

Spring 2014

# The Eagle's Eye

Florida Air National Guard

Volume 14 Issue 1



**KNOW YOUR WHY**



Features

- 4 TAG Message
- 6 Commander's Corner
- 8 Chaplain's Corner
- 9 News from HQ
- 10 Know Your Why
- 12 202nd REDHORSE
- 14 Alert Mission Continues
- 17 290th JCSS
- 18 Sentry Savannah
- 20 Media Contest Winners
- 22 Det 1: Mission Ready
- 23 Hometown Heroes
- 24 Valiant Eagle
- 26 ATV Training
- 27 IG Visits Med Group/ Eagle's Eye Online

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The Eagle's Eye is a funded Florida Air National Guard news magazine publication for the members of the Florida Air National Guard, FANG retirees, and others. Contents of The Eagle's Eye are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by the US government, DoD, USAF or NGB.

The editorial content is edited, prepared and provided by the Public Affairs Office, Florida National Guard. All photos are United States Air Force photos unless otherwise indicated.

To submit comments or articles please contact the Public Affairs Office. Submissions are subject to editing. Full names, rank, titles and contact information must accompany all submissions.

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa,  
Florida National Guard Public Affairs

STARKE, Fla. – Last fall the Florida Air National Guard lost one of its own when Tech. Sgt. David Stone – a member of the 44th Civil Support Team (CST) – died after being involved in a traffic incident.

Stone, along with Army Capt. Tecarie Czarnecki of the 44th Civil Support Team (CST), was struck and killed by an automobile while trying to help a motorist involved in a traffic accident on Interstate-10 near Tallahassee on Sept. 8, 2013.

Stone, 30, was honored during a funeral service in Starke, Fla., on Sept. 13, during which hundreds of friends and family gathered to pay their respects.

“David immediately made an impact on every mission and every project that I threw at him,” 44th CST Commander Lt. Col. Michael Ladd said of Stone during the funeral service at the Madison Street Baptist Church.

“...David was the kind of Airman you wanted on your team when the results mattered and the price for failure was steep. If life was 'kickball', you picked Dave first.”

Stone was born in Gainesville, Fla., and lived in Starke all of his life. He joined the Florida Air National Guard in 2002 as a member of the 202nd REDHORSE Squadron. He volunteered to serve in the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRBN) Enhanced Response Force Package from 2004-2011. After joining the 44th CST in 2011, he was assigned as a Survey Team Chief overseeing other Airmen and Soldiers during their missions.

He is survived by his wife and son.

Both Stone and Czarnecki were posthumously awarded Meritorious Service Medals and Florida Crosses. ✈



*‘David was the kind of Airman you wanted on your team when the results mattered.’*

**Estate Claim: Technical Sergeant David Stone**  
It is with deep sorrow that the Air Force announces the death of Tech. Sgt. David A. Stone, 44th Civil Support Team. Anyone having a claim against the estate of Tech. Sgt. Stone can contact the appointed Summary Court officer, Capt. Joshua Hornick at (904) 741-7720 or (904) 741-7080.



# ★ A MESSAGE FROM THE TAG

By Maj. Gen. Emmett R. Titshaw Jr., Adjutant General of Florida

*'I'm proud to wear the uniform that represents generations of fathers, mothers, sons and daughters that have answered the call for our state and nation.'*

**Why did you join the Air National Guard?** Our reasons are as varied as our Florida Air National Guard members themselves. For some, it was for educational opportunities. For others, it was the desire to go and see places they never would have, and some may have chosen to join the FANG for a job or because they were patriotic. Each of you had a personal and unique circumstance that drew you to the Florida Air National Guard, but have you considered what has influenced you to remain an Airman?

I've been in the Florida National Guard for almost 44 years, and for me, it all started when I was a kid wanting to be a pilot. I joined the Florida Air National Guard because they were in my hometown, right in my backyard, and because I had the opportunity to fly, which is what I always wanted to do. The chance to become a fighter pilot was what got me in the door, but as is the case with many of you, my "why" changed, almost imperceptibly, over the years.

For me, I was always a team kind of person. Whether it was team sports or Boy Scouts, I gravitated to those organizations where I could belong to a group of people who shared common goals and values. That sense of camaraderie and "family" togetherness that I found in the FANG is what hooked me.

I've continued to serve for a number of reasons. I'm proud to wear the uniform that represents generations of fathers, mothers, sons and daughters that have answered the call for our state and nation. I'm proud of the dedication and professionalism I see every day in the eyes of our Soldiers and Airmen and their families that steadfastly support them. And I'm proud to be an American - and to know that I am a member of a team that is committed to preserving the freedom and liberties for which Americans have fought for nearly 250 years.

I submit that many of you continue in the FANG because you truly believe in what you do and are proud of your contribution in completing the mission. Regardless of your motivations, the citizens of our state and nation are grateful for your service.

The next few years will be challenging for sure, but I am confident the collective strength of our "why" will enable us to adapt and remain the best air and space force in the world.

Thank you for what you do to make us always ready....always there. ✪

# ★ COMMANDER'S COLUMN

By Brig. Gen. Branyon, Commander of the Florida Air National Guard

*'It was a dream come true  
to be able to continue  
flying and serving  
my country'*

**Hello Combat Airmen, family members, and retired warriors!** I know it's been a while since we've had a printed version of The Eagle's Eye and many of you have expressed how much you have missed it. Due to the significant fiscal restraints of the past year, and because Air Force policy promotes the transition to e-versions of publications, we must re-evaluate and innovate how we stay connected with you. In the future, this will mean more media content over social media and online. We are even exploring a way to use GoPro cameras throughout the Florida Air National Guard to capture cool videos and pix to post on the FLANG Facebook page and other venues, enabling us to get to know our fellow Combat Airmen and understand their missions. Our commitment to you: keep you informed and to do it in a fun, innovative way!

What you will see in this and future online versions of The Eagle's Eye are shorter articles and more pictures of our Combat Airmen in action, whether it is performing their state or federal duties or giving back to the communities of Florida. If you like what you see, be sure to visit [www.fl.ng.mil/eagleseye/](http://www.fl.ng.mil/eagleseye/) to find future versions of the electronic Eagle's Eye, as explained inside by our awesome Public Affairs professionals.

This issue of The Eagle's Eye focuses on a question each of us should be able to answer – why did I join the Florida Air National Guard? The answers to this question are as diverse as our force, and there is no right or wrong answer. When I look back at why I made the decision to serve, I can tell you that it was an easy decision to join the Florida Air National Guard. As an active duty F-16 pilot, my wife Leslie and I loved the 9 years of serving in the Active Duty Air Force. However, as we were raising our 3 young children, we yearned to return to our home state where they could grow up and know both sets of their grandparents. When I learned that Jacksonville flew F-16s, it was a dream come true to be able to continue flying and serving my country while living near Orlando, where Leslie and I grew up. We immediately participated in all of the family programs at the Fighter Wing, bringing our kids out to visit whenever able. It pulled at my heartstrings one day when driving through the front gate, my 7-year old blurted out, "Daddy, I love the FANG!" Eighteen years later, she joined the Florida Air National Guard.

Do you know your why? This year, I challenge you to reconnect to your personal "why." Find a way on a reoccurring basis to do something proactive that will enable you to stay connected to that foundational experience. Find ways to increase your leadership development and that of the Airmen you lead. It can be via teaching, doing a cool teambuilding activity, or just passing on articles from great leaders. Officers and senior enlisted leaders – create time for your Airmen to focus on their combat skills training and to perform and train in their AFSC. Give them the opportunity to do what it is they signed up to do.

Also, find a way to connect with your local community – both to let Floridians know who we are and the value we bring, and also to give back in some way to the folks who support us so strongly. It is the right thing to do, and it helps us demonstrate why we are the most exceptional National Guardsmen in the nation.

It's not easy maintaining greatness, which all of you are doing well, and it's even tougher to be exceptional. But we have the teams that can do it! 🖱️

**FANG Airmen Rock!**

By Lt. Col. Sarah A. Shirley, FANG Wing Chaplain, 125th Fighter Wing

## The Evolving Why

When asked to write about my “why” for becoming and staying a Florida Guardsman, I immediately thought of Chaplain Stephenson. Chaplain, Brigadier General, Alphonse Stephenson visited my 2012 Wing Chaplain Course to admonish us to cling deeply to our vocations as clergy. He told us to never forget why we were ordained, asserting that if we kept our original reasons foremost in our hearts and minds, we would not become discouraged and we would perform well as military chaplains as well as civilian clergy.

My “why” started almost 50 years ago when I knew in my bones I was to be a priest. I believed the world was in great need of healing and transformation, and that the Gospel and Sacraments were the best means to that end I could imagine. My childhood coincided with the Vietnam conflict, and I wanted the Soldiers (I hadn't a thought about Airmen or Sailors or Marines then, and had never heard of the National Guard!) to be treated with love and respect. While I couldn't change the history being made in the 1960s and 70s, I knew that eventually I could become a priest and military chaplain to be a vehicle of God's love and healing.

Priests in my church (The Episcopal Church) do three things: Gather people together to hear the good news of God (“the Gospel”), nourish them with Sacraments and send them out to do God's work of bringing peace, justice and love to the world.

*‘My “why” for joining the military was to care for and help heal the souls of those Warriors and family members’*

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of my church, and if you're married you know that it takes a heavy dose of grace to have a happy and fruitful marriage. Grace allows us to love, encourage and forgive one another through all kinds of things. Without it, I can't imagine that any marriage would survive! All the Sacraments are about inviting divine grace into the ordinary things of our lives... birth, death, work, illness, community.



My original “why” of becoming qualified to preach and celebrate Sacraments was to help God heal the world and transform it into a place of peace and justice. As I learned more about the deep dysfunctions of the world and in my own life, my purpose evolved to be more about living as a Sacrament of the Kingdom of God by being a sign to others that change for the better is always an option.

Through many years of parish and healthcare ministry, I prayed continuously for Service Members and their families. Societies give military folks the most difficult task of protecting and defending our land, people and way of life. Sometimes that involves bringing destruction to others' land and people, a task that pains the soul no matter how righteous the cause. Priests are sometimes known as “curates” because they are charged with “curing souls” in a particular geographic boundary known as a “cure.”

In 2001 my bishop released me to become a military chaplain. My “why” for joining the military was to care for and help heal the souls of those Warriors and family members in my cure, first at Sheppard AFB, then Masirah Island, then Eglin AFB, and now the FANG. While part of the FANG you have sent me to care for people at National Guard Bureau and in Afghanistan, and have loaned me out to other parts of the Air Force to help chaplains become better spiritual care providers.

My fundamental “why” remains steadfast: to bring spiritual healing and love to Service Members and their families. While I'll follow Ch Stephenson's advice about holding that motivation close in my heart and mind, an equally important “why” has evolved over the years. When I was in Afghanistan in 2010-2011, I became homesick for Jacksonville, a city where I've never lived. I realized that the 125th Fighter Wing and the FANG had become my people. The miracle of friendship had made me part of the FANG, and made the FANG a permanent part of me. Through living to love Warriors and their families, I have received the gift of your love, the very best reason to serve I can imagine. ✎

By Col. Julia Kyrakis, Chief of Staff, Florida Air National Guard

## The Truth about Boards

Ever wonder how the FANG selects its next chief? Or how we choose our next unit commander? We conduct a lot of boards at State Headquarters to make sure that personnel actions across the Florida Air National Guard are formalized and standardized among units. Some of the boards that we hold include senior enlisted promotions, Florida awards, officer action (promotions, accessions, moves), federal recognition and selective retention.

We approach each board with the desire to approve every commander recommended action, however, in the process of putting together packages at the unit, some details are overlooked that lead to a board “disapproval.” It is important to understand the reason for boards and how they work as a part of the personnel management process.

Recently we had a number of Senior Master Sergeants recommended for promotion to Chief, but the number of Chiefs being put in for promotion exceeded the total number of Chiefs allowed for the state. So, who among the candidates would get the next Chief promotion? Would the next in line be based on date of rank/order of merit, or would each unit only be allowed to promote a Chief when another Chief vacated a position? Much discussion ensued among the state leadership and in the end the fairest Chief promotion policy resulted: individual unit Chief promotions are based on “one Chief out, one Chief in.”

Now that we use VPC-GR for our federal awards, we really don't see a lot of award and decoration actions. Most of the awards we get are for processing Florida awards and the majority of those get pushed back to the unit because 1) the write-up doesn't adequately explain how the member's service impacted the Florida Air National Guard, or 2) it duplicates a federal award. Whenever we have one of these boards, we appoint a variety of enlisted and officer representatives and allow each to review and comment on the award application. As a result, feedback comes from various vantage points.

The most controversial board we hold each month is the officer action board, which covers accessions, movement within the state, and promotions. If a new officer is coming into the unit, we review the records to ensure there aren't problems with PT or performance reports along with ensuring the officer is qualified for the position he or she is entering. We find very few issues with these standard actions, however, promotions can cause a lot of dispute. A minimum-time officer promotion (within the first year of eligibility) needs to

be limited to only the “cream of the crop” (both the regulation and FANG policy dictates). So, if the officer isn't in a job with significant responsibility, doesn't have the most superior performance reports, and doesn't have a glowing commander's letter, we're going to ask the commander to resubmit at a later date or fix the package to meet the promotion criteria. Obviously, if the commander sent the promotion recommendation up to state HQ, he/she is going to disagree and have heartburn with the disapproval. Regardless, NGB has gotten really discriminating with promotions and are encouraging units to make sure they improve officer records. As a result, we don't want to send anything up to NGB we don't think will be approved.



Recently, I had the opportunity to go to NGB and participate as a unit representative on several of their boards. One was an O-6 statutory tour hiring board and the other was an Intermediate Developmental Education and Senior Developmental Education board. It was enlightening to learn about the NGB process, but it also reinforced that we need to focus more on developing our people. Our officer's OPRs need to have both stratifications and push statements (recommendations for next job or PME).

Deployments and command are important as you're moving up the ladder. All Airmen need to look for career development opportunities that will benefit the state and NGB as much as it benefits them. The most glaring thing I saw was the lack of career diversity in the packages reviewed—if it does not shine at the unit level, it's not going to stand out when competing for career opportunities at a higher level. We also need to do better as a state at developing our own people and encouraging them to pursue in-residence PME opportunities and statutory tours at NGB. We as leaders need to bring these experienced members back home and provide them with opportunities around the state to expand their knowledge and broaden their careers.

I encourage anyone who is interested, to sit in or come and observe the process. Even though the boards appear to be cloaked in an air of secrecy, we are a closed board simply because of the personal nature of the information we discuss. I also encourage you to volunteer for ANGR or NGB boards. In the end, they get input from a field representative and you get to see “guard-life” from their point of view. I hope this sheds some light on the FANG board process and improves our ability to develop as Airmen and leaders at both the state and national level. ✎

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa, Florida National Guard Public Affairs

## Do You 'Know Your Why'?

We all feel like sometimes we're pulling the weight of the Florida Air National Guard by ourselves. At times it may feel like we are personally dragging a 50,000-pound fighter jet onto the flight line without any help.

The reality is that this is a team where each member is a critical component of success, but in order to continue that success we occasionally have to take a step back and ask ourselves: "Why did I join the Florida Air National Guard? Why do I put on this uniform and serve?"

At first glance they appear to be easy questions with equally easy answers, but they are asked to "re-inspire" us through contemplation and even a bit of soul-searching. If we remember "why" we serve, it will give us insight into "how" we should serve, and, ultimately "what" we can do to succeed as a modern organization.

Brig. Gen. Robert Branyon has challenged the men and women of the Florida Air National Guard to "Know Your Why."

## 'Start with Why'

The idea of "Know Your Why" was originally inspired by the leadership principles of author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek. Sinek, whose TED Talk "How Great Leaders Inspire Action" was featured on the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's Reading List, has included military professionals in his circuit of inspirational leadership talks.

Many of his speeches and writings focus on the theory that the most successful people or organizations first ask themselves "why" they exist, before they decide "what" they should do and "how" do they do it. This concept – called "The Golden Circle" – is described in-depth in his 2009 book "Start With Why."

For the Florida Air National Guard, if we know "why" we exist as part of the U.S. Air Force and "why" we are here as individuals, the "how" and "what" will be more meaningful and effective.

## Footstep of the pioneers

Gen. Craig McKinley made history in 2012 when he became the first National Guardsman to serve as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His reason for joining the Air Force in 1974 – his "why" – stems from his early days as child and wanting to "fly."

While growing up in Jacksonville, he watched military planes constantly flying in and out of the Naval Air Station. His uncles who flew in the Army Air Corps during World War II also inspired a desire to fly military planes. And most importantly, he wanted to serve his nation.

"The motivation to serve was always there; to be part of something bigger than myself," the former chief of the National Guard Bureau and retired Florida Air Guardsmen said during a recent interview.

After 38 years of service to the Air Force and more than 4,000 flight hours, Gen. McKinley suggests our current Florida Air Guardsmen reflect on their service as a chance to give back to their communities and nation.

"I would ask them to choose to serve, to do something (more than) for themselves," the general said.

World War II veteran and former Florida Air Guardsman Tiger Holmes found his "why" after Japanese planes attacked the U.S. Navy fleet on Dec. 7, 1941.

Like many young Americans at that time Holmes was inspired by family who had served in World War I, and he wanted to join the military.

"When they bombed our fleet at Pearl Harbor there wasn't any question – we all wanted to get in at the same time," Holmes explained.

After serving as a pilot in the Army-Air Corps during the war, Holmes let the wave of patriotism carry him into the Air National Guard. But what kept him in the Florida Air National Guard were like-minded individuals who felt that America could never "let down" its guard again – people who wanted to help maintain the nation's readiness.

"When you are around a bunch of people like that I think it deepens your friendship, and you get real friends – friends that stand by you and understand you," the 93-year-old Holmes said.

## The pride of serving today

The 202nd RED HORSE's Master Sgt. Alan Brinkley has 34 years of service under his belt. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps and the Florida Army National Guard, he joined the 202nd in 1990 because he was drawn to the unit's mission of heavy engineering.

"I love the mission," Brinkley said. "I grew up on a farm, running heavy equipment all of my life and that is what I wanted to do. And it hasn't let me down."

After three deployments, he said his "whys" for staying in the Air Guard are the camaraderie with his fellow Airmen the feeling of "giving back" to communities during state emergencies.

"It is amazing when communities have tragedies and how the Guard responds," Brinkley explained. "You just see the people (with) a glow in their eyes when they see you with that case of water or bag of ice."

Pride in serving is what keeps the 125th Fighter Wing's Staff Sgt. Yasmine Mays in the Florida Air National Guard. She joined the military originally to help out her family with finances – and to follow in the footsteps of some relatives who served in the Navy and Army.

"I'm still here because I love it," Mays said. "I always wanted to go into the military but I didn't know much about it. My first sense of pride came when I was graduating boot camp and you had all of the families sitting there watching you." Her "why" has only grows clearer the longer she serves.

"Since I've been here at the Florida Air National Guard I've gotten more involved and I've had some really good mentors, so that is what's making me love being here," she added. "I enjoy the people and I enjoy what I do."

## The 'Remarkable Point Four-Five'

"There is a large percent of our population who will never serve in uniform and will never truly understand what it means to serve," Adjutant General of Florida Maj. Gen. Emmett Titshaw said recently. For those in uniform serving today, especially the members of the Florida Air National Guard, Titshaw pointed out that they represent an elite sliver of the overall population.

"They need to understand that they are a remarkable group who have raised their hand and volunteered, and they are very small segment of our society," he explained.

According to Maj. Gen. Titshaw, about 11 percent of the U.S. population served during World War II and more than four percent served in Vietnam era. Since Sept. 2001 only 0.45 percent of the U.S. population has volunteered to serve, he added.

But regardless of future budgetary constraints or other issues that might affect the military, the Florida Air National Guard is still a great place to find and strengthen your "why," the state's top Guardsman said.

*'The motivation to serve was always there; to be part of something bigger than myself.'*

"I am confident we will come out an even stronger and better organization, with even more opportunity for those who are serving today to make a real contribution to this nation's defense," he said.

"It is about belonging to an organization that few understand and few contribute to... It is not about the uniform so much; it is about the people in those uniforms." ✎

For more information on Simon Sinek or his writings visit [www.simonsinek.com](http://www.simonsinek.com) or @simonsinek on Twitter. To view the TED Talk mentioned in this article, please visit

[http://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action)

The Florida Air National Guard to me is a golden opportunity to continue to serve my country, both Federal and State, and have a traditional family life. After almost 29 years, I have never regretted my decision. The relationships I have built are strong, long lasting, character building, and educational. I am amazed at the professional (i.e. Drs, Lawyers, Pharmacists, Engineers) and successful business people who serve in the FLANG out of a sense of honorable duty. I attribute my personal success to the mentoring lessons of several of those folks."  
-- Master Sgt. Susan Mason, Paralegal, 101st Air Operations Group

"I joined because I'm from a military family and I'm continuing to honor my family tradition of being part of something great. I also joined because I want my son to be proud of me, and proud to tell people what his mom does! I also love Florida weather!"  
-- Staff Sgt. Ebony Hills, Bioenvironmental Engineering, 125th Medical Group

"We here at the 125th are a family, forged by a great love of country and utmost respect for those who have gone before us. I wear my uniform with pride. My heart soars and my soul sings whenever the Star Spangled Banner plays. I bleed red, white and blue."  
-- Senior Airman Carlynne DeVine, Ammo Troop,

"Being part of an organization that defends and protects our freedom is an honor. Being able to defend and protect in my own community is a privilege."  
-- Tech. Sgt. Penny Pippin, Plans and Scheduling, 114th Range Operations Squadron

"I am a member of the Florida ANG because it offered me an opportunity to make something out of myself. I was stuck at a dead end job, and now I have the means to further myself, my family and my career."  
-- Airman 1st Class George Youstra, 290th Joint Communications Support Squadron

"After 12 years and two deployments serving in the Air Force, I was looking for more a little more stability for my family. I selected 114 ROPS because I was excited by the opportunity stand up a mission I love from scratch in the FLANG, Offensive Space Control."

-- Maj. Warren "Brando" Riner, DOU Flight Commander, 114th Range Operations Squadron

"The Florida Air National Guard was an opportunity for me, after active duty, to continue to serve while working with an Air/Homeland Defense mission. It also provides me an opportunity to continue my education while being able to establish lasting ties within the community."

-- Master Sgt. Angela Johnson ISR Ops, 101st Air Operations Group

"I'm a St Augustine native, and grew up immersed in the rich history and legacy of Floridian military culture. I was so honored to get hired from active duty, and come home to serve my great state, with my fellow Floridians. GO FLANG!"

-- Master Sgt. Luke Mullins, Tanker Planner/Air Mobility Division Superintendent, 101st Air Operations Group

"Initially I joined the Guard for stability and flexibility, but now I stay for the family atmosphere and being part of the citizen-Soldier heritage."

-- 1st Lt. Sherri Stanfill, Deputy Cyber Operations, 101st Air Operations Group

"I gladly serve the United States and my home State of Florida. Not for any other reason other than my family, friends, neighbors are worth it. Whatever the cost.....They are worth it."

-- Senior Master Sgt. Gregory Jones, Operations Superintendent, 114th Range Operations Squadron

"America's Warriors deserve the very best spiritual care, and by serving in the FLANG I remain qualified, ready and available to ensure that care is provided wherever in the world it is needed."

-- Lt. Col. Sarah Shirley, Chaplain, 125th Fighter Wing

"I had ten years of active-duty AF service and many PCS's but desired to be part of a more family-oriented organization. The FLANG brings that and stability to my own family so I can focus more on both my federal Space mission and our State Active Duty mission. Go Guard!"

-- Master Sgt. Mark Farmer, Flight Chief, 114th Range Operations Squadron

"My Father, Robert Brown, was in the AF and encouraged me to join for the benefits and education. I am the only one out of six kids that join in my father's footsteps. I join to make a difference and the benefits for education. I joined the FLANG to get exposure to traveling and making a difference in the world in helping members when they were sick or hurt and to support our country. I love my job as a 4N, Medical Tech."

-- Master Sgt. Karen Acree, Medical Services Craftsman Supervisor, 125th Medical Group

"When I left Active duty I wanted to find a way to still serve as well as provide stability for my family. The Florida Air National Guard provided this opportunity. I have a fulfilling career and have proudly served and my family has the stability we needed."

-- Tech. Sgt. Ray Simpson, Commo Chief, 48th Civil Support Team

"I'm a member of the FLANG because it's a family. When I decided to leave active duty, I thought I was done with the military, but then a family friend told me about the FLANG. I joined and it has changed my life. The family atmosphere makes it feel like a second home."

-- Master Sgt. Danielle Jones, Structural Superintendent, 202nd REDHORSE Squadron

"Being a member allows me to give back to the country that has afforded me so many opportunities, yet demanded nothing in return. My military obligation is a small token of my gratitude."

-- Staff Sgt. Rutven Leclair, 202nd REDHORSE Squadron

"I initially joined the Guard to take advantage of the education benefits and leave once my enlistment was up. Thirteen years later, I continue to serve to carry on the military tradition in my family and to be the role model to those that wish to serve."

-- Tech. Sgt. JaRon Howell, Headquarters – Florida Air National Guard

# ★ NIESON TAKES COMMAND OF 202ND REDHORSE

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa, Florida National Guard Public Affairs



## Nieson takes command

STARKE, Fla. – The Florida Air National Guard’s premier heavy engineer unit started a new chapter in its history this weekend, as a new commander took over the reins of the 202nd REDHORSE Squadron.

Col. Robert Nieson formally assumed command of the unit during a military ceremony at Camp Blanding on Aug. 17, receiving the unit’s traditional guidon from Commander of the Florida Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Robert Branyon.

Nieson, who came to Florida from the Minnesota National Guard this year, told the REDHORSE members gathered for the ceremony that he would help the unit posture itself for continued success during his command.

“We can have the best team – the best RED HORSE team – in the Air National Guard and in the Air Force,” Nieson said. “Thank you for this opportunity.” Nieson said his command emphasis

would be on practicing the Air Force Core values, complying with unit requirements, building relationships with other military organizations, and embracing diversity within the unit.

The mission of the 202nd REDHORSE Squadron is to provide a highly mobile, rapidly deployable civil engineering force. The unit performs heavy damage repair and recovery of critical Air Force facilities following an enemy attack or natural disaster.

*‘We can have the best team,  
the best RED HORSE team  
in the Air National Guard  
and in the Air Force.’*

The 202nd last deployed overseas in 2012 to Southwest Asia in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Brig. Gen. Branyon told the 202nd Airmen at the ceremony that Nieson’s leadership would take them in a positive direction that would help them to “become an elite REDHORSE unit.” “I want you to be the premier REDHORSE organization in the nation, and I want you to be damn proud of it,” Branyon said to the Airmen.

Nieson enlisted in the Minnesota Air National Guard in 1976, serving in the electrical section of the 133rd Civil Engineering Flight. He rose through the enlisted ranks to become an electrical section superintendent, and eventually earned a commission to officer in the early 1990s. Concurrently he worked as a civilian electrician, and in 1992 received a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Minnesota.

In 1994 he became a full-time technician with the Minnesota National Guard, and in 2006 was selected to command the 133rd Communications Flight. He was promoted to the rank of colonel in November. ✎



**KNOW  
YOUR  
WHY** ★

“Continuing the family tradition”

Staff Sgt. Joseph Tremblay, Fuels Specialist

# FLORIDA AIR GUARD ALERT MISSION CONTINUED DESPITE SHUTDOWN

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa, Florida National Guard Public Affairs

*'We are on immediate response 24 hours a day, 365 days each year.'*

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- A critical Florida Air National Guard mission providing air-sovereignty over the Southeast United States was operating at "100 percent" despite challenges associated with the recent government shutdown last fall.

According to Vice Commander of the 125th Fighter Wing Col. Robert Wetzel, the public should feel secure that the unit continued its Aerospace Control Alert (ACA) mission even though it was confronted with some potential obstacles due to mandatory furloughs in early October.

"They should be completely confident in us," Wetzel said from the 125th's headquarters at the Jacksonville International Airport. "The Air Force, the Florida Air National Guard and the National Guard Bureau all recognize the importance of the mission."

Under direction of Continental U.S. North American Aerospace Defense Command Region at Tyndall Air Force Base, F-15 Eagle pilots with the 125th Fighter Wing's Detachment 1 are on continuous 24-hour air defense "ready alert" status at Homestead Air Reserve Base in South Florida. If called, the Air National Guard pilots can scramble their jets to intercept any unidentified or hostile aircraft.

"We are on immediate response 24 hours a day, 365 days each year," Wetzel said of those Guardsmen assigned to the alert mission. "These are very dedicated Airmen that take this business of defending our homeland very seriously."

Wetzel explained that even though some of their technicians at the base in Jacksonville were on furlough for the first week of October, the pilots and maintainers at Homestead were all exempt from the shutdown. Also, the 125th staged extra F-15s in South Florida to compensate for any aircraft maintenance issues at the alert site.

An early concern was if the technicians remained on lengthy furlough, the 125th would not be able to provide long-term aircrew proficiency for the pilots. Nor would they be able to perform extended maintenance on the F-15s.

"As time went by it would have had an impact," Wetzel said. "It would have eroded our readiness and compliance as regards to the alert mission...but in the near-term it was not a significant impact to our readiness."

Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Souza, aircraft maintenance superintendent at the 125th, admitted the government shutdown presented potential dilemmas for them, "but they are not taking our focus away from meeting the ACA mission" of providing homeland defense.

"It is still 100 percent up," Souza, who was initially furloughed with more than 200 technicians at the 125th Fighter Wing, said. "We didn't miss a beat. We pressed right on through it."

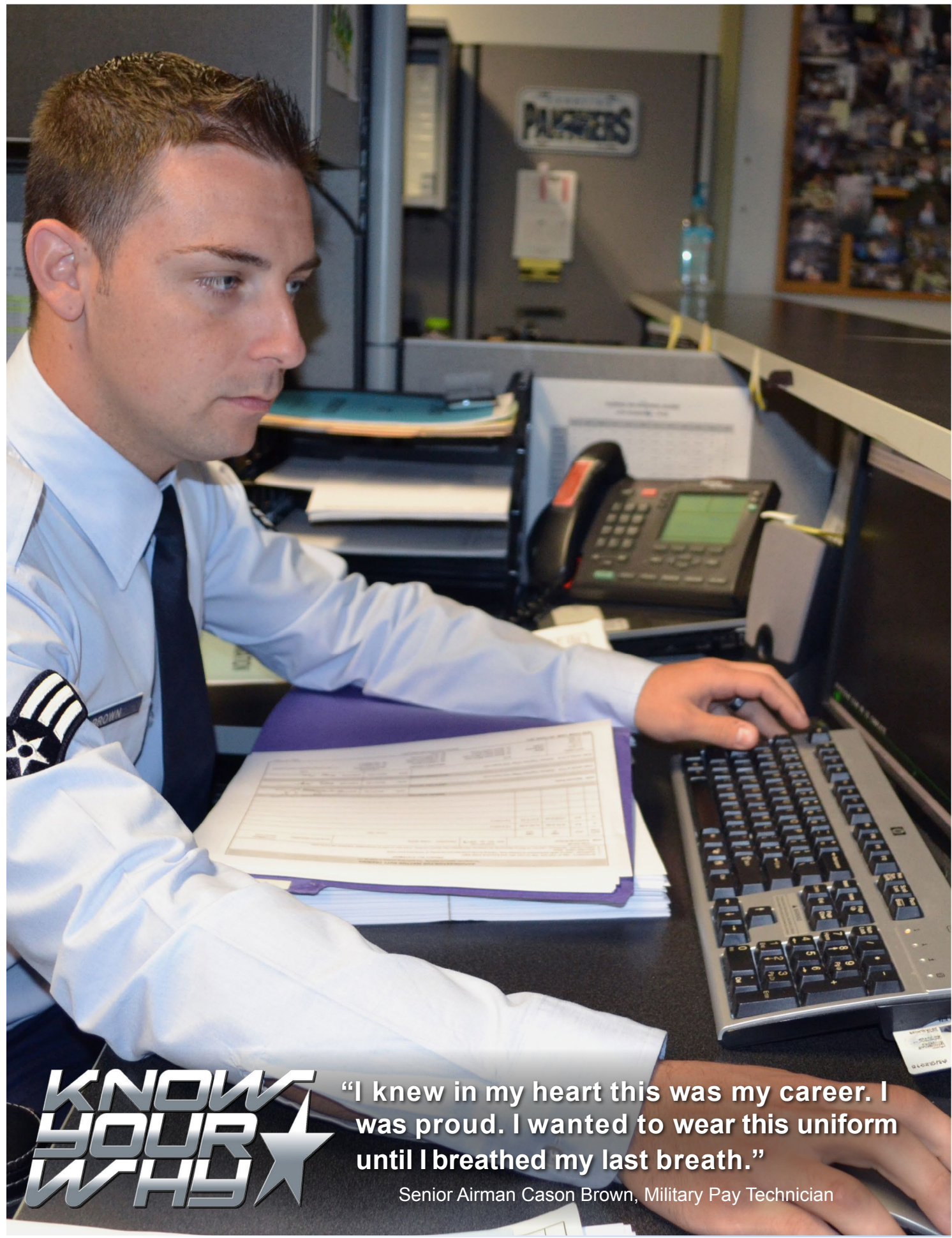


All furloughed federal technicians returned to work Oct. 17 after the 16-day shutdown ended.

The Florida Air National Guard has performed an alert mission in Florida since the late 1950s, but since 2001 its alert has been in support of Operation Noble Eagle. ✎







**KNOW  
YOUR  
WHY** ★

“I knew in my heart this was my career. I was proud. I wanted to wear this uniform until I breathed my last breath.”

Senior Airman Cason Brown, Military Pay Technician

## GILES TAKES COMMAND OF 290TH JCSS ★

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa, Florida National Guard Public Affairs

MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – The 290th Joint Communications Support Squadron welcomed its new commander on Feb. 22, as Maj. Matthew Giles assumed command of the Florida Air National Guard unit.

During a ceremony at MacDill Air Force Base, Giles received the unit’s guidon from Commander of the Florida Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Robert Branyon as a symbolic gesture of assuming command.

Giles, who mostly recently served as the operations officer for the 114th Range Operations Squadron, follows Lt. Col. Daren Van Aulen as the 290th commander. “The 290th does such a great mission to support the joint task force commanders all over the world – to set up command and control communications – to get any operation started,” Branyon said. He added that Maj. Giles is joining the unit as a commander with a “proven record of excellence and performance.”

“What he also brings to the 290th here is his care for people and their families, his positive attitude and his enthusiasm,” Branyon added. “With all of those together, and the outstanding leadership and Airmen that are already here at the 290th, this unit is just going to rock!”

Giles joined the military in 2000, and served five years of active duty in various units as a communications and information officer. He joined the Florida Air National Guard in July 2005, transitioning into the Space Operations career field at the 114th Range Operations Squadron. In 2013 he transitioned back into Cyber Operations as the result of a mission-realignment.

Giles, a graduate of the University of Florida, has deployed to Kuwait and Iraq.

During the assumption of command ceremony Giles lauded the Airmen he would now be leading: “I am truly honored to work for you...work for YOU... as the commander of our squadron. Since the squadron’s beginning thirty years ago in 1984 you all have answered the nation’s call to support every conflict overseas as members of the Joint Communications Support Element.”

Giles also stressed his desire to support the individual needs of the 290th Airmen.

“Understand my top priority is taking care of our Airmen and your families,” he said. “When we all are genuine and take this approach, our Airmen will soar and make the most impossible things possible...My vision is to have the 290th Joint Communications Support Squadron soar to new heights of teamwork. I challenge each and every one of you to be your most outstanding self. Start your engines.”

*‘I am truly honored to work for you...work for YOU...as commander of our squadron’*



# ★ SENTRY SAVANNAH

By Tech. Sgt. William Buchanan, 125th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The 125th Fighter Wing took the lead on planning and organizing one of the largest joint training opportunities in history here in Jacksonville, Fla. this February.

The exercise spanned over the course of 30 days with 684 planned sorties and up to 40 aircraft in a single mission. All of this training was hosted at the Savannah Combat Readiness Training Center (CRTC), Savannah, Ga.

The exercise was dubbed Sentry Savannah 2014 and included participants from the Florida and Georgia Air National Guard, Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps. There were service members from Vermont, Hawaii, Oklahoma, Alabama, and South Carolina. Training took place 12 hours per day, Monday through Friday flying F-16s, F-22 Raptors, F/A-18 Hornets, F-15C Eagles, AWACS, C-130, KC-135.

The unique aspect of this exercise for the 125th Fighter Wing was the fact they could launch and recover the F-15 Eagles from their home ramp in Jacksonville, Fla. The ability to launch and recover the aircraft without deploying, provides high value training at a very low cost.

“Local sorties were utilized to play in this exercise. Large Force Exercises that are normally only attainable when deployed, are few and far between,” said Maj. Jonathan Kassebaum, 125th Fighter Wing Weapons Officer. “The mission sets in this exercise are entirely developed by the individual units participating.”

The joint service nature of this exercise allowed each branch the opportunity to communicate and practice effective wartime operations that mimic real-world scenarios. This type of training experience helps everyone involved prepare for possible real-world missions.

“The training our pilots have taken part of in this exercise is some of the best, if not the best, training that has ever taken place from this base,” said Col. Brian Simpler, 125th Fighter Wing Commander.

The Savannah Combat Readiness Training Center is one of four Air National Guard training centers in the U.S. equipped with the technology to track, record and

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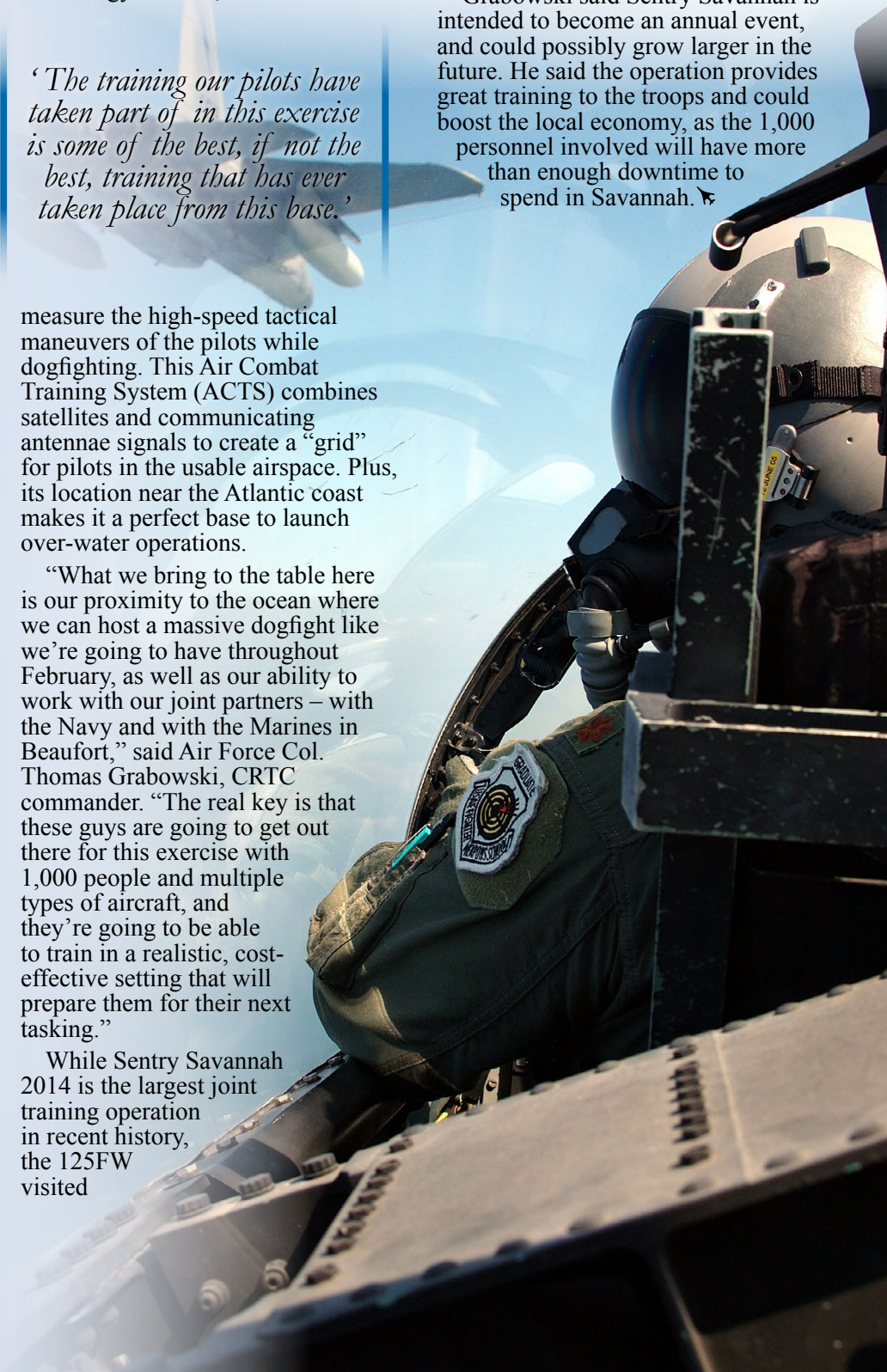
measure the high-speed tactical maneuvers of the pilots while dogfighting. This Air Combat Training System (ACTS) combines satellites and communicating antennae signals to create a “grid” for pilots in the usable airspace. Plus, its location near the Atlantic coast makes it a perfect base to launch over-water operations.

“What we bring to the table here is our proximity to the ocean where we can host a massive dogfight like we’re going to have throughout February, as well as our ability to work with our joint partners – with the Navy and with the Marines in Beaufort,” said Air Force Col. Thomas Grabowski, CRTC commander. “The real key is that these guys are going to get out there for this exercise with 1,000 people and multiple types of aircraft, and they’re going to be able to train in a realistic, cost-effective setting that will prepare them for their next tasking.”

While Sentry Savannah 2014 is the largest joint training operation in recent history, the 125FW visited

Savannah CRTC for a similar exercise in 2010. That 2010 exercise made the 125FW the first customer on the brand new ramp at Savannah CRTC.

Grabowski said Sentry Savannah is intended to become an annual event, and could possibly grow larger in the future. He said the operation provides great training to the troops and could boost the local economy, as the 1,000 personnel involved will have more than enough downtime to spend in Savannah. ▶



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YOUR  
WHY** ★

“Because tradition matters”

Senior Airman Myles Barnett, Security Forces

★ 2013 AIR FORCE MEDIA CONTEST (NGB) WINNERS



Photo "Walking the Line" by Senior Master Sgt. Shelley Gill - 1st Place, *Pictorial*



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Shelley Gill - 2nd Place, *Personality Photograph*



**125FW PA Shines at National Level**

Senior Master Sgt. Shelley Gill and Staff Sgt. Jeremy Brownfield demonstrated a mastery of their career field with these award winning products. Between these two professionals they accounted for 10 percent of the awards distributed in the NGB Media Contest. These photos and graphic designs are examples of how these public affairs professionals tell the FANG story at a national level.

The official blog of the Florida National Guard, "TAGLine," was also awarded first place in the Blog category. TAGLine went on to place third in the Air Force Media Contest.

You can follow TAGLine at:  
<http://dma.myflorida.com/tagline/>

Photo "Delightful Revenge" by Senior Master Sgt. Shelley Gill - 2nd Place, *Feature Photograph*



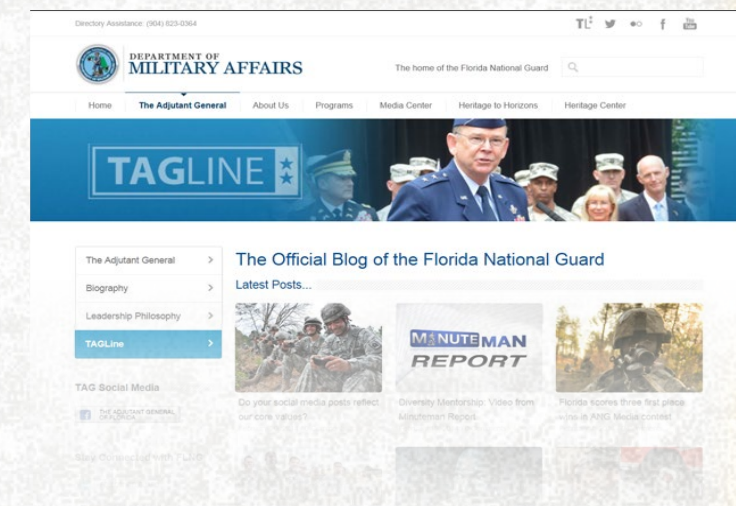
Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Brownfield - 2nd Place, *Illustrative Photography*



Photo "Vigilant Sentry" by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Brownfield - 1st Place, *Non-combat Documentation*



Layout by Staff Sgt. Jeremy Brownfield - 2nd Place, *Graphics Layout and Design*



"TAGLine" by JFHQ-FL/PAO - 1st Place, Blog  
 3rd Place Air Force Media Contest

# ★ ALERT FORCE EVALUATION REVEALS EXCELLENCE

By 2nd Lt. Justin Phillips, Florida National Guard Public Affairs

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Those responsible for keeping the East coast safe from air threats have proven their outstanding capabilities again during their most recent Alert Force Evaluation.

Detachment 1, 125th Fighter Wing, Homestead Air Reserve Base, Fla., earned a “Mission Ready” rating when inspected by the Northern Air Defense inspection team in December.

The inspection team report was laden with descriptions such as “pristine jets,” “alert expertise evident,” “maintainers take pride in the mission” and “strong airmanship,” all resulting in the near perfect inspection.

To ensure the Airmen knew how important this inspection was, Florida Air National Guard leadership -- to include Assistant Adjutant General Air of Florida Brig. Gen. James Eifert -- met with Detachment 1 personnel to congratulate the team and recognize outstanding performers Feb. 6.

Col. Brian Simpler, 125th Fighter Wing Commander, told those in attendance, “This inspection validates what you already know -- you know it’s a no-fail mission, you know you have to perform it every day because there is no second chance when it comes to the Alert mission.”

“You never know when you come to work, if it will be another normal day or if you will be tested to your extreme limits,” he said.

The inspection covered all aspects of the alert mission, aircraft condition and maintenance, weapons systems and pilot operations. These inspections are no notice and are conducted by an Air Force alert facility inspection team that travels the country making certain Air Force alert sites are mission ready.

Brig. Gen. Eifert emphasized his appreciation to all those involved in the preparation and execution of this vital mission, and said that the results of this inspection continue to build upon the reputation of excellence the Florida Air National Guard has developed in the world of air superiority.

“These results are as close to perfect as you can get on an AFE and this was all made possible by the dedication of those of you in this room and those who support the mission from 125th Fighter Wing in Jax,” he said. “I could not be more proud of how this group represents the Florida Air National Guard and more importantly ensures our coastline is safe 24/7.”



# 202ND REDHORSE HOLDS HOMETOWN HEROES CEREMONY ★

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa, Florida National Guard Public Affairs

CAMP BLANDING JOINT TRAINING CENTER, Fla. – The Florida Air National Guard’s premier engineer unit honored many of its Airmen Nov. 16, during a ceremony at the unit headquarters.

More than 90 members of the 202nd RED HORSE Squadron were recognized as “Home Heroes” during a ceremony that included present and past members of the unit.

The Hometown Heroes Salute recognition program is a sanctioned Air National Guard program that was created in 2008 to celebrate and honor the “significant contribution of its Airmen, families and communities and those special supporters to the mission of the U.S. Air Force and the Air National Guard.” The RED HORSE Airmen honored during this recent ceremony were recognized for have deployed for more than 30 consecutive days in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, Noble Eagle and other peacekeeping operations across the globe since Sept. 2001.

Also during the afternoon, three officers were promoted in a special ceremony in front of the unit. Second Lieutenants Jacqueline Branyon and Michael Rivera were promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant, and unit Commander Lt. Col. Robert Niesen was promoted to the rank of Colonel.

RED HORSE is an acronym for Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers, and the unit’s mission is to provide a highly mobile, rapidly deployable civil engineering response force which can perform heavy damage repair for recovery of critical Air Force facilities.

The unit last deployed in 2012 to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, where it served as part of the 557th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.



# VALIANT EAGLE IS THE BIRD OF COMPETITION

By Tech. Sgt. William Buchanan, 125th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Guardsmen competed for glory and compliance Dec. 4-6 at Jacksonville Air National Guard Base. -- For three days, Guardsmen of all ranks battled to be the best in tactical training, physical challenges and trivia contests. The competition, dubbed Valiant Eagle, pitted teams of Airmen against one another as well as the official combat readiness regulations, effectively disguising training as friendly competition.

"They got pretty creative in the events that they worked up," said Capt. Clayton Thompson, acting Inspector General Internal (IGI) inspector for Valiant Eagle.

Planning for Valiant Eagle began in October 2013 during the government shutdown. At that time, a Phase II Operational Readiness Inspection was scheduled for the first week of December. Due to cutbacks, the Phase II was scaled down and leadership brainstormed ways to maximize training effectiveness within their new fiscal parameters.

Valiant Eagle evolved from what individual shops might refer to as a rodeo or "turkey shoot." A turkey shoot was originally used in the pilot and OPS career fields as a way to turn mandatory training requirements into a competitive event. So wing leadership asked the groups and squadrons to identify individual combat skills that could be turned into a competition, and then asked Airmen across the wing who was the best.

"They haven't done this before, and I've seen a lot more motivation than doing it the standard way," said Airman 1st Class Manuel Repollet, POL fuels journeyman. "It's a little bit more lax, but at the same time you still get the vital training you need."

Events in Valiant Eagle were judged using two levels of criteria. First, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) defined the challenges and submitted their own metrics for judging each team's success. These metrics were evaluated and approved by leadership.

Then, at a second level, IGI Inspectors evaluated each event for their overall effectiveness at training Airmen in necessary combat skills. IGI has identified areas within each event that would qualify for official inspections under AFI 9201, and were present during the competitions to inspect those criteria. Upon completion of Valiant Eagle, the IGI team will write a formal report. "This is the first year we've done it, and I think it's probably on our radar to continue," Thompson said.

Although Valiant Eagle was designed to teach essential combat skills and increase mission readiness, its secondary mission was to boost morale and esprit de corps. Individuals from every shop in the wing were free to assemble their own teams and compete against rivals and strangers alike. For many events, friends and shop mates became spectators cheering and jeering at event participants.

One team from each event was awarded a trophy during a ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 7. For some competitions, such as PT, individuals were also given certificates in recognition of their outstanding performance. Overall, Valiant Eagle provided a fun and competitive environment for Airmen to practice their combat skills.

"Hopefully it grows from here and just gets better as we move forward," Thompson said.



*'I've seen a lot more motivation than doing it the standard way.'*



# ★ FLNG MEMBERS LEARN ATV SKILLS

By Chief Warrant Officer Mike Starnes,  
Camp Blanding Joint Training Center Safety Office

CAMP BLANDING JOINT TRAINING CENTER, Fla. -- Teamwork was paramount for students attending the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) training at Camp Blanding Joint Training Center (CBJTC), on Wednesday, Dec. 4. Twelve Airmen and two Army National Guard personnel learned the value of driver training and received certification by CBJTC Range Control NCO Sgt. 1st Class Michael Bates and Spc. Justin Delance.

The majority of the students were from the Florida Air National Guard's 125th Fighter Wing. Their additional duty mission is to provide medical support during a disaster. All trainees were eager to learn the basic safety principles. Instructions included an indoor phase at the Land Management Building Range Control brief room, an outside phase in the field and a final examination. During the outdoor off-road driver instruction everyone gained confidence in their driving abilities, commencing with the basic maneuvers through orange cones and into the rigorous "rough environment" phase. The students maneuvered through varying terrain, mud, soft sand and climbed a 15 percent incline/decline off Dade Road at the terrain association area.

Delance said the students learned how to navigate terrain, handle different situations, and check the vehicle for serviceability for use and to not abuse the ATV. Certification for proper use of ATV vehicles included wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) and the helmet (DOT 218 approved). He has been wearing helmets and PPE for over a dozen years and it has taught him safety in both tactical and recreational use.

Bates stated many units don't have the opportunity to use ATVs, but it is a great experience for all new or experienced drivers as it teaches them how to handle this equipment much better along with basic knowledge and preparation for safe operations.

Along with critical skills, students in the course received certification allowing them to operate their ATVs for use on Camp Blanding Joint Training Center. To sign up for an ATV training course, service members may contact Sgt. 1st Class Bates at Michael.s.bates8.mil@mail.mil for more information.

# DOD MEDICAL ASSESSMENT IMPROVES HEALTHCARE ★

By Master Sgt. Thomas Kielbasa, Florida National Guard Public Affairs



JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – A recent visit to the Florida Air National Guard by U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) inspectors might help improve the healthcare of military personnel before and after deployments. On Jan. 30, analysts from the DoD's Office of the Inspector General traveled to the 125th Fighter Wing Medical Group at the Jacksonville International Airport as part of an ongoing project to gather data that could possibly refine pre- and post-deployment healthcare.

"The importance of this project is to assess what programs, policies, or regulations need to be changed or adjusted so that the Guard and Reserve are efficiently and effectively supported in regards to healthcare," according to Office of the Inspector General analyst Christopher Cocco during the visit. "Information gained during the visit, along with information gained from many other site visits and meetings, will be used to produce a set of recommendations to inform decision makers of areas with potential for improvement. Also, information from the visits and this project will be used to identify the programs that are working and benefiting Reserve component healthcare."

During the meeting Cocco and his team met with 125th leaders and personnel, discussing areas of health services at the Wing including deployments and re-deployment processes, and healthcare.

This was the team's first site visit to an Air National Guard unit.



## Florida Air National Guard's 'Eagle's Eye' goes online

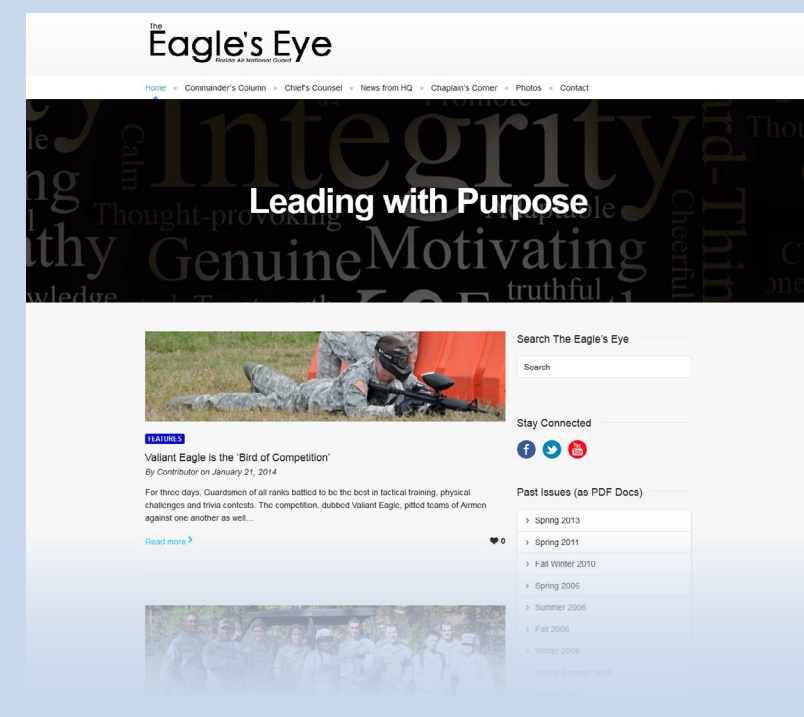
The official print magazine of the Florida Air National Guard – "The Eagle's Eye" – is ending a 12 year stretch of print editions, and will now be available online.

The magazine produced by the Florida Air National Guard Headquarters and the 125th Fighter Wing has featured the talents and stories of the Florida Air National Guard for more than a decade. "The Eagle's Eye Online" is available to everyone at:

[www.fl.ng.mil/eagleseye](http://www.fl.ng.mil/eagleseye)

The online edition will continue to feature stories from all of the state's geographically separated units, and include columns from leadership and photos of current missions.

A digital archive of older print editions of "The Eagle's Eye" are also available on the site.



**I BELIEVE IN THIS**

I WANT TO DEFEND AND PROTECT MY COMMUNITY, MY COUNTRY

**THIS IS A HIGHER CALLING**

I WANT TO DEFEND FREEDOM

I WANT TO HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE ME

I WANT TO HELP THOSE IN NEED

**I AM A PATRIOT**

I HAVE A NEED TO SERVE SOMETHING GREATER THAN MYSELF

I WANT TO SUPPORT THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

I COME FROM A HISTORY OF SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN

**I WANT TO SUPPORT WHAT I BELIEVE IN**

I WANT TO GIVE BACK TO A COUNTRY THAT PROVIDED ME WITH SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES

**I WANT TO BE THE VERY BEST AT WHAT I DO**

I WANT TO BETTER MYSELF I WANT TO BE RECOGNIZED FOR SOMETHING GREAT

**I WANT TO HONOR MY MILITARY HERITAGE** I WANT TO SUPPORT THE MISSION

**I WANT MY KIDS TO BE PROUD OF ME** I WANT TO BE PROUD OF MYSELF

I WANT TO EARN THE RESPECT OF MY PARENTS

**I WANT AN EDUCATION**

I WANT THE BENEFITS THE MILITARY HAS TO OFFER

I WANT FINANCIAL STABILITY FOR MY FAMILY

**I WANT TO TRAVEL** I DESIRE MENTORSHIP

I CRAVE EXCITEMENT I NEED ADVENTURE

*I NEED TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE FOR MY CHILDREN*

**I NEED SECURITY** I WANT TO BE RESPECTED

I WANT TO DO SOMETHING FUN

I WANT TO BE SOMETHING SOMEDAY

**I JUST WANT TO FINALLY EARN MY KEEP**

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