

Prairie Soldier

The Joint Newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard

New Grand Island aviation facility dedicated in May

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

State, local and military leaders helped usher in a new era of Nebraska Army National Guard aviation when they officially opened the Guard's new Army Aviation Support Facility #2 in Grand Island, May 28.

"Grand Island and Nebraska... we should be very proud. This is an absolutely major facility," said Gov. Dave Heineman before he and other officials cut the ribbon to the new \$19.2

million facility.

The new 1,000 square foot aviation facility, now home to five Nebraska Army National Guard aviation units, was designed to house six CH-47 Chinook helicopters and four smaller OH-58 Kiowa helicopters. It includes a massive hangar as well as maintenance and operations space, and improved storage space. The facility also includes 396,000 square feet of parking apron space.

Heineman complimented officials from the Nebraska Army
See GRAND ISLAND on 8.

Nebraska Soldiers wished well before starting latest Iraqi Freedom mission

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

More than 1,500 family and friends turned out for the 1195th Transportation Company sendoff ceremony held May 12 at the Kearney Event Center, home of the Storm USHL hockey team. Similar events took place in

McCook and Lexington for Soldiers assigned to Detachments 1 and 2 of the 1195th Trans. Co. "We had a considerable turnout at each location, McCook and Lexington. A lot of people showed their support for our Soldiers," said Capt. Eric Baptiste, 1195th Trans. Co. commander.

At the Kearney site, Soldiers
See SENDOFF on 4.

Honoring Nebraska's Heroes



Saluting America's Veterans: A Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker boom flies over a serene Fort McPherson Cemetery in western Nebraska on Memorial Day.

Air Guard crews continue Memorial Day tradition

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

There's something strangely serene yet exhilarating about flying face down over the rolling Nebraska countryside, soaring approximately 1,000 feet over greening fields, rocky canyons and rolling sand hills at a speed of 230 knots.

First of all there's the changing colors as one travels from east to west and then back east again across the state: purple lilac bushes, the deep greens
See MEMORIAL DAY on 3.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Watching Nebraska Roll By: Master Sgt. Mark Fusco, a 173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron boomer, monitors his equipment during the May 25 Memorial Day flight.

Wakefield sends 12 seniors into Nebraska Army Guard

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Years from now the Wakefield Community School Class of 2009 might want to consider holding its class reunion at the Nebraska Army National Guard armory in Wayne.

That's because 13 Wakefield seniors – nearly one-third of the graduating class of 44 students – have enlisted into the military

service. And of that number, 11 have joined the 189th Transportation Company in Wayne and Norfolk, while one other has joined another Nebraska Army Guard unit as a medic while a second has enlisted into the active Air Force.

According to Nebraska National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command officials, that means the 2009 Wakefield Community School Senior Class has the largest group of Nebraska Army Guard enlistees – both by number and percentage – of any other school in the state this year.

"I couldn't believe it when they told me that there were 13 kids going into the service and 11 of them were coming to the 189th," said Capt. Troy Dannehl, 189th Trans. Co. commander.

"I'm surprised," he added. "If 11 kids would've come out of a Class A or Class B school, it wouldn't have surprised me.

But to have almost one-third of a class joining the services, that's pretty amazing."

Wakefield, Neb., population 1,353, is located in the rolling hills of Dixon County, approximately 10 miles from Wayne where Detachment 1, 189th Tran. Co., is located. According to Sgt. 1st Class Dale Alexander Jr., recruiting and retention sergeant for Wayne area, he never expected to achieve

See WAKEFIELD on 6.

Guard sends 'Buddy Platoon' to basic training

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Kendra B. Thilliander stood nervously in a quickly warming wood panel-lined room, fidgeting slightly as she strained to listen as Capt. Nathan Loose gave her and about two dozen other new Nebraska Army Guard recruits one last pep talk.

"Listen to your noncommissioned officers at basic training, at your (Advanced Individual Training) and when you get out to your unit," said Loose, operations officer for the Omaha Military Entrance Processing Station and commander of the Guard's Company A, 1-376th Aviation, in Grand Island. "Those individuals will be the ones who



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Buddy Platoon: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's "Buddy Platoon" reenact their oath of enlistment under the direction of Capt. Nathan Loose, May 21.

are directly impacting your building of skills."

"Sometimes you may or may not realize the guidance is being

given for a specific goal, but it is," Loose added. "Be assured, they will give you the skill sets

See PLATOON on 5.

Nebraska Air Guard master sergeant honored during Washington events

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

Nebraska Air National Guard master sergeant from Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., as part of the 170th Group was recently named the Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year for the entire United States Air National Guard.



Bingham

In June, Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham, a member of Nebraska Air Guard's 170th Group

See BINGHAM on 13.

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Construction worker dies after accident at Guard base

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A civilian construction worker died May 16, four days after he and a fellow worker were severely injured in an accident at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

Ryan Hitchler, 25, of Waverly, Neb., died of massive head injuries received after he and Preston Gibson, 21, from Merriam, Kan., fell from a high lift that tipped over while they were repairing the roof of Nebraska Air National Guard's main hangar at approximately

9 a.m., May 12.

Officials estimate that both men fell at least 20 feet. They were immediately treated on the scene and then transported to Lincoln's Bryan LGH West Hospital for further treatment.

Hitchler, a native of Wood River, Neb., died on May 16. His funeral was May 21 in Grand Island.

Gibson is currently recovering from his injuries.

The men were both employees of a subcontractor that is repairing the Air Guard hangar.

The accident is currently under investigation.

NEWS DIGEST

■ Pakistani leaders unite against Taliban, al-Qaida

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Pakistani leadership is united in opposing the Taliban occupation of the Swat Valley and the leaders also understand a "whole-of-government" counterinsurgency strategy is necessary in the country, the chief of U.S. Central Command said May 10.

General David H. Petraeus said on "Fox News Sunday" that Taliban operations in the valley – about 60 miles north of the capital of Islamabad – "seem to have galvanized all of Pakistan."

He said that not only political leaders of all parties, but also the Pakistani people, realize swift and effective action must be taken against the Taliban in Pakistan. The shift of forces from eastern Pakistan, facing India, to the western border region is an example of this realization, Petraeus said.

Petraeus said al-Qaida leaders are in the federally administered tribal areas of western Pakistan. "There is no question that al-Qaida's senior leadership has been there and been in operation for years," he said. "We had to contend with its reach as it sought to facilitate the flow of foreign fighters, weapons, resources into Iraq through Syria."

Calling these times "very important" and "pivotal," Petraeus said the next few weeks will tell if the Pakistanis can roll back this existential threat to the government and nation.

■ Better-equipped Guard still facing critical shortages

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Equipment critical to both domestic and warfighting missions and aircraft essential to guard-

ing the nation's air sovereignty remain areas of concern for the National Guard.

That was the message Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III, director of the Air National Guard, and Maj. Gen. Raymond W. Carpenter, acting deputy director of the Army National Guard, gave members of the House Armed Services Committee's air and land forces subcommittee May 5.

"The Army has made great progress toward improving equipping levels within the Army National Guard," Carpenter said.

"In recent years, the Army has made an unprecedented level of investment in Army National Guard equipment."

But both Carpenter and Wyatt said more needs to be done – and the Air Guard director sounded a warning about aging F-16 Fighting Falcon jet fighter aircraft.

"Our primary concern is that 80 percent of the F-16s, the backbone of our air-sovereignty alert force, will begin reaching the end of their service life in eight years," Wyatt said. "We need solutions for what we in the Air National Guard refer to as the 'mid-term gap,' and for long-term recapitalization. Neither of these can be sacrificed."

"If we sacrifice the mid-term, we risk uncovering a critical line of defense. If we sacrifice the long term, or fifth generation, we risk what can best be referred to as our children and grandchildren's critical edge."

Critical dual-use items needed for both domestic and overseas missions are a top priority for the Army National Guard and the National Guard Bureau, Carpenter told committee members.

"It is... important to note that a significant quantity of critical dual-use equipment, while it may have been is-

Guard chief sees peacekeeping as mission for Guard

WASHINGTON – The National Guard can expect peacekeeping roles in Afghanistan and Iraq in the future, the chief of the National Guard Bureau said in May.

"I've challenged our staff with thinking through what happens after Iraq, what happens after Afghanistan," Gen. Craig R. McKinley told an audience at the Heritage Foundation on May 13.

"In many cases, the National Guard – primarily the Army National Guard – stays behind, and they are the people who finish the job," McKinley said.

McKinley said he could see a time when the National Guard may be used for peacekeeping in other parts of the world, just as in Kosovo.

"People kind of forget that [Kosovo] was a major conflict, but there's still a lot of peacekeeping going on in that part of the world," McKinley said.

The National Guard has troops deployed today on its

13th peacekeeping rotation in Kosovo.

The National Guard also contributes to the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai, an international peacekeeping force overseeing the peace between Egypt and Israel crafted in the 1979 Camp David Accords.

National Guard troops also perform duty with Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, whose tasks since 2001 have included preventing conflict and promoting stability.

Meanwhile, the National Guard is playing a large and increasing role in warfighting, McKinley said.

"Over 40,000 men and women today are serving in a federal capacity... in our wars overseas or domestically... with Noble Eagle," he said.

Operation Noble Eagle is an ongoing, post-Sept. 11 mission to protect North America's skies in which the National Guard plays a significant role.

McKinley said along with peacekeeping and supporting the war, the National Guard is involved in other international operations.

National Guard agribusiness development teams are playing a significant, non-kinetic, soft-power role in Afghanistan, he said. These teams that draw on the civilian-acquired skills of National Guard members to help Afghan farmers improve agricultural practices came out of an initiative from Missouri and now involve multiple states.

"What [started] out to be an experiment now has turned into 12 teams," McKinley said. "The land grant universities from all over the Midwest are now eager to put these... teams out into the remote areas of Afghanistan to help."

"Just something as small as trellising a crop, getting it up off the ground, has produced crop loads in excess of anything they've ever seen before," he said.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Memorialized: A portion of 22nd Avenue in Bellevue, Neb., now bears the name of Spc. William Bailey III, who died May 25, 2007, in Iraq while serving as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 755th Chemical Company.

Bellevue honors fallen Soldier

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A fallen Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier was honored by his hometown, May 17, when Bellevue, Neb., renamed a street in honor of the late Spc. William Bailey III.

Bailey, a member of the Guard's 755th Chemical Company, was killed on May 25, 2007, when a roadside bomb ripped through his vehicle near Taji, Iraq, during a convoy security mission.

He was buried with full military honors in Bellevue, Neb., on June 5, 2007.

In civilian life, Bailey was a volunteer firefighter and aircraft dispatcher with the Bellevue Volunteer Fire

Department.

During the May 17 ceremony, in which approximately 300 people



Bailey

gathered at the Bellevue Volunteer Fire Department Number 1 station, Bellevue Mayor Ed Babbitt officially renamed a portion of 22nd Avenue in front of the station in honor of Bailey.

Among those attending the ceremony were Bailey's wife Dee, the fallen Soldier's five children (Cody, 18, Maquala, 14, Kaitlyn, 13, Billy, 11 and Logan, 5) and members of the 755th Chem. Co.

sued to [Army National Guard] units, is chronically unavailable to governors... due to continuing rotational deployments," Carpenter said.

■ Political humorist Stephen Colbert tackles basic training

FORT JACKSON, S.C. (ARNEWS) — While the vast majority of new Soldiers arrive at Basic Combat Training in a bus from the airport, the Army's newest private arrived in a style befitting his cult-like status.

Pvt. Stephen Colbert, of *The Colbert Report*, showed up in front of the 120th Adjutant General Battalion (Reception), May 8, in a stretch limousine ready to begin his in-processing.

Colbert got off on the wrong foot when he

dropped his bag in front of his drill sergeant and promptly asked, "Can I get a bellman?"

Colbert and a production crew spent the day filming scenes of Colbert being put through various BCT training events under the instruction and watchful eye of his drill sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Demetrius Chantz, an instructor at the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant School.

The scenes were for *The Colbert Report's* June trip to the Persian Gulf. The show was broadcast in for an entire week in June from the region.

When asked how Pvt. Colbert did, Chantz just shook his head in disgust.

"He wouldn't graduate," he said. "We would be in trouble if he was in uniform."



U.S. Army photo

New Recruit: Pvt. Stephen Colbert is corrected by Drill Sgt. (Sgt. 1st Class) Demetrius Chantz during a taping of *The Colbert Report* at Fort Jackson, S.C.

Prairie Soldier

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Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Sand Hills Shadow: A Nebraska Air Guard KC-135R Stratotanker casts a shadow over a cattle watering point near Tryon, Neb., located in the Sand Hills of western Nebraska.

MEMORIAL DAY continued from page 1.

of cedar trees, the lighter greens of cottonwoods and newly planted fields, the yellow-whitish sandhills, the browns of deer darting out of their hiding spots in deep, western Nebraska canyons, the reds, whites and blues of Old Glory standing in a manicured cemetery, the bright hats worn by the people below.

And then there's the speed. At 1,000 feet above the ground makes the speed makes the landscape seem almost frighteningly closer than it really is, which is already closer than what most four-engine aircraft typically fly above.

"You know, it really is quite a view," said Master Sgt. Mark Fusco, a boom operator assigned to the 173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron, May 25, as he lay on his stomach during a three-hour mission that took him from eastern Nebraska out to the panhandle and back again. "You really get a sense of how unique this state is."

Fusco was a member of one of two Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker crews that performed flyover salutes over 136 cemeteries, part of the Guard's annual Memorial Day tribute.

According to Col. Robert Athan, 155th Air Refueling Wing vice commander who served as a navigator aboard Fusco's aircraft, the mission is important for the Nebraska Air Guard crews, many of whom volunteer year after year to participate in the aerial salutes.

"This is our chance to let the veterans who have come out to visit our fallen Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines and civilians... know that we respect that service and that we honor that service," said Athan.

Over the course of Athan's flight, the aircrew - which also included Maj. Kipper Hesse and Capt. Wade Holden - conducted salutes over 65 individual cemeteries. Some were for large ceremonies, the flags and glint from automobile windshields easily visible from miles away. Others were for nearly deserted cemeteries where very few people were visiting.

Each of the salutes, however, was important said Athan. "Some of these cemeteries, there's nobody there," he said. "But we know in our hearts that there are men and women that have given their ultimate measure. They're there and we are paying our respects to them."

Just riding in an aircraft during the mission is a unique experience. For nearly an hour before takeoff, the crew works hard to input all the individual waypoints into the aircraft's on-board Global Air Traffic Management system, which then steers the aircraft directly toward each of the individual cemeteries.

That means that once in flight, the aircraft is seldom flying straight and level for more than a few minutes at any one time. Athan said the mission tests the aircrew, requiring them to focus intently both inside and outside the aircraft to ensure that they safely and accurately fly over their "targets" at precisely the planned moment.



Heading Out: Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker crews carry their gear out to their aircraft, May 25, as they prepare to start out on their traditional Memorial Day aerial salute.



Coordination: (From left) Col. Rick Evans, commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing, talks to Col. Robert Athan, 155th ARW vice commander, about the route that Athan's aircraft will take during the annual Memorial Day salute. Both Evans and Athan served as navigators for their respective aircraft during the May 25 flights.



Pre-Flight Conversation: Maj. Kipper Hesse, 173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron, talks with Staff Sgt. Kasey Korth during pre-flight briefings before the start of the May 25 Memorial Day flights.



Logging In: Col. Robert Athan, right, inputs aerial waypoints into his aircraft's navigation computer while Maj. Kipper Hesse (top left) and Capt. Wade Holden (top center) complete their final pre-flight preparations.

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Athan said the mission tests the aircrew, requiring them to focus intently both inside and outside the aircraft to ensure that they safely and accurately fly over their "targets" at precisely the planned moment.

"There's quite a bit of coordination between the pilot, the co-pilot and the navigator," he said. "We try to fly right to the point and then, once we get to that point, we cycle to the next waypoint. So, we are always flying to the next action point, the next target."

The crew, Athan said, also has to be constantly aware of changing wind speeds that can cause the aircraft to drift slightly while also constantly scanning the air space around them for possible hazards such as birds, radio towers or other aircraft. That's definitely a different type of flying environment than a tanker crew normally experiences as they circle about in a miles-long 'race car track' waiting for another aircraft to rendezvous with them for fuel.

"When you're at 1,000 feet above the ground, you want to make sure you're looking outside for other air traffic, birds. You really need to know where you're at in relationship to the terrain, in relationship to any other antennas or any restricted areas." It also means working hard to pick out individual cemeteries, which often is tricky to do for those that are located far outside of their local communities. Athan

said flying over the cemetery near Tryon, located in the western Nebraska sandhills of McPherson County, particularly stuck out.

"Essentially there's two towns in that county and the cemetery is located about 15 miles northeast of Tryon," Athan said. "Tryon is a small little town. You can see Tryon... you couldn't see the cemetery but we knew our (navigation system) was right on."

"As we flew north out of town, we couldn't see the cemetery, but we could see all the cars," he added. "There were people there at Tryon waiting to see our flyby and were there at the time we told them we were going to be there."

Athan said it was one of the best missions he'd ever flown. "It was an honor and privilege to fly," he said. "And it was truly warming to see at each of those cemeteries all those people there."

Fusco agreed. "It's definitely one of those missions you'll remember for a long time."



Aerial Route: Master Sgt. Mark Fusco, 173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron boomer, traces the route of his tanker over western Nebraska from his boom pod.

Deploying Airmen wished farewell in May

By Senior Airman Brandon Kusek
Staff Writer

Deploying Airmen, mostly from the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron, and their families received an official sendoff May 3 in the 155th Civil Engineer Squadron classroom at the National Guard air base in Lincoln.

The members received words of encouragement and support from some of the top members in the Nebraska Air National Guard while also learning about the support system available to them through the Airmen and Family Readiness Center.

"This is where preparation and training means opportunity. So, as you get ready to go out and help Airman, take a good attitude and work ethic, and go out and do a great job," said Brig. Gen. Jon Fago, Joint Force Headquarters chief of staff-Air.

Col. Richard Evans, 155th Air Refueling Wing commander, said the Airmen were undoubtedly ready for the deployment after having learned numerous valuable lessons during the wing's recent operational readiness inspection. "We should be about as ready as we've ever

■ Ceremony designed to help affected Air National Guard families learn where to receive critical information, support

been to go out and do good work for our country."

The sendoff wasn't just about words of encouragement from leadership. It was also about providing comfort to the families of deploying Airmen, said Karen Jordan-Anderson, wing family program coordinator. She said it's important for families to know they have a support network available in Lincoln.

"We're here to do what we can to make sure your families are taken care of at



Photo by Senior Airman Brandon Kusek

Wishing Airmen and Families Good Luck: Brig. Gen. Jon Fago, Nebraska Air National Guard chief of staff, speaks to members of the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron and their assembled families during a sendoff event held May 3.

home so you can do your job over there," she said while describing some of the different programs available for the Airmen's spouses, children and other family members.

Robin Johnsen, wife of Staff Sgt. Jason Johnsen, 155th CES pavement and equipment operator, was in attendance with her husband and two children.

She said she's nervous and anxious because this is her first experience dealing with a deployment. She

added that the information she received at the sendoff was very helpful.

"This was really good for me to connect with other families within the squadron and meet others that are in the same situation," she said.

Officials also stressed the importance of keeping up with communication between deployed members and their families.

Tech. Sgt. Christian Bradley, 155th CES, and his wife have a 'Yahoo!' group for the deployed members and their families as a way to help them better keep in touch. The group, which will be self-monitored by members of the squadron, will offer another opportunity to provide information to the affected families.

"If someone isn't able to necessarily get to a computer or phone, but runs into someone from the squadron who can, this will allow them to post 'I saw so-and-so today and they're doing alright', in a closed and safe environment," Bradley said. "We want to be able to bring as much peace of mind as possible.

"You may have family close by," Bradley said, "but this is family too and we take care of family."

SENDOFF

continued from page 1.

milled about before the official start of the ceremony — talking to the people who had gathered in their honor, talking to friends, taking pictures. Many others passed the time by simply talking about the things that Soldiers talk about, like how the sooner they left the sooner they would be back.

"The biggest thing is that they are ready to get started," said Baptiste. "Many see the ceremony and see that it is one step closer. We know that it is one final goodbye until we return, so it is more of a finality to see the ceremony."

The Soldiers would depart for Fort Stewart, Ga., the next day to continue approximately 45 days of post-mobilization training prior to departing to Iraq. Once there, they will be attached to an Oregon Army National Guard Brigade Combat Team.

Baptiste said once in Iraq, his unit will primarily be responsible for providing convoy security along with transportation duties. That, of course, is subject to change, he added.

The unit is made up of a number of Soldiers who have deployed before, many of whom deployed together.

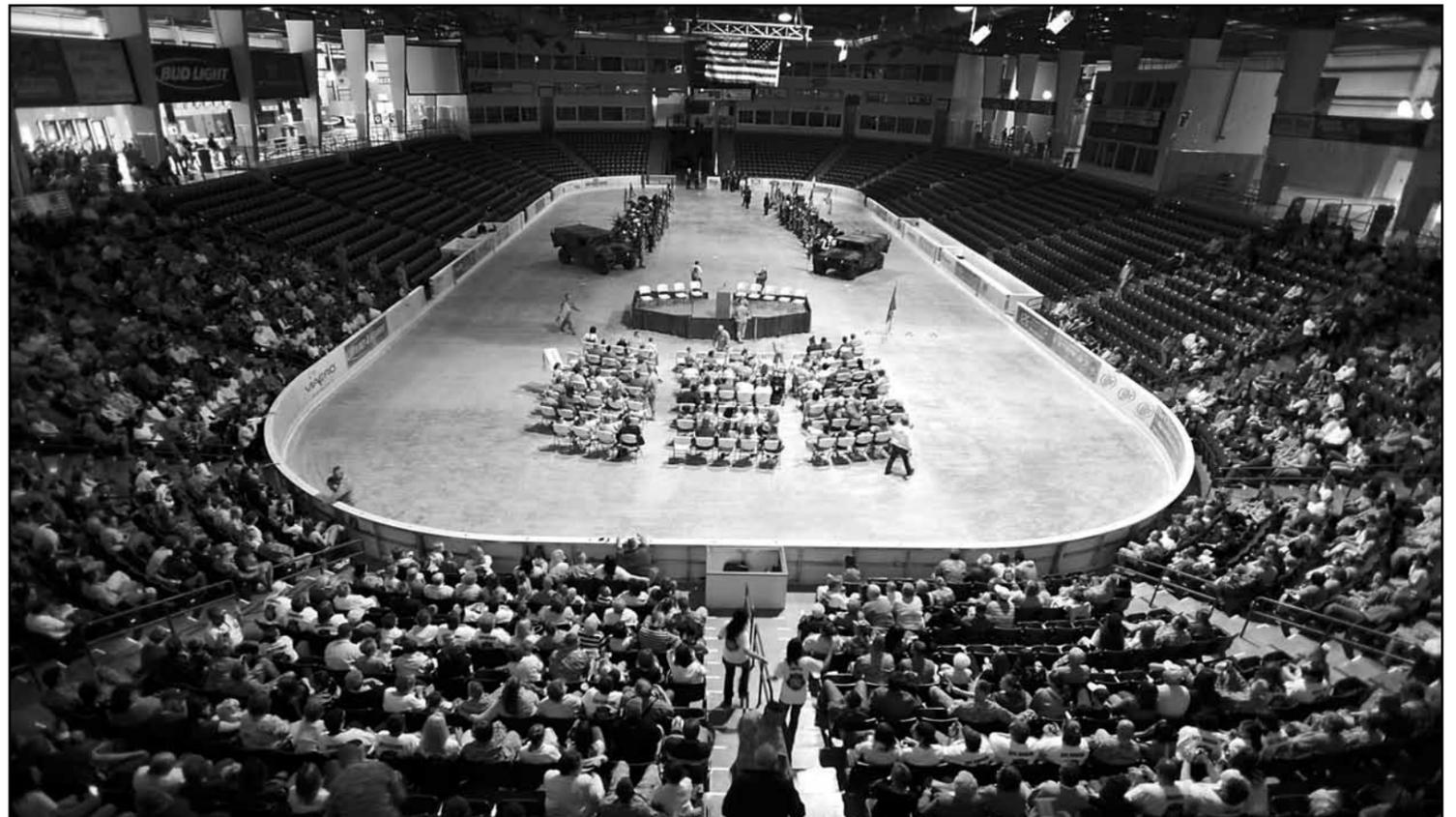
"I have a unit with almost half of the Soldiers that have deployed before," said Baptiste.

Sgt. 1st Class Robert Swantz, platoon sergeant for the 1195th Trans. Co.'s second platoon, said the returning deployers make up a core group of experienced Soldiers within the unit.

"Honestly, it started back in 2005 when I had a group of squad leaders and squad members (on deployment to Kuwait)... we made a dedication to each other that if we would deploy again I would stay in and they would stay in," he said. "So we started preparing back then that there would be a possibility that we would deploy again."

Schwantz said even though some of the faces have changed since 2004 when the unit, then known as Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion, deployed, the support the Soldiers are receiving from the local communities is just as visible today as it was then.

"It is amazing how much you really notice it in the smaller



Photos by David Nore

Thunder Dome: More than 1,500 friends, family and visitors met at the Kearney Event Center, home of the Kearney Storm USHL hockey team, to honor departing Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1195th Transportation Company. Military and governmental leaders and dignitaries formed at one end of the 'ice' while the Patriot Guard completed the oval at the opposite end.

communities," said Schwantz. "Especially in smaller communities in Lexington and McCook. It just really amazes me how much support you get from them. They all treat you like family — really treat everyone like family — when you are gone. So it takes a lot of the worries away from you as a Soldier."

Swantz and his wife Mary, who sang a touching rendition of the National Anthem for the Kearney ceremony, have six children. They said their family relies heavily on family support, both in their extended personal family group and the National Guard family group.

"Most generally the community of Gothenburg is supporting my family. Most of my family lives here and our church group is here, so we have a really good support group right here in our home town," Swantz said.

"It is hugely important," said Mary Swantz. "We couldn't be as successful as we are without our families. We live five blocks from my parents and one-and-a-half blocks from his parents."

During the official sendoff ceremony, the 1195th Trans. Co. Soldiers listened intently



Quiet Time: Sgt. Candace Coon, 1195th Transportation Company, attends an informal formation held by 1st Sgt. Bob West at the Kearney Event Center with her son Jonathan in her arms, just prior to the start of the sendoff ceremony for her unit in Kearney, Neb., on the evening of May 12.

from the floor of the ice arena, which normally would have been surrounded by Kearney Storm Hockey sponsor signs, as a group of distinguished guest speakers that included Lt. Gov.

Rick Sheehy and Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, Nebraska adjutant general, wished them well.

"I have seen your training you have received at Camp Roberts (Calif.) and you are more than

ready to deploy," Kadavy told the Soldiers. "You are one of the most outstanding units in the Army and the most outstanding unit Nebraska has sent to war to this point."

Substance abuse puts military careers, numerous financial benefits in jeopardy

By Staff Sgt. Mandy Cunningham
Drug Demand Reduction Office

Drug abuse is inconsistent with National Guard values and readiness.

The objectives of the Drug Testing Program are to deter individuals from abusing, facilitate early identification of drug abuse and enable commanders to take appropriate disciplinary or other administrative actions. These actions may include evaluation and possible rehabilitation, monitor rehabilitation of those enrolled in alcohol and/or other drug abuse rehabilitation, and collecting data on the prevalence of drug abuse (taken from AR 600-85, CH. 4-1).

Two years ago, the responsibility of conducting drug testing for Nebraska's Air and Army National Guard fell on the shoulders of just one individual. Today, over 75 percent of units are trained to conduct their own drug testing with the goal of 100 percent by the end of September 2009.

The Substance Abuse Program is a

unit's responsibility designed to maintain Soldier/Airmen readiness with an overall goal of deterrence from using illegal drugs or abusing legal substances.

This fiscal year, 17 individuals have been discharged from the Nebraska National Guard due to testing positive for drugs and 21 more are scheduled to go in front of a board to determine their future with the Guard.

What's at stake aside from the accompanying humiliation and shame? A traditional E-5 with six years of service will lose approximately \$5,248 base pay annually. Bonus money received may also be recouped. Student loan repayment would be stopped immediately.

15 out of the 17 individuals kicked out this year were using student loan repayment. Potentially up to \$4,500 per year in tuition assistance would be gone forever along with the possibility of having to repay what has already been used.

Any hopes of receiving retired pay and benefits are also gone.

Other harmful consequences of drug and alcohol abuse may include a decline

in mental and physical health, increased problems at home, a decline in attendance and performance at school, and a negative impact on current or future employment.

Fortunately, the Nebraska National Guard provides several resources for military members who have a problem or think they might have a problem.

The best option for traditional Soldiers and Airmen, veterans or active duty Soldiers and Airmen is to go through the local Veterans Administration. Active duty Soldiers and Airmen may also go through Offutt Air Force Base. Finally, Military One Source is available to all Soldiers and Airmen regardless of status.

Unit leadership can contact Officer Candidate Jennifer VanDerPol at (402) 309-7044 for assistance with drug education or Staff Sgt. Michael Oehm at (402) 309-7043 for assistance with their Substance Abuse Program.

Soldiers and Airmen can also visit the NEGUARD website at www.neguard.com/FAMILYASSISTANCE/ to obtain information on helpful resources.

Medical unit mobilizing for Operation Iraqi Freedom again

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Approximately 80 members of a Lincoln-based Nebraska Army National Guard medical company will be mobilizing in mid-October for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

According to Nebraska Army National Guard officials, the Soldiers are members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance).

While mobilized, the unit will be responsible for providing ground evacuation and medical treatment within a theater of operations.

This will mark the second time that the 313th Med. Co. has been mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The unit was first mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom from October 2004 until November 2005.

According to Maj. Grant Sieden- burg, 313th Med. Co. commander, the unit is ready for what lies ahead.

"We're excited about the mission," said Sieden- burg.

Sieden- burg said the unit first learned that it might be deployed again as early as December 2007. That took the company by shock, said, however, over the past year- and-a-half the mission has actually been pushed back several times until the most recent notification.

"So, we've essentially had about 20 months to prepare to deploy again," Sieden- burg said.

Currently, there are four Sol- diers assigned to the 313th Med. Co. who deployed with the unit in 2004. Sieden- burg said each one of them has indicated they're ready to serve again.

Following the unit's mobilization, they will complete final training at Fort Hood, Texas, before moving on into the Central Command Theater of Operations.

Their final destination is not be- ing released at this time.

Guard organizations make major blood donations

■ Camp Ashland, 155th Air Refueling Wing contribute enough blood during recent drives to help 309 patients

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Two Nebraska National Guard or- ganizations made huge contribu- tions, recently, when each held a blood drive for the Nebraska Community Blood Bank.

According to Col. Bryan Saucerman, commander of the Camp Ashland-based 209th Regiment (Regional Training In- stitute), 102 staff members and students donated a total of 75 units of blood during an April 10 drive.

Saucerman said he recently received a letter from Phyllis Ericson, chief execu- tive officer of the Nebraska Community Blood Bank, indicating the donation helped 225 patients.

The Camp Ashland drive was actually the second quarterly donation effort orga- nized by Master Sgt. Dorrance Atherton

"It definitely hit home that what we're doing is not only just helping unknown patients, but one of our own. It definitely rein- forced the importance of donating blood."

— Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen
Nebraska Air National Guard

of the 209th RTI. On Dec. 19, 102 donors contributed 63 units of blood, which was credited with helping 189 patients.

The Camp Ashland Guardsmen weren't the only ones busy giving blood either.

Member of the Nebraska Air Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing have also orga- nized numerous blood drives in support of the Nebraska Community Blood Bank, the most recent being June 3.

According to Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen, who helped organize the event, she has received word that the June drive brought 32 donors, including 12 new participants, who contributed 28 units of blood.

Officials estimate that blood donation will help 84 patients at local hospitals.

For Nielsen, the most recent blood

drive has gotten a lot more personal for her, recently.

A member of the 155th Air Refuel- ing Wing, recently learned that her four-year-old son has leukemia, mean- ing that he now can expect to undergo chemotherapy over the next three years.

"She saw that I was organizing a blood drive and told me that she was glad to see we were holding a blood drive and how important it is," said Nielsen, adding that the sergeant's son goes into the hospital once a week for blood, platelets and red blood cells.

"It definitely hit home that what we're doing is not only just helping unknown patients, but one of our own," said Nielsen.

"I think it definitely reinforced the importance of donating blood."



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Next Stop...Basic Training: Nebraska National Guard recruits listen to a travel briefing May 21 at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Omaha before moving on to basic training.

PLATOON continued from page 1.

you need to be successful Soldiers and to build successful teams."

Concentrating on Loose' words was hard, though. Awoken from her hotel bed at 4:30 a.m., Thilliander had already been up for six hours, much of which had been spent shuffling between different examination stations at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Omaha or waiting on a plastic chair as she prepared to officially start her new military career.

Thilliander really didn't look all that different from the other new recruits who were waiting to move on to their basic training. Her's was just one of countless faces of countless recruits that had passed

individual truck driver training together in the same platoon, the first time that Nebraska Army Guard had formed what is commonly called a "Buddy Platoon" in about 20 years.

According to Sgt. Maj. John Valasek, a Nebraska Army National Guard Recruit- ing and Retention Command sergeant major, state officials decided to bring back the buddy platoon concept this year as a way of helping unit recruiters fill truck driver vacancies, which is currently the single-largest need in the Nebraska Army National Guard.

"We haven't had a buddy platoon in a while," said Valasek. "We just thought

through here on their way to join- ing the Marines, the Navy, the Air Force, the Army, the Nebraska National Guard.

In a way though, Thilli- ander and 24 other soon-to-be Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers process- ing through the Omaha MEPS May 20 were indeed unique.

They were all heading to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., to attend basic training and advanced

it would be a good idea."

Valasek said Nebraska Guard buddy platoons were actually reasonably com- mon back in the 1970s and 1980s when groups of infantry, armor and artillery recruits from different Nebraska Army Guard units would be formed into single platoons that would then attend basic training and AIT together. In fact, Valasek said, the current state Recruiting and Retention Command commander, Lt. Col. Jim Murphy, was himself a member of a buddy platoon in the early 1970s.

"He talks about it quite a bit," said Valasek. "He still keeps in touch with a lot of those guys, some of whom got out of the Guard and have gone on to become doctors, lawyers, successful businessmen."

"It's just amazing the camaraderie throughout the years... the people you meet from that buddy platoon," he added. Valasek said that by forming a buddy platoon the state was also able to secure a May 20 school date for its Soldiers, something that is often difficult to do as Army basic training posts enter into the height of their training year.

In order to fill the platoon, Valasek said the state created an incentive challenge for unit recruiters. Recruiters from the state's transportation companies, such as the 189th Transportation Company from Norfolk and Wayne, and the 1075th Medium Truck Company from Columbus and York, quickly jumped in. Ads were also placed in local community newspapers while signs in schools advertised the op- portunity.

Ultimately, Valasek said, a buddy platoon is designed to help new Soldiers

better adapt to basic training and military service in general.

"I think going with the buddy platoon takes away a little bit of the fear factor," he said. "You know that you're going with people from your home state."

"When I went, I was all by myself from Nebraska. I didn't know anybody," Valasek added, saying it created strong feelings of anxiety and stress. "I feel this takes that away because you've got somebody you can relate to and talk to if you do have any problems."

Valasek said Guard Recruiting and Retention officials are already looking toward next year to form an even larger buddy platoon, which again will most likely be formed of future truck drivers.

"I think we're definitely going to do it again," he said. "It definitely seems to be a step in the right direction."

Members of the buddy platoon are: Joshua Annen, Ogallala; Samuel L. Beale, Clay Center; Corey M. Calhoun, Wakefield; Camden L. Carlson, Pilger; Corey M. Cavanaugh, Norfolk; Megan L. Dreyer, Wisner; Michael J. Gregerson, Al- len; Drew D. Henderson, Wakefield; Aaron S. Hensley, Lincoln; Erik A. Hernandez, Lexington; Quelbin M. Izaguirre, Colum- bus; Michael J. Kielty, Wayne; Jacob A. Kraatz, David City; Josiah B. May, Battle Creek; Jeffrey D. Milner, Omaha; Trevor L. Munster, Cozad; Joshua D. Osterhoudt, Broken Bow; Dylan A. Recek, Columbus; Curtis T. Scott, York; Justin W. Spector, McCook; Matthew T. Tenorio, Hartington; Kendra B. Thilliander, Beemer; Lance C. Thomsen, Pender; Derek J. Utemark, Wakefield; August N. Wilson, Atkinson.

Girls Staters learn more about Nebraska Army, Air National Guard

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

The Nebraska National Guard hosted approximately 450 girls at the Nebraska National Guard air base June 3, as part of the American Legion's Boy's and Girl's State.

The girls were able to interact with current members from both the Army and Air National Guard, and get an up-close view of military equipment, including tours of a Nebraska Air Guard KC-135R aerial refueler, and Army Guard UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 "Chinook" helicopters.

They also had an opportunity to try out a laser controlled M-16 rifle shooting range while also getting their photos taken in front of a Dale Earnhardt Jr. Number 88 NASCAR racecar.

The six-day Girls and Boys State programs provide high

school juniors across the state the opportunity to participate in hands-on government training by forming a mock government including elected officials on local, county and state levels and then carrying out the duties of those offices.

The Nebraska National Guard has been a part of the State program for several years and the kids seem to really enjoy themselves every year, said Sgt. Maj. Ted Guenther, Recruiting and Retention Command sergeant major.

For many, seeing the military equipment and interacting with Guardsmen is an educational experience.

"It exposes these kids to some of our assets, our equipment and our personnel," said Guenther. "It



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

On Target: Brittany Muller, Fremont High School, fires a laser-fitted M-16 rifle at a target under the guidance of Staff Sgt. Dan Nichols during a Girls State visit to the National Guard air base, June 3. The event was hosted by the Army and Air Guard.

ensures these kids have a better understanding of the National Guard. It gives them an idea that we're Citizen Soldiers and Citizen Airmen out there supporting our communities, our state and

close where you can touch it and see it, it's much more personal."

Of the different things the girls saw, favorites varied.

"I think the coolest thing that I've done and seen is the fire

truck," said Nicole Atkinson from Boys Town in Omaha.

Along with entertaining students and educating them about the National Guard's mission, the goal of participating in the State program is to look for the best and brightest future Soldiers and Airmen, said Guenther.

"What we're trying to do is encourage these kids to look at the Guard as an option," said Guenther. "The Air Guard and Army Guard have some great opportunities here in the state of Nebraska."

Girls also got to see that the military is not just a man's world.

"As a girl I think this is pretty cool," said Atkinson. "I never really thought about Army stuff because I thought it was all for boys, not girls. You guys are kind of showing us that as women we have an opportunity to also do the same as what men do."

WAKEFIELD continued from page 1.

such success with a single high school graduating class.

"I have to give a lot of credit to the recruiter who was here before me," said Alexander, who became the Wayne recruiter in December 2007. He replaced Sgt. 1st Class Brad Wieland, who retired after serving as the primary recruiter for northeast Nebraska for many years. "He spent a lot of time in that school."

That long-term relationship undoubtedly paid a major part in the recent success at the Wakefield's K-12 school, Alexander said. "He probably planted that seed in their heads a long time ago and now I'm just reaping the benefit."

Alexander said Wieland actually recruited the first two current Wakefield enlistees into the 189th Tran. Co. before he retired from the job 16 months ago.

Juniors at the time, one student joined to be a unit supply specialist while the other enlisted as a truck driver. Both attended basic training last summer as part of the split option program that allows Guard Soldiers to attend basic after their junior year of high school and then complete advanced individual training after their senior year.

Despite those enlistments, Alexander said he never expected what happened next.

"I started talking to a few kids last year. Most of them were juniors," he said. "There was one kid, Tyler Lamb, he talked to every recruiter who came into the school. He just wanted to be in the military. I don't think he really cared one way or another which one he got into. He would come into the office when I came to the school and tell me about what the Marine recruiter told him or what the Navy recruiter told him."

"Then he wanted to know about the Guard and what it was all about," said Alexander.

That meeting with Lamb would be repeated numerous times during Alexander's weekly stops at Wakefield.

"He would always have an update on what recruiters he talked to and he'd want to know more about the Guard again. Sometimes I thought he just wanted to get out of class."

While working with Lamb, Alexander enlisted Jessica Burns, one of the top students in the Class of 2009. Burns, Alexander said, already knew about the Nebraska Army Guard based upon her older sister's experience. She had served in Alexander's platoon during the 189th Tran. Co.'s 2005-06 deployment to Iraq.

"I think with her sister being in the Guard, she thought it would be a good option for her," said Alexander. "She wants to be a doctor. What we talked about was her getting into the AMEDD (Army Medical Department commissioning) program once she gets accepted into medical school."

"So, she sees all kinds of opportunities that the Guard has to offer," he added.

Alexander then enlisted Seb Kramer, who also had a tie to Guard - his aunt is a member of the Nebraska Army National

Guard.

Alexander was also still keeping in contact with Lamb, who was also spending quite a bit of time 'hanging out' at the house of a Wakefield family that has two children - a daughter and son - who are members of the 189th Tran. Co.

Alexander said through their conversations he learned more about the Lamb's personal goals. Along with being interested in joining the military, Lamb was also studying to become qualified as an emergency medical technician.

"He will basically be an EMT as soon as he turns 18," Alexander said. "He lives to be an EMT."

Lamb, Alexander said, continued to look more and more closely at joining the Guard. "Throughout the summer, he stopped by the office here in Wayne," Alexander said. "And then, at one point (last fall) he said, 'I'm going to join the Guard. I've made up my mind.'"

"The big decision for him was I didn't B.S. him. He thought I was a straight-shooter and didn't tell him just what I thought he wanted to hear. I just told him the good and the bad. That's what made his decision," he said.

Alexander said after Lamb joined the Guard, a tidal wave of enlistments from Wakefield soon followed.

"When Tyler Lamb got in, I wasn't sure if I was recruiting the kids at Wakefield or they were recruiting me to come to the school," said Alexander. "It really started to snowball to the point that in February I enlisted five kids all from Wakefield."

The Guard's Recruiting Assistant Program - in which Soldiers can receive up to \$2,000 for every friend they refer to recruiters who ultimately enlists and complete training - was a big help during the recruiting effort, Alexander said.

"The GRAP was what was probably the biggest deal out of Wakefield," Alexander said, adding that as soon as a person enlisted into the Guard, he immediately enrolled them into the program and then gave them a backpack filled with Guard t-shirts, basketballs, canteens and other items designed to help get the Guard's name out. "They know that if they got a friend and make that referral, they're going to make \$2,000."

"In fact, a lot of them are more concerned about getting Mission Zone points that the cash," said Alexander, referring to a program that allows Guard Soldiers

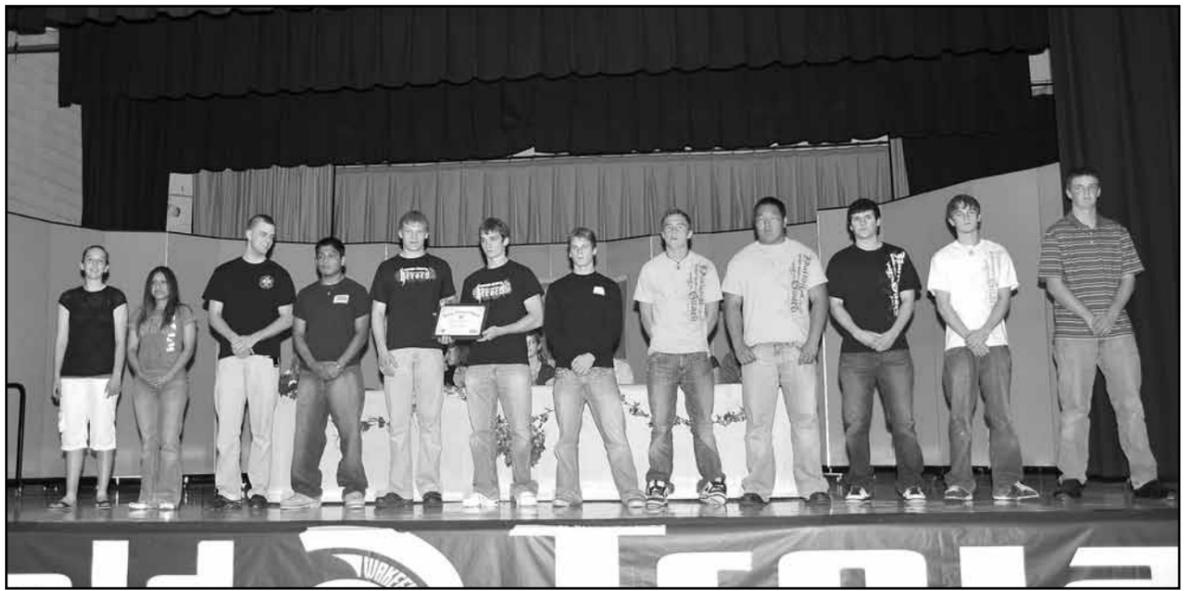


Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

New Recruits: Members of Wakefield High School's Class of 2009 who have enlisted into the military are honored May 4 during the High School's annual honors ceremony. Capt. Troy Dannehl, commander of the Norfolk and Wayne-based 189th Transportation Company, awarded the enlistees with a plaque naming them "The Most Patriotic Class in Nebraska."

to earn points for referrals that they can use to then receive additional Guard-oriented items.

Alexander said the impact of having the new recruits wearing Guard-themed t-shirts can't be underestimated.

"That's free promotion for me. And as a recruiter, one of the things that we want to do is get (the recruits) out and recognized in the community," said Alexander, adding that on one of his morning visits to Wakefield he counted 10 students wearing 'National Guard' t-shirts.

On May 4 Dannehl and Alexander officially congratulated the Wakefield Class of 2009 when they presented the class with a plaque designating it as the "Most Patriotic Class in Nebraska" during the school's annual honor's ceremony.

Accepting the plaque were the enlistees, nearly each of whom wore their National Guard t-shirt to the event.

Earlier, Dannehl said the students entering his unit would have a nearly instant impact because they've already developed a camaraderie from their years in school together.

"With 11 of them coming into the same unit together, you've already got a close knit group of people... a support element to bounce stuff off of," he said. "When they come to the unit, they don't have to sit off in the corner because they feel like they're left out. They've already got a large group of people that they can talk about stuff with and work through stuff."

That should ultimately equate to a group of Soldiers who are already able to work together as a team, Dannehl said.

"They've done things together. They've gone through things together. They don't have to have the new guy fears," said Dannehl.

That also means that Wakefield now has a much more vested interest in the 189th Tran. Co., Dannehl said, adding that unit must take that interest seriously.

"In the Army structure, it behooves the leadership - not just me, but all the way down to the NCOs in the teams and squads - to take the time to train them correctly, to teach them the right ways to do what is required of them in the military," he said.

Alexander agreed, saying that having so many new Soldiers come into the unit at one time from a single community places a major responsibility on the 189th Tran. Co. and him personally as a Guard recruiter.

"I think that's why the National Guard recruiting force does everything it can to take care of those kids who enlist," he said. "Unlike the other services - those guys are gone in two years - I plan on doing this for a long time."

"If a kid has a bad experience in the Guard, well that's going to hurt me down the road for a long time," he added. "That's why I'm always very honest with what I tell these kids, good and bad. I want them to be aware of everything they're signing up for. I don't want to have that bad experience."

"It's going to happen... it's inevitable in some ways, but I always tell them if you have any problems, contact me. I'll know who to call to get those issues resolved," Alexander said.

For now, though, Dannehl said he can't be prouder to be able to call himself the commander of such a special group of Soldiers as the Wakefield students.

"This is a generation that has learned its core values," said Dannehl. "I'm sure that these kids grew up with World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans that were probably an intricate part of their community. And I'm sure that they saw those people and looked up to them."

"That probably instilled in them that I'm an American citizen and it's my responsibility to protect democracy around the world," he added. "To serve - to me - is an honor. It's an honor that a community like Wakefield has also instilled in them."



Learning New Skills: (From left) Spc. Travis Engler and Pfc. Adam Brodahl measure a piece of metal conduit before cutting it during a Castle Stakes challenge that required their squad to successfully install an electrical switch in an hour. Both 623rd Engineer Company Soldiers are unit plumbers.



Triangulation: A pile of wooden triangles lie on the ground at the Mead Training Sites, remnants of a staircase challenge.



Hand Signs: Spc. James Benal, a heavy equipment operator with the 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical Construction), gives directions to his squad, busy excavating a ditch, while using a builder's level to monitor their progress during the May 2 Castle Stakes competition.

Castle Stakes

■ Nebraska Army Guard engineers use May competition to sharpen new skills

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

While more than 150 of the National Guard's top distance runners were in Lincoln preparing to tackle the annual Lincoln/National Guard Marathon, approximately 80 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were gathered 30 miles north of the capitol, competing in a contest all their own.

In this case, the competition wasn't about who could tackle a 26.2 mile course the fastest, but rather which squad of engineers could best pour concrete footings, wire a light switch, survey a job site or correctly construct rafters during a day-long contest called "Castle Stakes," held May 2 at the Mead Training Site.

According to Capt. Cory Hinrichs, commander of the Wahoo-based 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical Construction), the competition was designed to give the unit's youngest members cross-training in a fun and competitive setting.

"What we wanted to do was put together an event that kind of culminates everyone's (Military Occupational Specialty) tasks," said Hinrichs. "We also wanted to create an event that reinforces such things as job site safety, teamwork and so forth."

Castle Stakes was actually a series of challenges that essentially included every aspect of the unit's mission from construction and masonry tasks, to electrical and plumbing problems.

Spread out in football field-sized patch of grass near the concrete rubble of an old missile site, the Soldiers were broken into seven- and eight-person squads and then given a problem – such as successfully constructing rafters or laying concrete footings – which had to be completed

within an hour.

Hinrichs said the competition was designed to give the individual squads – which are made up of carpentry, electrical, plumbing and masonry specialists – a chance to work together as consolidated team, much as they would most likely in a deployed setting.

"We get to build and do construction work, but we never get to where the team is working together," said Hinrichs. "Usually, it's a niche group – like bringing all of our plumbers together to do a particular project while the construction folks work on a different project."

Staff Sgt. Christopher Harmon, a unit construction team leader assigned to develop Castle Stakes, said the idea originated about six months ago when the 623rd Eng. Co. held a site lay-out competition for the individual squads.

"Everybody loves competition and the younger you are, the more you enjoy it," he said. "That's where I got the idea."

The May competition consisted of seven individual tasks, each worth 100 points for the team. The squads were scored on their ability to successfully complete the project, employ teamwork, maintain job site standards and the overall quality of their finished project.

Harmon said the tasks were designed based upon the unit's past training schedule. The competition, he said, was a good way



Grading Their Work: Sgt. 1st Class Mark Smith, 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical Construction) platoon sergeant, grades the progress of a squad as they tackle the challenge of successfully building wooden rafters in an hour time limit.

for unit leaders to gauge how much the unit's youngest Soldiers had learned and retained from that training.

"Every one of these tasks is something we've trained on this year," he said. "We gave a class on rafters, on stairs, site layout and concrete.... Now, we'll see how well they can remember it."

1st Lt. Christopher Pelchat, unit construction operations officer, said one advantage of the competition was that it allowed the younger Soldiers to practice their skills in a safe, forgiving environment under the watchful eyes of senior noncommissioned officers who are already experts in a particular engineer trade, either through military experience or in their civilian careers.

"This is the place to learn," Pelchat said. "We have our resident experts as graders, so they can watch and hear (the squads) go through their thought processes. They can also allow them to make that mistake and correct it on the spot and walk them through how it really should be done."

The competition, said Harmon and Pelchat, also enabled



Putting Down Stakes: Pfc. John Langley, a 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical Construction) carpentry and masonry specialist, begins work on a stake that will ultimately become the layout for a building. The Castle Stakes competition was designed to give unit engineers a chance to learn additional engineering skills.

unit leaders to evaluate the new Soldiers on their ability to take on greater leadership roles in the future.

"It's critical at this point with this many young Soldiers," said Pelchat, adding that 623rd Eng. Co. is the youngest unit "by far" in the Nebraska Army National Guard. "We have a private first class who has a construction management degree that we might not have known about before. We have people who work as plumbers in civilian life."

"We don't have a lot of experienced plumbers except in the lower enlisted ranks," said Harmon, adding that in one squad a 19-year-old private first class became the de-facto leader. "He gathered everyone around him and told them how to do it."

Probably the biggest benefit, said Harmon, was the fact that every member of the unit got the opportunity to practice their skills.

"This is what they want to do on their weekends. This is what they signed up to do," he said.

According to Pfc. Joshua Sladky, an interior electrician from the Hastings detachment, the competition was a great chance to learn more about what it means to be an engineer.

"I'm definitely getting some good cross-training," said Sladky, a civilian landscaper from Venice, Neb. "When we go to drill, I get to do some electrical, but not a lot. We actually get to do a lot of everything."

"This (competition) lets us get around and learn more job skills, like plumbing," he added. "I'm definitely looking forward to that."

Pfc. Scott Sneed, a carpentry and masonry specialist from North Platte, echoed Sladky.

"It's just a whole lot of different stuff," he said. "We've gotten to dig a trench, pour concrete and now we're going to build rafters." "It's pretty fun."

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

'Fresh' Equipment

■ Mechanics use May drill to learn more about newly arrived state-of-art maintenance system

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Mechanics from the 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical Construction) were smiling ear-to-ear during their May drill at the Mead Training Site.

That's because it marked the first time that the seven Soldiers were able to get their hands on a new state-of-the-art maintenance system that now allows them to fix vehicles literally "on the go."

Called the Forward Repair System or FRS (pronounced 'fresh,') the system gives maintenance Soldiers the ability to conduct work on vehicles in the field instead of having to pull them back to a maintenance facility, adding hours and even days onto missions.

Mounted on the back of a Palletized Load System Truck, the system can be put into action by its two-person crew in approximately 120 seconds. That means maintenance Soldiers can begin making major repairs on damaged or inoperable vehicles literally in minutes.

"It was originally designed to be with armored cavalry units that have M-1 tanks or Bradleys as they're going down-range fighting the battle," said Staff Sgt. Ronald D. Hernandez maintenance sergeant for the Wahoo and Hastings-based 623rd Eng. Co., as he showed

off the FRS, which had been set up in the motor pool area at Mead's Unit Training Equipment Site #2.

Just talking about the equipment had Hernandez smiling like the owner of a shiny new sports car. "It's grown from there to the other branches—engineers and transportation," he added.

Hernandez said the 623rd Eng. Co. received the FRS—the first in the state—around mid-February. The May 1-3 drill was the first opportunity for the unit's mechanics to begin learning how the FRS will revolutionize the way they conduct maintenance.

"They're fighting over it," said Hernandez, laughing. "It's like a new toy... a new toy that everybody wants to play with, which is good because it's going to build the confidence in the mechanics because they know they've got the best equipment."

"And this is the state-of-the-art," he added.

One of those mechanics impressed with the FRS was Sgt. Ron Olson, a light-wheeled vehicle mechanic assigned to Detachment 1, 623rd Eng. Co. at Hastings.

"You've got every tool you could possibly imagine to do the job," said Olson, who farms and does maintenance work near Brunswick, Neb., in civilian life. "This is awesome."

In examining the new FRS, it's easy to see why Olson, Her-



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Fresh Capabilities: A Forward Repair System — more commonly referred to as a "Fresh" — stands fully deployed at the Unit Training Equipment Site #2 near the Mead Training Site, Neb. The FRS is assigned to the 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical Construction) and will now give the unit's mechanics the ability to conduct major maintenance on damaged or disabled vehicles in the field, thus dramatically cutting the time such maintenance typically takes.

nandez and the other mechanics are so impressed with the new system.

The FRS includes a rear-mounted crane that can lift up to 10,000 pounds, extend and elevate up to 15 feet, and rotate 320 degrees. Hernandez said the crane allows mechanics to quickly remove and install engines from a damaged or inoperable vehicle without ever having to move.

Along with the crane, the FRS includes a self-contained generator capable of providing electrical power for all of the FRS' subsystems; an air compressor that can be used for on-board pneumatic tools, inflating tires or compressed air

cleaning; welding and cutting equipment; industrial grade hand, pneumatic and power tools; air jacks and bags capable of lifting 40,000 pounds up to 15 inches in the air; and a canvass tarp and heater that allows the maintenance specialists to be protected from the weather yet still have access to their tools and other equipment.

"It's just a mechanic's dream," said Hernandez. "With this piece of equipment, there's nothing (we can't fix.) Every wheeled vehicle, every tracked vehicle in the military's inventory, we can fix it."

That's particularly important for an engineering unit that frequently conducts missions

in areas that make moving a disabled vehicle out problematic in the best of circumstances.

"With the engineers, if something breaks downrange, like excavating equipment, we can go to them," Hernandez said. "The old way, we would've had to bring it back to a shop."

"Turn around repairs (will be) cut way in half," he said.

Olson said the ability to work with state-of-the-art equipment that civilian maintenance companies do not have will also make it easier to recruit new Soldiers into the unit.

"It makes it easier to get a new recruit," Olson said. "It just makes you want to go to drill a lot more."

GRAND ISLAND continued from page 1.

National Guard, Grand Island and the Central Nebraska Airport Authority for their teamwork, beginning in 2002, to create a state-of-the-art aviation facility that is now positioned to support local, state, national and even international emergencies.

"What they've done to build this facility is absolutely awesome," said the governor. "This is a facility that is going to be a model for the country."

According to Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, adjutant general for Nebraska, the Guard is excited to be able to work in its new facility after having operated out of temporary facilities for the past few years.

"This provides the Nebraska National Guard a capability not previously possessed here in the state of Nebraska," said Kadavy after saying AASF #2 helps fulfill his goal of having 'world class facilities for world class Soldiers.'

"It gives us additional flexibility. It gives us additional capability to support the governor in an emergency... to support state emergencies and project aviation capabilities into central and western Nebraska," he said.

The facility also helps position the Nebraska Army Guard well for the future.

"It also makes sure that we are a viable part of the Army aviation community," Kadavy said. "It allows us to go for missions and new airplanes."

Kadavy's predecessor, Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Roger Lempke who now works as a representative for U.S. Sen. Mike Johanns, lauded the Guard and Grand Island officials for making the project a reality.

"I think what you see today is an example of when we plan in Nebraska and the money comes in here, it gets spent well and it gets spent wisely," said Lempke, who was adjutant general at the time that Grand Island was chosen to be the site of AASF #2.

He added that the facility was also



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

All Together Now: (From left) Col. Rick Dahlman, Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, Gov. Dave Heineman, U.S. Representative Adrian Smith, Grand Island Mayor Margaret Hornady and Central Nebraska Airport Authority Executive Director Mike Olson prepare to cut the ribbon to the Nebraska Army Guard's new Army Aviation Support Facility #2, May 28.

the result of hard choices that had to be made to ensure the viability of Nebraska Army Guard aviation for the future.

"Nothing like this comes without a number of tough decisions and commitments," he said. "You know, the CH-47 probably wasn't the first choice of aircraft to transition to... but at the time, you look at the mission and how national strategy was going and it was just a very logical choice."



Chinooks' New Home: A Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter sits on the parking ramp near the newly completed Army Aviation Support Facility #2, May 28, in Grand Island, Neb. The new facility gives the Nebraska Army Guard the ability to better project aviation resources into central and western Nebraska.

absolutely and magnificently in that they were the very clear winner with

"This could not have happened without the community of Grand Island. You could not have asked for a better partner in the development, execution and finally the construction of this facility."

— Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy

vision on how they wanted to support the development of this facility."

Kadavy, too, thanked the people of Grand Island for all they did to bring the project to a successful conclusion.

"This could not have happened without the community of Grand Island. You could not have asked for a better partner in the development, execution, and finally, the construction of this facility," Kadavy said.

"Thank you for putting your arms around all these Soldiers standing in the back who are now part of your Grand Island community."

Colonel Rick Dahlman, state safety and aviation officer, said the Nebraska Army Guard is now well positioned.

"This is a great facility for current and future aviation professionals," Dahlman told the assembled crowd that included members of the fabled 242nd Assault Aviation Battalion who flew and fought in Vietnam under the title "Muleskinners." The "Muleskinners" name has now been adopted by Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.

"World class Soldiers deserve a world class facility," he added. "Thanks for everyone involved in supporting your Soldiers as they prepare to take on tomorrow's challenges with the best led, best equipped and the best Army Guard in the world."

PRAIRIE SOLDIER SPECIAL FEATURE



PATRIOTS

in Stripes

The Nebraska Army National Guard simply couldn't do its mission without the hundreds of professional noncommissioned officers that make up its ranks. From the command sergeants major who are responsible for looking out for the morale and welfare of their troops, to the supply sergeants who makes sure that Soldiers have the equipment they need, to the medical sergeants who maintain Soldiers' health and treat their wounds, to the drill sergeants who ensure that Soldiers start their careers on the right foot, the Nebraska Army National Guard depends on the quality and professionalism of its NCOs to make sure that the hard jobs get done right the first time. They literally are the backbone of the Army.

As part of the Army's continuing Year of the NCO observance, the Prairie Soldier spotlights the work that Nebraska Army National Guard NCOs do on a daily basis to ensure that the Nebraska Army National Guard is ready, trained and capable to do its mission.

Following in his father's footsteps

■Nebraska Army Guard first sergeant filling same role in same unit as father

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Steve Harris is a busy man with a lot on his mind. As the first sergeant for the 1075th Medium Truck Company, which is split between York and Columbus, his drill weekends literally keep him hopping.

One moment he's confirming to see if his Soldiers' rations are ready and in place. The next he's talking with one of his platoon sergeants about the progress of the weekend's training. Then he's on his cell phone, checking on the location of one of the unit's convoys.

Along the way, he chats with his Soldiers who are also busy at work. How's college going? How's your family? Have you filled out this or that paperwork yet? When are you going to reenlist?

It's about caring, says Harris during a rare break at the end of his May drill. It's about caring for your Soldiers by giving them the right training, the right counseling and more importantly, the time to help them become the best they possibly can be.

It's also about being honest with them about what the future holds.

"Don't try to pull anything over on them," Harris says about his leadership philosophy. "Be honest and upfront with them. I believe right there, that is the key. You instill their trust and they will follow you."

"Take care of your Soldiers," he adds, "and they will take care of you." For most Soldiers in Harris' position, such a philosophy is built up over time, the result of countless mentoring sessions with noncommissioned officers they've served with over their careers.

In a way, Harris is no different. He, too, says his philosophy was developed by watching and learning from the sergeants he's worked for since enlisting into the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1980. Not the least of which was a first sergeant who early on helped teach Harris the value of caring for Soldiers and mentoring them for the future.

That first sergeant was Harris' father, Jack R. Harris, who served as the senior sergeant for the York, Neb., company from 1984 until his retire-



1st Sgt. (Ret.) Jack R. Harris
Hometown: Fairmont, Neb.
Job Title: Retired First Sergeant, York, Neb.
Years of Service: 23
Family: Wife: Loris K. Harris; Sons: Jeff, Doug, Dave, Steve, Mike.

1st Sgt. Steven T. Harris
Hometown: York, Neb.
Job Title: First Sergeant, 1057th Transportation Company (Columbus, York)
Years of Service: 29
Family: Wife: Barb J. Harris; Sons: Andrew, Cory.

ment in 1989.

The same community where Harris also now serves as first sergeant.

"I learned everything I know from him," said Harris, who is responsible for approximately 180 1075th Soldiers. "If it wasn't for him, I don't know if I would've got to this spot."

Jack Harris' military career began in 1954 when he joined the Air Force as an aircraft mechanic. The son of a fighter pilot who won a Silver Star in the Pacific during World War II and fought again during the Korean War, Jack said military service was already coursing through his veins when he began a career that would take him from Detroit, Mich., to Alaska and finally York, Neb.

"There's a lot of military background in our family," said Jack, whose uncle served and died in Vietnam when his special operations unit was ambushed.

Jack served in the Air Force until 1964. After moving to central Nebraska, he decided to enlist into York's Company A, 67th Support Battalion, in 1976 to complete his military career and earn a retirement.

Serving with the Nebraska Army National Guard for 13 years, Harris moved steadily up the ranks in the unit, which was responsible for providing groceries, fuel and ammunition for the rest of Nebraska's 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized). He also helped recruit many of the members York's current Detachment 1, 1075th Medium Truck Co., including four of Jack's sons. Steve, the youngest of the four, was the last to



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Like Father, Like Son: Retired 1st Sgt. Jack Harris and his son, 1st Sgt. Steve Harris, show off their first sergeant stripes while standing in the motorpool at the York armory. Both Soldiers served as first sergeant in York, Neb., Jack Harris for Company A and B, 67th Support Battalion, and Steve for the 1075th Transportation Company, which also includes Soldiers based in Columbus.

join in 1980.

Jack said his son was pretty much like any other new Soldier.

"He was apprehensive," Jack said. "I think they all were. You don't know what's going to happen at basic training. You don't know what to expect."

Harris said it was difficult being both a young Soldier and the son of his unit's senior sergeant. "Through my eyes I honestly have to say that he was harder on me than anybody else because he didn't want me to fail," Harris said. "It was hard not only as a young Soldier, but as his son. Sitting there with dad saying, 'You are going to do this or else, it is hard for a son to follow.'"

"You're like, 'You're family, what the heck are you doing?'" he added, laughing. "It's hard enough being young and not knowing anything about the military. It becomes, 'I guess I have to follow along because you're the first sergeant.'"

Jack said all of his sons became good Soldiers. The older three, however, had other career goals they wanted to pursue, so they left the Guard.

Not Steve, though. "I could see that he was taking an interest," Jack said. "He's a Soldier... a Soldier's Soldier."

Harris said serving in a unit with his father helped him develop a better understanding of the military and himself.

"As time went on, I grew," said Harris, who, along with the rest of his Columbus and York unit, deployed to Iraq for a year-long mission in 2004. "I got to understand why I was serving. It wasn't for myself...it was for my country and other people... to serve for them."

Jack said the unit he helped lead in the late 1980s was different from

the one his son now helps lead. Back then, as the primary support unit for a Nebraska infantry brigade, Soldiers from York spent much of their drills and annual training "out in the field" setting up bivouac sites where they helped distribute food, ammunition and petroleum products to the rest of the brigade.

Still, his duties as a first sergeant weren't that much different than the ones his son now has.

"My biggest worry was personnel, making sure they were taken care of, especially in the field; making sure they got their rations, everything like that," Jack said.

It wasn't just a part-time job, either.

"I was up here (at the York armory) every day even though I wasn't a full-timer," he said, adding that his philosophy was pretty simple: "If you didn't take care of your people, the job wouldn't get done."

Jack said he also quickly learned that he couldn't do it alone. He needed to trust the NCOs under him to do their jobs well. "When I was the first sergeant I tried to give people the authority and then held them accountable," he said. "There was no way that I could have my finger on everything, but I put people in place where they could tell me what was going on."

"I had a good bunch of people," he said. "My NCOs were good."

Probably the best part of the job, Jack said, was the times he got to spend working one-on-one with the individual Soldiers.

"Mentoring to me was probably the

See **FIRST SERGEANTS** on 10.

Helping people find right path driving Wayne-area recruiter

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Dale Alexander Jr. faced a difficult decision. About two years ago Alexander, who had recently returned home from Iraq after serving a year in the Middle East as a platoon sergeant with the Nebraska Army National Guard's 189th Transportation Company, was approached by Sgt. 1st Class Brad Wieland about becoming a recruiter for the company's detachment in Wayne.

Wieland, who had served as the Wayne recruiter for more than two decades, was about to retire from the Guard and thought Alexander would be a good fit to replace him.

Alexander, who had recently been promoted into an office career as a northeastern Nebraska probation officer, wasn't sure, though.

Could he step away from a career where he was responsible for helping troubled youth find a different path? Was he recruiter material?

He just didn't know.

Wieland, ever the recruiter, finally got Alexander to promise to at least consider the possibility.

"I decided I'd take a serious look at it. (I) did some soul-searching and realized that I wouldn't be where I'm at today without the experiences and schooling and everything that the Guard has done for me," said Alexander, a native of Emerson, Neb., who had served in the Wayne unit since joining the Nebraska Army National Guard in December 1987.

Alexander said he suddenly realized that becoming a recruiter similar to the work he did as a 16-year veteran probation officer: helping young adults find what interests them and giving them an opportunity to pursue their dreams.

"Basically, all I want to do is see these kids become productive people in their communities and not be a burden on the community," he said. "To get them headed into the right direction."

In December 2007 Alexander formally became the recruiter for Detachment 1, 189th Trans. Co. Since then, he has logged nearly 28,000 miles in his official car while



Sgt. 1st Class Dale T. Alexander Jr.
Hometown: Emerson, Neb.
Job Title: Recruiting and Retention Sergeant, Detachment 1, 189th Transportation Company (Wayne, Neb.)
Years of Service: 21
Family: Wife: Stacey Alexander; Daughters: Jordan, Jacie.

making weekly visits to 19 high schools spread across a wide swath of northeast Nebraska ranging from West Point to Wynot, from South Sioux City, Emerson and Bancroft to U.S. Highway 81.

Alexander said a typical day usually starts at the Wayne armory. He then points his car north or south and begins the work of finding people interested in joining the Nebraska Army National Guard, visiting school guidance counselors, recently enlisted recruits and people looking for more information about the Nebraska Guard.

He quickly learned that it's a tough, tough job.

Days often extend well into the night, which often means missing one of his two daughters' school activities. It also means relentlessly maintaining a positive attitude in the face of adversity.

"You have to be able to take 'no' for an answer and not be devastated," he said. "I think for some people, for some recruiters, hearing 'no' over and over again is very discouraging. But you have to come at it with the thought process that the military is not for everybody."

"Those kids have plans of their own," he said.

Alexander credits Wieland with helping him get started on the right foot. "I learned a lot of my stuff from Wieland," he said, adding that the veteran recruiter gave him several pieces of advice that he carries with him each day.

The first is that he's responsible for making sure the Wayne detachment and the 189th Trans. Co., as a whole, are staffed with good, quality



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

On The Road In Search Of Tomorrow's Guardsmen: Sgt. 1st Class Dale Alexander, recruiting and retention sergeant for Detachment 1, 189th Transportation Company, poses in his staff car along a road near Wayne, Neb. Since becoming a recruiter in December 2007 he has logged nearly 28,000 miles in his car.

Soldiers who want to make an impact on the organization's mission. The second is that before enlisting any new Soldier he has to talk to the parents first.

"One of the guidelines he had for himself was, you will not enlist someone until you meet the parents," Alexander said. "It's a good philosophy because then you go over it again with Mom and Dad and they have a full understanding of what their child is about do."

"And they ask a lot of the hard questions that kids don't ask," he added.

For example, questions about deployments always come up. Alexander said he's always honest any questions he receives.

"I go over the good and the bad," he said. "I talk about my experiences in Iraq."

He said he always makes sure the potential recruit and his or her parents realize that deployments are now a very real part of a Guard Soldier's

"Basically, all I want to do is see these kids become productive people in their communities and not be a burden on the community. To get them headed into the right direction."

— Sgt. 1st Class Dale Alexander

commitment.

"They can't join the military thinking that they will not be deployed," he said. "It's going to happen. That's the mindset that they need to come in with."

"And if they're not comfortable with being deployed then that's okay because the military isn't for everyone," he added.

Honesty, he said, is extremely important.

"If you B.S. them, they are

going to at some point say, 'I don't think I want to do this,'" he said.

Since becoming the recruiter for Wayne, Alexander has enjoyed considerable success. His unit is currently over-strength, which means he has relatively few positions to offer to people interested in joining his detachment.

He also recorded a rare feat when he enlisted a total of 12 seniors from nearby Wakefield Community School's graduating class into the Guard, the largest amount of recruits by both number and percentage from a single high school class in Nebraska this year.

He said he's also learned that he loves the challenges of being a recruiter.

"I love this job," he said. "I like the social aspect of this job. I think that's what I liked about probation – always meeting new people."

"I work with my mind and my mouth," Alexander said. "That's just the way I've always been."

FIRST SERGEANTS continued from page 9.

thing that I looked forward to doing the most," he said. "If I saw a troop in trouble, I tried to help him out. Sometimes I failed, but most times I achieved it."

His son said after returning from Iraq he began thinking more about his future and his career in the Guard. He also started dreaming about someday becoming a first sergeant in the same unit his father had once served as the top sergeant.

In April 2008 that dream became a reality. After learning that he'd been selected to become first sergeant for the 1075th, Harris said his first thoughts were of his father.

"It was overwhelming for me. It was like, 'I finally caught up to him,'" he said with a sparkle in his eyes. "I don't know if I'll ever surpass him, but I finally caught up to him."

"I was just so excited and thrilled. I couldn't wait to call him and tell him. I just wanted to hear his voice and listen to his response."

His response?

"He called me 'Top' right away and said, 'That's just outstanding.'"

Jack said he too felt overwhelmed knowing that his son had just become first sergeant of the unit that still meant so much to him.

"I get shivers up and down

my spine that my son has become the first sergeant that I used to be in," he said, adding: "I didn't say anything to anybody, but I was tickled pink. I was totally excited. I was hoping it would happen because I knew he was first sergeant material."

Harris agrees that the 1075th is a different unit than the one his father oversaw in the 1980s – not better, just different.

"I wouldn't say it's a better Guard, but rather a different Guard in the aspect that we're going all different directions whereas back when he was the first sergeant we were all together training," Harris said.

He said convoy missions, training support requests and preparing for the unit's homeland defense mission often takes up much of the company's drill weekend and annual training. "The Soldiers accomplish everything 100 percent. They'll do whatever we throw at them."

"What they don't always accomplish is taking care of themselves, to be blunt," he added, saying that getting his Soldiers to maintain their physical fitness and personal training, completing military schools on time and ensuring that they are administratively ready, is a constant worry.

Taking care of Soldiers is a

philosophy he carries with him to each and every drill, Harris said. It's something that he learned from his father that is still as valid today as it was 20 years ago.

"This man here taught me everything I know today as far as taking care of your Soldiers, knowing where they're at, accountability, making sure they're fed, making sure that they're getting paid because they've got families at home who are depending on them," said Harris.

"Come out and guide them in the right direction," he added, "and those Soldiers, if you take care of, they'll come back and take care of you."



Soaring Job: Sgt. Beth Ramsey, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew chief with the Lincoln-based Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, stands next to one of the helicopters she and other unit crew chiefs are responsible for maintaining.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon



Photo by Mark Roland

Proud Beat: Sgt. Darrin Fulford, an assistant platoon sergeant with the Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion, stands next to the American and his unit's colors during a recent drill weekend. Fulford joined the Guard shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Helicopter crew chief loves job that keeps her away from desk

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

Always the first one to the aircraft and last one to leave it. Responsible for the maintenance and up-keep of a medical evacuation UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, a crew chief's job is never truly complete.

Lives literally depend on the medevac helicopter being ready to fly at a moment's notice.

Sgt. Beth Ramsey is one such crew chief. A member of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion in Lincoln, Neb., this nine-year veteran was once an unlikely candidate for the position, let alone the military.

The daughter of "hippies," Ramsey said she always had the desire to join the military and do something completely different than anything she could do as a normal citizen.

"When I picked the job, I wanted it to be something that I'd never do in the civilian world," said Ramsey. "I wanted it to be something completely separate, something that I would never do, something that only the military could give me the option to do. So I became an aircraft mechanic."

As an aircraft mechanic, Ramsey's military job is quite a departure from her civilian career goals. She graduated from Doane College in Crete, Neb., May 17, with a degree in Environmental Science and hopes to work outdoors as a field biologist.

Although Ramsey's military and civilian careers may take different paths, the reasoning behind her choices is the same.

"Me and offices don't get along," said Ramsey. "I just like being out there and getting my hands dirty."

As far as the Black Hawk helicopter is concerned, "I can't get near the aircraft without getting my hands dirty," she added.

Mechanics new to the Army start as general mechanics, but aspire to become crew chiefs, said Ramsey. Crew chiefs must possess many

2009
YEAR OF THE
Strength from within **NCO**

Sgt. Beth Ramsey
Hometown: Lincoln, Neb.
Job Title: UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew chief, Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, (Lincoln, Neb.)
Years of Service: 9
Family: Single

skills that only come with hard work and experience, thus it's typically a job reserved only for noncommissioned officers.

"It's an NCO role simply because you have a lot of responsibility as a crew chief," said Ramsey. "It does take a lot of leadership. It takes a lot of responsibility to be in charge of this multi-million-dollar aircraft and keep it up and running."

"Also, during medevac missions you need to be able to keep your head," she added. "Some situations get hairy and you need to have that leadership role of being able to take charge of the situation."

Ramsey received first-hand experience with those hairy situations when she deployed to Kosovo in 2003-04 and then to Iraq as a crew chief from 2006-07.

Working as a crew chief instilled a strong sense of pride and ownership, said Ramsey. It wouldn't be the same sense of pride and joy if she worked behind a desk in an office.

That sense of pride shows in the work Ramsey and the rest of the medevac teams have accomplished.

"We don't just save U.S. Soldiers, we don't just save Iraqi soldiers," said Ramsey.

"We moved a lot of Iraqi civilians. We are doing good over there and I think we have some good stories as far as improving the quality of life of the civilians, not just the Soldiers."

Military police sergeant says life experiences help him become good leader

By Mark Roland
Unit Public Affairs Representative

The attacks on the World Trade Center activated patriotism in many Americans.

For Sgt. Darrin Fulford the feelings were enough to cause him to pursue a career in the military.

Fulford was born in North Chicago, Ill. and raised in Milwaukee, Wisc. His abilities in football and track at Alexander Hamilton High School earned him a scholarship to Mankato State University in Minnesota.

Later Fulford transferred to Wayne State College in Nebraska where he earned bachelor of Science degree in Broadcast Communication Arts in 1990.

After the 2001 attacks, Fulford began talking with his wife about joining the Army. He also discussed the idea with recruiters from the National Guard.

"9/11 became the emphasis for me to join the Army. After 9/11, a few years later the Army raised the age limit (to join the service), so I enlisted into the Army on April 27, 2005."

Fulford was 39 when he enlisted. A week later he turned 40. A week after that he left for basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C.

"At basic training I was older than the battalion commander and everyone," Fulford said. "The first four weeks were really the toughest. With my age I had to get into the routine of getting up and the running."

"It was different, but it was one hell of an experience," he added.

When Fulford completed supply technician advanced individual training and returned to the 267th Maintenance Company he had no idea how fast his military career would take off. Five months later he was transferred to the 867th Quartermaster Battalion and deployed to Iraq.

Fulford was quickly able to apply his civilian experience to his new military position.

"When I was in Iraq I was the (Unit Level Logistics System) clerk in the supply room. When I took it over it was in such disarray that I thought 'Holy cow! I fell back on my civilian employment (experience) knowing that things are supposed to be in order. Using what I know from my work on a civilian job, I used a lot of those skills to get that room in order."

2009
YEAR OF THE
Strength from within **NCO**

Sgt. Darrin Fulford
Hometown: Milwaukee, Wisc.
Job Title: Assistant platoon sergeant, 402nd Military Police Battalion, (Omaha, Neb.)
Years of Service: 4
Family: Wife: Christine Fulford; Children: Andrew, Ashley, Noel, Kaleb, Lucas

Much of the strength Fulford had during the deployment came from his wife Christine, whom he refers to as his 'hero.'

"She had to fight the battles back here," he said.

"I always told her that her job was way harder than my job. I was gone 15 to 18 months without her love, support, courage and selflessness... because she gave up her husband up to the military. That's a big commitment on both our hands, but a bigger commitment for her than it is for me."

When the unit returned from its deployment, it was re-designated as the 402nd Military Police Battalion. Fulford quickly jumped at the opportunity to become a Military Police officer.

Last September Fulford deployed to Louisiana for hurricane relief support duties where he applied his new training while assisting local law enforcement protect civilians.

After returning from Louisiana Fulford was selected to become an assistant platoon sergeant.

"What an NCO brings to the Army is knowledge and experience," he said. "I always looked up to the NCOs and I always wondered what type of responsibilities they inherited. When you have to perform that job, now you can see the difficulties they have to go through."

Fulford knows the importance of the role of an NCO in the military and constantly applies himself to accomplishing the mission.

"The NCOs lead the way. I truly believe in that," he said. "When NCOs are tasked with a duty, we get the job

See **MILITARY POLICEMAN** on 12.

Sergeant major strives to keep Soldiers supplied

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

When Boyd Navratil joined the Nebraska National Guard 27 years ago, he joined to serve his country, learn a new specialty as a logistician and make a little extra cash.

What he didn't know at the time was that he was on a road that would eventually take him to an Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) full-time position with the Nebraska Army National Guard where he recently became the senior logistical noncommissioned officer in the state.

As the logistical sergeant major for the Nebraska Army National Guard, Navratil is now responsible for ensuring the state's Soldiers have the tools, equipment and supplies they need to accomplish any mission.

That means he currently oversees logistical support and services for approximately 3,800 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers.

"It goes all the way from equipping our Soldiers with clothing to the major end items like trucks, helicopters, weapon systems, communication systems and everything in between including rations, ammo and fuel. If the Soldiers need it, it's logistics," said Navratil.

"I believe there's a lot of reward and gratitude when you look back after a successful training event, mission, or mobilization knowing it couldn't have happened without the Quartermaster Soldier," he added. "Logisticians are usually the first in and the last out in supporting the force and victory. This requires Soldiers who are committed, resourceful and innovative in providing 100 percent Soldier support."

Today's Army National Guard logisticians are part of a long line of Quartermaster Soldiers that stretches back to the earliest days of the Army when Gen. George Washington appointed the first Continental Army quartermaster in 1775.

Today's logisticians are responsible for a huge array of missions ranging from unit supply operations to such fields as food services, petroleum operations, laundry services and grave registration.

For Navratil, a 46-year-old native of Crete, Neb., who now lives in Lincoln with his wife Sanda and their daughter Alaia, 17, and son Seth, 14, the opportunity to learn a trade "on someone else's dime" and working with numbers and accounting are what initially

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YEAR OF THE
Strength from within NCO

Sgt. Maj. Boyd L. Navratil
Hometown: Crete, Neb.
Job Title: State Logistics Sergeant Major
Joint Force Headquarters (Lincoln, Neb.)
Years of Service: 27
Family: Wife: Sanda Navratil; Children: Alaia, Seth

drew his interest when he joined the Nebraska National Guard 27 years ago as a supply specialist.

"Inventory management and accounting for equipment seemed like a natural fit out of high school and one year of college," he said. "When you're 19-years-old and looking to join the military, you look at yourself and make a decision based upon strengths and interest. This career field appealed to me 27 years ago and it still does today."

"I really wasn't mechanically inclined – and I'm still not today – so logistics was one avenue I could go," he said.

Navratil started his AGR career January 1986 in the Nebraska Army National Guard in the state's Class IX warehouse.

Navratil initially worked in a variety of logistical jobs, primarily in the state Property Book Office, before transferring to the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) at Camp Ashland to serve as the Senior Logistics NCO for the National Guard school house in 2000.

While there Navratil and his team of supply specialists struck gold, winning the prestigious U.S. Army Chief of Staff Supply Excellence Award five consecutive years from 2002-06 after taking the runner-up award in 2001.

Navratil also spent a year in Afghanistan when he deployed with the 209th RTI to help establish a training program for the new Afghanistan National Army.

He said the experience he received in Afghanistan was probably one of the most defining periods of his military career.

"True colors of an individual are shown during a mobilization," he said. "The technical and tactical proficiency along with the capability to execute any given task in those conditions separates the weak from the strong."



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Ensuring Soldiers Have What They Need: Sgt. Maj. Boyd Navratil conducts an inventory of unit supplies and equipment at the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb. As the state logistics sergeant major, Navratil is responsible for overseeing logistical support and services for 3,800 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers.

"I was outside my comfort zone, just like most others. I've never been a patient person or a person who got overly excited about transition," he added. "That deployment taught me more about patience and transition than I'd gotten in my entire military career," he said.

Probably more influential, however, were the words of advice Navratil's father, a retired Air Guard sergeant, gave him earlier in his career.

"I give my dad a lot of credit for the advice he gave very early in my military career: 'Do your job. Do it well. Have a great work ethic. Take care of the service member regardless of rank and people will recognize your efforts and potential,'" Navratil said. "I hope that is the case for why and where I'm at today. I've tried to do my job to the best of my abilities no matter what job I was assigned."

That's especially important in the logistics field, said Navratil. "We are a service-oriented branch and if we need to measure our logistician's success, ask our greatest customer... the Soldier."

Customer satisfaction, he

added, is a must.

"We are stewards of all government resources and actively practice supply economy and discipline," he said. "We must maintain 100 percent accountability of all resources at all times."

"Some people have called me anal-(retentive) while fulfilling my duties. In this field it's called attention to detail," he said. "Two critical skills sets to succeeding are attention to detail and organizational skills... if you lack in either you're not going to succeed."

As the new state logistics sergeant major, Navratil is now responsible for developing a state-wide team of logisticians capable of equipping and sustaining the transformation of the operational force.

Navratil said it's a huge challenge, but one he's ready to tackle.

"We need to understand that we're in this together," Navratil said. "In this state, with 40-plus units, our success will be measured by the level of logistical readiness at the unit level."

Navratil said he hopes to accomplish this by working hard to establish new standardizations based primarily on the

Army's Command Supply Discipline Program while helping reinvigorate the Army Chief of Staff Supply Excellence Award for those individuals and units that "like to compete and separate themselves from their peers for extraordinary efforts that serve as examples to all others."

He also is looking to develop more state-wide training designed to not only develop standardization, but also state-wide team building.

In achieving a professional milestone, Navratil said he's amazed at how far he's come. He's also realistic that he did not achieve his present rank on his own.

"I didn't do it myself," he said. "I have a great faith in God. I've (also) been truly blessed having the best logisticians in the Nebraska Army National Guard to mentor, coach, and challenge me in my professional development. They always showed me what right looks like with high regulatory standards."

"The unsung hero making this military milestone is my family – they provided the support, encouragement and purpose."

MILITARY POLICEMAN continued from page 11.

done correctly and get it done within the time constraints."

Fulford said he also believes another responsibility of an NCO is to develop subordinate Soldiers.

"The NCO has to mentor the lower enlisted Soldiers. That within itself is a major job. Lower enlisted (Soldiers) learn by watching the NCOs. Part of the NCO's job is to task out duties and responsibilities in order to get the job done, but you also have to talk to the lower enlisted to let them know whether they did the job correctly or they did the job incorrectly," he said. "You have to guide them, too."

"When you're passing down responsibilities (you're) preparing them for an NCO position, to become a leader,"

Fulford added.

"As an NCO, if you do not task down those responsibilities to lower enlisted, or give them a sense of being, sense of responsibility, a sense that they are worth something, you as an NCO are not doing your job."

The function of the chain of command that the Army uses is one of the components of the military life that Fulford tries to most apply in his civilian career.

"In my civilian job I am a lab technician. I have a team leader and a supervisor. If I have a problem I take it to the lead person and I let the lead person take it to the supervisor," he said.

"I try to instill that in (my fellow

technicians). It's a systematic way that things should run. It's so efficient that it's difficult for me not to bring it over to the civilian world and apply it," he said.

Getting his co-workers to understand why the military chain of command system works well, said Fulford, is often a challenge.

"They are not in the military, so they don't understand a chain of command," he said.

"A lead person is trying their best to take care of their people like an NCO takes care of (Soldiers). When you have something and you jump over the lead person and take it straight to the supervisor, when the supervisor comes to the lead person

and says 'What about this?' that lead person has no clue. I just think it is so unfair that the lead person has no idea what is going on."

Solving problems, he said, is simply part of being a good leader. "That is one of the major jobs of an NCO... putting out fires and making sure that Soldiers have what they need," said Fulford. "One of the biggest parts of my day is making sure that everyone is present, making sure that everyone has everything that they need and taking care of personal issues that they have."

"The most rewarding part of the day is to see a smile on my Soldiers' faces at the end of the drill weekend when it's time to go. It's nice to know that the Soldiers are taken care of."



Photo by Master Sgt. Mike Smith

2009 Awardees: Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham (center) stands at the Air Force Memorial with the other Air Guard Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

BINGHAM

continued from page 1.

was honored in Washington, D.C., during a week-long series of events celebrating the Air National Guard's Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

"There are still days when it doesn't seem like I can grasp the whole concept of being named one of the top senior NCOs in the entire Air National Guard," said Bingham, who was accompanied to a June 11 formal banquet by Maj. Gen. Timothy Kadavy, adjutant general for Nebraska.

According to Kadavy, the entire state can be proud of Bingham.

"The Nebraska National Guard recruits and retains the highest quality individuals to be Airmen and Soldiers in our units," said Kadavy. "The selection of Master Sergeant Bingham as the Airman of the Year (Senior Grade) is validation of the quality of our force."

Bingham is responsible for ensuring that pilots and crewmembers are current in all their required training and flying hours while also managing their flight records.

In winning the national honor, Bingham was first named the top senior non-commissioned officer in the 170th Group before interviewing for the state title, which he also won.

Guard officer receives Standing Bear award

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

A Nebraska Army National Guard officer was honored for his humanitarian work, May 15, at the State Capitol rotunda in Lincoln.

Lt. Col. Tom Brewer was awarded the 2009 Chief Standing Bear Humanitarian Award during an hour-and-a-half ceremony marking the 130th anniversary of the 1879 landmark legal ruling in the case of Chief Standing Bear versus Brig. Gen. George Crook that declared Native Americans "people" under the law.

Brewer, a member of the Lakota Sioux tribe, said he was awestruck to be honored by the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs and the Chief Standing Bear Planning Committee with an award named in honor of the late Ponca chief who did so much for Native Americans.

"When the announcement came out that I was to receive this award, one of my officer counterparts said, 'I don't think it's appropriate that you should get this award,'" Brewer told the assembled crowd. "Chief Standing Bear wasn't known for his great warrior feats, but more for how he represented his people."

Brewer said he struggled with the award for awhile.

"He had a point," said Brewer, a 30-year veteran of the Nebraska Army National Guard who is currently assigned to the National Airborne Operations Center at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb. "I guess I came to terms with receiving this award because a lot of what we do today, and I don't know that everybody realizes that, is not combat in many of the roles that we go into."

"When I arrived in Afghanistan, my job was to build the Afghan National



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Chief Standing Bear Award Winners: Lt. Col. Tom Brewer (center) and Roger Welsch stand next to a bust of Chief Standing Bear, May 15, at the State Capitol Rotunda. Brewer received the 2009 Chief Standing Bear Humanitarian Award from Welsch, the 2008 winner of the award which is named for the Nebraska chief who helped Native Americans gain legal recognition as "people" during a landmark 1879 trial.

Army," said Brewer. "Now understand that the building of that army enabled the people to have the freedom that they needed so that they could vote in elections, so that they could open schools — especially for the women — and it changed their lives."

"So, even though we went there in a role as a Soldier, as warriors — and there were occasions where we fought battles — the reason we were there was to give that nation the opportunity to have the freedoms to do the things that we take for granted here," he said.

Brewer said during his tour in Afghanistan, he soon learned how important the humanitarian role is, adding that it now reminds him of the same actions that Chief Standing Bear took to better the lives of his own people.

"It was the actions of Chief Standing Bear that enabled many Native Americans to have a better life," said Brewer. "It made the world a better place."

"Hopefully, what we're doing in places like Afghanistan and Iraq are making the world a better place," he said.

Military kids honored during April state-wide luncheons

By Amy Reinbold

Family Program Office

On April 23, the State Family Program Office combined Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day with Month of the Military Child and held pizza luncheons at three armories across the state — Scottsbluff, Kearney and Lincoln.

The children were treated to pizza, a t-shirt, a specially labeled candy bar and a certificate of appreciation.

In 1986, Former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger established April as the Month of the Military Child. The Month of the Military Child gives people

inside and outside of the military community an opportunity to honor the youngest members of the military family. The focus of the month-long celebration is to acknowledge the unique challenges military children face daily.

At the Scottsbluff armory three children had the opportunity to accompany their parent to work. One of the participants, Michael Gutherless, commented to his mom, Staff Sgt. Irma Gutherless, after the ceremony: "that was so nice for them to do that for us."

The kids also found out there are 15,000 military kids living in Nebraska, a statistic that seemed to surprise the honored guests.



Photo by Patrick Hynes

Lunch With Dad: Lt. Col. Michael Deger attends the April 23 pizza luncheon in Lincoln, Neb., with his children (from left) Kreyton, Merriek and Korenn.

Taikos echo in Lincoln during Asian Pacific American Month luncheon

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The pounding rhythm of Japanese drums echoed throughout the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb., as around 100 Nebraska Army and Air Guardsmen, civilian employees and representatives from the local community celebrated Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, May 19.

Called a "taiko," which means "great drum" in Japanese, members of Lincoln's Koyko Taiko Drummers demonstrated the instrument's lasting impact on Japanese culture during an hour-long performance, part of the annual celebration hosted by the Nebraska Military Department.

According to Maureen Brase-Houchin, leader of the Koyko Taiko Drummers, the drum was historically used in Japanese shrines and during warfare. Recently, however, a new artform has taken place in which groups of drummers perform together in what is called "kumi daiko," or ensemble drumming.

Performing taiko, said Brase-Houchin, has many other benefits.

"It's fun exercise," she told the assembled crowd after one particular performance that left her out of breath with sweat rolling down her face. "It's making music and making a cultural art."



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Drumming 101: Maureen Brase-Houchin (center) leads a group of volunteers through a drumming lesson during the Nebraska Military Department's Asian Pacific American Heritage Month luncheon, May 19, in Lincoln, Neb.

Brase-Houchin and her group of three students performed a number of songs, many of which had the crowd clapping along. One even had an "ogre" dancing amongst the crowd while the group

pounded out their rhythmic cadence on their barrel-shaped drum.

Six members of the crowd also had a chance to get up onto the stage and learn a song under instruction from

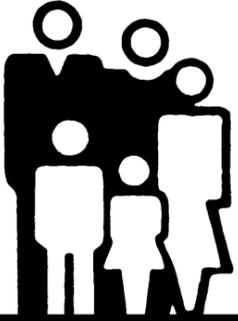


Coordinated Effort: Members of the Koyko Taiko Drummers perform a song on their taikos, which translates to "great drums" in Japanese.

Brase-Houchin.

According to Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, who presented the performers with Nebraska Military Department certificates of appreciation after their performance, luncheons like the Asian Pacific American Month commemoration are an important part of being able to represent all Americans.

"We're a nation of many different cultures," he said. "The more we understand each other, the better we'll be able to work together."



Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



Shoppers stock up during case lot sale

By Don Miller

Region 5 Family Assistance Center

Like to save 50-60-70 percent and more on groceries?

That's exactly the type of savings shoppers found at the North Platte armory, April 24-25 during a case lot sale sponsored by the F. E. Warren Air Base Commissary.

The sale was bigger and better than expected; the weather was beautiful and 426 patrons turned out to capture what many called "fantastic" buys.

The support from the Family Program Office and the Family Assistance Center personnel, as well as many vendor representatives, helped make the sale a huge success.

Some examples and amount of items sold:

Meat department:

800 pounds of 93 percent lean ground beef (sold out), 500 pounds of bone in rib steaks (sold out), 600 pounds of whole boneless pork loins (sold out), five cases of StoneyFork Ribeye steaks (sold out), 28 cases of Tyson Fresh Chicken (sold out).

Produce department:

Two bins of five-pound potatoes, one bin of three-pound onions, two bins of four-pound oranges, one bin of five-pound apples, seven cases of bag grapefruit, five cases of three-pound bag lemons, 14 cases of six-pack tomatoes, nine cases of grape tomatoes, 15 cases of spotlight peppers.

Overall the grocery department sold one and two-third semi-truck loads of products.

The event was advertised in the local paper, fliers and posters, on the local TV station and through e-mail throughout the Nebraska National Guard.

KNOP, the local television station in North Platte, interviewed Kathy Beatty, store director on April 24 and then televised the story on the 10 p.m. news. It



Courtesy Photo

Temporary Commissary: Patrons waded through aisles of merchandise while shopping at a commissary case lot sale held April 24-25 at the North Platte armory. The sale was put on by the F.E. Warren Air Force Base Commissary.

brought even more people on Saturday.

Everyone who participated in the sale considered it very successful. Customer feedback was outstanding, as noted in the

on-site surveys, with the only major "complaint" was "why didn't we buy more."

Watch for the next one... it may be coming to a town near you.

Family Program Office honors eight volunteers in April

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska National Guard honored eight volunteers for their support during the past year, April 27, at the "Spirit of 1776" armory in Lincoln.

According to Sgt. Michelle Degarmo of the State Family Program Office in Lincoln, the recognition was held as part of April's annual Volunteer Recognition Month.

"Each of the volunteers have worked a minimum of four to five hours a week volunteering for the prescription program that services (Active Guard and Reserve employees) and retirees of all services," said Degarmo. "The volunteers have become subject matter experts in the portion of the program that they run and have cross-trained to backfill each other in absences."

"The volunteers truly run this program and have a true love of what they are doing," she added. "Every day they show up, they are eager and willing to do their part with a smile. The volunteers have taken 'Help them help themselves' above and beyond."

Recognized during the event were:

- Jerry Hepp, four years service;
- Larry Hennings, seven years service;
- Mary Brehm, seven years service;
- Al Neemann, two years service;
- Linda Stoehr, three years service;



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Thanking the Volunteers: Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kathy Molinaro and Sgt. Michelle DeGarmo pose with (from left) Jerry Hepp, Larry Hennings, Mary Brehm, Richard Norris and Jim Kirk during the 2009 Annual Volunteer Awards Ceremony held April 27 at the "Spirit of 1776" armory in Lincoln. Not pictured are Al Neemann, Linda Stoehr and Bill Fagerberg, who were unable to attend the ceremony.

- Richard Norris, two years service;
- Jim Kirk, five years service;
- Bill Fagerberg, three years service.

Along with helping out with the Prescription Program, Degarmo said the volunteers have also lent critical support to the State Family Program Office. For example, she said, the volunteers have helped the staff put binders together, build packets and prepare many of the

office's events while also assisting in copying and labeling.

"They also come to our events and volunteer their time and energy in helping assist with our many events in various ways," Degarmo said. "We could not afford the budget that we would have to pay staff members to do what they do so willingly (do when they) step up and donate their time and love to help us."

Volunteer Spotlight:

Richard Norris
Lincoln, Neb.

My name is Richard Norris, a retiree from the Naval Reserve. I am married and have five daughters, 10 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

The first experience I had with the military was in 1943 when a troop convoy (carrying one of my five uncles who all served in World War II) passed through our small town in Missouri. As we stood along the side of the road, the troops on the trucks tossed oranges to all of us kids. What a treat.

Fast forward to October 1953, my junior year of high school, when I became a seaman recruit in the Naval Reserve. My initial enlistment was a two-by-eight. A two-by-eight meant starting out in a reserve unit and, when your draft number was called, you served two years active duty and finished out in the Reserve.



Norris

After the eight-year enlistment was finished, I reenlisted and finally retired as a petty officer first class with 28 years of service.

In my civilian life, I was very active in the credit union movement and served in many volunteer activities. In our church, I volunteer as a Eucharistic Minister so I can take communion to the shut-ins on Sundays (some of whom have not had a visitor since the previous Sunday.)

In 2007, I became aware of the Retiree Prescription Program coordinated by the Nebraska National Guard Family Program Office with the assistance of a group of very dedicated and capable volunteers. I volunteered to help with the program and it was not long before the office found something for me to do.

The duties of the prescription program allow me time to help various staff members of the Family Program Office as they assist families and Soldiers of the Nebraska National Guard.

Someone once said you receive more than you give when you volunteer. To prove a point, I will share with you a recent family incident.

One of my daughters was scheduled for surgery on the day of my volunteer duty. When I told my volunteer coordinator that I would not be available that day, she said: "No problem." A couple of days later my wife and I received a fantastic card from the Family Program Office staff. Each person in the office expressed their thoughts, prayers and support. Wow. What an uplift — just when it was needed.

If you volunteer and say "yes" when asked to help, you will never regret it.

In today's world, character counts more than ever

When each of us entered into our nation's military, we took an oath of enlistment or an oath of office. During that oath, we swore allegiance to our constitution, to defend it against all enemies and to follow the orders of those appointed to lead us.

To me this is a solemn and sacred commitment we make to the people of our nation. They place a tremendous amount of trust and confidence in each and every one of us to defend them and represent them around the world.

Our uniforms have either "U.S. Army" or "U.S. Air Force" patches and the American Flag on our shoulder to show our service, national pride and the respect we have in those who have served before us.

In poll after poll the American people continue to name our military as the most trusted of our national institutions. This trust and confidence are placed in us because of our continued display of high moral character and of our military values.

So ultimately our individual character counts, regardless of our rank, duty or position with in our service.

We are counted on to do what is right, to represent our nation with the highest of moral courage and character. Each and every time we put on our uniform and report for duty, the citizens of our nation and those of the rest of the world are watching us. This is a tremendous responsibility and burden that we bear as American service men and women.

It is important to our national security that we live up to this responsibility.

I think all of us remember the many photos and stories surrounding Abu Ghraib and the murders by a few Soldiers in Iraqi city of Mahmoudiya. These stories made world news and had a tremendous impact on the perception of our efforts in Iraq.

On Military Service

By Maj. Gen. Timothy Kadavy
Nebraska Adjutant General

National and world public opinion condemned the American military and questioned our

motives and actions in Iraq. It most certainly served as a call for reprisals against us by the Iraqi and Arab communities. It only takes one instance to stain the character of us all. Right or wrong we are at times measured by the action of a few.

In today's world of Internet and immediate reports from anywhere around the globe, there is no margin for error or time to relax your guard...we are always out front representing our nation. No one wants to be on the front page or the subject of a global incident, but it happens more than we would all like.

The time of the 'strategic private' is here to stay.

Each and every one of us needs to live by our military values in and out of

the uniform. We need to hold each other accountable for our actions.

Whether a unit leader or a subordinate, this is about all of our military and how we look, act and the decisions we make... they are critical to the success or failure of our mission. We must all understand we are part of the team and have a key role in the nation's and world's perception of our service.

I don't believe anyone enters the military thinking what can I do to disgrace our military or nation, but unfortunately it happens all the time. So we must all hold ourselves to the highest of moral and military values.

It is not always easy. No one ever said being a Soldier or Airman was going to be easy; rather it is just the opposite. The standards are high for good reason, not living up to them can place our nation at tremendous risk.

So character counts; remember who and why you serve, and the importance of your action.

Combat vets support groups form in eastern, central Nebraska

Combat veteran support groups have begun meeting in a number of locations across eastern and central Nebraska.

The OIF/OEF support groups are designed to be a fellowship group oriented toward the resolution of combat stress and readjustment issues from trauma experience on active duty.

The groups also assist members in coping with the impact of their combat experiences while understanding how the war currently affects their lives while providing them an opportunity to interact with, support and learn from one another.

The goal is to help individuals cope more effectively with wide range of issues including: family and relationship discord, depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, impulse control, decision-making, styles of communications and self-medication.

The discussion of issues, situations and experiences are held strictly confidential.

The following support groups are hosted by the Lincoln and Omaha Vet Center. For more information contact the appropriate Vet Center. (L) Lincoln - (402) 476-9736, (O) Omaha - (402) 346-6735

♦**Beatrice** (L) - First and third Tuesday of each month, 6:30 p.m. at Adams Hall on Southeast Community College;

♦**Geneva** (L) - First and third Thursday of each month, 7 p.m. at city library;

♦**Hastings** (L) - Second and fourth Tuesday of each month, 6 p.m. at Crossroads Mission (702 West 14th Street);

♦**Holdrege** (L) - Second and fourth Thursday of each month, 7:30 p.m., TierOne (4th and Burlington);

♦**Kearney** (L) - Second and fourth Wednesday of each month, 7 p.m. at

Central Community College;
♦**Lincoln** (L) - Anger Group, second and fourth Tuesday of each month, 6 p.m. at Lincoln Vet Center (3119 "O" St);

♦**Nebraska City** (O) - Every Thursday evening, 6 p.m., Ambassador Care Center (1800 14th Avenue);

♦**Omaha** (O) - Every Sunday, 2 p.m., Vet Center (2428 Cuming Street.)

Omaha, Lincoln Vet Centers hosting Spouses, Significant Other Support Groups

Living with someone who has gone to war?

Spouses and Significant Other groups are forming in Lincoln, Omaha and Nebraska City.

The focus of the support group will be on group dynamics, which is based upon healthy communication skills. The content and agenda will evolve from the concerns of the individuals in the group.

The goals are to enjoy the supportive environment and to transfer the healthy communication skills into other avenues of life.

♦**Lincoln** (L) - First and third Wednesday of each month, 6 p.m., Lincoln Vet Center (3119 "O" Street);

♦**Nebraska City** (O) - First and third Thursday of each month, 6 p.m., Ambassador Care Center (1800 14th Avenue);

♦**Omaha** (O) - First and third Sunday of each month, 2 p.m., Omaha Vet Center (2428 Cuming Street.)

For more information contact the appropriate Vet Center. (L) Lincoln - (402) 476-9736, (O) Omaha - (402) 346-6735.

Interested in having a local support group? Please contact Patricia Miller at 1-800-228-6838 or (402) 476-9736.

VA Update

By Bonnie Bessler
Transition Assistance Advisor



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

New Sign: Warrant Officer Class 09-001's sign now stands at Camp Ashland, Neb.

New class committed to excellence

Nebraska's second Warrant Officer Candidate Class 09-001 is preparing for the fifth weekend of training at Camp Ashland.

Nine candidates are in the current class and for the first time three candidates will attend Initial Entry Rotary Wing (IERW) at Fort Rucker, Ala., upon completion of WOCS.

Making a class sign is a tradition established long ago by the Warrant Officer Candidate School.

The sign made by the current class is on display outside the Warrant Officer classroom. The current sign's significance is described by the candidates.

The red background represents the class color. Committed to Excellence is the Class Motto. The Eagle Rising is the symbol of the Warrant Officer Corps.

The brown border represents the Warrant Officer color.

The TAC officers' names, Chief Warrant Officer 4 John Regan, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Teresa Domeier and Chief

Warrant Officer 2 Todd Wagner represent the instructors that teach the candidates the way to becoming a warrant officer.

The names of the nine warrant officer candidates and their branch insignia they are pursuing. The sign includes the past and the current warrant officer rank. The creativity of the sign is very unique and it represents the ingenuity of our second WOC Class.

Warrant Officer Candidates, C. Monismith, Robinson McDonald, Shottenkirk, Nun, Bruce, Robinson, Bayne, Schaaf, and Dishman are "Committed to Excellence."

Chief's Business

By Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steve Weber
Nebraska Army National Guard
Command Chief Warrant Officer

Simple safety steps can make homes smaller targets during vacation season

Summer is here and many people are looking forward to a vacation as a way to relax and get away from the stressors of a busy career.

One must not relax too early and forget to make sure homes and property are protected against thieves before leaving for a vacation destination, however.

Thieves will look for indicators of a home owner and family being away for a vacation.

Remember the old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

The following are simple precautions to take before leaving for the lake, mountains or elsewhere:

Discourage The Thief: Since burglars prefer to break into houses that look unoccupied, lower your home's appeal by making it look like you're there. Use

timers on lights, radios and televisions. Ask neighbors to put trash cans out on trash day. Leave drapes and shades open.

Leave a car parked in the driveway, or ask a neighbor to park there.

Do not let mail or newspapers pile up; arrange for mail and newspaper delivery to stop, or ask a friend to help. Mow lawn before leaving.

Prevent Easy Access: Make your home a more difficult target by increasing the time it takes a burglar to enter. Lock all doors and windows, and secure the garage door. Install deadbolt locks for added security.

Trim trees and hedges; this gives bur-

Protecting Yourself

By Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder
Nebraska Air National Guard
Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection Office

glars fewer hiding places. Replace burned-out yard lights and consider upgrading with built-in motion detector lights.

Manage The Risk: Make sure neighbors know you are going on vacation and ask them to watch your house. Tell them how long you will be gone and the names or descriptions of anyone that may need access to your house.

Leave a house key and a number where you can be reached with a trusted individual.

For extended vacations consider a house sitter and notify police of when you will be away.

Detect An Intruder: Consider in-

stalling a home security system. Security systems decrease the likelihood a home will be burglarized. Because crime statistics show that most security systems are turned off in those homes that are burglarized, home-owners need to activate their systems when no one is home, but especially when on vacation.

Finally, make sure that anyone with access to the home knows how to properly operate the system.

These relatively simple steps can help one enjoy your vacation by letting you not worry about the home you left behind.

For more information, contact: Capt: David Cooper, Nebraska Army National Guard antiterrorism officer, (402) 309-7406; Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder, Nebraska Air National Guard antiterrorism officer, (402) 309-1565.

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Col. Judd H. Lyons
Col. Mark A. Stockstell
Maj. Michael M. Akins
Maj. Brian L. Petersen
Capt. Timothy Cass
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Daniel N. Hill
Sgt. Maj. Boyd L. Navratil
Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey J. Brehm
Sgt. 1st Class Richard H. Lassek
Sgt. 1st Class Paul W. Price

Army Commendation Medal

Lt. Col. Martin R. Apprich
Lt. Col. Douglas C. Ladd

Maj. Craig A. Anderson
Maj. Darin E. Huss
Maj. Jeffrey C. Searcey
Capt. Bradley J. Bohnert
Capt. Theodore E. Hanger
Capt. Jeremiah J. Szymskie
1st Lt. Clinton F. Brady
1st Lt. Matthew C. Misfeldt
1st Sgt. Clark D. Bednar
Sgt. 1st Class Robert L. Sons
Staff Sgt. Bradley E. Johnson
Sgt. Matthew J. Franklin
Sgt. Cody A. Trindle
Sgt. Cherie Wilford
Spc. Steven M. Kane
Spc. Matthew R. Lamb

Spc. Ronee L. Smith

Army Achievement Medal

Capt. Russell L. Stewart
1st Lt. Guinio Volpone
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Douglas J. Luethke
Sgt. 1st Class Gerald D. Bouska
Sgt. 1st Class Monte R. Davison
Sgt. 1st Class Steven R. Gavre
Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy J. Preister
Staff Sgt. Heath C. Blackwell
Staff Sgt. David L. Dooley
Staff Sgt. Kelli J. Hatzenbuehler
Staff Sgt. Hunter C. Isley
Staff Sgt. William D. Jacobsen
Staff Sgt. Michael G. Uhing

Staff Sgt. Penny F. Winterburn
Sgt. Octavio Baeza
Sgt. Joseph D. Busing
Sgt. James M. Dubbs
Sgt. Tyson A. Gould
Sgt. Amanda L. Hillgren
Sgt. Scott A. Kennece
Sgt. Jenee E. Montgomery
Sgt. Michael L. Noyes
Sgt. Billy G. Ward
Spc. Justin J. Eickmeier
Spc. Andrew J. Gaghagen
Spc. Vanessa D. Hunter
Spc. Shawn N. Schomer
Spc. Shawn M. Sullivan
Pfc. Nathaniel J. Emons

Pvt. Christopher M. Breisch

Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal

1st Sgt. Michael D. Lageaux

Nebraska National Guard Legion of Merit

Sgt. Maj. David A. Rickers
1st Sgt. Gary L. Miller
Sgt. 1st Class John P. Samson

Nebraska National Guard Commendation Medal

Sgt. Ashley R. Barbour
Spc. Waylon M. Lippold
Pfc. Michelle K. Lindgren

Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal

Staff Sgt. Travis D. Arner
Staff Sgt. Curtis K. Cattau
Sgt. Adam A. Fritzler
Sgt. Adam J. Hake
Sgt. Cody A. Trindle
Spc. Jonathan W. Burnham
Spc. Jonathan F. Haack
Spc. Ryan D. John
Spc. Cody S. Carlson
Spc. Anthony W. Noyes
Pfc. Rodney M. Aulner
Pfc. Mathieu K. Ethington

Nebraska National Guard Recruiting Achievement Medal

Lt. Col. Michael D. Deger

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard Colonel

Richard H. Dahlman
Michael L. Deger

Chief Warrant Officer Three

Todd C. Sumovich

Chief Warrant Officer Two

Joseph R. Amen
Michael J. Flynn
Jeffrey J. Kuklis

Warrant Officer One

Corey L. Baker
Michael J. Deforge

Sergeant First Class

Sean C. Bowden
Robert L. Combs
Robyn I. Crow
Nickolas J. Effle
Michael A. Hagen
Jennifer A. Lühr
Jonathan C. Panipinto
Jason E. Roberts
Jason P. Sharp
Michael W. Victor
Gregory L. Wolff

Staff Sergeant

Timothy J. Brewer
Gary M. Broski

Jeffrey S. Drager
Brian M. Flavin
Darrin D. Fulford
Brandon R. Gladwin
Robert H. Hague
Brian C. Kennicutt
Shane A. Mapes
Dean P. Martin
Jeffrey L. Meyers
Dell M. Schultheiss
Peter J. Smith
Casey N. Sorensen

Sergeant

Lauren M. Bunsen
Jason B. Douglas
Melissa L. Ewing
Shane D. Harsh
Luke A. Heritage
Jason C. Jensen
Evan R. Kirkpatrick
Jacob A. Kohlman
Lindsay M. Loftus
Robert M. Mahood
Jonathan J. Musilek
Jess A. Myers
Brian M. Nystrom
Jesse R. Olson
Kyann M. Rasmussen
Michael A. Sobotka
Jason D. Soester
Jeffrey J. Wagner
Elisabeth N. Weyers

Kalie K. Wilson

Specialist

Brock A. Ackerman
Lacey M. Acosta
Joshua C. Anderson
Matthew J. Boelter
Mitchell R. Boesch
Brandt O. Bottolfson
Ricky A. Brandenburg
Trevor M. Bugh
Matthew R. Buhlmann
Alberto Camarillo
Luis U. Cardona
Trenton B. Dohmen
Jacoby M. Dosch
Caroline C. Droscher
Sean D. Fisher
Cory B. Gotch
James M. Haggerty Jr.
Michael A. Hansen
Joseph P. Hatzenbuehler
Adam T. Hazen
Nicholas E. Hoffmann
Jennifer M. Hopkins
Tamara R. Johnston
Joshua A. Kambell
Owen P. Karre
Kimberly A. Lenczowski
Andrea N. Lewandowski
Frederick P. Matulka II
Caleb T.J. McCleod
Ashley E. Mohar

Riley J. Ohde
Chad M. Oswald
Jessica E. Parker
Erik L. Payne
Jonathan L. Robinett
Brandon W. Rudloff
Cory W. Seamann
Matthew D. Salomons
Gary L. Schellhorn
Robert E. Sherard Jr.
Katrina L. Taylor
Allan S. Tison
Tyler M. Villwok
Alex J. Williams

Private First Class

Tiffany J. Holsten
Cody B. Lubeck
David I. Matson
Jacob A. McCormack
Amber J. Nielsen

Private Two

Michaela R. Fitzgibbon
Amy N. Glenn
Joseph C. Keeton
Jessica A. Marlow

Air National Guard Major

Ben West

Captain

Andrew Thimgan
Matt Vancleave

Senior Master Sergeant

Jeffrey A. Claypool

Master Sergeant

Frederick Oltrogge
David B. Schmidt

Technical Sergeant

Amber R. Albano
Gerald A. Eipperle Jr.
Bartholomew Frey
Jennifer A. Gubbels
David A. Lehman Jr.
Scott M. Sokolik

Staff Sergeant

Brandie Iovino
Teresa King
Andrew C. O'Grady
Jesse C. Schmidt

Senior Airman

Abby L. Ford
Travis D. Carlson
Matthew J. Dieckhoff
Marisa L. Moreno
Paul R. Rutten

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Capt. Timothy R. Cass
Command Sgt. Maj. Robert J. Bergman
1st Sgt. Gary L. Miller
Master Sgt. Kenneth V. Bader Jr.
Sgt. 1st Class Harley F. Fass
Sgt. 1st Class Sylvester Grandberry
Sgt. 1st Class Richard H. Lassek
Sgt. 1st Class Paul W. Price
Sgt. 1st Class Bryan R. Traub
Staff Sgt. Jeffery E. Davis

Air National Guard

Col. Donald L. Schense
Col. George R. Skuodas
Chief Master Sgt. Dwight A. Morehead
Chief Master Sgt. Kenneth J. Nauert Jr.
Master Sgt. Donald C. Birkentall
Master Sgt. Bryan E. Hart
Master Sgt. Steven K. Urkoski
Tech. Sgt. Marilyn S. Ryan

Luis A. Zendejagarcia
Kevin B. Zuver

Airman First Class

Zachary C. Bennett
Alina M. Busboom

Shorttakes

Retiring Guard general receives state promotion

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A retiring Nebraska Army National Guard general was wished well, June 6, when approximately 75 family members, friends and fellow Army and Air Guardsmen gathered at Camp Ashland's Memorial Hall to honor Brig. Gen. William F. Kuehn.

Kuehn, the current assistant adjutant general, Army, is retiring from the Nebraska Army National Guard in July, completing a career that has spanned more than 39 years.

"A great Soldier. A great Nebraskan," said Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, adjutant general for Nebraska, shortly after he presented Kuehn with a number of awards and certificates including the Legion of Merit.

Kadavy also promoted Kuehn to the rank of major general (Nebraska.)

"When you look at his resume and look at his bio, he's just about done it all," Kadavy said. "I think the thing that really sticks out about General Kuehn is that he truly made a difference."

That, Kadavy added, could be most seen in the Nebraska Army National Guard's noncommissioned and commissioned officer ranks that are filled with people who had their careers shaped by Kuehn through his work at Camp Ashland's 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute.)

Kuehn was born on July 24, 1949, in Lincoln, Neb. A 1967 graduate of Lincoln High School and a 1972 graduate of Nebraska Wesleyan University where he received a bachelor of Arts degree in Education, he graduated from federal Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga., in 1974.

During the course of his career, Kuehn served as a rifle platoon and Redeye section leader, an aide to the commander of the 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), and as a tactical officer at the Nebraska National Guard Military Academy. He also served as a finance and



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Honors: Brig. Gen. William Kuehn, assistant adjutant general, Army, receives the Legion of Merit from Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy, adjutant general for Nebraska, June 6 at Camp Ashland, Neb.

accounting officer, director of information management, detachment commander and commander of the 209th RTI.

Prior to becoming the assistant adjutant general, Army, June 2004, he served as the Nebraska Army National Guard chief of staff and then as the strategic plans officer.

Kuehn, who has already been inducted into the Federal OCS Hall of Fame, wasn't the only Kuehn honored in June. His wife Patricia also received a certificate of appreciation from Kadavy as well as a bouquet of flowers from the Joint Force Headquarters.

Kuehn said he's amazed how much the Guard has changed over the course of his career. "This really is a different Guard than when I got in 39 years ago," he said, adding that Guardsmen and active duty Army and Air Force service members now routinely work side-by-side in a wide array of missions. "That takes a lot of dedication by both Soldiers and Airmen alike."

He added that he's been honored to have the chance to serve for so many years amongst so many friends.

"It really has been an honor serving the nation and state and serving alongside you."

Nebraska Air Guard tanker crew honored during Kyrgyz deployment

By SMS Leighton Michaelson
170th Group

A Nebraska Air National Guard air crew recently returned from a deployment to Manas Air Base, Kyrgyzstan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom with major honors.

The KC-135R crew, which consisted of Lt. Col. James Dalton (aircraft commander), 1st Lt. Caleb Ramsey (co-pilot)

and Senior Master Sgt. Leighton Michaelson (boom operator), was named the 22nd Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron (EARS) Aircrew of the Month for their exceptional performance.

Additionally, Michaelson was named the 376th Expeditionary Operations Group Senior NCO of the month.

Manas Air Base, which was activated in 2001 in response to the terror attacks of September 11, supports

Operation Enduring Freedom.

Located just north of Afghanistan, the country of Kyrgyzstan is strategically positioned in the region. The airfield, which also serves as an international airport, plays a critical role in the continuing military operations in Afghanistan and in ensuring stability for the Central Asia region.

"This deployment was a great opportunity to gain invaluable experience flying in the (Area of Responsibility)," said Dalton. "Air National Guard aircrews do not frequently get that chance due to the way (Air Expeditionary Force) cycles work."

The Nebraska Air National Guard is not new to the mission at Manas. Lt. Col. Paul Foy represented the Nebraska Air National Guard as the 22nd EARS director of Operations during the fall of 2008. This

time-period represented the first time that the leadership positions in the 22nd Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron were filled by Air National Guard personnel.

Under Foy's leadership, many 22nd EARS single-day refueling records were set including total offload in a 24-hour period — over 1 million pounds (150,000 gallons) of aviation fuel.

"The current 22nd EARS commander, Lt. Col. Patrick J. Rhatigan, agrees. "The

22nd EARS is made up of active duty, reserve and ANG crews. There is no distinction between them. They are all here to fuel the fight," he said.

It was Rhatigan who honored the Nebraska Air National Guard Crew with the Aircrew of the Month award. He complemented the crew for "going the extra-mile to support the deployed personnel from Fairchild, excelling during the high ops

tempo at Manas and for their desire to fuel the fight against Global Terror."

Earning the award was truly a unified effort — even among the crewmembers.

Dalton and Ramsey are from the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, 155th Air Refueling Wing, at the National Guard air base in Lincoln. Michaelson is the senior enlisted advisor for the 170th Group at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha.

He flies as a boom operator, however, with the air refueling squadron in Lincoln.

"I truly have the greatest job of all time, getting to work within these two units and with all of the fantastic people of the Nebraska ANG," Michaelson said. "Although being a boom operator at Offutt is interesting, I get some funny looks when people see a boom wearing an ACC (Air Combat Command) patch."



Courtesy Photo

Top Crew: (From left) Senior Master Sgt. Leighton Michaelson, Lt. Col. James Dalton and 1st Lt. Caleb Ramsey receive the 22nd Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron Aircrew of the Month award from Lt. Col. Patrick Rhatigan while operating out of Manas Air Base, Kyrgyzstan.

Street Talk

"In the April Prairie Soldier, Major General Tim Kadavy wrote about the need for Nebraska National Guardsmen to take responsibility for their own individual readiness. What are you doing to make sure you're ready to mobilize?"

Total Quality Boot Initiative

In my last Prairie Soldier column, I wrote about my vision for improved quality and readiness of our force in the Nebraska National Guard.

The Adjutant General
Major General
Timothy J. Kadavy



our recruiting and retention team has placed the Nebraska National Guard in a position to improve readiness and quality to levels never before acquired within

End Strength remains strong; both the Army and Air are over 100 percent required strength and we have waiting lists for enlistment in both.

We will continue to work hard to recruit and retain the very best to serve next to you in our Nebraska National Guard.

We are going to work hard to improve the quality and readiness of our force.

To that end you will see a renewed effort on basic Soldier and Airman readiness.

The first step, as strange as it might sound, is to enforce the standards, rules and regula-

tions as they apply to Soldier and Airman readiness and our ability to retain them. We will all be held accountable for physical fitness, height/weight and annual urinalysis results. We will begin working with all respective chain of commands to begin remedial actions or, if required, discharge.

We want to retain and enlist all eligible top quality Soldiers and Airmen.

This is a start, with more to come to help commanders, leaders and subordinates reach our quality and readiness goals.

The tremendous effort of

our history.

I ask for all us to stop and determine "am I the Soldier or Airman I need to be to meet our national and state missions?" If not then put together a plan to get yourself there. If you need assistance, contact your leadership.

Now is the time to take the next step to improve the quality and capability of our Army and Air National Guard.

Let us work together for our state, nation and the Soldier/Airman next to you in formation whose life may rely on your ability to get the mission done.

French to honor fallen Nebraska Guard officer during July ceremony

Sixty-five years ago next month, Lt. Col. Alfred Thomsen, Omaha, was mortally wounded when an artillery shell landed near his battalion command post just days after his organization helped capture

a key hill in the fight to liberate the critical Norman city of St. Lo, France.

Yet, to all but a few, the death of this Nebraska National Guard battalion commander has faded from memory.

Across the Atlantic, however, Thomsen's memory will soon live on when the people of Normandy memorialize the Omaha native's ultimate sacrifice next month with a plaque they'll unveil in honor of the fallen battalion commander, part of the community's commemoration of its liberation from the Germans in July 1944.

The battle for St. Lo, France, was the first combat for the 134th Infantry, which originated in the Nebraska National Guard. By the time the regiment arrived on Omaha Beach in July 1944, almost exactly a month after D-Day, the Nebraska Soldiers had trained for years to prepare for the combat that waited.

Nothing, however, could adequately prepare the Soldiers for horrors of warfare, said the late Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Francis Greenleaf, former National Guard Bureau chief from Hastings, Neb., in May 1994.

"As soon as we got onto the beach, we saw bodies of dead G.I.s piled up like cordwood," said Greenleaf, a platoon leader with the 134th Infantry during the battle of St. Lo.

"Let me tell you, things started getting real pretty fast."

The men of the 134th Infantry moved into the frontlines in mid-July 1944, relieving members of the 115th Infantry Regt., 29th Inf. Div., who had been fighting through the confusing, claustrophobic maze of Normandy's hedgerows since landing in France on D-Day.

After a month of battle, Greenleaf said he believed the 29th Div. Soldiers from Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia were simply worn out after multiple attempts to take St. Lo, one of the 29th Div.'s D-Day objectives, at a cost of more than 1,000 casualties.

"The 29th had been in continu-

ous combat for over a month. The truth of the matter was, they were just beat to hell by the Germans," Greenleaf once told retired Capt. Douglas Hartman, a Nebraska Army Guard historian who writing Nebraska's Militia: This History of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard at the time.

The 134th's first major objective of World War II was to take Hill 122, which sat on high ground leading into St. Lo. Heavily defended, Hill 122 had allowed the Germans to stop each Allied offensive thrust up to that point.

On July 15, 1944, the 134th infantrymen rolled into battle behind a rolling artillery barrage designed by Col. Butler Miltonberger, regimental commander. By noon, 1st and 2nd Battalions had reached a point that allowed Miltonberger to release the 3rd Battalion, Thomsen's battalion, to exploit an opening in the lines.

By early evening 134th Soldiers reached the base of Hill 122 and then continued onto the crest, encountering brutal fighting. By the time dawn broke on July 16, the Nebraskans had secured the hill.

By then the 134th Infantry had already suffered 792 casualties.

The next day the 134th Inf. Regt., part of the 35th Infantry Division, continued to fight while clearing out the southern approach to the hill. Despite German minefields the 134th sent a number of patrols into St. Lo during the night of July 17-18, including one under of Greenleaf.

On the morning of July 18, members of the 134th Inf. Regt. attacked again, this time routing the Germans, who quickly fell backward through St. Lo with the Nebraska infantrymen nipping at their heels.

At this point, the story becomes much more controversial.

According to Hartman's research, Miltonberger received an order to hold in place. Instead, 29th Div. Soldiers, who were also fighting their way into St. Lo, were to given the honor of liberating the city.

So, at 6 p.m. that evening, a procession of 29th Infantry Div. Soldiers and press corps members rolled into St. Lo and formally proclaimed it "liberated."

For its part, the 134th Inf. Regt. had sustained over 900 killed and wounded over the course of just four days of combat.

Needless to say, years have not made the subsequent argument of "who liberated St. Lo?" any less controversial. Greenleaf tried his best to take some of the heat out of the argument, saying that because the battle was actually a combined arms fight, multiple divisions could rightfully claim their role in the liberation.

Still, countless 134th Infantry veterans went to their graves convinced they'd not received the honor they had earned.

The citizens of St. Lo haven't been silent in the debate, either. In 1999, the city rededicated a museum in honor of both the 29th Div. and the 134th Inf. Regt. in a church on the outskirts of town. Next month's dedication, during which the 35th Infantry Division will also be honored, is undoubtedly the next, and hopefully final, chapter of this long debate.

Thomsen died on July 30, 1944, just as Operation Cobra, an offensive that allowed the Allies to breakout of the hedgerows, was just kicking off.

Although memory of Thomsen's sacrifice has dimmed, a dedicated group of 134th Inf. Regt. descendants, many of whom lost fathers in the war, fought long and hard to ensure his memory and that of the regiment didn't disappear completely. Next month they will see that dream come true.

Unfortunately, few if any 134th Infantry Regiment veterans will be able to attend the July 17-18 ceremony in Normandy when Thomsen and the regiment receive their long overdue honors.

Yet, even though they won't be there in the flesh, it's not hard to imagine those proud, unbowed veterans standing there in spirit, honoring what their regiment did in one of the climactic battles of the 20th Century and most memorable chapters of Nebraska National Guard history.

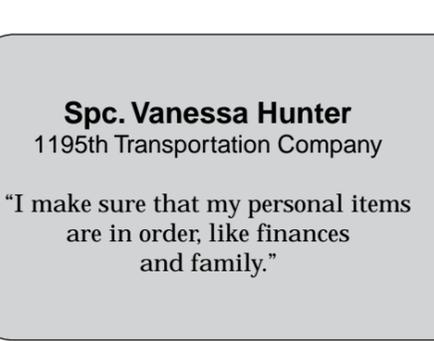
Hopefully it will allow them to rest just a little easier.

My Turn
Editor, Prairie Soldier
Kevin J. Hynes



Airman 1st Class Eva Dean
155th Civil Engineering Squadron

"I make sure I always have someone lined up to take care of any issues that may come up when I'm deployed."



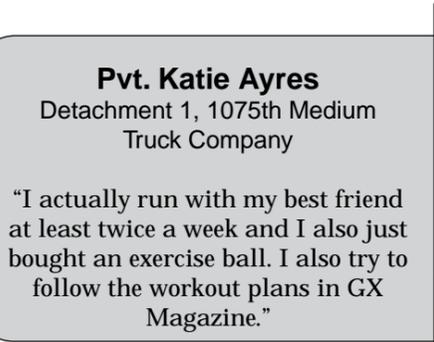
Spc. Vanessa Hunter
1195th Transportation Company

"I make sure that my personal items are in order, like finances and family."



Tech. Sgt. Sarah Bredthauer
155th Civil Engineering Squadron

"I make sure I include my family in the whole deployment process and explain it so they understand what's happening."



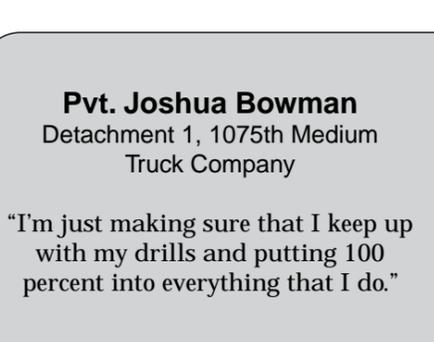
Pvt. Katie Ayres
Detachment 1, 1075th Medium Truck Company

"I actually run with my best friend at least twice a week and I also just bought an exercise ball. I also try to follow the workout plans in GX Magazine."



Pfc. Ethan Koinzan
1195th Transportation Company

"I prepare by training to do my job the best I can."



Pvt. Joshua Bowman
Detachment 1, 1075th Medium Truck Company

"I'm just making sure that I keep up with my drills and putting 100 percent into everything that I do."



Texas, Kentucky runners take top spots in Lincoln

■Oregon Guard wins team title during National Guard Marathon

By Capt. Andrew Nelson
Staff Writer

Captain Scott Proctor knew he was being watched. And that's what kept him running.

Every time he passed a water station manned by the troops of the Nebraska National Guard, every time he saw one of those Soldiers clapping and cheering for him during the marathon, he knew he had to set an example.

"I just like to exemplify the importance of fitness in the Guard and the Army as a whole," said Proctor, 44, of the Washington Army National Guard, after the race.

163 Soldiers and Airmen from around the United States participated in the Lincoln/National Guard Marathon on May 3. The race included 43 teams made up of Army and Air National Guard members from 42 states and one territory.

1st Lt. Nathan Flores of the Texas Army National Guard was the top male runner at 2:39:22. 1st Lt. Varinka Barbini of the Kentucky Army National Guard led the military women at 3:18:07.

According to Texas' Flores, who placed fourth overall in the race, the discipline involved in marathon training is the same discipline required to be a good Soldier.

"You just do the little things right and that's how you become a great distance runner," said Flores, who lives in Austin, Texas. And physical deficiencies someone might think of as obstacles really aren't, he said.

"If you want to be good at something, you want to do it a



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Lee Straube

Final Miles: 1st Lt. Nathan Flores of the Texas Army National Guard, pushes himself up a hill near Holmes Lake in Lincoln, Neb., during final quarter of the 2009 Lincoln/National Guard Marathon, May 3. Flores won the National Guard men's title with a time of 2:39:22.

lot," said Flores, who is about 5-feet 4-inches tall. "If you are a runner, it doesn't matter how tall you are, how short you are, it's not how much weight you have to lose, your body will adapt."

The importance of inspiring others to improve their physical fitness and adopt a healthy lifestyle was a common refrain at the marathon.

Jeff Galloway, a former Olympian, author of books on running and the marathon's "guest instructor," told them each marathoner inspires 25 others to improve their physical fitness. Many of the participating Guard members said they wanted to inspire Soldiers and Airmen to be more physically fit, thereby preparing them for deployment.

And they had ready answers when asked how marathon running correlated to their military



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Early Morning Stroll: 1st Lt. Varinka Barbini, Kentucky Army National Guard, runs past the Nebraska state capitol, May 3, during the 2009 Lincoln/National Guard in Lincoln, Neb. Barbini won the National Guard women's race, finishing the 26.2 mile course with a time of 3:18:07.

careers.

"I remember running for cover in my full gear," said 1st Sgt. Rosa Bartol, recalling a mortar attack in Iraq. The National Guardsman from Arlington, Wash., would finish the Lincoln, Neb., race with a

time of 4:06:23. "I don't know how else I would have run for that shelter if I was not fit and ready for that."

That feeling was echoed by Master Sgt. Bill Kaemmer, a member of the Oregon National Guard Marathon team that won

the overall team championship. Deployed Soldiers face a lot of discomfort, he said, but the rigors of preparing for a marathon also help prepare them for war.

"You can't train for a marathon and not be uncom-
See MARATHON on 19.

Air Force 'Athlete of Year' tackles Lincoln marathon course in May

By Spc. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

The red brick road east of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Memorial Stadium was covered with runners from across the globe as the sun began to emerge above the horizon, May 3.

Amidst the brightly colored uniforms and the hustle and bustle of the pre-race activities, runner number "2017" from the Washington National Guard Marathon Team hardly stood out. In fact, in the crowd of 6,500 runners, he wasn't even noticeable.

Just another number among thousands of others.

But number "2017" was hardly just another number or another runner. He's the Air Force's "2008 Male Athlete of the Year."

Tech. Sgt. Michael Bergquist, 36, of the Washington Air National Guard was competing in his second marathon in two weeks.

"I love to race. You have to have motivation for these things" he said.

Bergquist is a 15-year veteran of the Washington Air Guard. He currently is attached to the 92nd Security Forces

Squadron at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash. Prior to that, he served as a satellite and telemetry systems specialist.

He said his current unit is extremely supportive of his athletic pursuits.

"The 92nd really cares and helps me do these things."

For Bergquist, physical training is simply a part of his life.

"I'm a triathlete and compete in eight to 12 triathlons per year," said Bergquist, who lives in Medicine Lake, Wash. "So I don't really train for marathons specifically, but per week I swim 10-15 kilometers, bike 100-150 miles and run 40-70 miles."

In 2008 that training really paid off for Bergquist. He won 19 races while setting 11 course records. Bergquist also qualified for the 2008 Triathlon World Championship in Estonia where he finished 71st overall and third best amongst the American competitors.

Those efforts also led Bergquist to the title of 2008 Male Air Force Athlete of the Year, given to the top athlete in the active Air Force, Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard.

Bergquist said he "never expected to win the title," because he was competing against four service members who were

selected as U.S. Olympians.

This wasn't the first time that Bergquist had received a major honor as a result of his physical fitness pursuits, either.

On June 3, 2005, he had just completed the "Gap2Gap" relay in Washington State, when Bergquist noticed a woman struggling after her kayak overturned in the frigid waters of the Yakima River. He immediately jumped in and saved her life.

"All of the rescue staff had left and someone had to do something, so I just jumped in and pushed her closer and closer to shore," he said.

He received the distinguished Airman's Medal for that particular life-saving effort.

Bergquist isn't the only member of his family committed to physical fitness, either. His wife, Amanda F. Bergquist, 24, recently joined the Washington Air National Guard so that she could spend more time with her husband on his "business trips," as she puts it.

On this particular day in Lincoln, Neb., Airman Bergquist was also competing as a member of the Washington National Guard Marathon Team, wear-

See ATHLETE on 19.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Tour de Lincoln: Tech. Sgt. Michael Bergquist, Washington Air National Guard, passes the Nebraska state capitol while competing in the 2009 Lincoln/National Guard Marathon held May 3 in Lincoln, Neb. He is the 2008 Air Force Athlete of the Year.

Iraq mission transforms average athlete into All American

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

Alone, running along a dried river bed, a Soldier's feet land softly in the dusty sand. Focused on preparing for the Army physical fitness test, he doesn't notice a rapidly approaching sandstorm until it's too late.

Finding himself engulfed in the reddish blanket of swirling sand, the Soldier covers his mouth and nose as best he can, and crouches by what small brush the Iraqi desert provides. He prays he's not sharing his makeshift shelter with other desert inhabitants, particularly scorpions.

As quickly as the sandstorm strikes, it is over. As the Soldier returns to camp he can't help but think how different this workout is than those he goes through as a member of the track and field team at the Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Neb.

"I think I swallowed enough sand that I figured I'd never be a very good athlete," said Staff Sgt. Derek Carson, an intelligence analyst with the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade in Lincoln.

Carson spent time away from a promising academic and track career at Wesleyan when he was deployed to Al Asad Air Base with the 67th Area Support Group in 2005-06, but returned from Iraq a more focused student and determined athlete.

Carson enlisted in Nebraska Army National Guard prior to his freshman year at Wesleyan, but didn't attend basic military training and advanced individual training until he had finished his first year, allowing him to participate in a full track season. He then deployed to Iraq before he was able to compete in another season of track.

Prior to his Army training and

deployment to Iraq, Carson was a relatively average athlete, said Ted Bulling, director of track and field and cross country, and Carson's coach at Wesleyan. When Carson returned to the track, Bulling said he saw a different competitor.

"Since he got back from his last tour he became very, very focused on his goals," said Bulling. "I'm sure before he was deployed he still had the goal of being a great athlete and doing well in school, but it seemed like when he got back he knew how to go about accomplishing it."

Carson, who just finished his senior year, echoed Bulling.

"I think that once I got back from Iraq was kind of a turning point," said Carson. "I think I was just a lot more ready. Ready to go, ready to embrace it more whole heartedly than I did before."

Carson used his new-found confidence, focus and determination when he qualified for and competed in the 2009 NCAA Outdoor Division III Track and Field Championship at Marietta College in Marietta, Ohio.

Carson's 400-meter relay team placed second and his 1600-meter team placed third. Carson also placed eighth in the 400-meter individual race.

A 2008 Academic All-American and 2009 hopeful, Carson has been running since he was a child. He's been running competitively since the sixth grade.

The wiry Carson said he has always enjoyed the competition,



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

All American Soldier: Staff Sgt. Derek Carson, an intelligence analyst with the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, stands on the track at Nebraska Wesleyan University with the tools of his trade. Carson recently earned All American honors after competing in the 2009 NCAA Division III Track and Field Championship.

atmosphere and camaraderie of a track meet.

"It's been a sport I've always felt really relaxed while doing," said Carson. "I'm pretty competitive as it is and I really like the opportunity to compete and maybe get to know the people that you're running against."

Although Carson's Army training and deployment to Iraq was nothing like the collegiate track scene, Carson gives a lot of credit to the Guard for keeping him fit and actually increasing his strength.

"I was able to stay in pretty good shape," said Carson. "The military brought me to a higher physical level than I'd ever been at before and I was just able to continually build on that."

Not only did Carson gain raw physical strength, he gained

a mental edge that few of his competitors enjoyed.

"Basic training breaks you down mentally and physically so you can build yourself back up," said Carson. "I kind of used that same mind frame when I got back."

"I knew my body wasn't ready to really be at the level I wanted it, but mentally I was prepared. I knew it was going to be painful, I knew it was going to be a lot of work, a lot of time and a lot of effort, but it wasn't that big of a deal after some of the stuff the military puts you through just to make you into a Soldier," he said.

In addition to Carson's individual athletic improvement on the track, his attitude, leadership and hard work have proven beneficial to the entire team, said Bulling.

"He was a leader by example, and without question our hardest worker," said Bulling.

"It just kind of brought everyone's level up," said Bulling.

Although Carson has found success on the track and in the military, his true focus has always been on academics. Carson graduated from Wesleyan this spring with a 3.904 GPA in History. He again credits his military training for much of his success in the classroom.

"I think it's helped me focus more," said Carson. "It's given me a better sense of what needs to be done and how I should go about getting it done."

Carson said the intelligence training he received from the Army has given him a focus on what he may want to do for a career. "When I went through AIT I definitely realized this is something that I really do enjoy," said Carson. "It's challenging, it's interesting and everyday is going to be different."

Carson is now attending a 10-week internship at the Bureau for Intelligence and Research in Washington, D.C., where he plans to continue developing his skill in the intelligence field, possibly parlaying it into a future career.

Carson downplays his accomplishments. "I don't see the things I've done as being really extraordinary," said Carson. "I think it's just been from a lot of hard work and perseverance."

Once a good student and average athlete, an enlistment in the Nebraska National Guard and deployment to Iraq, helped turned the student-athlete into a Soldier, a great student and an All-American athlete.

Carson took advantage of the mental and physical training the Army provided, and ran with it - literally.

MARATHON

continued from page 18.

fortable," said Kaemmer. In winning the team race, the Oregon National Guard runners posted a combined time of 8:32:21, outdistancing Guard runners from Utah, which scored a combined time of 9:00:04 to take second place.

Leading the way for Oregon was Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Vandervlugt, La Grande, Ore., who finished fourth in the Guard male race with a time of 2:47:19. Also placing for the Oregon team were 1st Sgt. Seven Richmond, Albany, Ore., who finished the race in 2:49:02, and Capt. Sean Nixon, Sunriver, Ore., who finished race in 2:55:51.

The Guardsmen and Guardswomen all spoke of the hospitality of the people of Lincoln, Neb., and how much it meant to see civilians pour out of their homes to cheer and encourage the runners along the tortuous 26.2-mile route through the city on its streets and bike trails.

"It knocks you out of a bad zone if you are in one ... it helps you to refocus," said Lt. Col. Chris Toesnsing of the Delaware Air National Guard. "You realize all those folks along the course believe that you're going to finish it. That's an incentive to get it done."



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Lee Straube

Mid-Race Shower: Tech. Sgt. Michael Bergquist, Washington Air National Guard, douses himself with water while passing a 2009 Lincoln/National Guard Marathon water point.

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ing number "2016." She would finish the rugged 26.2-mile marathon course with a time of 3:49:46 - tops among Guard women in the 20-24 age category.

Her husband said he couldn't be prouder of his wife. "She's a cancer survivor and strong competitor," said Bergquist.

As far as Bergquist's race went, it wasn't one of his strongest outings, he said, adding that he started battling a left calf injury around the eighth mile. "The injury caused me to almost drop out, but I knew my team was counting on me."

Bergquist would ultimately finish the marathon with a time of 2:50:39, eighth-best amongst the Guard male runners

while placing second in the National Guard's Male 35-39 age category.

He also helped propel the Washington National Guard Marathon Team to a fifth-place finish in the team championship hunt, finishing tops amongst the Washington National Guard runners.

Despite all that he's accomplished over the past year as a result of his uncompromising dedication and hard work, Bergquist said he's determined to remain humble.

"It's a huge honor" he said, referring to the "Athlete of the Year" award. Still, he added, he simply wishes to be known by his preferred title: "Guardman."

2009 'All Guard' team named after Lincoln marathon

By Sgt. Michael Coleman
Staff Writer

Fifty-seven of the nation's top Army and Air National Guard distance runners were named to the 2009-10 "All Guard Marathon Team" after completing the arduous Lincoln/National Guard Marathon, May 3.

The All Guard Marathon Team is comprised of the top 40 male finishers, the top 15 female finishers and the top two masters (50 and older) finishers. The All Guard Marathon Team is expected to compete in five to eight marathons across the United States during the upcoming running season. The selectees will alternate events that they attend.

"The members rank the list of events we are attending on which ones they can and want to attend," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael A. Hagen, National Guard Bureau Marathon Program coordinator.

Along with competing at the races, the members of the All Guard Marathon Team will also staff race expo booths designed to help raise interest in the National Guard and marathon running, said Hagen.

Selected this year were:

MEN: Nathan Flores, Texas; Robert Schnell, Arizona; James Bresette, Arkansas; Timothy Vandervlugt, Oregon; Seven Richmond, Oregon; Jeff Olive, Georgia; Barry Brill, New York; Michael Bergquist, Washington; Michael Streff, South Dakota; Jesse Arnstein, New Jersey; Whitney Miller, Indiana; Sean Nixon, Oregon; Christopher Odekirk, Utah; Ray Workman, Utah; William Raitter, Nevada; Trent Sinnett, Illinois; Walter Bird, New York; Clay Bird, Montana; Eric Peterson, Utah; Tyrell Heaton, Minnesota; Gregory Smith, Oregon; James Zwiefel, Alaska; Ed King, Oregon; Mike Zeigle, Wisconsin; Chase Duarte, Arizona; Russell Hoyer, New York; Aaron Davis, Idaho; David Meyer, Colorado; John Zimmermann, Virginia; George Graff, Utah; Brenton Davis, Pennsylvania; Donald Barnard, Indiana; Jesse Espinoza, New Mexico; Paul Laymon, South Carolina; Luke Mostoller, Arizona; Wiley Blevins, Delaware;

Michael White, Washington; James Proctor, Washington; Michael Embury, Ohio; Charlie Koepen, Indiana.

FEMALE: Varinka Barbini, Kentucky; DeAnne Trauba, Utah; Kristine Laughlin-Hall, Alaska; Nancie Margetti, Illinois; Michelle Kiluk, California; Mary Chipper, Virginia; Amanda Bergquist, Washington; Stacy Fagan, Oklahoma; Paulette Goodwin, Alaska; Michele McVenes, Minnesota; Annaliese Baumer, Vermont; Apolla Benito, Hawaii; Rachelle McKay, Illinois; Rosa Bartol, Washington; Devika Hull, Georgia.

MASTERS: David Baker, Colorado; James Baurer, Washington.

Cornhusker Runners: Members of the Nebraska National Guard running team pose for their group photo a day before the May 3 Lincoln/National Guard Marathon.



Nebraska National Guard photo

Guard runners pound Lincoln streets in May



Photo by Master Sgt. Alan Brown

And They're Off: Thousands of runners move out onto the Lincoln streets as a cannon signals the start of the 2009 Lincoln/National Guard Marathon.

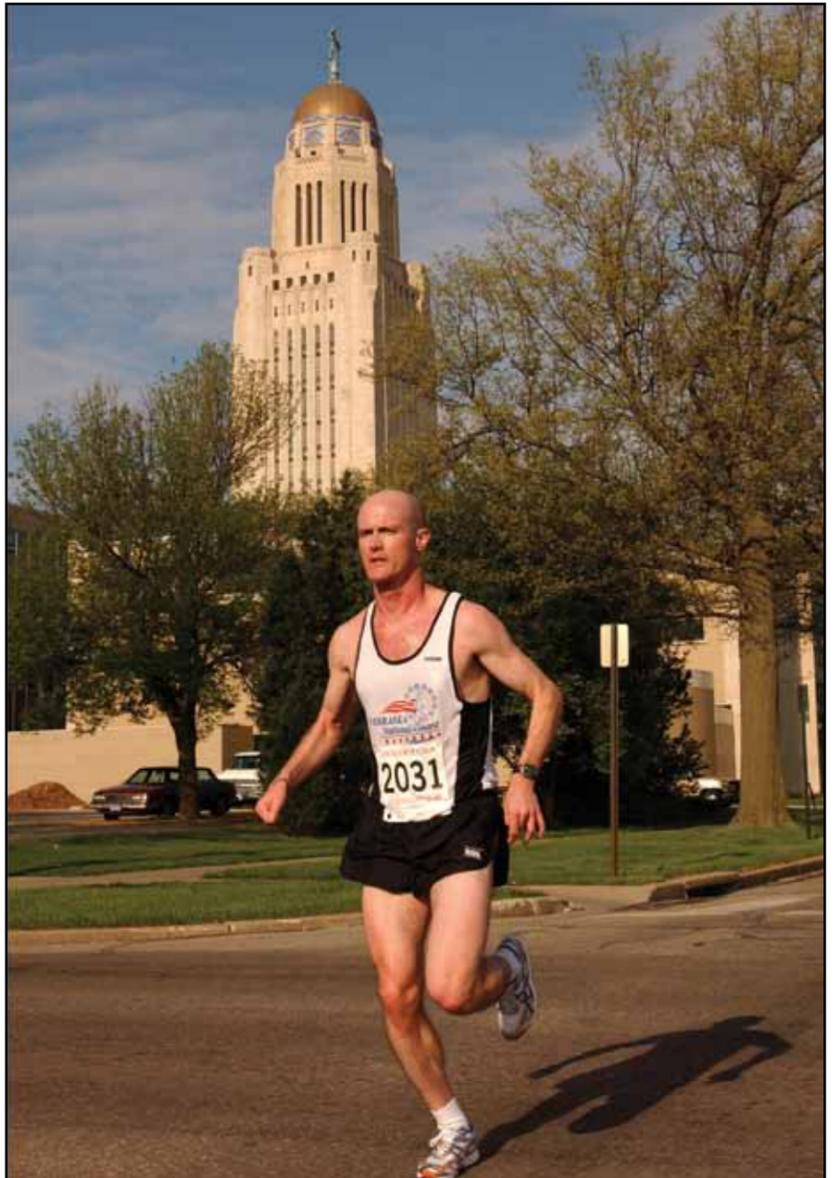


Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Early Morning Run: Robb Campbell makes the turn near the State Capitol in Lincoln, as the rising sun paints the historic building in a golden glow.



Photo by Spc. Koan Nissen

Running With The Marathon Crowd: Barb Gossage pushes herself down a Lincoln, Neb., street as she runs toward the half-way point of the marathon.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Lee Straube

Veteran Runner: Philip Perrone, a veteran of dozens of marathons, keeps his gait steady as he passes a water point near Holmes Lake in eastern Lincoln. Perrone would finish the race with a time of 4:27:55.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Eyes Front: Jamison Nitz focuses on the crowd in front of him as he paces himself down a Lincoln, Neb., street during the Lincoln/National Guard Marathon.



Photo by Sgt. Michael Coleman

Almost There: Dennis Hartman waves to the crowd as he approaches the finish line.

Nebraska team mixes rookies with experienced runners

By Sgt. Michael Coleman
Staff Writer

For most Guardsmen running is part of their physical training. For some, though, it is a way of life.

"I love running. You're pushing your body to limit," said Spc. Amie D. Gale, a patient administration specialist with the Nebraska Army National Guard's Medical Detachment in Lincoln.

"I have time to think and reflect on things, time for myself," said Gale, who was one of six Nebraska Army and Air Guardsmen who competed in the National Guard Marathon in Lincoln, Neb., on May 3 as part of the Nebraska team.

While focused training is important to being a successful distance runner, team members say over-preparation can often become a stumbling block.

"People are so dedicated that they don't always take a day off from running when they should," said Chief Master Sgt. Barb Gossage, Nebraska Air National Guard state command chief. She said it is important to train smartly to prevent injuries

while also making sure to give oneself enough time to recover when injuries inevitably occur.

"The goal is to be able to run as long as you are mentally able, but you have to listen to your body," said Gossage. "There is always tomorrow. Take time off to recover and you will come back stronger and wiser."

Injuries had a major impact on the Nebraska team this year, which along with numerous deployments, kept several team regulars from competing. While that served to set back the team, it was also an opportunity for state officials to find new members interested in giving distance running a try.

"This has given people who wouldn't have made the team in the past a chance to compete," said Gossage.

This year's Nebraska team was actually a collection of new, rookie runners as well as seasoned athletes who have numerous marathons under their belts.

Not only have deployments allowed new runners to compete, but running is a benefit to Guardsmen who are deployed, said several of the runners.

"You don't have to run marathons, but you have to find a physical activity to be a stress reliever while deployed," said Command Sgt. Maj. Philip G. Perrone, 734th Transportation Battalion command sergeant major who recently completed a year-long deployment to Iraq with the 67th Area Support Group.

"This is an important part of maintaining my mental and physical fitness," he said.

This year's Nebraska team featured runners with a wide range of experience levels. According to team members, the mix of experienced and first time runners added to the overall experience that each runner encountered at the marathon.

Gale, who took 3rd place in the female rookie categories, said she was thankful to be able to learn from the more experienced runners on her team and at the event.

"They're competitive, but it is also a community that helps each other out and encourages each other to do their best," said Gale.

Perrone said the older Guardsmen realize that for

the Nebraska team to become competitive again, it needs to find new runners interested in helping out and learning to compete at the highest levels and giving them the experience they need.

"They are the future of the team and the National Guard," said Perrone.

Gossage said she enjoys watching new marathoners develop and experiencing the enthusiasm that the older runners have.

"I ran with a rookie. He was so excited to represent his state and get paid to do something that he loves," said Gossage. "It was awesome."

Gossage said by running marathons for the National Guard, the Nebraska team has been able to inspire fellow service members to improve their own physical fitness.

For example, she said, about five years ago a Soldier helping the marathon was inspired by the runners. At the time he was unable to pass his run on the PT test, but he decided that he was going to run a marathon and he did, said Gossage.

"You don't have to be a

distance runner to attempt a marathon. Enjoying running may help, but anybody can do a marathon," said Gossage.

Gale said next year she plans on training more seriously with a set plan. She also plans to recruit someone else to run with her so they can keep each other motivated during training.

"Just because you complete a marathon doesn't mean that you know how to run one," said Perrone. "It is a continual learning process."

"The bottom line is marathons are another opportunity to build teamwork and camaraderie in the National Guard."

Nebraska National Guard Marathon Team Results:

Nebraska 2 (11:54:39)

Shane Fernau, 3:40:13
Dennis Hartman, 3:46:31
Philip Perrone, 4:27:55
Amie Gale, 4:50:42

Nebraska 1 (11:58:08)

Zachary Labrayere, 3:37:28
Jamison Nitz, 3:52:45
Barbara Gossage, 4:27:55