to control your entire body to get accurate shots. They want to test us under extreme physical stress, simulating firing in combat. They implement the time limit and combat gear to see how we do against all the outside factors of shooting well."

The Illinois team placed in the top 10 in all eight team matches. Perdeu was the first first-time shooter, Perdeu, to ever win the All-Army Small Arms and All-Army Sniper event in the same year. Perdeu was awarded a Secretary of the Army M-1 service rifle for winning the first-place overall novice individual championship. He later swept the Long Range (Sniper) Championship by winning first-place in both events with the highest average score, for this he was awarded a customized AR-10 assault rifle. Additional prizes, coins and awards were distributed among the team for excellence in the tournament, placing third amongst all 48 teams in the highly sought after All-Army Team Aggregate Championship Match.

Every inch of measurement and second in time



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard's Staff Sgt. Bill Thorpe of Millstadt, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Battalion in Marion crawls under barbed wire during the Combined Arms Match for the All-Army Small Arms Championship at Master Sgt. William E. Krilling Range at Fort Benning, Ga., March 25.



Illinois David Head Battalion target during Army Ga., M distinguishing compete every s during champ "No a base "That

Semi-pro football team are comrades on and off fie

Story by U.S. Army Pfc. Jason Northcutt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD -- On a cold spring day, 16 men gather on the field to wage battle. Some of them have waged battle overseas, but today they wage battle yard-by-yard, touchdown-by-touchdown, in a game called football.

The Capital City Outlaws, a semi-pro football team, is not just a group of men playing football, but is tied to a greater heritage, a military heritage.

The team is co-owned by three Illinois Army National Guardsmen; Col. Chris Lawson, Lt. Col. Alex Lawson, and Capt. Tomas Akers. But it goes further than just the owners; there are five Illinois Guardsmen playing on the team. With the team playing by Eight Man Football League (8FL) rules, they make up half of an eight-man team.

"For many of the players, it's a chance to continue their dream of playing football," said Akers of Springfield who commands the 1844th Transportation Company in Quincy. "Many played through high school, college (even Division 1), and some have even played Arena football. This allows them to teach others what they have learned and continues that dream of playing."

The Outlaws, part of the 8FL, fall under one of two conferences, the National Conference, and run an eight-man team offensively and defensively.

They follow many of the rules of the NFL with a few differences, such as shorter field and 12 minute quarters.

For some, playing football and coaching is something that just comes naturally. Both Chris and Alex said they grew up knowing football. Their father, Leland Lawson, was a professional player with the L.A. Rams. They spent their childhood years watching, eating and essentially breathing football.

"Playing football and now owning a team is what we know," said Lt. Col. Lawson, who commands the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery of Chicago. "Our father told us we had to play to go to college. Our father played, we played and now we teach

others to play."

Spc. Darius Miller, an Outlaw player from Springfield said he loves getting out on the field and playing football.

"I don't play because I want to get paid or famous. I play because I love the game," said Miller. "Being part of the team, knowing Capt. Akers, and the friends I have made, (has) helped me to make a decision to re-enlist with the Guard. I cannot think of doing anything else."

The Outlaws were not always the Outlaws. The team was created in 1991 as the Springfield Statesmen and in 2002 changed its name to the Springfield Buccaneers with the Mid-Continental League. After changing their name to the Capital City Outlaws in 2003, they joined the 8FL in 2004.

But playing football is more than just a team sport on the field. It also plays a large role in the military life of the players.

"The team structure on the field is also carried over to our daily job for the Guard," said Sgt. Jae Russell of Springfield, a Training Sergeant with Joint Forces Headquarters. "Structure is the biggest benefit on and off the field. The military plays a strong role in leadership. I draw on my military experience and time on the football field to help me stay level-headed in times of pressure."

Photo by U.S. Army Pfc. Jason K. Northcutt, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

(left) Capt. Tomas Akers of Springfield holds a half-time huddle with his defensive team. Akers, commander of the 1844th Transportation Company in Quincy and a counterdrug officer with Joint Force Headquarters in Springfield, is the interim head coach while Col. Chris Lawson attends the Army War College in Pennsylvania. Akers also doubles as the defensive coordinator and reminds his players to keep a level head on and off the field. With a 30 to 0 lead over Mid-State at half-time March 27 the team pushes hard to continue its winning streak.



scrimmage, compete, dominate Illinois among the best fighters



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

is Army National Guard's Sgt. 1st Class Perdew of Astoria, Headquarters and Detachment, 44th Chemical Battalion based in Macomb runs to engage each other at the Master Sgt. William E. Krilling Range during the Combined Arms Match for the All-Army Small Arms Championship at Fort Benning, March 25.

guishes a win from a loss amid the level of competitiveness and skill at the All-Army matches. With site picture, breath and trigger squeeze, performance of those crucial moments creates individual and team emotions.

one of America's enemies have ever been killed by baseball, football, basketball or golf ball," said Pody. "It will always be the job of a skilled marksman."

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman
Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

FORT BENNING, Ga. -- Six of 14 Illinois Army National Guard Combatives Team Soldiers placed in three separate weight classes, taking second place overall in the 4th annual 2011 Army National Guard Combatives Championship Finals at the Hector Santiago Fitness Center on Fort Benning, Ga., March 19 and 20.

More than 100 Soldiers from 15 states competed to prove battle readiness in mixed martial arts. The fighters were broken down into seven weight classes, ranging from flyweight at 125 pounds and under to heavyweight at 205 pounds and up.

"Illinois is definitely a stand-out state that competes to win," said Sgt. Joe Sult of Corvallis, Ore., a Warrior Training Center senior combatives instructor. "The team's talent, good coaching, and warrior ethos justifies their continued success."

The Modern Army Combatives Program includes various fighting styles such as Jiu-Jitsu, Judo, Freestyle wrestling, and Muay Thai kickboxing. Depending on a fighter's strength in a particular style, the opponent may have to use a different fighting style to overcome their opponent's advantage whether standing or on the ground.

If Soldiers find themselves unarmed during an imminent enemy encounter, close-quarters combatives are pivotal skills to stay alive in combat. The purpose of the competition is to establish the best military fighters. It also draws a crowd, which Soldiers use as motivation to keep training.

Six minute, double-elimination opening rounds were fought using standard combatives rules, where the objective is to win by opponent submission through chokes or joint manipulation. There is also a point system where each opponent scores points based on the number of dominant fighting positions they obtain during the match. If a fighter does not submit, the points will determine the winner.

Progressive tournament style moves winners of the previous standard round



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Illinois Guardsman Staff Sgt. Adam Therriault of Ottawa, with Company A, 33rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion in Marseilles took second place in the final round at the 4th annual 2011 Army National Guard Combatives Championship Finals at the Hector Santiago Fitness Center on Fort Benning, Ga., March 19 and 20.

to the 10-minute-long pankration round, where fighters increase the variety of attack methods with additional open-hand slaps to the face, closed-hand strikes to the body and kicks anywhere head to toe. Eleven of the 14 Illinois Guard fighters progressed from round one (standard) to round two (pankration) without being eliminated.

In the consolation round, Illinois Guardsman Staff Sgt. Nicholas Grant of Caseyville, with the 129th Regional Training Institute in Springfield, placed third with a win by submission against Arizona Guardsman Staff Sgt. David Steff from Company B, 1-285th Attack Helicopter Battalion in Phoenix.

Illinois Guardsman Staff Sgt. Adam Therriault of Ottawa, with Company A, 33rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion in Marseilles took second place in the final round.

The four finalists competing for first place in both cruiserweight and light

heavyweight classes were all Illinois Guardsmen. Of the four, Sgt. Aoutneil Magny of Dolton, with the 708th Medical Company in North Riverside had to challenge Sgt. Aaron West of Braidwood, with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Urbana.

"Challenging a fellow Soldier on my team isn't easy, but I look at it as a training opportunity," said Magny. "I focus on the challenge of it, so I can become a better fighter."

Magny took first place in the cruiserweight division with West in second. In the light heavyweight division, Illinois Guardsman 2nd Lt. Ivan Yochkolovski of River Grove, with Company A, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment in Bartonville, took first place over fellow Illinois Guardsman Sgt. Jeremy Stimac of Braidwood, a member of the Company A, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

"These Soldiers train year round and nonstop," said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Vincent Cruz, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Warrior Training Center Combatives Program. "There's no way I can express how much these guys go through and they never quit."

The major sacrifice National Guard Soldiers make to compete is their time and money. Active Duty Soldiers have the conveniences of local training facilities on post and training time during their work schedules. National Guardsmen put time aside from their daily schedules and money from their own pockets to train year round. They train by attending outside civilian combatives schools requiring long commutes at times.

"Unlike active duty, we as guardsmen are required to train as a team and individuals," said Maj. Jeffery Jiannoni of Petersburg, the Illinois Army National Guard combatives coach. "We can't train daily on a single installation together, so we rely on civilian training and schools and then we bring that training together when we meet at the tournament. We make every effort to get together to train even if it's on our own income, because we love what we do."

The Illinois Army National Guard Combatives Team is a tight-knit family of Soldiers dedicated to the same passion. They have proven themselves in their fourth All National Guard Tournament and look forward to competing at the next All Army Tournament, said Jiannoni.

"These guys will actually go to compete in the All Army tournament," said Cruz, "The active duty fighters will be sorely mistaken to take this Illinois National Guard Team for granted."

ld ■Runners take on 26.2 miles of Little Rock

Story by U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer (2) Rachele McKay
129th Regional Training Institute

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. -- What is your definition of crazy? A person who rides their bicycle against traffic? Or maybe a Soldier willing to jump out of an airplane blindfolded?

Four members of the Illinois Guard Running Team made up their own definition of crazy March 4 to 6. Capt. Kira Crocker of Springfield, Chief Warrant Officer (2) Rachele McKay of Springfield, Staff Sgt. John Tierney of Lincoln and Sgt. 1st Class Greg Hoffman of Virden traveled to Little Rock, Ark., to run the Little Rock Marathon.

For some that may not constitute crazy; however, if one adds that all four of these Soldiers signed up three weeks before race day with minimal training, crazy may come to mind. All of the Soldiers except for Tierney have ran in marathons prior to the race.

Why would four Soldiers sign up to run 26.2 miles with no training? That answer was easy: the medal. The organizers of the Little Rock Marathon pride themselves on creating a huge and unique medal for the marathon finishers. This year the medal is seven and half inches tall, five inches wide, weighing more than a pound and a half and part of it spins.

"I'm not sure what is crazier... running a marathon or running a marathon



Photo courtesy of U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer (2) Rachele McKay, 129th Regional Training Institute

(Left to right) Sgt. 1st Class Greg Hoffman of Virden, Staff Sgt. John Tierney of Lincoln, Capt. Kira Crocker of Springfield and Chief Warrant Officer (2) Rachele McKay of Springfield, traveled to Little Rock, Ark. to run the Little Rock Marathon March 4 to 6. All four Illinois National Guard Soldiers are part of the Illinois Guard Running Team.

untrained," said Hoffman. "Regardless, the challenge to accomplish a seemingly impossible task, and complete it, was the reward. Or it could have been just about the medal."

The Illinois Guard Running Team is

looking for runners, male or female, of any age, with the Illinois Army National Guard or Air National Guard. If you are interested in redefining crazy - give McKay a call at 217-761-1212 or email at rachele.mckay@us.army.mil.

Soldiers train with top-of-the-line equipment

Story by U.S. Army Sgt. Keith VanKlombenberg
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

MARSEILLES -- As enemy tactics evolve overseas, training must evolve at home to ensure Soldiers enter the battlefield with the right tools to complete the mission.

Marseilles Training Center (MTC) has provided troops an edge overseas for years by implementing immersive, realistic training lanes and has just procured a few more tools that will provide more authentic training than ever before.

"The goal of the training site is to give the Soldier the most realistic training available," said Sgt. Andrew Prentice of Streator, the MTC training aids, devices, simulators and simulations coordinator.

Until now, Soldiers have used paintball guns to train in team and squad tactics at MTC. While useful, using paintball has its flaws, said Prentice.

"We want our warfighters to develop good habits in training, and good muscle memory of using their own weapon systems," said Prentice.

To accomplish this, MTC has acquired 160 Ultimate Training Munitions conversion kits for the M16 and M4 rifles, 42 9mm pistol kits and 20 for the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon.

"What the (close combat mission capability kit) conversions do is allow Soldiers to enter a training scenario with their own assigned weapon instead of using a paintball marker," he said.

The kits allow the use of man marker rounds, which use a cosmetic wax to mark targets and are as reliable and accurate as real rounds, even allowing Soldiers to zero their weapons with the kits.

"From my limited experience with these rounds, I am very impressed," said Prentice. "I have fired quite a few of these rounds with no weapons issues."

In addition to the new conversion kits for individual weapons, MTC has also acquired some very advanced improvised explosive device (IED) simulators, Prentice said.

The Pacific Coast Systems Fox is a roadside bomb simulator that fires six simultaneous pyrotechnic rounds

to provide a large, yet safe, simulated explosion in a device small enough to be carried by one man.

The 155/2 Joint Artillery Counter-IED Trainer provides a pyrotechnic IED simulator housed inside a 155mm artillery shell, which, according to Pacific Coast Systems, can be daisy chained. It replicates multiple detonation methods seen on the battlefield, such as remote-control, victim operated and command wire detonated.

IEDs hidden in 155mm rounds are common in both Iraq and Afghanistan, so this device will give Soldiers an opportunity to familiarize themselves before they deploy. The 155mm rounds are frequently used as IEDs in Iraq, but in Afghanistan they are more commonly found as unexploded ordnance. Because of the versatility of the system, the simulators at MTC can meet any and all mission requirements.

MTC has also acquired the Under Vehicle Explosive Device, which can simulate an IED buried underground.

All of the IED simulators use M30 pyrotechnic rounds already found in the Army's inventory system.

The simulators will be used in both mounted and dismounted training lanes, said Prentice.

"These give good visual and audible cues that an IED has gone off," he said.

Prentice said these new simulators are not just cool new toys for Soldiers to play with; they are realistic life-saving training tools.

"I believe that training has become more realistic than it has been in the past. I think that our Soldiers expect it to be," he said. "I think that combat readiness can only be attributed to good commanders that utilize every aspect or opportunity to effectively train their troops."

Pacific North Coast Systems will provide training for MTC trainers this spring and they aim to start using the new equipment this summer, said Prentice.

The mission of MTC is to provide military organizations the best environment for conducting individual and collective training and has recently seen upwards of 80,000 servicemembers per year come



Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Fischman, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Sgt. Andrew Prentice of Streator, Marseilles Training Center Training Aids, Devices, Simulators and Simulations Coordinator, displays some of the simulation munitions used in training scenarios. These simulated explosive materials provide an explosion large enough to make a training scenario seem as realistic as possible without injuring anyone.

through its lanes, Prentice said.

"All of the new IED simulators and training aids at Marseilles are going to give Illinois Army National Guard commanders the opportunity to add that one ingredient to training that is of the utmost importance: realism," said Capt. Joseph Poquette of Downers Grove, MTC commander.

"Without this, the Soldier has to learn the hard way and we can't have that. Soldiers have access to some of the most high-tech and top-of-the-line simulators that the Army and private sectors have to offer in order to ensure that we meet our mission of providing the best training possible," Poquette said.

Disaster felt across seas and cultures

■ Soldier reflects on training with Japanese troops

Story by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert Fafoglia
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.

SPRINGFIELD - As I'm sure the whole world is aware, an 8.9 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Japan on March 11. It is the most powerful earthquake Japan has ever experienced and the fifth most powerful earthquake of all time. Unfortunately, it did not end there, as the earthquake caused massive tsunamis that tore through the area, destroying homes, killing thousands and leaving many more homeless. There are also several nuclear reactors that are failing as a result of the quake, one which may even now be in partial meltdown.

As a country and a people, I believe that we are essentially generous and kind-hearted. I know that this tragedy affects most people as it does me. I imagine most people heard what was happening on the radio, or saw it on the TV or internet, and felt horrible and heartsick for the people of Japan. But there is still a tendency to compartmentalize. However bad we feel, it didn't happen here so it doesn't seem as real to us. Sometimes it is hard to identify with faces on a screen.

For me, it is all too easy. I was just there.

In October, I took part in an exercise called Orient Shield XI at Camp Kami-Furano, on the island of Hokkaido, Japan. OS 11 was a 10-day bilateral training exercise between elements of the Army National Guard, U.S.

Army Japan and Japanese Ground Self-Defense Forces. The operation focused on improving interoperability between the two nations, which were celebrating the 50-year anniversary of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, signed in January 1960.

The exercise gave American and Japanese forces a chance to exchange ideas, training procedures, battle drills and tactics. More importantly, however, it gave Soldiers from both countries a chance to get to know each other, to understand a little more about each other's customs and culture. It was an amazing experience for all of us, one that makes what is happening right now even more upsetting. I have faces and experiences that stand out to me, not just the images on TV.

The Japanese are a people with an unbelievable amount of generosity. I have never felt so warmly welcomed, so taken care of or so respected. They did everything in their power to make us feel like we belonged there. They couldn't stop thanking us, many times even when it was for accepting a gift they were giving us.

The Japanese Soldiers wanted to learn how the U.S. military operated, but also learn about us. When we weren't training we were getting to know each other, asking hundreds of questions about the other's family, hobbies, goals and ambitions. The language barrier was a challenge, but one we overcame with interpreters, hand gestures and simple determination. It speaks volumes to me that even during

our time off from work, the camaraderie continued. We ate together, sang songs, played games and laughed. I think that's what I remember most, all the laughing.

Then of course, there is the land itself. It is heartbreaking to see the images of the streets, choked with debris and wreckage. I can remember the rolling hills, dotted with little houses and farms. Even the cities and towns found ways to incorporate nature into their designs. Small gardens are everywhere.

We visited a sake factory, and I remember walking out of the back door to find a beautiful garden, almost a small park, complete with a coy pond with bridge, several benches, a rock garden and shade trees. Just a quiet little retreat from the rest of the world. These kinds of things were everywhere.

We visited a zoo, and I was fascinated by the animals, some very familiar and some exotic. I remember being impressed with the zoo's construction, how the animals habitats seemed to be constructed more to work with nature than to box it in. I cannot even imagine all that being gone, erased by the tsunami.

I love being an American. I have a great sense of pride in this country and what we stand for. All the same, I can remember getting off the plane in Chicago. I stopped in a small shop for some cold medicine, and waited at the counter for 10 minutes for the cashier to finish talking on his cell phone.

You could tell that I was a huge

inconvenience to him, and the transaction concluded without a word spoken or any form of eye contact. I knew then, without a doubt, I was back in the U.S.A.

I never saw this kind of thing during my time in Japan. I'm sure it exists, but it is definitely not the norm. The Japanese carry themselves with a quiet grace and dignity that is just short of awe-inspiring. It is something we seem to be missing in this country sometimes, for all of our success: simple human civility. I love living here, but I sometimes miss that politeness, that unyielding respect and dignity.

I think it is that, more than anything, which will pull the Japanese through this dark time. They are an amazing people, full of strength and ingenuity. They will do what they must to clean up and rebuild, and they will go about it with the same grace and civility that I observed during my time there.

The U.S. and other nations will help them as much as possible; I firmly hope and believe that. I urge people to help as much as possible, whether that be through donations of time or money, food drives, volunteering or prayers. Anything we can do will help, and I assure you it will be appreciated more than you could ever know.

Staff Sgt. Robert Fafoglia is the print section noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the Illinois Army National Guard's 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. The unit supported the Orient Shield XI exercise in Japan this past fall.

The dum-dum's guide to the 2020 Joint Strategic plan

By U.S. Army Maj. Brad Leighton
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Director

SPRINGFIELD -- Perhaps you overheard it in a bar – some machismo want-to-be casually dropping a couple lines about it to impress the ladies. Or maybe it was that self-important diva in the power suit holding court at the water cooler ranting on and on about “vision” and “strategic aims.”

No matter how you've heard of it, everyone knows the Illinois National Guard 2020 Joint Strategic Plan is the new “in” thing.

What? You don't really know what it is all about? Don't worry, my friend. This guide will prevent any faux pas when “The Plan” comes up in conversation.

The first thing you need to know is that any successful organization has to have a solid idea of what it wants to look like and accomplish in the future. That's called vision. The Joint Vision for the Illinois National Guard is that:

“The Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard are a mission ready force able to meet and win all foreign and domestic challenges of the future.”

Tap your heels and say that three times, because that's how we want to look and function in the year 2020.

Next we need to look at what our mission is now. The Illinois National Guard Joint Mission is:

“The Illinois National Guard, like the Minutemen of the past, stands ready to support and defend our country and local communities from all dangers, natural or manmade.”

“Wait a minute,” you say. “Aren't the Vision and the Mission stating pretty much the same thing?”

I can't get much by you, slick.

Yes, they are very similar. The mission of the National Guard to protect our local communities and our nation hasn't really changed much in the last 374 years – and we want to be able to continue to accomplish our mission far into the future.

What has changed is the environment we work in. So, to continue to be successful protecting our communities and nation, we need to take a peek into the future and determine what we need to accomplish.

Now we get into the meat of the plan - the nine “Strategic Aims.” This is our strategic ‘to-do’ list to continue to be successful. Each aim has several “Objectives” or sub-tasks that need to be done to accomplish the aim.

But let's not get into all the objectives and just stick with the aims. After all, we

are just trying to get enough information here to impress our friends.

Each of the aims has some highfalutin language, so let's look at each aim and a translation for dummies:

Strategic Aim #1: “Seek every opportunity to become one of the top 10 mission ready Guard organizations in force structure and secure proportionate resources to achieve our mission and vision.”

Translation: Illinois is a big state, the fifth largest in the Union. We have a huge city with many potential terrorist targets. We have a lot of other threats – floods, earthquakes, seven nuclear facilities, tornados, winter storms, etc. We need more units and the right type of units to reflect the size of our state and the threats we face. And we need more support for the units we already have. On the Army side, the Illinois National Guard has the lowest number of Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA) authorizations (read support positions) of any state with between 9,000 and 11,000 Soldiers.

Strategic Aim #2: “Through a demonstrated excellence in our State Partnership Program, expand with future partnerships in support of international security cooperation, without degrading our current relationship with Poland.”

Translation: Wanted: a partner nation looking for a strong military-to-military relationship with the fifth largest state in the union and the home of the U.S. President. Just any nation will not do – must have good potential synergy with Illinois. Jealousy is out of the question. Illinois' partnership with Poland is the best. Three-way relationship may be considered.

Strategic Aim #3: “Develop and retain effective leaders who are equipped to balance the demands of the mission with the well being of our Citizen-Soldiers/Citizen Airmen”

Translation: We need to continue to develop excellent leaders that understand the unique challenges faced by our Guard troops, their families and their employers. We need future leaders that are creative, flexible, adaptable, resilient, and well-rounded - able to accomplish the mission and at the same time help our troops lead happy fulfilling lives.

Strategic Aim #4: “Use capabilities of current and emerging technologies to enhance robust lines of communication within the ILNG and with its stakeholders.”

Translation: Communication is key. We need to communicate with our Soldiers and Airmen, our citizens and our partners using the most effective technology available to the military.



Illustration by Sgt. Michael Camacho, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Strategic Aim #5: “Achieve concurrent and proportional fielding of organizational equipment and missions in relation to the active component.”

Translation: The days of “hand-me-down” equipment from the active services needs to be a thing of the past. We need to train on the best, most modern, equipment available to the U.S. military.

Strategic Aim #6: “Seek and grow nationally recognized Centers of Excellence.”

Translation: A Center of Excellence or, as the happenin people say, a “CoE,” is a regionally or nationally recognized program that gets specifically funded for the long haul. It is unique or only one of a few. The Illinois National Guard has a lot of great programs and one or two of them should be developed into a CoE.

Strategic Aim #7: “Remain a community-based organization while enhancing and developing international, national, regional and local Centers of Influence.”

Translation: We draw our strength from our local communities and we need to maintain those local connections, but we also need to keep influential people at all levels informed about the value of the Illinois National Guard. When decisions about allocating resources are made, we need to ensure those that make those decisions have all the facts.

Strategic Aim #8: “Modernize existing and acquire additional training sites and

facilities that are sustainable, flexible, and postured to support both current and future force structure.”

Translation: We need more training sites, but we also need to maximize the ones we have. We can do this with training simulators and other technology. We also need “green” facilities that don't use much energy and ones that are able to handle new equipment and different types of units.

Strategic Aim #9: “Promote Guard culture through our shared history, tradition, brotherhood, values and identity to foster increased esprit de corps, cohesion and commitment to service.”

Translation: The National Guard is unique and very very cool. We are the oldest U.S. military component dating back to 1636 and the only one explicitly written into the U.S. Constitution. We are the only ones with dual state and federal missions. We want our Soldiers, Airmen and the general public to know how cool we are.

Well, that's it for the Aims. Why are there nine instead of an even 10? Come on, 10 would be too cliché and we're above that sort of thing.

So, now you've got the Vision. You've got the Mission. You've got the Aims. That's the Cheat Notes version of the Illinois National Guard 2020 Joint Strategic Plan.

Now you're with the “in” crowd. You're about it. You're a playa. You're all that. You own the Cheese. You're the Big Dog, the Mack Daddy, the end all and be all, the...

Common Access Card and the traditional Soldier

By U.S. Army Lt. Col. Alex Lawson
Directorate of Information Management

For many years, Department of Defense (DoD) continues to provide new ways of securing our networks and the data it holds. Soon, user codes and passwords will be a thing of the past. As hackers become more proficient, we must stay vigilant to ensure our network and data are not compromised. I do not have to tell you the issues of identity theft and compromised data. All it takes is one incident and the reputation of that government agency is at stake. DoD has taken measures to ensure we remain ahead the technological war.

Utilizing best practices, DoD implemented Multi-factor Authentication; also known as Strong Authentication. Multi-factor Authentication is a methodology involving three basic factors; something the user KNOWS, something the user HAS, and something the user IS. Currently DoD networks, to include the Illinois Army National Guard (ARNG), utilizes two-factor authentication; something the user KNOWS and something the user HAS. The Common Access Card, known as CAC, is based on the two-factor authentication method.

The user is issued a CAC; what the user HAS. The user enters their Personal Identification Number (PIN) to access DoD systems; what the user KNOWS. If the CAC is lost or stolen, it is useless. The hacker must know the PIN and vice versa.

The Traditional Soldier (aka M-Day)

More of our systems are implementing CAC as the only means of access. However the traditional soldier feels like they are left behind in this process. These soldiers are expected to access DoD CAC enabled websites utilizing their civilian computer systems. This is magnified as more training is pushed to these websites and just recently traditional soldiers must



Submitted photo

utilize the Defense Travel System (DTS). This means they have to purchase or acquire a CAC reader, load the software and certificates and configure if required. The end result is either the user figures it out or they give up. This article is intended to provide ARNG soldiers guidance on how to configure their civilian systems to access DoD CAC enabled systems.

Implementing CAC on your civilian system is a four step process; six if you would like to digitally sign forms and documents (i.e. OERs, NCOERs). These steps must be done in order!

Step 1: Obtain a CAC Reader

Step 2: CAC Reader driver

Step 3: DoD Certificates

Step 4: ActivClient

Step 5: Lotus Forms

Step 6: Approvel

These steps and detailed instructions are located on the following sites: www.militarycac.com or www.us.army.mil under Help. It is highly recommend you utilize the www.militarycac.com website for installation guidance. Each step has a link to detailed instructions. In addition, it has video and specific problems users might encounter during their installation. The soldier should test their connectivity with AKO FIRST! Most sites utilize Single Sign-On. Meaning, if you access any number of military sites that require CAC access, chances are it is interfacing AKO for authentication. AKO is the authority and in most cases, if you cannot login to AKO, you will not be able to login to other DoD CAC enabled sites.

For those that continue to have issues configuring their systems, please contact the AKO Help Desk at 866-335-2769, press option 2. However, we recommend utilizing this site prior to calling the AKO Help Desk because AKO Help Desk response times are long and usually users find a resolution prior to AKO contacting them.

NEWS BRIEFS

The Illinois Guard says goodbye to a few good men

■ Col. Gary T. Schmitt

SPRINGFIELD – Soldiers devote their careers in hopes of living up to the Army values. Col. Gary T. Schmitt of Springfield, an Illinois National Guardsman who retired March 25 after 31 years, lived those same values and dedicated his life to lead by example and help other Soldiers along his path.

“I believe in taking care of Soldiers,” said Schmitt, the director of strategic plans and policy for the Joint Staff of the Illinois National Guard and a Dania Beach, Fla., native. “If you take care of the people around you, you show them you’re willing to suffer ... live the same way they are living and if you’re technically and tactically proficient, you’ll be a leader.”

Schmitt said he learned how to be a leader early and taught his sons those qualities as they grew up.

■ Chaplain Lt. Col. Jerry H. Gleason

BARTLETT – Chaplain Lt. Col. Jerry H. Gleason of Bartlett, the deputy state chaplain for the Illinois Army National Guard, retired March 31, after 31 years of uniformed service.

After seminary, Gleason moved to Bartlett to start a new church and become a pastor. After three years at this church, a stranger approached him and changed his life, he said.

“I was challenged by a person whom I had never seen or ever saw again to join the reserves because they were short on chaplains,” said Gleason. “I was already serving as a pastor and thought serving as a chaplain might be a good fit for me and the military.”

Gleason said he applied and was accepted as a chaplain for the Illinois National Guard in 1985, and found it to be a very good fit.

■ Master Sgt. Robert Edwards

PARIS – A military career that has spanned over four decades will come to an end in July. Master Sgt. Robert Edwards of Paris, with the 232nd Command Sustainment Support Battalion in Springfield, will retire after an illustrious career that included two major conflicts, several activations, and multiple awards.

“I think the service of a Soldier impacts our country greatly,” said Edwards. “Other countries will not take care of us. We have to do it ourselves. When the civilian sector sees the military and what they’re trying to do it gives them security and lets them know they will be taken care of. There are going to be good times and bad times, but they just need to stick with it. It’s the best job going on right now and you get to serve your country. It’s a very prestigious career.”

183rd Fighter Wing responds to crash

Story by Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD -- Firefighters from the Springfield-based 183rd Fighter Wing responded to a civilian airplane crash at approximately 11 a.m. on Jan. 6 at the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield. The aircraft came to rest off the runway in the grass in front of Standard Aero.

Four firefighters from the 183rd Fighter Wing, which serves as the first responders for airplane crashes at the Springfield airport, responded to the crash.

“They responded under the minimum time required by the Federal Aviation Administration and did a terrific job extinguishing the fire, securing the aircraft and providing aid to those on board,” said Lt. Col. Chuck Coderko, 183rd Fire Marshal.

Six individuals were on board the aircraft, with two people injured and taken to the hospital for further medical treatment.

“Our firefighters are top notch and performed their job with great professionalism. I am proud of the work they did today and do every day,” Coderko said.

As part of the previous mission of the 183rd Fighter Wing, the Air National Guard unit has 18 full-time firefighter positions. The fire fighters

are highly trained for Hazardous Material and Homeland Defense response. They provide fire protection for Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport as well as Mutual Aid Support to Fire Departments from Springfield,

Sherman, Athens, Pleasant Plains and any department that requests.

The crash remains under investigation by the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.



Photo by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Shaun Kerr, 183rd Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Four firefighters from the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield responded to a civilian airplane crash at Capital Airport in Springfield at approximately 11 a.m. on Jan. 6. 183rd firefighters serve as the first responders for accidents at the Springfield airport. Six individuals were on board the aircraft, with two of those individuals taken to a local hospital for further medical treatment.

REMEMBERS

■ From page 2

Marion. Melton died after an improvised explosive device detonated in Kandahar, Afghanistan in June 2009.

“Everyone around here knew him. He would’ve helped anybody and he didn’t have one enemy,” said Richie G. Holtgrave, Melton’s cousin.

Speakers at the event on April 9 included Maj. Gen. William L. Enyart of Belleville, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, State Senator Kyle McCarter, Holbrook and many family and friends of Illinois servicemembers who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

“Josh Melton was a true representative of Clinton County, and of the people of Clinton County. He was a patriot, he was a volunteer,” said Enyart.

Similar stories abounded throughout the day from those closest to the veterans.

One in every 25 men in the United States lost their life 150 years ago in the Civil War. Contrast that to today when only one in 1,000 men bear the brunt of the ongoing wars, said Enyart.

This is not only telling as to how brave these men and women of the armed forces are, but how much they deserve not to be forgotten.

This ceremony was about remembering those that have died serving their country. Grief and emotion were apparent as a friend or family member spoke about their Soldier who perished. However, when the speaker finished memorializing, many times they smiled and seemed much happier just to have been able to share with others a little about their hero.

There were more than 650 guests who attended April 9 and April 10 to honor the men and women in uniform.

Other guests in attendance included the Illinois Patriot Guard who brought with them their Fallen Heroes Traveling Memorial Wall, Miss Illinois Teen USA Paige Higgerson, the St. Louis Rams cheerleaders, Poison cover band Posin, representatives from both the American Legion and the VFW, and musical performers Kerry Steinmann and Stephen Koritta.

Koritta wrote and performed a song during Saturday’s ceremony to mark the occasion entitled “Central Standard Time.”

Although Melton’s life was taken, his memory will now stand in stone for countless years, and his deeds will surely serve to inspire those who hear his story.

Maintenance company provides support in Germany

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

HOHENFELS, Germany -- It was just another day in the shop, but with a

few new faces and in a different country. Approximately 50 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers from Company B, 634th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), in Champaign, conducted a three-week

overseas deployment training (ODT) mission to Hohenfels, Germany, Feb. 5 to 26.

The Soldiers primarily worked at the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment Motor Park and the Consolidated Maintenance Activity, where they worked directly with local German mechanics and active duty Soldiers.

“It is good to have the extra help,” said Christian Lang, a civilian German mechanic who has worked at the Consolidated Maintenance Activity in Hohenfels for the past two years. “It is nice to work together and meet new people.”

The Illinois Soldiers provided direct maintenance support to on-post vehicles, which included humvees, fuelers, freightliners, five-ton trucks, armored personnel carriers and tractors. They also worked on trailers, stompers and scrapers among other equipment.

Approximately 3,000 maintenance work orders are processed each year at Hohenfels, said Sgt. 1st Class Dennis W. Mills, Jr., the noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) of the Consolidated Maintenance Activity. Company B completed more than 125 work orders during its ODT.

Throughout the course of a year, there are approximately 10 units ranging from

military police companies to engineers that conduct its annual training at Hohenfels, said Mills. This is Company B, 634th BSB’s third ODT mission to Hohenfels. Previous missions were completed in 2001 and 2004.

“These missions are essential for a high state of readiness and will keep us relevant for future deployments,” said 1st Sgt. Joseph R. Briggs of Mahomet, Company B, 634th BSB’s readiness NCOIC.

Company B completed a deployment of 87 Soldiers to Afghanistan from December 2008 to September 2009 with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. While deployed, National Guard Bureau recognized the company with the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence. The award was given for displaying superior expertise and professionalism in the maintenance field and in June 2010 the company accepted the award in Richmond, Va.

Because of the high level of performance, Soldiers were rewarded with visits to many historic sites in Munich, Rothenburg and Neuschwanstein and also enjoyed a taste of authentic German food while on their ODT.

“We have worked hard and are grateful for the opportunity to improve our skills and enjoy the local culture,” said Briggs.



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

Pfc. Vincent Biagioli of Naperville, a machinist with the Illinois Army National Guard’s Company B, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, welds a replacement metal piece to a fender, Feb. 14 in Hohenfels, Germany. Biagioli has been working at the Consolidated Maintenance Activity during a three-week annual training mission.

Air Guard trains in combat setting in Wisconsin



Photo by U.S. Army Pfc. Jason Northcutt, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Airmen with 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base stand guard over a generator as the base comes under attack during the Rally Torch 11-01 exercise March 21 at Volk Field, Wisc. Airmen have to contend with mock missile attacks, while wearing full chemical biological gear in several inches of snow and high winds.

Story by U.S. Army Pfc. Jason Northcutt
139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

VOLK FIELD, Wisc. -- The Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing based at Scott Air Force Base, the first air refueling wing in the Air National Guard, is participating in the joint exercise Rally Torch 11-01 at Volk Field, Wisc.

The Air Force Readiness Exercise is a week-long operation testing a wing's ability to deploy quickly, to operate in a chemical combat environment and respond to a variety of scenarios created by the exercise evaluation teams.

"This is my first Operation Readiness Exercise and I am excited to learn more about being prepared to rapidly deploy and to operate the communications flight in a chemical environment," said Tech. Sgt. Lauren Herren of Chicago. Herren is the communications specialist during the exercise.

"My main job is to field calls and place work orders that relate to communications and so far this has been a very rewarding experience," said Herren.

During the exercise, the Airmen's ability to react to

any scenario is tested. During the first night's exercises, not only did they have to contend with simulated mortar attacks, enemy sniper rifle and fires, but the Wisconsin spring weather playing havoc. So far they have received several inches of snow with more to come.

"After 19 years in the service, this is one of the best exercises I have participated in," said Tech. Sgt. Adam Cannon of Vandalia. "It's well organized from the top down and has pushed them to do the best they can during each scenario."

Cannon's main focus this week is to assist in the Airfield Damage Repair (ADR) of the runway. The ADR works hand-in-hand with Runway Rapid Repair teams as needed. The main focus of both teams is to ensure the runway is always fully functional. If the runway is damaged during an attack, they are called to action and have limited time to repair the runway. The team is graded on how long it takes to respond and repair the damage.

"Our first day has been great and I look forward to gaining more knowledge and different aspects of the job as the exercise progresses."

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Calling all Unit Public Affairs Representatives – the Illinois Guardian needs you!

We are always on the lookout for good stories and photos or ideas for upcoming issues of the paper. If you have stories or photos to submit for consideration, see the deadline below or contact the public affairs office at (217) 761-3569 or via e-mail at ngilstaffpao@ng.army.mil for more information.

Deadline: Deadline for submission of materials for the Summer 2010 issue of the *Illinois Guardian* is the last Wednesday of June.

Address changes: If you are not receiving the Guardian due to a recent address change, please contact the Military Personnel Office to update your records.

1744th Transportation company says goodbye, then hello again

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

ROBBINS -- Members of the 1744th Transportation Company gathered for an uncasing ceremony Jan. 23 at the Crestwood armory in Robbins.

"Today the 1744th Transportation Company uncased its company colors here in Robbins to continue its legacy," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Koslowski of Plano, the readiness noncommissioned officer for the 1744th.

The ceremony was held in honor of the company's new mission and move from Streator to Robbins.

The company, created in 2002, was originally based at the Marseilles Training Center.

After the company outgrew the space allocated to them at the center it was moved to a vacant armory in Streator.

In 2006, the company was deployed to Iraq for a year to conduct recovery operations and escort convoys.

In 2008 the company's mission was changed as the Illinois Army National Guard transformed the 404th Chemical Brigade to the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade to reflect a shifting mission overseas.

The unit became Company A, 405th Brigade Support Battalion.

Last year, the Illinois Army National Guard reconsidered its decision to change the company after the needs of the force shifted again. It was decided that a new

transportation company was essential to the Illinois Army National Guard and that the 1744th would be reinstated.

"I'm very excited to see the 1744th come back online as a transportation company," said Lt. Col. Tracey Collins of Naperville, commander of the 1144th Transportation Motor Transport (TMT) Battalion. "Adding another transportation line-haul company to the state increases our ability to move equipment ourselves instead of hiring contractors."

The official party of the ceremony included Collins; Sgt. Maj. Anthony McCormick of Jacksonville, senior enlisted advisor of the 1144th TMT; and 1st Lt. Shay Randolph of Chicago, commander of the 1744th Trans. Co.

Randolph recently took command of the 1744th. She says she is motivated to get the company back up and running again.

"I want to get us to the point where we are fully mission capable, ready to deploy and excited about it," said Randolph.

During the ceremony Collins and Randolph unveiled the company's flag symbolizing the transition of the unit to its new home as the Soldiers of the company, standing in formation, looked on.

"The very soul of a military unit is symbolized in the colors under which it fights," said Koslowski. "For they record the glories of the past, stand guardian over its present destiny, and ensure inspiration for its future."



Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Chasity Johnson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

1st Lt. Shay Randolph of Chicago, commander of the 1744th Transportation Company and Lt. Col. Tracey Collins of Naperville, commander of the 1144th Transportation Motor Transport Battalion, unveil the 1744th's company flag symbolizing the transition of the unit from the Streator armory to the Crestwood armory Jan. 23 at the Crestwood armory in Robbins.

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