April 2012 | Now available on-line at www.neguard.com | VOL. 62, NO. 2

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

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One team returns, another departs

■Nebraska's second Afghan Agribusiness Development Team welcomed home

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

The Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 2 was historic. It marked the first time the Nebraska National Guard has sent a joint Nebraska Army and Nebraska Air National Guard team on a major overseas combat deployment.

Now for the majority of the team's members, the deployment itself is history.

Forty-six of the team's original 58 members were welcomed home during a ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. April 6.

Big Hug: Lt. Col. Ross Finley receives a welcome home hug from his nephew, Calvin Finley, following a nearly yearlong deployment to Afghanistan.

The Guardsmen are members of the Nebraska National Guard's ADT No. 2, which mobilized last June for a deployment to Afghanistan where they assisted Afghan agricultural officials and local farmers in redeveloping their agricultural infrastructure. The team was reorganized last month into a U.S. provincial reconstruction team.

The 46 Soldiers and Airmen made up the ADT's security and headquarters sections. The 12 remaining members are agricultural specialists and will continue to serve in Afghanistan until they return later this spring. They will be replaced by the Nebraska National Guard's ADT No. 3, which was wished farewell April, 10.

The Soldiers and Airmen were bused from Camp Atterbury, Ind., prior to their arrival for the ceremony, emotions were running high for the hundreds of people there to welcome home loved ones.

Jenny Morehouse waited with her two children to welcome home her husband, Sgt. 1st Class Chris Morehouse. She said she was doing her best to control her emotions.

"I just know I'm going to get all the butterflies and be all excited and nervous and everything like that, so I've just been chillin'," said Jenny.

Jenny said she's ready to have her husband back to reunite the family and get some help with their children.

"It's like you're missing a part of yourself when they're gone," she said. "So it'll just be nice to have him back and have the help with

See HOMECOMING on 8.

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Welcome Squeeze: Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Burton, a member of the Nebraska National Guard's Afghan Agribusiness Development Team No. 2, hugs his son, Sam, 5, at the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., April 6, after a 10-month long deployment to Afghanistan where he helped redevelop the nation's agricultural infrastructure.

Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 wished farewell

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Family and friends said their goodbye's during a farewell ceremony for members of the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 before a yearlong mission to provide agricultural support in Afghanistan.

The farewell ceremony was held at the "Spirit of '76 Armory" in Lincoln, Neb., April 10, to honor the Soldiers heading to Afghanistan and express confidence in their ability to accomplish the mission and return home safely.

The ceremony was held only a few days after the homecoming ceremony for ADT No. 2. Members of ADT No. 3 are replacing members of ADT No. 2 in Afghanistan.

"I'm excited, nervous, anxious and about everything you could think of right now," said 1st Lt. James Small, an agricultural specialist with the ADT No. 3. "I'm ready to get going and start the job."

Lt. Col. Will Prusia, commander of ADT No. 3, said the ceremony marks the beginning of a journey during which 11 Nebraskans will travel more than 7,500 miles over the next 400 days. In that time they will teach Afghan farmers and government officials and continue the work of ADT No. 2.

Members of ADT No. 3 said they hope to help create Afghan solutions for Afghan problems within their agricultural system.

The goal is to help the Afghans be successful in the long run after we are gone, said

See FAREWELL on 8.

Nebraska Guard Soldiers honored at Capitol building

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The historic Warner Legislative Chamber within the Nebraska State Capitol came to a hushed silence, March 6, when a moment of silence was conducted in memory of the late Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter crew chief with Grand Island's Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, who died Aug. 6 in Afghanistan's Wardak province.

The memorial tribute, which was attended by Hamburger's family, was part of a lengthy ceremony designed to honor both his sacrifice and 13 other Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers, most of whom earned significant military awards during deployments to either Afghanistan or Iraq.

Those awards included the presentation of the Silver Star to 2nd Lt. Bradley Larson and the Soldier's Medal to Staff Sgt. Justin Dean McCoy and Staff Sgt. Eric L. Schnell.

Other medal presentation included the Bronze Star Medal with Valor device to Spc. Eric Ryan Blackburn, the Purple Heart to Larson, Sgt. 1st Class Daniel R. Malizzi, Staff Sgt. Brian W. Anderson, Staff Sgt. Michael G. Cordes, Staff Sgt. James M. Dubbs, Staff Sgt. Seth D. Wecker, Sgt. Jeffrey A. Burton, the late Staff Sgt. Hamburger, Sgt. David J. Suing, Blackburn and Spc. Alex B. Young; the and the Army Commendation Medal with Valor device to Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hartmann and Young.

The ceremony was attended by Gov. Dave Heineman, Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, and several dozen Nebraska state legislators including State Senator Mike Flood, speaker of the legislature, and State Sen. Bill Avery, chairman of the Nebraska Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

According to Heineman, ceremonies such as the capitol awards event are an important way of honoring those Nebraska Guards-

See MEDALS on 6.

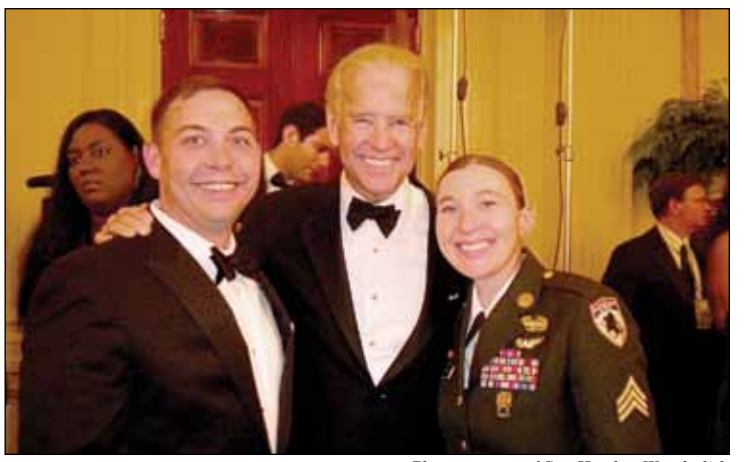

Photo courtesy of Sgt. Heather Wunderlich

Night To Remember: Sgt. Heather N. Wunderlich, a Nebraska Army Guard flight medic, and her husband, Sgt. Jeremie Wunderlich, pose with Vice President Joe Biden at an official White House dinner, Feb. 29.

A dinner to remember

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Writer

A wave of nervous pride come across Heather Wunderlich as she presented her credentials and two forms of identification to the security detail posted in front of the house.

A deep breath, she then placed one foot in front of the other she walked up centuries old steps and entered the house arm-in-arm with her husband of just more than one year.

By her own accord, Wun-

See WHITE HOUSE on 7.

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NEWS DIGEST

■Active duty downsizing should benefit reserve forces

WASHINGTON, – A policy board plans to ask Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta to highlight service in the reserve forces as a good option for outgoing active-duty members during downsizing.

In its first official action with broader membership and a direct line to the secretary, the Reserve Forces Policy Board agreed March 8 to send eight recommendations to Panetta to encourage National Guard and reserve service for people leaving active duty. The fiscal 2013 defense budget request calls for the military to reduce its end strength by 5.5 percent in the next five years.

Retired Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Arnold L. Punaro, who chairs the board, said a force reduction letter the secretary sent to the services last month included 12 objectives in the drawdown, but did not mention the National Guard and reserves.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Anita Gallentine, a reserve mobilization augmentee who heads the board's continuum of service subcommittee, said the Defense Department should learn from past drawdown mistakes that discouraged active duty members from joining the reserve components. In the post-Cold War drawdown, she said, programs helped service members become civilian teachers and police officers and offered bonuses for troops to leave active duty, but they had to pay the bonuses back if they entered the Guard and reserves.

Gallentine noted that the reserve forces now are more of an operational force than their traditional status as a strategic reserve, and other members of the 20-member board spoke of the need to preserve those operational capabilities and training investments.

The board also agreed to send these recommendations to the secretary regarding homeland defense:

- Policy changes to accelerate the use of reserve forces to respond to disasters;
- Guidance that training exercises can be used to support disaster relief and other missions, such as when the National Guard pre-positioned forces leading up to Hurricane Irene in 2010;
- Guidance that will allow state leaders better predictability for calling up forces under Title 32, which has been used 13 times in the past nine years;
- Increase from 75 to 90 percent the amount the Federal Emergency Management Agency would reimburse states for National Guard disaster relief operations;
- Give consistency to protections and benefits states give National Guard members.

Also, the board requested that DoD review the law on the department's disaster reimbursement fund to ask Congress to stipulate it for domestic use only. "If we don't limit it to domestic use, it becomes a State Department get-well fund," Punaro said.

■Veteran job prospects brighter, Panetta says

KABUL, Afghanistan – Veteran unemployment numbers are encouraging, but the need for jobs will increase as the services trim their ranks, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told reporters here, March 15.

The unemployment rate for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans is down from last year's high of 12.5 percent to 7.6 percent, below the national rate of 8.3 percent.

Defense budget cuts and a strategic drawdown in Afghanistan, coupled with the recent withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq, will mean more veterans leaving service and seeking civilian employment in the coming years, Panetta said.

Panetta cited efforts by President Barack Obama and by Pentagon and Veterans Affairs Department officials to champion programs to help veterans find jobs or succeed in school as part of the reason for the improvement in unemployment.

And as more departing troops seek to enter the civilian work force, he added, "it's very important that we… (help) give them the ability to find a job, education (or) start a business."

The key to creating jobs for veterans lies not only in government programs, but also in private-sector initiatives, the secretary said.

"I have to commend the private sector, because they really have put together… (a) public campaign" to raise awareness of veteran employment and create hiring incentives for vets, Panetta added.

The U.S economy is showing improvement, which also helps job-seeking veterans, he noted.

■Air Force ending pilot spend account travel card program

WASHINGTON (AFNS) — The Air Force recently decided to transition existing Controlled Spend Account travel cards to an enhanced Government Travel Card by the end of fiscal 2012.

"The CSA, a pilot travel card program, provided some enhancements for travelers, but also brought about significant challenges for our most frequent travelers and those with unique mission sets," said Joan Causey, deputy assistant secretary for Financial Operations. "We recognized that for any travel card program to work, it has to work for all travelers. In the end, we were not satisfied that any proposed changes to the CSA program would get us to the desired state for our most frequent travelers."

The actual transition will occur in August and September and current CSA cardholders should continue to use their cards as normal. The transition strategy allows travelers to continue using their "blue cards" without interruption. The card functionality will be converted to a GTC by CitiBank without the need to get a new card. Also, travelers will once again be provided with a permanent credit limit and there will be no need to call for "temporary spend limit" increases.

One of the enhancements being pursued for the GTC program will be via the Defense Travel System. Default settings will be changed to automatically align most non-mileage expenses to the card.

Additionally, the traveler can split-disburse any residual funds to his/her personal account. Finally, as a carryover from the CSA program, Citi will upgrade their GTC online system to allow travelers to request electronic fund transfers of credit balances directly to their bank accounts.

"The CSA to GTC transition plan is already in motion," Causey said. "We're planning a brief test in July to ensure all systems are a go. If all systems perform as expected, roughly 300K cardholders will be converted during the August/September timeframe."

Citi will not process any early transitions and should not be contacted to do so. Further questions by Airmen regarding the transition should be directed to local agency program coordinators or comptroller squadrons.

Nebraska engineer company named tops in Army Guard

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A yearlong deployment to Afghanistan continues to pay dividends for Nebraska Army National Guard engineers assigned to a Wahoo and Hastings-based construction company.

The 623rd Engineer Company was recently named the recipient of the prestigious 2011 Itschner Award as the top engineer company in the entire Army National Guard.

Named after Lt. Gen. Emerson G. Itschner, the 39th chief of Engineers, the award is given annually by the Society of American Military Engineers to the most outstanding engineer company in the Army National Guard, U.S. Army Reserve and the active Army.

According to officials, the work that the 623rd Eng. Co. completed during its deployment to Afghanistan made it well deserving of the national honor. The unit, which returned home from Afghanistan in October 2011, completed more than 284 structures in 300-day span.

"That is completing a structure every two days," said Capt. Chris Pelchat, unit commander, during the unit's homecoming celebration in Wahoo. "Not only in good weather. We actually scooped snow to complete some of the structures."

The 623rd built multiple hardened troop barracks, operations centers, communication towers and transportable guard towers. Unit Soldiers also replaced multiple electrical systems and completed a large pre-fabrication structure used to store tools and fabricate items required for the construction of the hardened structures such as brackets, lifting hooks, gates and roofing trusses. The pre-fabrication facility will continue to benefit future engineer units deployed to the area.

Additional construction projects included a battalion aid station with a trauma bay, sick call room and a pharmaceuticals storage area; and a 9,000-square-foot hardened dining facility. The unit was also accountable for $25 million in equipment while the unit maintenance section kept the unit's rolling stock operational at a rate of more than 95 percent during the deployment.

"The 623rd has clearly shown with their collection of achievements in theater and within the state of Nebraska that they are one of the best engineer companies," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general. "They were able to conduct more construction operations across a greater battle space than any other engineer construction asset in theater and completed more than twice the number of projects as its predecessor."

"The prideful effort of the Soldiers and the meticulous planning of their leaders allowed them to stay ahead of any set project schedule," Lyons added. "That afforded them the opportunity to complete many additional projects at each worksite as available materials allowed, which contributed significantly to the quality of life of the service members and their Afghan counterparts."

"The 623rd also put special emphasis on training Afghan National Security Forces to construct buildings of the same quality for their forces to use for years to come.

"The 623rd Engineer Company's partnership with Afghan National Security Force was instrumental in giving the 2-203rd Corps, Afghan National Army, the needed skills to build and support independent operations," said Col. Paul Paolozzi, 18th Engineer Brigade commander.

"The impact of their projects to improve the quality of life for service members and Afghan partners made this company a true force multiplier," Paolozzi said.

The unit's family readiness group's work was also noted in the 623rd Eng. Co.'s award.

"The family readiness group's strength contributed to and enhanced unit effectiveness," said Lyons. "The family readiness group kept families well-informed and held events to support each other. These activities improved morale and reduced individual Soldier stress, which allowed the Soldiers to focus on the mission at hand."

The unit was formally presented with the Itschner award during the annual Engineer Regimental Awards Luncheon held April 21 at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. According to Pelchat, the award was truly a team-wide effort.

"It's a justification of everything they have done," said Pelchat prior to the award ceremony. "This really shows what a job they did while they were overseas."

"We knew that every time that we completed a project, we were making things better for the infantry. It was a very rewarding job that we had over there in that we were expanding the battlespace; we were making lives better for the guys on the frontline," said Pelchat. "I knew when we submitted the unit for the award that there was nothing more that we could've done. These guys worked their tails off and they made a huge accomplishment."

Editor's Note: *2nd Lt. Alex Salmon contributed to this article.*

How to continue receiving the digital version of the Prairie Soldier newspaper

As noted on the front page, this will be the final printed version of the Prairie Newspaper. Following this issue, all subsequent editions will be available at www.ne.ng.mil. You can subscribe to the digital paper by following these steps.

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The **Prairie Soldier** is the newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, authorized and published by the State Public Affairs Office, Military Department of Nebraska, in accordance with AR 360-1 and AFI 35-101. It is Army and Air Force-funded and published bi-monthly by contracted photo-offset process. Circulation is about 8,000.

Deadline for all submissions is the first Wednesday of the month: February, April, June, August, October, and December.

Letters, articles, notices of events, photographs and art are welcome, but may be edited for clarity or brevity. Publication of any submission is at the discretion of the editor. Submissions can also be emailed to kevin.hynes@us.army.mil. All photos must be high resolution and include complete caption information.

The views and opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the Military Department of Nebraska or the U.S. Department of Defense.

The Prairie Soldier can be read on-line at www.ne.ng.mil

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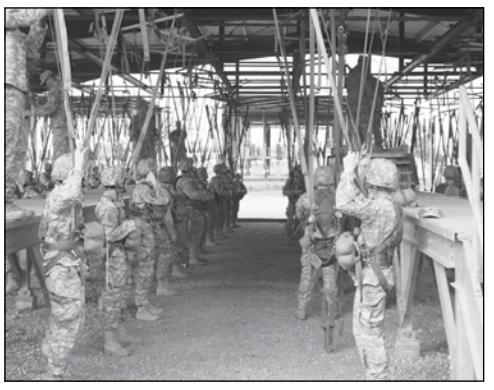
Soaring Nebraskans

Nebraska units conduct airborne refresher

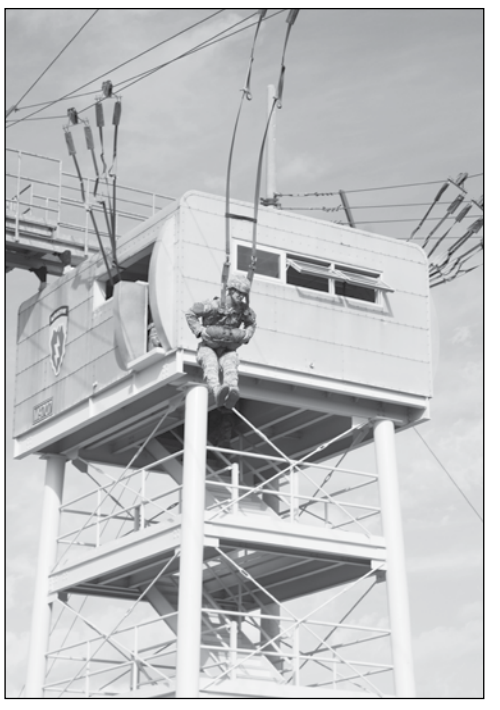
Photos by Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen

Free Fallin': Nebraska National Guard paratroopers from Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Rand Surveillance), and Detachment 1, 195th Forward Support Company, jump from a Missouri Air National Guard C-130 Hercules over a drop zone at Fort Benning, Ga., March 3. The Nebraskans trained alongside fellow Guardsmen at Fort Benning's Warrior Training Center. **Insert:** Soldiers with Nebraska's Company C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance), climb aboard a C-130 Hercules at Fort Benning, Ga.'s, Lawson Army Airfield, March 3, to get a basic airborne refresher.

Hurry Up And Wait: Nebraska Guardsmen prepare to exit a Missouri Air National Guard C-130 Hercules during the first jump of a basic airborne refresher at Fort Benning, Ga., March 3. For some of the paratroopers, this was their sixth jump and first since initial airborne training.



A Bit Tied Up At The Moment: Nebraska National Guardsmen with Company C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance), hang in the U.S. Army Airborne School's suspended harness training apparatuses at Fort Benning, Ga., March 2. The training is critical in helping the Soldiers deal with potential mid-drop problems they may encounter after exiting the aircraft.



Good Technique: A Nebraska Army National Guardsman jumps from a 34-foot tower so his senior evaluators can gauge his exit technique at the U.S. Army Airborne School in Fort Benning, Ga., March 2.

Guard paratroopers get back into harnesses after long layoff

By Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

More than 80 Soldiers from Nebraska's Troop C, 1-134st Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance), and Detachment 1, 195th Forward Support Company (Airborne), conducted a Basic Airborne Refresher at the Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning, Ga., March 2-4.

Due to the unit's high operations tempo and other training needs, the organization had fallen out of standard with policies governing airborne-ready units, and the BAR is mandatory for Soldiers to remain current if they have not jumped in more than six months.

Sgt. 1st Class Steven Brewer, a platoon sergeant and fulltime readiness noncommissioned officer with Troop C was one of those Soldiers. Brewer hadn't jumped since 2009.

"We've been looking at this mission for about eight months now," said Brewer. "We have some guys that haven't jumped in years."

Brewer, a 29-year-old Clatonia, Neb., native, has more than 45 jumps under his belt, so this training was a true refresher for the experienced jumper. However, for the newer Soldiers who have only completed their introductory Airborne School jumps, they found this exercise to be more than a refresher – they found it be the highly-anticipated sixth jump.

The sixth jump was exactly the kind of thing that Spc. Jesse Beaudette was looking for.

"I haven't been in a parachute harness since I went through airborne school (two years ago)," said Beaudette. "I'm stoked!"

Beaudette, a 23-year-old Lincoln, Neb., native said the unit hit the ground running. They immediately started training on things like parachute landing falls, tight-body positioning when exiting the high-efficiency aircraft, and all the other time-proven techniques for successful airborne operations. According to Beaudette, in the world of airborne, any jump one can walk away from is a good one.

The Nebraska-based Soldiers had to travel to Fort Benning for the training because Nebraska does not own the necessary equipment to properly prepare and support paratroopers. Items such as The Mock Door, The 34-foot Tower, and The Lateral Drift Apparatus Parachute Landing Falls are all expensive luxuries maintained and staffed, mostly, by the 1-507th Parachute Infantry Regiment at the U.S. Army's Airborne School.

Good to Go: 1st Lt. Bradley Schamel, a U.S. Army airborne jump master with the Warrior Training Center at Fort Benning, Ga., inspects the exit door moments before Nebraska Guardsmen from Company C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance), jump from an aircraft at the U.S. Army Airborne School, March 3.

"The most beneficial part of this is getting the whole unit together and training with the Warrior Training Center," said Capt. Rob Schepers, commander of Troop C. "These guys are great."

Schepers said the staff at the WTC provided all of the equipment, manpower and jump master needs his unit required. Having access to all the equipment and all the knowledge of the WTC is ultimately going to prevent injuries and help make the Nebraska airborne Soldiers better prepared for the units' future missions.

He said on one hand if the Nebraska National Guard had the assets a little closer to home, paratroopers and their respective units could maintain a higher level of proficiency and safety on a regular basis. But on the other hand, having to travel is worth the time and not a problem when faced with a challenge like this.

"It's very important to do this training, especially since we haven't jumped in a while," said Schepers. "There's roughly 400 Soldiers jumping in Nebraska now – sustainment is a must."

Bringing Home 'The Cup'

Nebraska Guard unit accepts hardware after winning national cooking competition

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Food service specialists and field sanitation team members of the 267th Support Maintenance Company gained serious bragging rights after winning the Philip A. Connelly award in the National Guard field kitchen category.

This marks the first time the Nebraska National Guard has won the competition's national award. The unit won the award after previously winning the state and regional cooking competitions.

Members of the 267th joined U.S. Army Reserve and active duty Soldiers and civilians from across the globe at the Town and Country Resort and Convention Center in San Diego, Calif., March 31, to be recognized as the Army's best food-service professionals during the 2012 Philip A. Connelly Awards Program. The ceremony was held in conjunction with the Joint Services 2012 Excellence in Food Service Award ceremony.

The Soldiers of the 267th were definitely proud of their accomplishment... a first in state history.

"There is only one first time, and no matter what happens from now on, there isn't anyone that can take that from us," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Brickner, food operations sergeant with the 267th SMC. "We were the first, we might be the only, who knows. We were the first and that can never be changed."

The awards program is named in honor of the late Philip A. Connelly, a past president of the International Food Service Executives Association. Connelly is highly regarded as the driving force behind obtaining IFSEA sponsorship for the Department of the Army's recognition of excellence in Army food service. The program is co-sponsored by IFSEA and the Department of the Army.

While in San Diego, the 267th SMC Soldiers were also able to receive hands-on food-service training, attend classes, compete in the 2012 Bistro Challenge, and attend the IFSEA Conference and Trade Show.

"The classes we did were interesting," said Pvt. Erin McNiel, a food service specialist with the 267th SMC. "They went over how a restaurant breaks down a menu and why they price things the way they do. Now I go out to eat, I look at the menu and know how they price it because of the information I learned in the classes."

In addition to the classes, the Soldiers were able to talk one-on-one with experienced chefs to ask questions, learn the tricks-of-the-trade and learn more about the food-service field.

"It was interesting to talk to other people within our profession," said McNiel. "Especially being able to talk with the chefs and seeing what they do on the civilian side verses what we do on the military side."

> *"I feel wonderful to have come this far and be part of the national championship team. I feel like we deserve it, we tried our best and here we are."*
>
> ***— Pfc. Tiffany Brown***
> *267th Support Maint. Co.*
> *Food Service Specialist*

Once the classes were done, it was finally time for the 267th to accept all the awards that came along with winning the Army National Guard Field Kitchen award. The team learned they won the award earlier this year but said they weren't able to grasp the concept of being national champions until they received the trophy, which they've dubbed, "The Cup," and numerous other awards, certificates and coins.

"I feel wonderful to have come this far and be a part of the national championship team," said Pfc. Tiffany Brown, a food service specialist with the 267th SMC. "I feel like we deserve it. We tried our best and here we are."

"I'd probably have to say this is one of the proudest moments of my life," said McNiel.

The unit has come a long way to become national champions. The 267th SMC put together a brand new food service team after a recent deployment.

"The cooks did outstanding, (from) not knowing anyone, to winning a national championship in less than a year," said Brickner.

Brickner added that Pvt. Brandon Alhers, a food service specialist with the 267th, had his first Guard drill on the day of the national judging for the Connelly competition. Ahlers knew what needed to be done and jumped right in.

"They told me it was a competition," said Alhers. "Then they told me it was nationals. I was competing nationally right after (Advanced Individual Training). At first it was nerve-wracking but they warmed up to me right away."

Now that the team knows how much commitment, team work, dedication and quality of food service it takes to become national champs, they plan on improving and learning more.

"The next step is to fine-tune their skills," said Brickner. "Now that we have won this and a year off because we can't compete again. They can fine-tune their skills in other areas that would help on the next Connelly evaluation."

Photos by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Award Winning Team: (Back Row left to right) Pvt. Brandon Alhers, Spc. Stephen Donica, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Brickner, Sgt. James Wieting, Spc. Nathan Hampshire and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tollie Yoder, (Front Row) Pvt. Erin McNiel and Pfc. Tiffany Brown, all of the 267th Support Maintenance Company, stand proudly by the national Phillip A. Connelly Award in the National Guard Field Kitchen Category after receiving the award during the Joint Services 2012 Excellence in Food Service Award ceremony March 31 in San Diego, Calif.

Receiving The Cup: Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, presents the national trophy to Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tollie Yoder during the Joint Services 2012 excellence in Food Service Award ceremony March 31 in San Diego, Calif.

All Smiles: Pfc. Tiffany Brown and Pvt. Erin McNiel, food service specialists with the 267th Support Maintenance Company, get their hands on the hardware after winning the state, regional and national cooking competitions of the Philip A. Connelly Award in the National Guard field kitchen category.

Nebraska cook competes in reality television-like cooking competition

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Many people watch television cooking competitions and wonder how they do it in such a short amount of time with secret ingredients revealed moments before the time starts.

As if the short time and secret ingredients aren't challenging enough, throw in team members you hardly know and it makes it even more challenging.

One Nebraska Army National Guard cook took the challenge in San Diego, Calif., during the International Food Service Executive Association Conference and Trade Show 2012 Bistro Challenge on March 30.

Pfc. Tiffany Brown, a cook from the 267th Support Maintenance Company, was chosen by culinary experts to compete on the Army's team. The Army team consisted of cooks from all different parts of the world including The Nebraska and Virginia Army National Guard, United States Army Reserve and United States active Army.

"Your selection clearly demonstrates you as a true leader in your field," said Gen. Raymond Odierno, United States Army commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command, via a statement read by Joint Culinary Center of Excellence officials. "Again, congratulations on this most distinguished selection and remember you will always be a valuable member of this great Army."

Brown and other members of the 267th SMC were in San Diego attending the IFSEA Conference and Trade Show along with the Joint Services 2012 Excellence in Food Service Award ceremony. They were there to accept the Army National Guard Field Kitchen award when Brown was chosen to compete.

"It was a little bit nerve-wracking getting chosen for the bistro challenge," said Brown, "because I didn't know what I was going into."

Brown and the Army cooks put their culinary skills to the test during the high-energy, fast-paced cooking competition. They competed against culinary students from multiple university teams and the United States Navy.

The teams had 90 minutes to plan, prep, plate and present a three course meal consisting of a salad, main course and dessert to a panel of culinary judges. The competition was designed for the competitors to think creatively and work outside the box.

At the beginning of the competition officials revealed the secret ingredients: pineapple and Black Cod. Each team had to use both ingredients in at least one of the courses and was only allowed to use one burner with limited water and secondary ingredients.

Brown concentrated on making a cucumber and onion salad. She put her own twist on the salad by adding zucchini and using peppers creatively.

"I was going to make a bowl out of fruit, but they only ended up having (strawberries) and they used that for the dessert," said Brown. "Instead, I improvised and used the peppers to make a bowl."

After a fast 90 minutes, the teams were judged on creativity, teamwork, organization, front of house skills, menu planning, sanitation and taste.

"It was a great experience to work with other people and completing the challenge of getting thrown into something like this," said Brown. "It's a challenge to go with what they give you."

"But it's just like getting thrown into a real-life scenario," added Brown.

Brown and the Army team pulled together and finished second place in the challenge.

"From what I've heard," said Brown, "the Army has never placed before, so it was a pretty rewarding feeling to get second."

Salad With A Twist: Pfc. Tiffany Brown prepared a cucumber and onion salad with a twist during the International Food Service Executive Association Conference and Trade Show 2012 Bistro Challenge on March 30 in San Diego, Calif.

Photos by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Challenge: Pfc. Tiffany Brown, a food service specialist with the 267th Maintenance Company, was chosen to be a part of the All-Army team during a Bistro Challenge on March 30 in San Diego, Calif. Brown and the Army team competed against culinary students from multiple university teams and the United States Navy and took home second place.

Nebraska National Guard staff prepares for disaster response

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Approximately 50 members of the Nebraska National Guard staff had the opportunity to plan for potentially nightmarish scenarios during a three-day Joint Force Headquarters/Joint Task Force Staff Training Course held March 2-4 in Lincoln, Neb.

The course was conducted by training officials from U.S. Northern Command. It was designed to help prepare Nebraska Army and Air National Guard staff members to plan for and stage a Joint Task Force in the event of a major disaster.

According to Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, the course is designed to prepare the Guard officers, warrant officers and noncommissioned officers to support civilian authorities should the need arise.

"When I look at 'Fort Nebraska' and what is going on here in the state, I ask myself, 'Are we ready?'" Lyons told the assembled Soldiers and Airmen at the start of the March classes. "Are we ready to step out of here in 15 minutes and form a joint task force?"

"Are you ready?" he added.

According to National Guard Bureau, joint task forces are designed to provide command and control of all assigned state military assets deployed in support of civilian authorities or a specific incident, while also allowing for the facilitation of information to flow between deployed units and joint force headquarters. It can also be used should active duty, Title 10 forces be needed to meet the needs of the situation.

Typically, joint task force headquarters are established following major natural or man-made disasters, such as floods or tornados, however they can also be implemented to support such occasions as major political or sporting events.

The March event focused primarily on developing the procedures that the Nebraska National Guard would use to support such major disasters as tornados and flooding, especially in the event that such a disaster overwhelms the state capabilities and support is requested by the governor from other states and the federal government.

According to Lyons, the course was designed to give the Guardsmen an opportunity to begin thinking and planning now rather than waiting for an actual event to occur.

"We're all Nebraskans. We're all good citizens. Nobody wants to fail and in a situation like this, we cannot afford to fail because the citizens of Nebraska are counting on us," Lyons said. "Each one of you has a real role. This is important stuff."

Brig. Gen. Mike Navrkal, assistant adjutant general for Army and one of several Nebraska National Guard leaders who has already been pre-selected and trained to command a joint task force in the event one is needed, echoed those thoughts.

"If we had to pull up a JTF, this would be the staff that would make it happen," Navrkal told the assembled Guardsmen, adding that the time spent training and planning now could pay huge dividends should a major tornado or flood strike Nebraska. "We all know these are no-notice events. The relationships we're building here today will allow us to work together and get to know each other better."

"You are absolutely the team that is going to get this done."

Cutting Edge Refueling Flight

A KC-135R Stratotanker from the Nebraska Air National Guard's155th Air Refueling Wing refuels an F-35A from the Joint Strike Fighter Integrated Training Center of the 33d Fighter Wing based at Eglin Air Base, Fla., over the Emerald Coast April 12. This was the first F-35 air-to-air refueling for Eglin's variant of the joint strike fighter.

U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Casey Smith

Western Nebraska battalion deactivates

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska Army National Guard said farewell to a historic Nebraska unit, April 15, when the 168th Quartermaster Petroleum Supply Battalion was deactivated during a ceremony at the Scottsbluff readiness center in Scottsbluff, Neb.

"This is a day filled with emotion," said Lt. Col. Randall Ames, commander of the western Nebraska organization. "For me and all those who have been associated with this organization, this is the last day of the battalion's existence… proud colors, rolled up and cased; misty eyes and proud hearts."

"I was struck by the magnitude of this last opportunity and I thought to myself, 'Randy, you had better get this right,'" Ames added. "But as I considered what I ought to say, I was reminded of the fact that this battalion has always got things right. In peace and in support of war, in training and in emergencies and disasters it was called to serve, in ceremony and celebration, the 168th has already gotten it right for over 91 years."

The unit's history dates back to July 29, 1920, when it was organized and federally recognized in the Nebraska National Guard at Scottsbluff as the 1st Separate Company of Infantry. It was later designated as Company E, 1st Infantry.

The unit served several campaigns in World War II as Company E, 134th Infantry. These campaigns included the Aleutian Islands, Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe. The unit was additionally decorated with the Presidential Unit Citation, the Bastogne Embroidered Streamer and the St. Lo World War II embroidered streamer.

Following World War II, the unit was reorganized and re-designated multiple times, the largest of which happened in May 1959 when Company I, 134th Infantry, was converted and redesignated as 1st Howitzer Battalion, 168th Field Artillery. The unit would remain part of an artillery battalion until it was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 168th QM Bn. in in September 1997.

According to Col. Doug Ladd, former commander of the battalion, the Soldiers of the organization have a lot to be proud of.

Photo courtesy of the 168th Quartermaster Battalion

Final Act: Lt. Col. Randall Ames, commander of the 168th Quartermaster Petroleum Supply Battalion, places a protective covering over the battalion's colors during the deactivation ceremony for the 168th QM PS Bn., held April 15, in Scottsbluff, Neb. Assisting Ames is Command Sgt. Maj. John Parfait, battalion command sergeant major. The ceremony marked the end of the 91-year history of the western Nebraska organization.

"The Soldiers of the 168th, or more specifically the Soldiers of this western panhandle community, have a proud history of service to their state and country. They know what it means to sacrifice for the cause of their fellow man. They know what it means to give up the comfort and security at home so that Americans and others could have comfort and security in their lives," said Ladd.

"They know what the wages of war cost. They know that in war, the loneliness, the fear and the uncertainty of what might be next," he added. "The Soldiers of this community will continue that same tradition of selfless service after we complete this ceremony today because that is who they are, that is who their parents were and that is how their children will be."

Ames echoed those sentiments, adding that the deactivation of the battalion ends a significant chapter of both local and state history.

"The 168th Quartermaster Battalion is an organization deeply rooted in the local community," said Ames. "Over its long history, its units have played important, noteworthy roles in state service. In that regard, it is unique and its demise is a loss to us all."

"After today, for the first time in its history, all that is great about the 168th Quartermaster Battalion now lies behind it. We cannot further the work, for it is done; nor support the mission, for it has been accomplished; nor carry forward the lineage, for it is no longer our's to hold."

"Today, we remember once more the victories won, the sacrifices made, the achievements accomplished and the camaraderie enjoyed," Ames said. "A great organization passes away today and so it is important that we dedicate ourselves to those things that made the 168th great… but this battalion will never be forgotten as long as history of those fighting units that make up this unit's nearly 91-year lineage is studied, as long as those great colors we have cased today – and the magnificent Soldiers they flew over – are remembered."

"You will always be the 'Enforcers of Democracy,'" Ames concluded, echoing the unit's motto.

The Scottsbluff armory will continue to serve as the home of the Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company; Company C, Recruit Sustainment Program; Zone Seven for Military Funeral Honors; Region Six, Nebraska National Guard Family Assistance Center and a National Guard Recruiting Office.

'Prairie Soldier' pulls off national three-peat

■Newpaper, staff take home multiple awards during annual national journalism competition

The *Prairie Soldier* newspaper has been named the top tabloid-sized newspaper in the Army National Guard for the third straight year and sixth out of seven.

The newspaper, which is the official joint newspaper of the Nebraska Army National Guard, earned the title after competing in the annual National Guard Print Media Competition held in Washington, D.C.

According to National Guard public affairs officials, the competition pitted the newspaper and Nebraska Army and Air Guard journalists against the best in the nation. Officials say they received a total of 800 individual and team print and broadcast entries from 44 states.

In winning the award, the *Prairie Soldier* beat the Illinois Guardian, which finished second, and the Arkansas Minuteman, which finished third.

The *Prairie Soldier* then competed in the U.S. Army's Keith L. Ware competition, where it finished in third place.

Nebraska National Guard journalists also fared well during this year's individual print competition.

In the Army National Guard competition, Spc. Heidi Krueger, a print journalist with the Lincoln-based 111th Public Affairs Detachment, took first place in the Outstanding New Writer category for her work on a variety of news, features, editorial and sports articles.

In the Air National Guard competition, Tech. Sgt. (now 2nd Lt.) Alex Salmon, the *Prairie Soldier's* assistant editor and public affairs officer for the 155th Air Refueling Wing, was named the 2011 Air National Guard Print Journalist of the Year for his work in news, feature and sports writing.

This marks the second-straight year that Salmon has earned the prestigious award.

Salmon also placed second in the Sports Article competition.

Master Sgt. Vern Moore, a photojournalist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs Office, placed third in the Sports Article competition.

Also earning awards was Maj. Kevin Hynes, Nebraska National Guard state public affairs officer and editor of the *Prairie Soldier*. Hynes placed first in the News Article competition, first place in the Sport Article category, first in the Portrait/Personality Photograph contest, second place in the Feature Article category, third place in the Pictorial Photograph competition and third place in the Picture story competition.

Nebraskan awarded Silver Star for actions in Afghanistan

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

Bradley Larson always had a dream to fly. So after playing four years of college football while earning his degree from Doane College, and coaching high school football in his native Chambers, Neb., for a year, he decided to join the Army.

With his college degree, which qualified him to become an officer in the Army, he did the only thing that made sense to him – he enlisted.

"I wanted to be a ground guy first," said now 2nd Lt. Larson, a member of the Grand Island-based Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion who is currently in his 11th month of flight training at Fort Rucker, Ala., to fly the CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

"That was a personal choice of mine because I could've come in as an officer or a warrant, but I wanted to get some ground work," said the 30-year-old Larson.

"I've always wanted to fly and I thought, 'Well, I'll join the Army and work my way to where I can earn the respect of troops that are under me,'" he added.

Following a deployment to Afghanistan in 2009, and after being awarded the Army's third highest combat award, the Silver Star, along with a Purple Heart, Larson will surely have gained the respect of not only the troops under him, but the respect of everyone who knows his story.

In 2009, then-Sgt. Larson was a member of the active Army's Troop B, 361st Cavalry, 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, deployed to Afghanistan. His unit was stationed at Combat Outpost Keating in the Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province. According to Larson they were the most northern U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

COP Keating sat in a valley surrounded by mountainous terrain. The COP's 40-50 Soldiers were going about their duties on Oct. 3 at approximately 6 a.m.

Larson had just taken over a guard post near the COP's entry control point when an estimated 400 insurgents launched an organized, well-armed attack on the COP. The insurgents used B-10 recoilless rifles, rocket propelled grenades and small arms fire to try to overrun the guard positions and the COP itself.

Larson took cover in a Humvee near the guard post and took immediate enemy fire.

"They shot a rocket in at us and then I had sniper rounds bouncing off my .50 cal," said Larson. "It was an organized attack and they knew what they were doing."

Despite intense enemy fire, Larson got into the turret of the Humvee and returned fire.

"I went through probably 1,500 rounds of .50 caliber ammo in 10 minutes," said Larson.

Four other Soldiers came to help him and bring ammunition, but enemy insurgents had already penetrated the perimeter wire.

Larson and the other Soldiers decided to fall back to the main compound.

As they began to pull back to the main compound, Larson provided covering fire. He reloaded twice before precision sniper fire hit him in the head and arm and an RPG disabled his weapon.

Larson said the sniper's bullet hit his helmet in a place where there was extra Kevlar, stopping the bullet.

"If it would have been an inch lower it would have probably gone through the helmet and into my ear," said Larson.

Larson dropped back into the Humvee and planned a course of action to reach the compound. Once the plan was in place, Larson and another Soldier used their M-4 rifles to provide cover fire for three Soldiers attempting to reach friendly forces.

Once they initiated the plan, another RPG hit near one Soldier and two others were shot. Larson and another Soldier moved back to the Humvee to figure out what to do next.

"Our .50 cal was disabled at this point, the (M-)240 (machine gun) was disabled and we had 14 rounds of ammo between the two of us after all of this," said Larson. "And our radio wasn't working, so we had no communication, no ammo and not a clue what was going on."

By now Larson and the other Soldier in the Humvee could hear intermittent gun and bomb runs from fixed and rotary-wing aircraft on the enemy fighting positions. They then realized the Soldier who had suffered the RPG strike was still alive, but was in an open area with no cover.

The next time an AH-64 Apache Helicopter fired on enemy positions, they took action. Larson provided cover fire, using their remaining ammo, as the other Soldier quickly got their injured comrade back to the Humvee. Inside the Humvee the two Soldiers provided first aid as best they could.

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Silver Star: 2nd Lt. Bradley Larson is awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart by Gov. Dave Heineman during a ceremony held at the Nebraska State Capitol's Warner Chamber, in Lincoln, Neb., March 6.

For approximately five hours, the three Soldiers were cut off from all friendly forces. They managed to secure a 200-round drum of ammunition. Larson delinked the ammo and refilled M-4 magazines. Shortly after reloading, Larson killed two enemy fighters who had penetrated the wire and were attempting to take his position. He was also able to engage other targets from the window of the Humvee.

Larson and the other Soldiers finally gained communications with the COP when Larson provided cover fire as the other Soldier retrieved a functioning radio from a Soldier who had been killed. By this time it had been at least six hours since the beginning of the attack.

He immediately provided a situation report and proposed a course of action to evacuate the wounded Soldier.

Forces from the COP finally came to the aid of Larson and the other Soldier, allowing them to evacuate the wounded Soldier under heavy fire through an open, uncovered avenue to the troop aid station.

Larson then linked up with his section leader and pushed with an assault team, under heavy fire, to recover the two Soldiers killed in action. He then assisted in reinforcing the destroyed entry control.

"The front gate was blown up and we needed to reinforce that so I went and got concertina wire and we threw a few smoke grenades," said Larson.

Next, Larson ran patrols to try to locate Soldiers who were unaccounted for.

Because of the COP's remote location, elevation and mountainous terrain, it took a Quick Reaction Force approximately 12 hours to reach the COP.

As darkness fell, Larson's work was still not over.

"Once night came they were sending in the medevac Black Hawks to pick up the wounded and the dead," said Larson. "They needed a few people to go clear the landing zone for the helicopter, which was outside the COP. So me and my section sergeant led an assault force to clear the landing zone of any mines or insurgents."

Larson said the assault team traversed the 150 meters from the COP to LZ, which included crossing a river six times and once getting into a gun-battle with additional enemy fighters.

When the entire battle was over, eight Soldiers had paid the ultimate sacrifice, another 24 were wounded, and the COP was basically destroyed.

"Our COP was on fire," said Larson. "There was only one building that was still standing."

"It had holes in the roof from mortars coming in," he added. "How it was still standing, I have no idea."

Once again, because of the remoteness of the COP and extreme temperatures, the remaining Soldiers were forced to spend another four days at the nearly-destroyed COP before they were airlifted out.

"My platoon was the last guys on the last bird," said Larson. "I'm actually kind of proud of that. My section sergeant, who was my best friend, and I were the last two people on the last helicopter and it was a really good feeling to finally get picked up."

Larson was flown to a different Forward Operating Base, given a single day off, and then sent back out on missions.

With his deployment to Afghanistan more than two years behind him, Larson was honored with the Silver Star and Purple Heart, or as he likes to refer to it, the "Enemy Marksmanship Badge," by Gov. Dave Heineman and other state leaders during a ceremony held at the Nebraska State Capitol's Warner Chamber, in Lincoln, Neb., March 6.

There, Larson and 12 other Nebraska National Guard Soldiers – including one who paid the ultimate sacrifice – were awarded the Silver Star, Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star Medal with Valor device, Purple Heart or Army Commendation Medal with Valor device for actions during recent deployments.

"I actually thought the ceremony was very good," said Larson. "I had some family and friends come down, it was good."

Larson added that he was happy to learn that Heineman was once in the Army. He felt proud to be honored by someone who also had worn the uniform.

But beyond the glitz and glamour of the ceremony, Larson is a humble Soldier who wants nothing more than to get back to his hometown and normal life once he's graduated flight school. He said he also looks forward to welcoming home the members of Co. B, 2-135, GSAB when they return from their deployment to Afghanistan later this year.

"I'm looking forward to being back in Nebraska," said Larson.

"I plan on going back to Chambers and being a rancher and then flying helicopters whenever the National Guard needs me," said Larson.

And as far as the medal are concerned?

"I wish I wouldn't have gotten the Purple Heart," said Larson. "That means I was too slow."

"All I was trying to do was keep my guys alive," he added. "So they could go home to their families. So they could do something with their lives. I was a little bit older than most of my guys…I'd done quite a bit. I'd played college football, I'd coached, I had done a lot of things. I was more worried about them than anything."

"I wasn't looking for a medal at all," he said.

"I was doing my job."

Editors Note: *Some information in this article is taken from the Silver Star citation for 2nd Lt. Bradley Larson.*

Photo by Dave Nore

Nebraska Heroes: Gov. Dave Heineman poses with Nebraska National Guardsmen in the historic Warner Legislative Chamber at the Nebraska State Capitol, March 6, during a ceremony honoring the Soldiers with various awards they've earned recently.

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men and their families who have sacrificed for their state and nation.

"I am proud to recognize the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers we honor today for their heroic service and accomplishments," Heineman added. "Nebraska and America are very proud of you."

Lyons echoed those thoughts.

"Our Guard members have seen their share of action. They have encountered improvised explosive devices, sniper attacks, and both direct and indirect fire while completing their missions," he said. "Eleven Nebraska National Guard members have given their lives and over 80 have received the Purple Heart for wounds received in action. Our members have earned a Silver Star, 16 Bronze Stars with valor and 28 Army Commendation Medals with valor."

"In addition, three members have received Soldiers' Medals for valor under noncombat conditions," Lyons added. "Today we pay special homage to the latest of those who have earned significant military awards. They are but a few of the many Nebraska National Guard heroes and the Soldiers who are here today will gladly admit that."

Probably the most poignant moment of the ceremony came as the Hamburger's family was introduced to the chamber and then given portraits of their fallen Soldier in memory of their sacrifices.

Two Guard Soldiers awarded Soldier's Medals

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

The Army's Warrior Leader Course teaches young Soldiers skills to lead small groups during stressful situations. Instructors put the Soldiers into scenarios where they have to quickly assess a situation, make a decision on course of action, and then act.

So it stands to reason that two instructors of WLC would be well prepared for a stressful situation on the night of April 30, 2010.

When Staff Sergeants Eric Schnell and Justin McCoy decided to carpool to Sioux Falls, S.D., they couldn't have possibly foreseen how their night would unfold. The two Soldiers with the Camp Ashland-based 209th Regional Training Institute were on their way to visit family in the South Dakota city.

Traveling north on Interstate 29 near Beresford, S.D., at approximately 10 p.m., McCoy, who was driving, noticed something odd in the southbound lane.

"I looked out of the corner of my eye and I saw taillights going north in the southbound lane and so I was like 'That's not right,'" said McCoy, a small group leader for the WLC at the RTI. "As soon as I realized that, I watched two vehicles hit head on."

Schnell immediately dialed 911 as McCoy merged into the left lane, stopped and turned his vehicle so his headlights lit the scene of the accident. McCoy grabbed his flashlight and ran to a Ford F-150, which was now in the median and had caught fire in the engine compartment.

After getting no response from the driver, McCoy broke the front-passenger window and was met with a wall of smoke. He then jumped into the bed of the truck to look in the back window, which had been blown out in the collision.

"At that point I entered the vehicle from the rear window, grabbed the guy, knowing that if I move this guy he's probably going to have a neck injury, but the vehicle at that point had caught fire and was starting to come inside," said McCoy.

"At that point (Staff Sgt.) Schnell had made it up to the vehicle," added McCoy. "He came up to the vehicle and was on the driver's side front and was in the process of trying to free the guy's legs."

As the two Soldiers worked, bystanders, including a volunteer firefighter, stopped to offer assistance. The two Soldiers told them to find a fire extinguisher to try to control the fire that had now spread into the cabin of the vehicle, forcing Schnell to abandon his efforts to free the man's legs.

Others had begun helping McCoy pull the man out of the vehicle from the bed of the truck, but McCoy realized the flames were getting dangerously close.

"I remember thinking, 'OK, if this fire gets to this gas tank that we're standing on, it's going to be a bad thing,'" said McCoy. "So I directed the rest of the people to get away from the vehicle and I continued to try to pull and free the guy."

Once the flames got too close, McCoy was forced to end his efforts. From there the Soldiers went to the other vehicle, but were unable to render aid because that vehicle was engulfed in flames.

Emergency responders got to the scene and took the account of the accident from both Soldiers. The responders thanked the men for their efforts and continued their work.

For their actions, McCoy and Schnell were awarded the Soldier's Medal during a ceremony held at the Nebraska State Capitol's Warner Chamber March 6.

According to Army Regulation 600-8-22, the Soldier's Medal is the seventh highest Army medal given out, and is awarded to any person of the Armed Forces of the United States or of a friendly foreign nation who, while serving in any capacity with the Army of the United States, including reserve component Soldiers not serving in a duty status at the time of the heroic act, who distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy.

During the ceremony Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman, Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska National Guard adjutant general, and Com-

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mand Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, Nebraska National Guard state command sergeant major, honored McCoy and Schnell along with 12 other Nebraska National Guard Soldiers – including one who paid the ultimate sacrifice. The 14 Soldiers were awarded either the Silver Star, Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star Medal with Valor device, Purple Heart or Army Commendation Medal with Valor device during recent deployments.

"I am proud to recognize the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers we honor today for their heroic service and accomplishments," said Heineman during the ceremony. "Nebraska and America are very proud of each of you."

According to the citation for McCoy and Schnell, they were awarded the Soldier's Medal 'for heroism while responding to the accident where multiple vehicles had already caught fire. With disregard for their own personal safety, they attempted to remove two victims from the hazardous wreckage. While exposed to danger, they directed bystanders to aid in the rescue attempt. Their leadership and training directly contributed to the successful organized initial response. They then aided in the transition of control to emergency responders. They displayed bold initiative, selfless service and personal courage in putting their own lives at risk in order to protect others, serving as an example for all Soldiers to follow. Their actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon themselves, the 209th RTI and the U.S. Army.'

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Honored: Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy (left) and Staff Sgt. Eric Schnell, both with the 209th Regional Training Institute, receive the Soldier's Medal from Gov. Dave Heineman during a ceremony at the Nebraska State Capitol, March 6.

The Soldiers said being recognized for their actions by the governor and other state leaders at the capitol meant a lot.

"The ceremony was really nice," said Schnell, a small group leader for the Advanced Leader Course. "It means quite a bit. It shows that even outside of work you can be recognized for things that you do in your community."

"Honestly, it was humbling," said McCoy. "There were a lot of other Soldiers that did a lot of other things that were heroic in nature and it's very humbling."

Both McCoy and Schnell credit the military and their training for their ability to assess the situation and react.

"Over the years that we've been in the military it teaches (us) just to kind of react to a situation, so that's pretty much what we did" said Schnell, who deployed to Iraq in 2005. "We saw a situation and just reacted to it."

"Honestly, I just reacted," said McCoy, who deployed to Iraq in 2006. "I remember seeing it happen and saying 'Holy crap' and then saying 'Wait a minute, this is a problem.'"

"I just reacted and didn't even think twice about it," he added. "It was just, they need help and if I can do anything to help, that's what I was there to do."

Military positions the Soldiers have held over the years also helped in their response to the accident.

"Previous leadership positions that I've been placed in definitely came into play and helped me with making good decisions and providing the leadership aspect of it as well," said McCoy.

Schnell said he's been able to incorporate much of what he learned that fateful night into some of his teaching at the RTI.

And although their military job is teaching their students how to assess stressful situations quickly, make a decision and act during a military conflict, the skills their students learn can be applied every day – with or without recognition.

"The reason we stopped was not because we thought we would get an award," said McCoy.

"That just goes back to everything we've both been trained in the military – you never leave anyone behind," he added. "Even though the guy wasn't a service member, he was still a person in need so the Warrior Ethos came into play and Army values."

"We didn't do it for an award or anything like that," said Schnell. "We saw an accident, we knew they would need help, and we were there to help."

"You never know when something like this can occur," added Schnell. "Anytime you can help out and hopefully save a life… it means quite a bit."

"I didn't do my actions because I thought I would get something out of it," said McCoy. "I did what I did because I knew it was the right thing to do."

WHITE HOUSE continued from page 1.

derlich is "a simple, plain girl, who's a wife and mother."

Just another professional Army Soldier. A female National Guard Soldier in her late 20s in a Class A Army uniform, her dark brown hair neatly pinned in place, rows of military ribbons pinned over her heart on an Army dress jacket she had been donned for the last time.

Inside the house, a melodic harmony played by the Marine orchestra softly echoed off the intricately molded ceilings and filtered through crystal dangling from a golden chandelier hanging from the ceiling by a seemingly too small gold chain. An array of cocktails, champagne and two varieties of local beer accompanied decadent hors d'oeuvres were offered on trays by white-gloved staff.

Wunderlich sipped champagne and mingled with other guests as she and her husband roamed uninhibited throughout the halls of the great house, stopping to admire the artwork and grandeur of each room they entered.

It was early evening of Feb. 29, the middle of the workweek. Over the course of the next few minutes Wunderlich would be joined by 77 fellow service members representing each branch of the armed service and each of the 50 states. The walls of this particular house had not seen such a diverse group of military service members in the history of its existence. The young Nebraska National Guard Soldier felt a deep sense of satisfaction and pride as she scanned the crowd knowing she was part of this group of military individuals that mirrored the American public more than it had at any other time in U.S. military history.

What sets Wunderlich apart from most other Soldiers is the bronze star ribbon with "V" device she wears at the top of her ribbon rack... a ribbon that was part of the reason she now found herself at the White House this evening as a guest for a dinner with President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, honoring the million plus American military members who served in Iraq.

The event was called "A Nation's Gratitude Honoring the U.S. Troops of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn."

Wunderlich, 28, a flight medic with the Nebraska Army National Guard, accompanied by her husband, Sgt. Jeremie Wunderlich, represented her home state of Nebraska at the official White House dinner.

Later that week Wunderlich expressed her gratitude those service members who fought in Iraq, particularly those who paid the ultimate price.

"We will never forget them," she said in recognition of those American service members who paid the ultimate price of freedom in Iraq.

Serving two yearlong tours Iraq where she flew more than 200 missions as a helicopter combat medic, Wunderlich knows the tragedies of war. Dangerous combat missions and enemy fire were frequent occurrences during her time there.

Wunderlich, a recipient of the Bronze Star with Valor device, also saw firsthand the toll that war plays on military service members and their families.

It wasn't until she walked through the receiving line and shook the hands of the president and first lady, though, that she realized the caliber of the event.

"I assumed that maybe some higher level military would be there to speak," Wunderlich said.

It was not until after being ushered into the stately decorated dining room that she became aware of the stature of VIPs that were waiting inside to greet them.

Joining the president and first lady were Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden, Defense Secretary Leon E Panetta, Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other senior officials from every branch of service. They were all there to honor those military service members who fought and died in one of our nation's longest wars.

Seated at each of the elaborately decorated tables was a high level government VIP. Wunderlich, her husband and seven others shared their table with Admiral Robert J. Papp Jr., commandant of the United States Coast Guard.

Two tables behind her sat the president and vice president, both seated at separate tables reserved for families who had lost loved ones during the decade-long war in Iraq.

"I thought that was incredibly appropriate… none of us were angry," she said. "They're the people who this whole thing was about."

President Obama spoke of the significance of the evening's events and expressed his gratitude and admiration for the military's example of service and sacrifice.

"Tonight, on behalf of Michelle and myself, on behalf of over 300 million Americans we want to express those simple words that we can never say enough," the president said. "That's 'Thank you.'"

"When he said those words it rings home," Wunderlich said. "You open your eyes and there you are and the president is speaking to you."

"It was a huge honor and I am very proud to have represented Nebraska. I don't consider myself any different from any other Soldier," she added. "In my heart I don't feel special."

Speaking to the group that evening, Panetta said, "We are (also) indebted to your families and your loved ones for the sacrifices that they made so that their loved ones could help defend this nation."

Wunderlich said Panetta's message really resonated for her. Being single on her first deployment to Iraq in 2006 was nothing compared to the second deployment in 2010 when she deployed as a wife of a deployed Soldier and stepmother to two teenagers.

The couple sipped red wine while engaging in casual conversation with the commandant of the Coast Guard and a Marine sergeant major as they dined on tomato and fresh mozzarella garnished with fresh basil and drizzled with olive oil, followed by a rib-eye steak and potato plated on the Obama's official dinnerware complete with a gold presidential seal.

Champagne followed the main course, paired with a chocolate crème brûlée, a chocolate mousse and little triangular pieces of decadent chocolate with gold leaves brushed on the tops of each.

Photos courtesy of Sgt. Heather Wunderlich

Historic Photo Of A Historic Night: Sgt. Heather Wunderlich, Nebraska Army National Guard, poses for a photograph within the historic East Wing of the White House shortly before meeting President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle. Wunderlich was chosen to represent Nebraska during the Feb. 29 dinner honoring American service members for their work in Iraq.

Biden thanked the senior leaders for training the "finest generation of warriors," and expressed frustration in hearing talk of how Generation X is less prepared than previous generations. He then referred to Wunderlich's generation as the "9/11 Generation."

It was the first time Wunderlich had heard this term, but she said it's a fitting description of the U.S. military today, especially the group of service members sitting in the White House dining room that evening.

As she looked around the room, Wunderlich saw women and men of various ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations and religions who all shared one common feeling – love and commitment to their country.

Unfortunately, Wunderlich's family will not be able to experience the surreal events of that evening. Strict rules about video kept her from recording the entire thing. Every couple did get official White House "prom pictures" as they walked in and were allowed to take as many personal photos as they wanted. Wunderlich also made sure not to bend the fancy invitation with White House seal and kept her name card off the table.

She also has a souvenir from that evening that most of the others probably did not get. She said the disposable hand towels in the bathroom were some of the nicest she had ever seen. They were perfectly folded, white, and complete with the presidential seal.

One person's trash is another person's treasure she said she thought to herself tucking an extra towel into the inside pocket of her jacket.

Later that evening after the dinner, President Obama said, "there has never been a night quite like this."

What A Meal: American service members were treated to a main course of aged rib-eye steak, roasted beans and a cheese croquette that were served on President Barack Obama's official presidential china.

Wunderlich said she reflected on the president's words that evening.

"This was a peak moment in our lives," she said. "It just doesn't get any better than this."

Wunderlich's husband described the night's events as "amazing," and said he never uses that word.

It was a night and a dinner that will not soon be forgotten in the Wunderlich household.

"It will be something that my kids tell their kids," said Wunderlich. "Our families are so proud."

Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

One Final Squeeze: Capt. Kevin Janousek, a horticultural specialist with ADT No. 3, receives a hug from his son, Ryan, 2, during a farewell ceremony at the 'Spirit of 76' Armory in Lincoln, Neb. April 10, before deploying for a yearlong mission to Afghanistan.

FAREWELL

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Small, adding that he hopes the Afghans won't have the hunger issues they have now.

"It's a special privilege when you get the opportunity to wear the uniform of this country and be in a position where you can make a difference," said Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman. "That is what you are going to be doing as a part of the Agribusiness Development Team No. 3. You are going to go over there and make a difference."

With the long journey ahead, the members of the teamsaid they couldn't do it without the love, support and encouragement of their family and friends.

"I want to say thank you to our families for your love and support," said Prusia. "Without you holding down the fort and managing things on the home front, we could not do what we are expected to do when we wear this uniform."

"Likewise I want to thank our extended family and friends," added Prusia, "from whom we also receive support, encouragement and prayers."

Guardsmen prepare for Afghan deployment

By Spc. Riley Huskey
Staff Writer

Despite a recent restructuring, pre-deployment training for members of the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 proceeded as planned in March at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

ADT No. 3 will replace the Nebraska National Guard's ADT No. 2 in Afghanistan in early May. According to Maj. David Cooper, this rare Cornhusker handoff has the ultimate formula for success: relationships and communication.

"The entire time the ADT 2 has been in theater, they have been in contact with us," Cooper said. "They have been updating us on new systems and new equipment, providing us with a knowledge-based focus, a clearer idea and picture of what to expect in the takeover.

"There was a benefit being on the pre-deployment site survey team because these are Nebraska Soldiers - friends - there is and was a very warm welcome," he said. "Because of existing working relationships, the positive atmosphere was more conducive to learning what is actually happening in Afghanistan. They know you, they trust you and they can tell you how it really works."

A recent restructuring has changed the way ADT No. 3 will deploy. Many who thought they were deploying are not, and many have learned their roles are changing.

Cooper's role has changed from the operations officer to the deputy commander of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, an adjacent unit already in Afghanistan that will provide security forces for the agricultural team's missions. Cooper said this presents challenges but is confident things will work out.

"They now have an agricultural team, of which they were aware of, but never necessarily included as part of their initial training," Cooper said. "As a result, the number of personnel or missions that can go out at any one time may very well be affected. Hiccups or not, I don't believe this is anything we can't get past. Once we get into theater, we will get our battle rhythm established, even through the change in (operations tempo)."

Originally made up of 58 Air and Army National Guard members, ADT No.3 now consists of 12 total Soldiers – eleven Nebraska Army National Guardsmen and one U.S. Army Reservist who serves as the group's veterinarian. And although the number of people on the team has decreased, the pre-deployment training they all received is beneficial to those seeking future deployments.

"There has been an impact on the training," Cooper said. "But it is not as negative of an impact as I had expected it to be. The troops that were able to stay are providing us the necessary training, the tools needed to succeed alongside the PRT (security forces) in country."

> *"I look forward to the opportunity to work with the subject matter experts on the agricultural team and the people of Afghanistan. Being able to take our knowledge and help Afghans find Afghan solutions to Afghan problems."*
>
> ***— Lt. Col. Will Prusia***
> *ADT No. 3*

"It added some realism to our mission, and we had some fun with it as well," said Lt. Col. Will Prusia, officer-in-charge of ADT No. 3. "It helped us to focus on what could be ahead for us."

Prusia said he believes the team has been set up for success due to the diversity of the agricultural team and its close relationship with the currently-deployed Nebraska unit.

"New places, new faces, new experiences," Prusia said. "I look forward to the opportunity to work with the subject matter experts on the agricultural team and the people of Afghanistan. Being able to take our knowledge and help the Afghans find Afghan solutions to Afghan problems."

Photos by Capt. Andrew Nelson

Meeting the Locals: Lt. Col. Will Prusia (middle), ADT No. 3, and Maj. David Cooper (right), ADT No. 3 deputy commander, meet with an Afghan policeman portrayed by Sgt. Justin McKenna, a Pre-deployment Training and Assistance Element instructor, during the team's pre-deployment training at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 17.

Comparing the training to that of past deployments, Capt. Kevin Janousek, agricultural specialist, said the training was top-notch and fitting.

"The booby traps, pyro techniques, the different things we may encounter walking through a village in Afghanistan, made it much more realistic than training received before," Janousek said. "This training was physically demanding and maintained the realistic, everyday situations we will face overseas."

ADT No. 3 members agreed their pre-deployment training, which consisted of individual movement techniques and various battle drills, has been realistic and beneficial.

"The IMT lane was set up nicely," said Sgt. 1st Class Alex Ruden, a member of ADT No. 3. "The (Opposition Forces) played the role well, and I believe we ran into everything we could possibly run into in a hazardous urban environment. It really was good training overall."

Monthly drills have also been used to train and perform Army warrior tasks. From reacting to chemical attacks to land navigation.

"While the restructuring did happen, the Soldiers that are here are highly motivated to train," Cooper said. "More importantly, they are not taking the training lightly and I am proud of them for that. They stuck with it and continue to assist in providing an excellent source for training."

Stay Back: Sgt. Rachel Ramsey, a forester with ADT No. 3, tells a villager portrayed by Staff Sgt. Michael Coleman, a 111th Public Affairs Detachment journalist, to step back during the ADT No. 3's pre-deployment training at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 17.

HOMECOMING

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the kids too...because I know it's harder on them."

LeeAnne Schmidt waited for her son, Sgt. Jesse Schmidt, with her two daughters, Cori and Megan.

"I'm just totally excited," said LeeAnne. "Holding back tears waiting to see him."

"It's just this big void that's going to be filled with him coming back home," she added.

Cori said she was so "pumped" about her brother being home she was going to tackle him at some point…when it was respectable to do so.

Finally, two charter busses pulled near the facility to the delight of the crowd. After 10 months, the members of ADT No. 2 were home to see their loved ones.

"It's just unbelievable," said Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Burton, a member of the team's headquarters section. "It's so good to be home."

"I'm feeling great," said Sgt. Sam Kinnett, a member of the team's security forces, as he hugged his wife and two daughters. "It's a happy day."

Not only was the team's mission unique, the fact that this was the first joint overseas deployment between the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard made things interesting.

"It was a good deployment," said Burton. "When we started you could tell the difference between the Air Force and the Army, and when we finished, we finished as one team."

"It actually worked out really well," said Kinnett. "There wasn't any separation between the two branches. We came together really good and worked really well."

Kinnett added that each service was able to learn from the other. The Air Force was able to learn a little more about working outside-the-wire from the Army, and the Army was able to learn how to "chill out" a little bit from the Air Force.

Photo by Dave Nore

Here's Your Sign: Senior Airman Matt Crane, an ADT No. 2 Security Forces member, gets a grand welcome home from his wife, Emily, and son, Cannon, as family and friends wave signs and flags at the Army Aviation Support Facility No.1 in Lincoln, Neb., April 6.

State and local leaders were then able to thank the Soldiers and Airmen for their sacrifice.

"Obviously today is a great day," said Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman. "Not only is it Good Friday, but what a great day to have 46 Soldiers and Airmen returning home. And I want those individuals to know we are very proud of you."

Heineman also thanked the families and friends for their sacrifices in supporting their loved ones.

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, also thanked the families and said he was proud of the effort of the Soldiers and Airmen.

"This was the first time that the Nebraska National Guard has organized and deployed a joint team like this – Army and Air working together," said Lyons. "Fifty-eight Soldiers and Airmen, and we watched you form, train, now deploy and redeploy as one team, one mission and I think that's significant. We're one of the few states that has done that."

Commander of ADT No. 2, Col. Lynn Heng, said there were some issues in the beginning, but once everyone had on the same uniform, it was one united team.

"They're professional, they're courageous, they're hard working, they're dedicated and they're loyal," said Heng.

"Just an amazing group of people," he added. "I've been in the Army for over 25 years now and I've been in some pretty prestigious units and these folks are just the best of the best, I can assure you of that."

Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Proud Papa: Sgt. 1st Class Chris Morehouse holds his four-month-old daughter, Makella, at the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, April 6, during a ceremony honoring Guardsmen returning from a 10-month long deployment to Afghanistan as part of Agribusiness Development Team No. 2.

Best Warrior

Nebraska Guardsmen compete for title of state's best warrior, trip to regional competition

By Staff Sgt. Michael Coleman
Staff Writer

The desire to compete, to better oneself and to prove one's prowess lives in every warrior's heart.

Recently, six of the Nebraska Army National Guard's top noncommissioned officers attempted to do exactly that when they participated in the state's annual Best Warrior competition, held March 26-29 at three Nebraska National Guard training sites.

According to the competitors, the opportunity to test themselves against the state's best sergeants was an enticing opportunity.

"I always want to see how I compare to other leaders," said Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy, a small group leader with Camp Ashland's 1st Battalion, 209th Regional Training Institute.

Sgt. Joshua Kushen, a member of Beatrice's Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, agreed. "When I get into a competition I am very competitive and hard on myself."

That's exactly the types of attitudes that Nebraska's senior NCOs hoped to attract when they designed this year's competition, which incorporated a number of tasks designed to test the Soldiers' overall skills.

"We all love competition," said Command Sgt. Major Marty Baker, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade command sergeant major. "This separates the best soldiers."

This year's competition began months ago for the NCOs as they vied for their respective battalion's slot in the Best Warrior competition. Once selected, the Soldiers began the long march toward the actual state competition, which would then qualify them for the regional Best Warrior contest that was held in Nebraska in April.

"It was my peers that selected me out of my detachment," Kushen said. "Knowing that I had their support, I volunteered."

Photos by Staff Sgt. Michael Coleman

Battling To The Finish: Durring the last event of the close competition Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy grapples with Sgt. Joshua Kushen in a match that will determine the Best Warrior. The four-day event, held March 26-29, was designed to find the Nebraska Army National Guard's top noncommissioned officer for 2012, who would then go on to compete in the regional Best Warrior competition.

Steady Aim: Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy, small group leader at the 209th Regional Training Institute, aims his weapon during the Best Warrior Competition held at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 27.

Kushen said he made sure to study Army regulations and manuals, but it was difficult to balance time for training with his obligations to his family, school and his job. "I know I could have been better prepared but I am going to give it the best I have," said Kushen.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, state command sergeant major, this year's state event was designed to challenge each of the competitors by placing them into physically stressful and mentally exhausting situations. He added that victory would undoubtedly come to the one Soldier who could successfully channel their strength and focus on each individual step of the competition.

"The competitors lose track of time and what they are doing by looking too far ahead," said Valenzuela. "It is important to focus on the current event and not worry about what is coming ahead."

"When you are tired it is hard to be mentally agile," said Sgt. Maj. Mark Felker, Joint Forces Headquarters operations sergeant major, who added that each event was designed to push the Soldiers to their limits. "There isn't one specific event… We geared it to wear them down physically; then we challenge them mentally."

The senior Soldiers added that the competition was also designed to provide unique training opportunities that benefit each of the sergeants.

"There is going to be one winner, but there are no losers," said Baker.

"It strengthens each Soldier that competes and it strengthens their unit with the knowledge the Soldiers gains in the competition," added Valenzuela.

Still, because of each NCO's desire to win, the Soldiers said they knew they were in for a tough competition.

"It is anyone's game," said McCoy.

That made the relationship between the competitors and their sponsors – Soldiers who acted as individual coaches throughout the competitive events – even more crucial.

Rough Going: The Best Warrior competition often became a personal battle between pain and internal fortitude as this pair of blood-stained boots testified after the road march.

"I saw the competitors at regionals last year and I know McCoy can compete at that level," said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Hagedorn, senior small group instructor, 1st Bn. 209th RTI, who was working with his fellow instructor to help him best compete. "I am proud to be his sponsor."

"I like McCoy as a person and a Soldier, I know in my heart he can go the whole way," added Hagedorn.

According to both the sponsors and the competitors, sponsors play a critical role as coaches and motivators during the event, while also keeping the fatigued NCOs focused.

"I try to take his mind off the competition to reduce his stress but when we are at an event it's all business," said Staff Sgt. Cody Trindle, detachment sergeant with Co. C (LRS), 1-134th Cavalry, who was sponsoring Kushen.

Trindle said Kushen is very well rounded, adding that the toughest challenge Kushen would face wouldn't come in the form of individual events, but rather in avoiding psyching himself out.

"It is imperative to have a sponsor," said Kushen. "I couldn't ask

See WARRIOR on 10.

Soldiers pushed to the limits in grueling competition

By Spc. Jason Drager
Staff Writer

The Nebraska National Guard's Best Warrior Competition was held March 26-29 at three different sites throughout the state to determine the state's top warrior who would go on to represent Nebraska at a regional competition.

The competition, held at Camp Ashland, and the Greenlief and Mead training areas, included an enlisted and noncommissioned officer bracket. The winner of each moved on to regionals.

"The Best Warrior Competition is a series of events to determine the most physically and mentally agile Soldier," said Sgt. Maj. Mark Felker, noncommissioned officer in charge of the competition.

Over the four days the Soldiers competed in numerous physically demanding events, wrote an essay, took an exam and met with boards. Each event was worth 50 points and the board, which was the main event, was worth 100.

Photos by Spc. Jason Drager

Aiming For A Victory: A Nebraska Army Guard Soldier throws a practice grenade during the 2012 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior competition.

"The point is to beat the crap out of them physically and then challenge them mentally," said Nebraska State Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela.

Each competitor also had a sponsor with them throughout the entire competition.

"The sponsor is first of all, a battle buddy, then coach and then mentor," said Felker.

Initially the enlisted bracket was comprised of five competitors, however, due to sickness and dropouts it was reduced to two.

Spc. Michael Block of Headquarters Detachment, 126th Chemical Battalion, and Spc. Lemuel Sheard, 1075th Transportation Company, were both vying for the opportunity to represent the state in April's regionals.

"I'm very honored to have been selected for this," said Block. "I would be even more honored to represent Nebraska at regionals."

"My expectations are just to do the best I can with the abilities I've got," said Sheard. "If that's not enough for me to win then I can't be too upset."

On the first day the competitors completed the essay portion of the competition. The next morning, with an early start at 4:45 a.m., the competitors competed in the Army Physical Fitness Test. After the test and breakfast, everyone went to the firing range to zero their weapons and compete in rifle marksmanship.

Block was a perfect 30-out-of-30 before his weapon started double feeding causing him to miss his final 10 shots.

"It was a little dis-

See BEST on 10.

Heavy Burden: Spc. Michael Block carries a 30-pound rucksack during an eight-mile ruck march in the Nebraska Best Warrior competition at Mead Training Site, March 28.

Czech general visits Nebraska Guard in March

Visit to Cornhusker state allows senior Czech military leader to learn more about air refueling, Guard's capabilities

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska National Guard had the opportunity to strengthen its partnership with the Czech Republic, recently, when Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, hosted senior Czech Republic military officer during a visit to the Cornhusker state.

According to Maj. Brenda Fujan, Nebraska National Guard state partnership program coordinator, Maj. Gen. Miroslav Zizka's March 20-22 visit to Nebraska served a number of purposes.

"(Major General) Zizka's visit was a great opportunity for him to see firsthand Nebraska capabilities and diverse missions," said Fujan. "This serves as a basis for developing future engagements."

The visit was part of Nebraska's ongoing relationship with the Czech Armed Forces through the National Guard's state partnership program.

The Nebraska and Texas National Guard have been matched with the Czech Republic for more than a decade under the program.

The State Partnership Program is designed to help sustain enduring relationships with partner nations of strategic value in conjunction with the National Security Strategy, National Military Strategy, Department of State and Combatant Command Theater Security Cooperation guidance to promote national objectives, stability, partner capacity, better understanding and trust.

Zizka serves as the first deputy chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic. According to Fujan, Zizka had met with Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal during Navrkal's visit to the Czech Republic in June 2011.

During that visit, Fujan said, Navrkal extended an invitation to Zizka to visit Nebraska if he happened to be traveling to the United States.

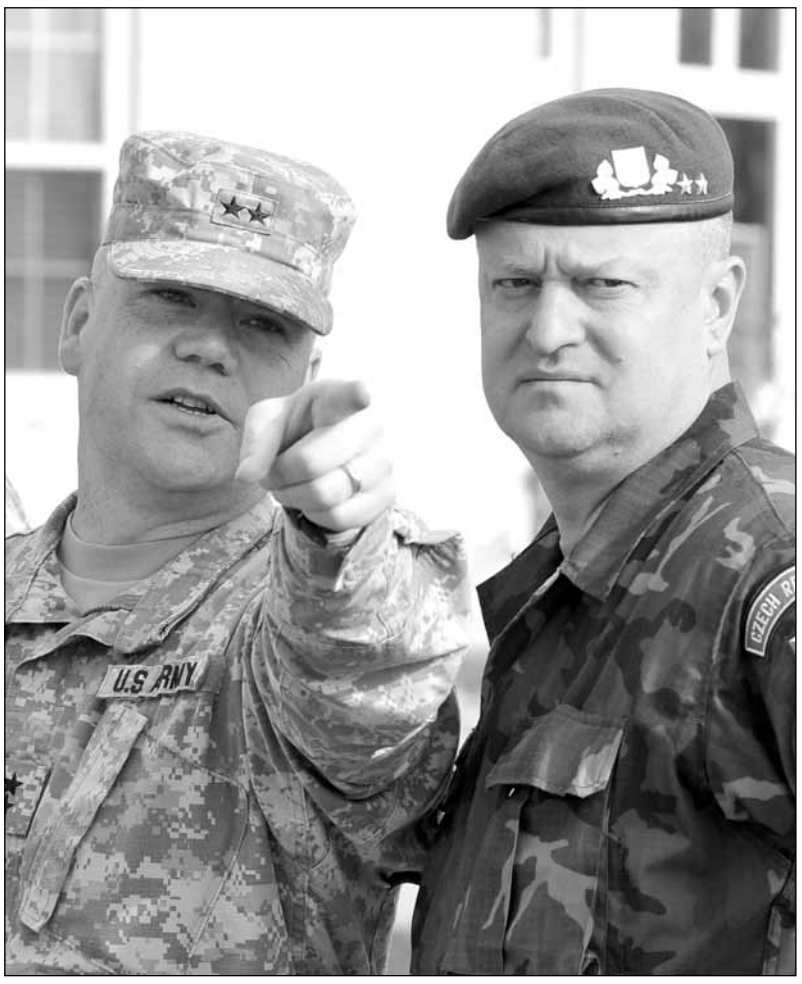
"That opportunity came in January when the Nebraska National Guard found out that Major General Zizka would be traveling to the U.S. to visit Czech soldiers," said Fujan. "Major General Lyons extended an invitation to visit Nebraska and (Major General) Zizka accepted.

According to officials from the Czech Armed Forces, the major goal of the Czech visit to the Nebraska National Guard was to upgrade military cooperation while also learning about a number of capabilities that the Czechs are interested in.

"There are good professional relations of passive surveillance systems of both Czech Republic and Nebraska for many years, and this time, the topic is air-to-air refueling, the capacity recently newly acquired by Czech," according to a Czech press release documenting the visit.

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Flying High: Maj. Gen. Miroslav Zizka, first deputy chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, smiles while checking out the boom pod of a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker during a March 21 aerial refueling training flight. Zizka was interested in learning more about air refueling during his visit to Nebraska.



Checking Out The Training At Camp Ashland: Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska National Guard adjutant general, points out the approach of a squad of Army Warrior Leaders Course students to Maj. Gen. Miroslav Zizka during a visit to Camp Ashland, March 22.

While in Nebraska, Zizka visited the state capitol in Lincoln where he was made an honorary Nebraska citizen by Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale. He also had the opportunity to fly aboard a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker and observe as members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing refueled several A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft. Zizka also spent a day observing Warrior Leaders Training at Camp Ashland, Neb., and the Guard's new ground improvised explosive indicator lane at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

The visit also gave Zizka, Lyons and other senior Nebraska National Guard leaders the opportunity to discuss a number of subjects related to Nebraska and the Czech Republic's ongoing State Partnership Program.

According Zizka, the visit lived up to his hopes.

"I had goals for this trip and I have to say that we achieved them together," said Zizka, adding that his chief goal was to further the cooperative relationship that the Nebraska National Guard and Czech military have already developed by looking at new areas where the two organizations might be able to help each other, such as in future medical or IED identification training.

According to Zizka, the partnership is especially important considering the fact that Czech and American Soldiers often find themselves serving side-by-side in locations around the world.

"It is good to go sit together and exchange information about our deployments to Afghanistan, for example, or to exchange the information about how we are providing the training," said Zizka.

Zizka said he was particularly impressed with the air refueling operation as well as the various people he encountered during his visit to Nebraska. He was additionally impressed by the amount of respect and gratitude that Nebraska citizens have for members of the military.

"This is fantastic," he said. "This is not something that is indicative in the Czech Republic," he said.

Zizka said he is also looking forward to continuing his discussions with Lyons at a later date. "It was very nice three days here and a very good trip," he said. "Good friendship and good personal contact between two generals is better than speaking through e-mails or through our assistants. And I am looking forward to sitting down with Major General Lyons again in Prague."

Learning More About Inovative Training: Eduard Prest, a counter improvised explosive device training integrator, explains the skills that members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard receive when training at the new dismounted IED visual indicator lane at the Greenlief Training Site to Maj. Gen. Miroslav Zizka, Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons and other senior Nebraska National Guard and Czech Republic Armed Forces leaders during a March 22 visit.

Photo by Spc. Jason Drager

Gas, Gas, Gas: Spc. Michael Block, an intelligence specialist with Headquarters Detachment, 126th Chemical Battalion, dons his gas mask during Nebraska's Best Warrior competition at Mead Training Site.

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heartening, but I tried to stay positive," said Block.

Block added that at least he got to practice the procedures to fix a malfunctioning weapon.

Next the competitors took part in a mystery event unknown until right before the start. The event turned out to be individual movement drills. Designed to push the Soldiers physically, the IMDs did just that. Halfway through the course, most of the Soldiers slowed substantially and began to gasp for breath as their faces turned red and sweat poured down. At the end of the rigorous event, the day was done.

The next morning, the competitors geared up for an eight-mile march with 30 pounds in their rucksack. For some of the Soldiers this was the most physically punishing event.

"In one word, grueling," said Block. "The hardest part was the first mile because of the events from yesterday, but after that it got a little easier."

The rest of the day consisted of Army warrior tasks, day land navigation and night land navigation.

The fourth and final day included a computerized exam over general Army knowledge, combatives and the boards.

At the end of the day a celebratory dinner was held to announce the winners. After all the sweat, hard work and exhausting days, Spc. Michael Block came out on top as the Nebraska enlisted best warrior. He now has the distinct honor to represent Nebraska at regionals and possibly go on to nationals.

"I feel damn good," said Block. "It makes me feel great that all the hard work paid off."

With regionals just around the corner, Block must prepare even harder. "I'll probably try to improve on the errors I made here, study more and workout harder," said Block. "Regionals will be stiffer competition."

Until then Block can take satisfaction in knowing he is the Nebraska enlisted best warrior for 2012.

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for a better sponsor; he competed three years ago."

Throughout the four-day event, the top scores remained close with the leader changing several times.

"We are number one on the sheet and we will be number one at the end," Hagedorn predicted at one point.

Shortly thereafter Kushen stole the lead from McCoy by three points. Hagedorn's prediction was right on the mark, however, as McCoy soon retook the lead for good after facing Kushen twice during the combatives competition – the final event of the overall contest.

McCoy said he was glad it was a close competition and had a great amount of respect for all of the competitors. "It's humbling knowing all the competitors were giving it their all," said McCoy.

Despite the fierce competition, the NCOs from across the state built camaraderie.

"During the events we are enemies. After the event we are all Soldiers," said McCoy. "After the event you let it go and move on."

"We are all friends and cordial, but we are still competitive," said Kushen. "I hate losing, but this is a good experience either way."

Nebraska Guard, other organizations assist vets, spouses seeking jobs

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska National Guard and several other organizations joined a cooperative effort in April to help veterans and military spouses find meaningful employment as part of the nationwide "Hire Our Heroes" initiative.

The Nebraska National Guard, in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Nebraska Department of Labor, the Lincoln Community Foundation, the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs, helped sponsor a career workshop at the "Spirit of '76" armory in Lincoln, Neb., April 17, and a day-long job fair at the Lancaster County Event Center in Lincoln, Neb., April 24.

According to Gov. Dave Heineman, the initiative is about bringing veterans and spouses in contact with employers looking for highly motivated and skills employees.

"Last year, Hire Our Heroes helped over 9,000 veterans across the country find employment, and this year the United States Chamber of Commerce is bringing it to our state," said Heineman, April 16. "There are approximately 4,800 Army and Air National Guardsmen and women in Nebraska and thousands more serve in the U.S. Reserves and active military. The enthusiasm surrounding Hiring Our Heroes shows that the courage and sacrifice demonstrated by these men and women has not gone unnoticed."

According to HOH organizers, the events were designed to give the veterans and their spouses the tools they need to better translate their experiences into language that employers better understand, and then bringing them together in a setting conducive to hiring.

"This is about bringing Nebraska's employers and service members, and their spouses, together in an environment that creates opportunities for both groups," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, during the announcement media conference. "Nebraska's service members bring tremendous skill sets and quality with them. Our Guardsmen and women, for example, have honed skills like leadership, problem-solving, an ability to operate under pressure, time management, and many others. These are abilities that our employers are looking for today."

"The same can be said for Nebraska's military spouses, who have been asked to take on many more responsibilities and roles while their loved ones have been deployed," he added. "They, too, bring tremendous qualities that are directly transferrable into today's work force."

> *'This is about bringing Nebraska's employers and service members, and their spouses, together in an environment that creates opportunities for both groups.'*
>
> ***— Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons***
> *Nebraska adjutant general*

According to Cathy Lang, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and the commissioner of the Nebraska Department of Labor, the event was important for the economic development effort in Nebraska.

"We know that our employers are increasing employment and looking for hard-working team members," Lang said. "We know that our military, veterans and their family members face unique issues when returning to the workforce. The career workshop and hiring fair events are intended to specifically focus on making a match between our well-trained veteran job seekers and our employer community."

Lang said that current statics show that the unemployment rate for veterans over 20 is on par with the state unemployment rate. However the unemployment rate is as high as 6.5 percent for those veterans between 18 to 34.

"These young veterans may have been deployed without attachment to an employer and so they face challenges in converting the skills they acquired while in service to our country," said Lang. "This hiring fair focuses on those issues to assist in matching our veterans to jobs in the Nebraska economy."

Easter at the Armory

Photos by Dave Nore

Kids invade Kearney readiness center in search of Easter Eggs

Above: Todd Munk leaps into action as he and many other Kearney-area children race in search of brightly colored plastic Easter Eggs filled with candy, March 17, at the Kearney Readiness Center. Hundreds of the bright eggs filled with candy were hidden on the lawn in front of the building on a blustery March day.

Right: Mya Boersma opens a candy-filled Easter Egg she found during a number of activities at the Kearney Readiness Center, March 17. Children enjoyed crafts, face painting, an inflatable 'boot camp' bounce house and, of course, Easter treats.

Move to new Joint Force Headquarters will cause some changes

Protecting Yourself

By Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder
Antiterrorism Officer
Nebraska Air National Guard

In just a couple short months, a number of personnel will be relocating from the facilities on Military Road in Lincoln, Neb., to the new Joint Forces Headquarters (JFHQ) facility on the Nebraska National Guard air base.

The influx of personnel will likely present a few challenges to both JFHQ occupants and base personnel when coming onto the installation in the morning and leaving at the end of the duty day.

There will be a few bumps in the beginning, but members of the 155th Security Forces Squadron are committed to ensuring a safe and secure traffic flow on and off the base.

In order to lessen confusion and help personnel get onto the base, a memorandum was drafted concerning installation access guidance. The memorandum was quite detailed and was sent to all Nebraska National Guard (NENG) personnel. Hopefully, everyone has reviewed it and has a good idea what to expect when coming onto the base.

Below is a summary of key points of the memorandum for everyone to know:

◆**Main Gate Location.** NENG personnel will normally use the installation's main gate (east gate) for daily access. The main gate is located on the west side of North Park Road after driving over the West Adams Avenue viaduct (southeast of the Lincoln Airport).

In the event the main gate is closed, notifications will be made to NENG personnel on how to access the installation. NENG personnel must remain aware of the barriers at the main gate in order to avoid accidents.

◆**Main Gate Sign.** The current Force Protection Condition (FPCON) and other pertinent messages are displayed on the electronic sign in front of the main gate. NENG personnel are highly encouraged to check the main gate sign when entering the installation.

◆**Identification.** NENG personnel will use their issued ID cards (CAC or agency card with photograph) for installation access. Personnel are required to physically hand their identification card to the Security Forces (SF) personnel when entering the base as 100 percent "hands-on" ID checks are conducted.

NENG personnel need to have their issued ID readily available when approaching the gate as this will expedite entry. Security Forces personnel will check the identification card before allowing access.

In the event personnel do not have their issued ID, Security Forces will ask for a point of contact in the NENG who can vouch for the individual who does not have an issued ID on their person.

◆**Personal Weapons.** Personal weapons of any type are not authorized to be brought onto the base.

◆**Speed Limit and Traffic Regulations.** The speed limit on the installation is 25 mph unless otherwise posted. Personnel are required to obey all posted traffic and parking signs. NENG personnel must pay particular attention to the stop sign located at the intersection of NW 24th Street and West Furnas Avenue.

Individuals driving onto or on the installation cannot use cellular phones while operating a vehicle. Individuals can use their phones while driving if using hands-free devices.

◆**Vehicle Inspections.** NENG personnel may be asked to pull into the Vehicle Inspection Facility behind the main gate.

Security Forces personnel conduct random vehicle inspections (RVIs) and random antiterrorism measures (RAMs) at the main gate and thus NENG personnel are required to follow the instructions of Security Forces personnel. Inspections are conducted for both inbound and outbound installation traffic.

◆**Expected Visitors.** NENG personnel who have an individual or group coming onto the installation for one day, outside of a special event, will contact the Base Defense Operations Center (BDOC) and provide the name of the visitor(s) or group, arrival time, meeting location and a point of contact (POC) with phone number. Escorts for the visitor may be required to come to the main gate.

◆**Deliveries.** Security Forces must receive prior notification of any "one-day" deliveries coming onto the base. These deliveries could be companies delivering supplies, etc. and the visit will just be for one day.

Deliveries *will not* be accepted by SF at the main gate for later pick-up by NENG personnel. A contractor entry authority lists must be accomplished if a company or individual(s) will be making routine deliveries.

◆**Entry Authority Lists.** All contractors (construction crews and service providers) who require routine or repeated access to the installation (for example, more than one day) are required to be on a contractor EAL. Individuals responsible for contractor work will contact the 155th Security Forces Squadron to coordinate contractor access onto the installation. Contractors will be denied entry if there is not an approved EAL at the main gate. NENG personnel who will be having a tour or other special event on the base will contact Security Forces to request an EAL template for their specific event.

◆**Suspicious Activity Reporting.** NENG personnel are reminded to be vigilant while driving onto or on the installation. Particular attention should be given to looking at the areas near the perimeter fence and adjacent public streets.

Personnel must contact BDOC if they observe a suspicious individual, vehicle, package, etc. either near or on the installation.

◆**Restricted and Controlled Areas.** The Nebraska Air National Guard has certain areas on the installation which are marked Restricted or Controlled Area. These areas require special access and NENG personnel are reminded to not attempt entry into these areas without proper approval.

◆**Airfield and Hangar Access.** NENG personnel must ensure that unauthorized individuals do not attempt entry onto the Lincoln Airport Authority airfield. All gates providing access to the airfield must be secured when not in use. In addition, individuals without official business should not transit through the hangar bay in Building 600, Main Hangar.

This list does not address all the issues which may arise during the relocation of the JFHQ onto the base. Personnel are asked to contact the 155th Security Forces Squadron with specific questions.

In Formation: Members of the 126th Chemical Battalion stand in formation before the start of the change of command ceremony at the South Omaha Readiness Center.

Courtesy Photo

Omaha chemical battalion welcomes new commander

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

Members of the Omaha-based 126th Chemical Battalion welcomed a new commander to their unit when Lt. Col. Steven P. Petersen accepted the colors of the organization from out-going commander Lt. Col. Troy Paisley. Col. Richard Dahlman, 92nd Troop Command commander, officiated over the ceremony.

In accepting command of the 126th Chemical Bn., Petersen brings with him a wealth of military experience after having served in Nebraska Army National Guard infantry, transportation, quartermaster and support units while also having served in a number of operational planning positions.

Petersen

Petersen's military career began in April 1991 when he enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard as an infantry Soldier. After receiving his commission from the Nebraska National Guard's Officer Candidate School, he was assigned as a platoon leader with Wayne's Company A, 1-134th Infantry (Mechanized). He later served as the company commander for Columbus' Company C, 1-134th Infantry (Mech.) before assuming command of Norfolk's 189th Transportation Company.

Paisley

Petersen's staff experience includes stints in the 867th and the 168th Quartermaster Battalion's, the 67th Area Support Group and the 92nd Troop Command. He also served as the command group executive officer and the counterdrug coordinator for the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters.

He also deployed to Iraq from September 2005 until September 2006 as a member of the 67th Area Support Group where he served as the plans officer in the Support Operations Directorate.

Petersen currently serves full-time in the Nebraska Army National Guard as the state training officer.

Petersen and his wife, Christine, have four children: Klaire, Grahm, Elizabeth and Asher.

Petersen's predecessor within the 126th Chem. Bn., has also served in multiple positions within the U.S. Army and the Nebraska Army National Guard.

Paisley's military career began in January 1991 when he enlisted in the U.S. Army in the signal specialty. While serving on active duty, he served a year-long tour in Korea and then was transferred to Fort Lewis, Wash., where he was assigned to the 1st Group Special Force (Airborne).

Paisley eventually earned a "Green to Gold" ROTC scholarship to attend the University of Nebraska-Kearney. He received his commission as an infantry officer in May 1996. His initial duty station was at Fort Carson, Colo., where he served as a member of the 1/8th Infantry Battalion before transferring to Fort Jackson, S.C., where he completed the Adjutant General Captain's Career Course. He was then assigned the deputy personnel officer at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

Paisley joined the Nebraska Army National Guard fulltime in July 2001 when he accepted a position as the 126th Chemical Bn.'s personnel officer. He later served as the commander of the Omaha-based 754th Chemical Company (Reconnaissance/Decontamination), which was mobilized for Operation Noble Eagle shortly after his change of command.

Following his mobilization, Paisley served in a number of positions, including the Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command officer strength manager, and at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he served as the assistant professor of Military Science. He also mobilized as a member of a mobile training team and served in Kandahar, Afghanistan, as a personnel mentor and then as the executive officer at the Regional Police Advisory Command-South.

Following his mobilization, Paisley was assigned to the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Domestic Operations Office before being reassigned to the 126th Chem. Bn. as the operations officer. He took command of the battalion in July 2009.

Paisley and his wife, Beth, have four children: Matthew, Nathan, Kaylene and Sarah.

Home from Kosovo, Grand Island aviators receive new commander

By Capt. Andrew Nelson

Staff Writer

The Soldiers of the 1-376th Aviation (Security & Support) Battalion bade farewell to their outgoing commander and welcomed a new one, March 17.

During a ceremony in the hangar of Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2, command of the battalion passed from Lt. Col Kevin Bricker to Lt. Col. Richard Gray.

"We – I – have every confidence in you," said Col. Michael Deger, commander of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, said to Gray during his remarks.

Bricker's tenure was an eventful one. It included separate deployments for the battalion headquarters and some of its subordinate companies and also getting some new aircraft. Two of them, UH-72 Lakota medical helicopters, were placed behind the podium facing each other during the ceremony.

Bricker took the battalion headquarters on a deployment to Kosovo, where he successfully integrated units from West Virginia, Arkansas, Pennsylvania and Nebraska.

Deger cited Bricker's flexibility, adaptability and his ability to lead in a constantly-changing environment in the Balkans.

"That's what we want all of our commanders to do, but in this case the expectation was high," Deger said. "And his performance was outstanding."

In addition to earning plaudits for his leadership, Bricker was awarded The Honorable Order of St. Michael, which recognizes those who have extensively contributed to the promotion of Army Aviation, according to the Army Aviation Association.

"I am truly honored to be one of the individuals that is part of this small group," said Bricker as 100 of his Soldiers stood in formation in front of him.

Bricker's wife, Anita, was awarded The Honorable Order of Our Lady of Loreto, which, according to the Army Aviation Association, recognizes people for their outstanding support of Army Aviation.

New commander, Gray, was also honored by receiving his Master Army Aviator's badge. Gray serves full-time as the state director of aviation and safety.

"He's a proven leader, a proven aviator. A tremendous amount of experience," said Deger about Gray.

Gray said Soldiers won't notice any stark leadership-style changes. "I don't have anything planned that's going to be different because he was an excellent commander," Gray said of his predecessor.

There are some long-planned organizational changes in the works, Gray said, including a switch to a hybrid civilian/military maintenance program.

Bricker was born in Fremont, Neb., and graduated from Lexington (Neb.) High School in 1981. He holds a bachelor's degree in industrial technology from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

He enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1986 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1989. Bricker's assignments include stints as a tank platoon leader, aviation platoon leader, flight operations officer for 1-167th Cavalry and maintenance officer for 92nd Troop Command.

Bricker

Bricker has earned the Master Senior Army Aviator's Wings, and has been awarded the Army Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal (third award), Army Achievement Medal (second award) and several others. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel on Dec. 9, 2009.

Gray was born in Iowa and graduated from Ralston High School in 1987. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Gray

Gray enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1987 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1995. His assignments have included positions as an infantry scout observer and infantry team leader with the the 134th Infantry Detachment (Long-Range Surveillance), scout platoon leader, aeromedical evacuation company commander of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion and counter-drug coordinator at Joint Forces Headquarters.

Gray has earned the Senior Parachutist Badge, Pathfinder Badge and the Ranger Tab. His military awards include the Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal, the Army Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal (second award) and several others.

He was promoted to lieutenant colonel on Nov. 25, 2008.

Bricker said he is looking forward to his next challenge, but hates leaving behind the Soldiers he has led.

"That's going to be the hardest part, leaving the people," Bricker said.

6 YEAR EXTENSION

You may be eligible for a

$10,000 BONUS

for signing 365- 271 days before ETS

- $7500 for 270-181
- $5000 for 180-91
- $0 for 90-1

*If a Soldier is less than 90 days to their ETS, they can extend one year and wait until they are within a 365 day window to re-enlist for a bonus pending the policy does not change.

- CONUS or OCONUS
- Must be E-7 or below
- Under 10 years service
- Cannot be excess
- Must be DMOSQ (Some policy exceptions)
- Meet other requirements in policy
- Can only have one incentive at a time (Bonus, Kicker, SLRP)
- At this time, the only re-enlistment/extension bonus available is for 6 years

Contact your Unit Readiness NCO or the Recruiting and Retention Office at (402)416-9452 or (402)309-7155

NEBRASKA NATIONAL GUARD
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155th Force Support Squadron welcomes new commander

By Senior Airman Mary Thach

Staff Writer

Lt. Col. AnnMarie K. Anthony assumed command of the 155th Force Support Squadron from outgoing commander, Maj. Pamelia J. Geistlinger at a change-of-command ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., April 1.

The ceremony was attended by distinguished guests, family, and fellow unit members who welcomed their new commander and wished the leaving commander well.

Geistlinger commanded the FSS since 2007 and led the unit though four years of high inspection and deployment tempos. She is transitioning into a position with Joint Forces Headquarters. She listed off the many accomplishments of the FSS over her tenure and thanked the unit members for their support.

Anthony, who was previously the 170th Group director of staff at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., transitioned to the Nebraska Air National Guard in 2002. She said she is honored to be a part of this change.

Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

New Boss: Lt. Col. AnnMarie Anthony (right) accepts the flag of the 155th Force Support Squadron from Col. Wendy Johnson during a ceremony at the 155th Air Refueling Wing hanger in Lincoln, Neb., April 1.

Anthony said she is inheriting a unit to improve instead of one to fix, giving credit to Geistlinger for creating an outstanding precedence. She thanked her family and said she was excited for this opportunity.

"I can't wait to get down to business," said Anthony.

Guard Family NEWS You Can Use

Warm-weather equipment maintenance critical before busy summer months

Lawnmower tune-up:

First Use of Spring:
- Change the oil, clean the deck and replace spark plugs.

Sharpen Blades:
- In addition to sharpening the blades, lubricate the controls. Tighten the blade as well as the engine mounting bolts.

Clean Air Filter:
- Check the air filter for visible signs of grime and dirt. Replace if needed. If your lawn mower uses a foam filter, wash it with soap and water. Squeeze filter until it's dry, and add 2 tsp. of oil before replacing filter.

Replace Oil:
- Drain and replace oil before starting engine for the first time. Rotate the engine slowly by turning the crankshaft or pulling the starter rope to distribute the new oil.

After Every Use:
- Check the fuel and oil levels after each time you use the mower. See that the tires are properly inflated. Locate any loose or worn parts before starting mower again.

Blade Maintenance:
- Inspect the condition of the blades throughout the mowing season. If you have to sharpen the blades, balance them before mowing again.

25 Hours Later:
- Clean or change the oil filter after every 25 hours of use. If your lawn is dusty, clean or change the filter often. Also lubricate the wheels/moving joints. Inspect the belts and chain drives of riding mowers.

End of Season:
- At the end of the season, change the oil, drain the gas or add gas stabilizer. Lubricate the cylinder and give the mower a thorough cleaning. Disconnect the spark plug wire, and safely store the mower.

Spring boat start-up checklist:

General:
- Clean hull, deck and topsides.
- Ensure drains/scuppers clear.
- Clean windows and hatches.
- Clean bilges and engine.
- Check spare parts and tools and replace as necessary.
- Make sure registration is current and onboard.
- Check and replace wiper blades if necessary.

Mechanical:
- Check propeller and propulsion system.
- Check drain plug.
- Check hoses and clamps.
- Check bilges pumps.
- Check/recharge batteries.
- Test all gauges for operability.
- Check all lighting fixtures.
- Check all electronics for proper operation.
- Inspect antennas.

Engines:
- Change oil & filters.
- Check fuel filters.
- Check cooling system.
- Check transmission fluid.
- Replace spark plugs.
- Check plug wires for wear.
- Inspect fuel lines, primer bulb and tank for leaks.
- Lubricate moveable parts.

Trailer:
- Check for current registration.
- Check rollers and pads.
- Clean and lubricate winch.
- Test lights/electrical connections.
- Check tire pressure/condition.
- Check brakes (if equipped).
- Check safety chains.

Required/Recommended:
- Sound signaling device.
- Check distress signals and expiration date.
- Check life jackets.
- Inspect life rings and cushions.
- Check fire extinguishers.
- Check and adjust compass.
- Check navigation lights.
- Check radar reflector.
- Check first aid supplies.

This is a short checklist of items, be sure to consult the owner's manual for specific instructions.

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

All Smiles: Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Gov. Dave Heineman and Jessica Shottenkirk-Cooley pose with a group of Nebraska National Guard miitary kids during the Month of the Miltary Child proclamation signing ceremony, April 11, at the state capitol in Lincoln, Neb.

Nebraska's military kids get their due in April

Nebraska's military kids were celebrated throughout April as part of the annual Month of the Military Children observance. According to Jessica Shottenkirk-Cooley, state youth coordinator for Nebraska, this year's observance included a number of activities including the "Military Child Golf Clinic," held at Lincoln's Wilderness Ridge Golf Course on April 7 (see page 20 for story) and the annual proclamation ceremony held at the State Capitol in Lincoln on April 11. According to Governor Dave Heineman, Nebraska owes its military children much for the sacrifices they've made in recent years. "They truly make a sacrifice along with that military member and we really appreciate what these military families do. They're out there everyday fighting for our freedoms and what we believe in this great country."

Beginners Motorcycle Rider courses available

If you are a current member of the Nebraska National Guard, you are eligible for reimbursement if you attend The Motorcycle Safety Foundation approved Basic Rider's Course. Completion of the Basic Rider's Course is required to operate a motorcycle on military installations.

The two- to three-day course (depending upon provider) includes classroom instruction and practical riding experience in a controlled setting. It is designed for beginners and re-entry riders above the age of 19. Once completed, the training allows riders to waive the Nebraska State motorcycle test for an operator's license and may also qualify the participant for lower insurance premiums.

Note: In order to be eligible for reimbursement, members must obtain pre-approval from the Safety Office prior to registering for this course.

For additional information, or to get pre-approval, contact the Nebraska Army National Guard Safety Office at (402) 309-1833 or the Nebraska Air National Guard Safety Office at (402) 309-1118.

Financial, medical issues important for for retirees

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

Hello and greetings from the Nebraska Military Retiree Council and the state retirement sergeant.

We're here to help you navigate your way through the red tape of retirement issues and ensure you find everything you need. We're also just a phone call or email away to assist you with those personal questions.

Defense Finance and Accounting Service's (DFAS) top priority is to deliver your pay accurately and on time every time. To do that, they often rely on the information you provide them. The current issue of their quarterly newsletter will help you understand and manage your retirement pay. For more information go to: http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/managingyourretpayacct.html.

Also, for those "younger" retirees who haven't reached Medicare age, be aware that approximately six months before you become 65, you'll need to enroll into Medicare Part B in order to remain eligible for Tricare for Life. Make sure you contact your local Social Security Office to enroll.

Congratulations to Master Sgt. (Ret.) Jerry Chenoweth and Sgt. 1st Class Mary Moss as recipients of the 2011 NMRC Founders Award. They were honored at the recent NMRC dinner at the Knolls Restaurant. Jerry stepped down from the council after serving as Secretary for many years. Mary was honored for her support to all National Guard retirees while serving as the Retirement noncommissioned officer..

Reminder: it's imperative you keep your information updated to protect you and your loved ones.

If you are not currently a member of the NMRC, dues are only $5 a year which covers postage and mailings to all members. Contact me at (402) 309-7105 if you are interested in becoming a member and receiving monthly updates of retirement specific issues.

As always, for those who like to riseearly to eat and share stories, here's the breakfast site information for those in the immediate areas:

Lincoln:
- ***Army National Guard retirees:*** First Monday of each month, 8 a.m., T&R Garden, 5250 Cornhusker Highway.
- ***Air National Guard retirees:*** Last Monday of each month, 8 a.m., The Pantry, Van Dorn village, 2548 South 48th Street (Van Dorn plaza).

North Platte:
- Second Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., Village Inn, North Platte.

■From Sgt. 1st Class Behnk

I can be contacted at (402) 309-7165 and at my email address: austin.behnk@us.army.mil. Sgt. Jennifer Short may also assist you with any retirement questions you may have. She can be reached at (402) 309-7319 and her email address: jennifer.l.short@us.army.mil.

I look forward to working with all of you and helping out with all of your retirement needs.

If you are in need of a 1099-R for tax purposes, you will need to contact DFAS at 1-800-321-1080 or through MyPay if you have an account.

MyPay is an internet based program used to retrieve your retiree account statements and make changes or updates to your retired pay account.

Remember that if there is any change in dependency status, such as marriage, divorce, death of a spouse, etc, you have one year to submit an election change to your Survivor Benefits Plan.

Please contact myself or Sergeant Short to assist with submitting the proper documentation to Human Resources Command and updating your DEERS information.

If you have any TRICARE related questions, you may contact the State TRICARE Manager, 2nd Lt. Nick Curto, at (402) 309-1738 or at email address: nicholas.curto@us.army.mil.

Finally, here's a list of helpful list of numbers for your use as needed:

DEERS/ID card stations in Nebraska.
- Personnel – 1234 Military Road Lincoln 402-309-7325 or 402-309-7264 or 402-309-7319.
- Spirit of 76 Armory 67th BfSB – 402-309-7058 or 402-309-7260.
- 92nd Troop Command Penterman Armory at Nebraska National Guard Air Base 402-309-1749 or 402-309-1739.
- Air Guard (Lincoln Air Base) Bldg 600 Room E209 402-309-1452.
- Offutt Air Force Base 402-294-5019.
- Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney 402-309-7743 or 402-309-7758.
- Norfolk Armory 817 Sout 1st St. Norfolk 402-309-8908 or 402-309-8900.

The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.

Enjoy your well-deserved retirement!

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel
Philip G. Houser
Jeffrey M. Kilgore
Shane M. Martin
Brenda A. Ruhrer

Major
Michael S. Wilson

Captain
Clinton F. Brady
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Christopher L. Meyer
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Trevor J. Ocken
Peter M. Olson

First Lieutenant
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Cory D. Languish
Mark R. Lindgren

Chief Warrant Officer 3
Donald G. Renner

Chief Warrant Officer 2
Dustin E. Guenther

Master Sergeant
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Jay F. Bottorff

Sergeant First Class
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Christine L. Raftery

Staff Sergeant
Rosalba Amezcua
Joshua A. Artherton
David D. Dettwiller
Justin R. Diggins
Thomas S. Harding
Trent S. Hellbusch
William T. Rader
Brain P. Wemhoff

Sergeant
Nathan P. Davis
Blake M. Fastnacht
Matthew D. Wetjen
Heath E. Wragge

Specialist
Coltin V. Bebensee
Eric M. Becker
Nissa L. Brown
Kyle N. Christofferson
Jared T. Cornell
Dylan J. Donnelly
Michael A. Hassler
Kyle W. Heese
Marc A. Hennings
Britton A. Hulme
Jared M. Klassen
Cyle L. Kling
Kyle E. J. Knievel
Kenneth J. Mcatee II
Aaron E. Murphy
Lucas T. Musfelt
Jenna S. Osmonson
Cody G. Pagel
Jesse A. Pfeifer
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Ty A. Schoenefeld
Jeffery B. Stocking
Shelby L. Willey
Nathan E. Worley

Private First Class
Zachary J. Bachmeier
Bradley E. Berney
Kalen T. Boyden
Daniel J. Camerson
Jason C. Cole
Joshua M. Donahoo
Rebecca S. Gonzalez
Tyler Q. Hill
Lawrence M. Lind
Gjohnte M. L. Nelson
Stephen N. L. Ramirez
Ryan M. Redowl

Private Two
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James M. Carattini
David E. Cisar Jr.
George W. Gardner
Jacob E. Hill
Arez M. Karim
Robert C. Krekeler II
Matthew R. Lahey
Dien T. Le
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Coleman J. Lonergan
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Troy Stauffer
Misty Roomsburg

Master Sergeant
Christian D. Bradley
Christopher C. Chattin
Aaron D. Couture
Steve R. Fisher
Michael J. Kucera

Technical Sergeant
Michael L. Amandus
Justin Johansen
Brandy M. Joy
Travis Laframboise
Jason E. Lang
Joshua B. McDonald
Ashlee K. Meehan
Paul B. Pinholt
Joshua K. Robinson
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Thomas E. McCloskey
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Gregory S. Pollmann
Brandon Sewell
Jarod M. Wozniak

Senior Airman
Megan Beacom
Jeffrey R. Brassington
Dale P. Butler
Cody C. Carlow
Dylan S. Floth
Michael E. Hebert
Bristol Prai

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Legion of Merit
Col. James A. Rose

Bronze Star Medal
Col. Lynn M. Heng
Lt. Col. David S. Rasmussen
Maj. Richard B. Jones
Master Sgt. Dennis D. Krecklow

Meritorious Service Medal
Lt. Col. Randall S. Ames
Maj. Brett E. Petit
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Teresa A. Domeier
Command Sgt. Maj. Boyd L. Navratil
Master Sgt. Steven S. Burns
Master Sgt. James H. McKeehan
Master Sgt. Bernard F. Pallas
Sgt. 1st Class Eldon R. Kuntzelman
Sgt. 1st Class Tamara L. Schmeling
Sgt. 1st Class David K. Waggoner
Staff Sgt. Daniel A. Paxton
Staff Sgt. Jay L. Weitzel
Staff Sgt. Philip J. Wemhoff
Master Sgt. Steven S. Burns
Master Sgt. James H. McKeehan
Master Sgt. Bernard F. Pallas

Army Commendation Medal
Lt. Col. Rose N. Finley
Lt. Col. Craig W. Strong
Maj. Guy F. Moon
Capt. Gary P. Hansen
Capt. Melissa J. Kramer
1st Lt. Jessica L. Franco
1st Lt. Christopher J. Rees
1st Lt. James M. Small
2nd Lt. Gregory P. Veys
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Timothy J. Gragert
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Corey L. Baker
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jeffrey M. Geiger
Warrant Officer Steven J. Stienike
Sgt. Maj. Leon D. Haith
Master Sgt. Michael G. Hayes
Sgt. 1st Class John D. Bates
Sgt. 1st Class Shawn M. Burton
Sgt. 1st Class D. J. Johnson
Sgt. 1st Class Michel J. Larrew
Sgt. 1st Class Christopher W. Morehouse
Sgt. 1st Class Daniel C. Nichols
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas L. Poppe
Sgt. 1st Class Barry D. Urtel
Sgt. 1st Class Roberto R. Vega
Staff Sgt. Brian W. Anderson
Staff Sgt. Adam J. Borer
Staff Sgt. David D. Dettwiller
Staff Sgt. Amber D. Engelman
Staff Sgt. Jennifer L. Feldt
Staff Sgt. Scyler W. Foos
Staff Sgt. Mandy R. Hatcher
Staff Sgt. Larry C. Jackson
Staff Sgt. Justin D. McCoy
Staff Sgt. Alexander Ramos
Staff Sgt. Herschel B. Talley
Staff Sgt. Neil A. Wesley
Sgt. Justin T. Clausen
Sgt. Nathaniel J. Coldiron
Sgt. Jacob A. Kohlman
Sgt. Chelsea L. Kramer
Sgt. Jesse R. Olson
Sgt. Shantel G. Webster
Sgt. Eric L. Wilford
Spc. Michael J. Block
Spc. Ethan D. Dodd
Spc. William E. Jones
Spc. Travis J. Kechely
Spc. Ashley N. Koehler
Pfc. Trey L. Neumann

Army Achievement Medal
1st Lt. Jessica L. Franco
Sgt. 1st Class Richard A. Hagedorn
Staff Sgt. Andrew J. Hytrek
Staff Sgt. Robert L. Johnson
Staff Sgt. Brett Robert Seifert
Sgt. Anthony A. Chaulk
Sgt. Raquel D. Chavez
Sgt. Cody D. Gibbons
Sgt. Matthew N. Holeman
Sgt. Samuel J. Kinnett
Sgt. Philip C. Mausbach
Sgt. Ryan S. Olsen
Sgt. Michael L. Starke
Spc. Brock A. Ackerman
Spc. Brittany N. Alcala
Spc. Curtis J. Erickson
Spc. Craig D. Hoppes
Spc. Ethan J. Koinzan
Spc. Ricky T. Parker
Spc. Clark W. Rowse
Pfc. Tyler J. Brom
Pfc. Jeremiah R. Ludwig
Pfc. Nathan L. Olson
Pfc. Michael T. Potthast
Pfc. Joey L. Thomas

Nebraska National Guard Commendation Medal
Staff Sgt. Justin D. McCoy
Spc. Craig D. Hoppes

Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal
Capt. James R. Hewitt
1st Lt. Ryan M. Carlson
1st Lt. Stephen A. Riley II
Warrant Officer Jennifer J. Kramer
Staff Sgt. Richard A. Bates
Staff Sgt. Randy A. Graves
Staff Sgt. Jeremiah B. Houlden
Staff Sgt. Gary M. Jacobsen
Staff Sgt. Timothy N. McCaslin
Sgt. Raquel L. Carlin
Sgt. Robert J. Jones
Sgt. Ryan S. Olsen
Spc. Corey C. Handley
Spc. Brock A. Helgerson
Spc. Kevin N. Kugler Jr.
Spc. Levi S. Loomis
Spc. Tyler D. Petty
Spc. Taylor D. Quinn
Spc. Casey J. Ryan
Spc. Rahshaw A. Sides
Spc. Blake L. Vela
Spc. Avery L. Walker
Pfc. William J. Rob

Nebraska National Guard Legion of Merit
1st Sgt. Richard R. Aldag IV

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Col. James A. Rose
Maj. David P. Benak
Master Sgt. Janice L. Hendrix
Staff Sgt. Stacy L. Nyberg
Staff Sgt. Charles H. Penner
Sgt. Bradley A. Jessen

Shortakes

Deployed Nebraska Air Guardsmen recognized as Hometown Heroes

By Senior Airman Mary Thach
Staff Writer

Seventy-one Airmen from the 155th Air Refueling Wing were recognized during a Hometown Heroes Salute ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base, in Lincoln, Neb., March 31.

"We can honor those members of our unit who have deployed in the year 2011," said Chief Master Sgt. Nancy Vondrasek, command chief of the 155th ARW. "They have deployed for various contingencies and periods of time."

The Airmen were split into two tiers, with Tier One members deploying for 30-179 days, and Tier Two members deploying for 180-365 days.

Every member in both tiers was presented with a letter of appreciation and Hometown Heroes Salute coins signed by the Air National Guard director and command chief master sergeant, enclosed in a rosewood case. Tier Two members were also presented with a framed American Flag with Hometown Heroes Salute coins. Their families were presented with a pen and pencil set, dog tags, and a medallion to honor their sacrifices while their loved one was away.

"We need to honor those people and their families who have gone out of their way to be part of our unit and to take time away from their jobs and their families to deploy for our unit, " said Vondrasek. "We need to honor that commitment and that sacrifice."

Several unit members, who were recognized, expressed their appreciation for the ceremony.

Senior Airman Matt A. Krepel, a jet engine mechanic, was deployed to Qatar for 35 days and spoke of his gratitude.

Photo by 2nd Lt. Doug Carlson

The Hardware: Staff Sgt. Nick Bethune is presented with a framed letter of appreciation for his deployment in 2011 during a "Hometown Heroes Salute" at the 155th Air Refueling Wing's hangar, in Lincoln, Neb., March 31. Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, assistant adjutant general - Air, Brig. Gen. Jon Fago, Nebraska Air Guard chief of staff, and Col. Rick Evans III, 155th ARW commander, presented the awards.

"To be recognized, I think, is fantastic," said Krepel. "Especially being surrounded by so many people who are being recognized for the same thing, for serving. This is a great feeling."

Master Sgt. Michelle Laframboise, non-destructive inspection shop chief, said she was glad to share this recognition with her family.

"For me, it's being able to share these words with my family... that is what's special about it, bringing this stuff home and sharing it with my kids and my husband," said Laframboise. "Every single one of us out here signs a piece of paper and we all know this day is going to come sooner or later where we have to leave home."

Brig. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, assistant adjutant general for Nebraska National Guard-Air, thanked the Airmen for their service and their families for their support.

"What is right is take the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of not only the deploying members but the support they receive from the family members. We simply don't do what we do without you and the sacrifices you make," said Bohac. "We are very proud of how you do your job."

Col. Richard J. Evans III, commander of the 155th ARW, echoed Bohac's comments and extended his appreciation to the service members and their families for the sacrifices they made in 2011.

"We are here to recognize the Airmen who are doing a fine job, worldwide, every single day," said Evans.

"We certainly could not do our mission without the support of our family members back home. That's what enables our members to go out and do good work."

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Top Sergeant: Master Sgt. Paul Sabatka, 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, receives his plaque as the Nebraska Air Guard's top first sergeant from Lt. Col. Ken Husted, squadron commander.

Nebraska's top Airmen honored

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Three of the Nebraska Air National Guard's "Outstanding Airmen of the Year," were honored March 30 during a ceremony in Lincoln, Neb.

Honored during the Air Force Association Chapter 187's annual awards recognition dinner were:

- Tech. Sgt. Andrew Munger, a member of the Offutt Air Force Base's 170th Operations Group who was named the Nebraska Air Guard's top Airman in the Noncommissioned Officer Category;
- Master Sgt. Mathew Ellison, a member of the Lincoln-based 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, who earned his title in the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Category;
- Master Sgt. Paul Sabatka, a member of Lincoln's 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, who was named the top first sergeant in the Nebraska Air National Guard.

Also honored was Senior Airman Bryan Bach, a member of the Lincoln-based 155th Civil Engineering Squadron, who won the Airman Category. Bach was deployed overseas.

Each of the Nebraska Airmen was presented with a plaque from the respective unit commander.

Along with the Nebraska Air Guardsmen honored, the AFA also honored several Nebraska teachers for helping build interest in science and aeronautics, a pair of Lincoln dentists who have provided support to the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing, and a number of Nebraska Civil Air Patrol, Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps and Air Force ROTC cadets who earned awards for their performance over the past year.

Bill and Evonne Williams, who have created a travelling exhibits detailing Nebraska's fallen military members since Sept. 11, 2001, also spoke during the dinner.

Street Talk

"If you could come up with the 'Street Talk' question, what would you ask?"

Pvt. Rowdy Jensen
Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade
"What is the most valuable thing you've learned since Basic Training?"

Staff Sgt. Damion Cruell
155th Maintenance Squadron
"What motivates you to do your best every day...what is your drive and how can you sustain it?"

Staff Sgt. Amber Bogle
155th Air Refueling Wing
"I would like to know what the Guard members do when they are not in military status. What unusual thing you would like people to know about you that they would never expect about you?"

Spc. Tara Frahm
Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade
"What would you change about drill weekends to make them more fun?"

Airman 1st Class Patric McDondal
155th Aircraft Metals Technology
"Where is the one place you would like to visit the most?"

Want to weigh in?

We will choose our favorite street talk questions and use them in future issues of the "Prairie Soldier." You can also weigh-in on our facebook page at: *www.facebook.com/nebraskanationalguard*

Nebraska National Guard improved by competitive spirit

The Adjutant General
Major General
Judd Lyons

Teamwork, unit cohesion and esprit de corps are words we think of when describing an outstanding unit or organization.

Based on the impressive performance of our units, activities and individual Soldiers and Airmen, we can also add *Competitive Spirit* to this list.

Over the past 18 months, multiple units and individuals from both the Nebraska Army and Air Guard have competed in and either won or placed in many prestigious regional and national awards.

I am very proud of our women and men for stepping up and challenging themselves and their units to represent us.

Competitions are hard work. They require long hours and extra work for many individuals that are directly or indirectly involved. However, I firmly believe that we are better off for competing, whether we win or not. We gain valuable experience and knowledge that can only help us in our federal and state mission.

A competition not only recognizes the unit/activity for their efforts, it also highlights the talented individual Soldiers and Airmen in our organizations and staff sections. We see this in unit competitions such as the Dragon's Challenge (126th Chem Battalion), Truck Rodeos and Motor Stables (734th Trans Battalion), and the Castle Stakes (623rd Engineer Company) to name a few.

Nebraska service members also have numerous opportunities to challenge themselves in individual competitions, such as the Best Warrior Competition, National Guard half and full Marathon, our Marksmanship Sustainment Exercise and Outstanding Airman of the Year.

I would like to recognize and congratulate the following organizations and individuals for the Competitive Spirit they have demonstrated (no precedence in order listed):

- Construction and Facilities Management Office — First-ever two time winner in the history of the Fred Aron Award, which recognizes the top CFMO organization in the nation;
- 267th Support Maintenance Company – First ever Nebraska Army National Guard national winner of the 2012 Phillip A. Connelly Award in the National Guard Field Kitchen Category, marking them as the best within the National Guard for their outstanding and professional food service operations and quality of meal served to the Soldiers;
- 267th Support Maintenance Company – U.S. Army Award for Maintenance Excellence (AAME) –competed in the Medium TOE category and was recognized as a national runner-up after winning this award last year for the first time in Nebraska's history;
- Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion – 2011 national Chief of Staff of the Army Supply Excellence Award winner; they also won this year's award;
- Detachment 2, 165th Quartermaster Company – 2011 national Chief of Staff of the Army Supply Excellence Award winner;
- 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) - 2011 national Chief of Staff of the Army Supply Excellence Award runner-up; they also won this year's award;
- JFHQ Property Book Office – competing in the Chief of Staff of the Army Supply Excellence Award for the first time. They received an honorable mention in this year's awards program;
- 623rd Engineer Company – national Lt. Gen. Emerson G. Itschner Award winner as the top engineer company in the Army National Guard;
- Nebraska Air National Guard Headquarters – 2011 Air Force Organizational Excellence Award;
- 155th Air Refueling Wing – 2011 Dick Schram Memorial Community Relations Award for the 2011 "Guardians of Freedom" Air Show;
- Nebraska Army National Guard Recruit Sustainment Program – National Guard Bureau "Program of Excellence for Attrition Management";
- Surface Maintenance Management Office – third NGB Golden Wrench Award, which recognizes one state in each of seven regions that achieves excellence in maintenance management;
- Nebraska National Guard Public Affairs Office- Prairie Soldier Newspaper – 2011 Army National Guard newspaper of the year, third place U.S. Army Newspaper of the Year. 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon – 2011 Air National Guard Print Journalist of the Year. Spc. Heidi Krueger – 2011 Army National Guard Outstanding New Writer of the Year.

I believe that the same *Competitive Spirit* that drives our Soldiers and Airmen to challenge themselves will be vital in its application to our IDT/UTA and Annual Training periods.

Our leaders need to be focused on providing challenging training that leaves our Soldiers and Airmen feeling that they have accomplished worthwhile things while drilling with us. Competitive and challenging training prepares us for our State and Federal missions, can be rewarding and fun, and makes us the Service of Choice for those who are willing to serve.

Thanks for being part of our team!

Big changes afoot for Prairie Soldier newspaper

My Turn
Editor, Prairie Soldier
Kevin J. Hynes

In case you have noticed by the lateness of this *Prairie Soldier* or the huge black letters on the front page of this month's issue, big changes are afoot for this newspaper.

This issue will mark the final printed version of this newspaper. After 62 years and two issues, the paper copy of the *Prairie Soldier* will be no more.

I'll have to admit, I've pushed off writing this column for some time, mainly because for me personally, it's painful to admit that this will be the last time that I will have had a hand in publishing a printed version of this paper.

For more than 22 years, I've worked on the staff of the *Prairie Soldier*, nearly the last 20 as the editor of the paper. For the most part, this has been the one real constant thing in my life for the past two decades. I've been the editor longer than I've known my wife, or been a father to my kids. I was the editor before I was a college graduate and long before I received my commission.

Being the editor of the *Prairie Soldier* has been something I've carried with so much pride that it's hard to explain.

Call me old fashioned, but I still love the smell of a newly printed paper, the aromas of the inks and new paper taking me back to a time long ago when I used to deliver newspapers in my hometown in northeastern Nebraska and would sneak a break midway through my route to read a newspaper in the stairwell of an apartment building. Reading about all those happenings taking place around the world as the black ink stained my hands opened up a world to me, giving me insight into global issues and causing me to want to be part of the action.

In a sense, newspapers are what helped guide me into the military career that I now have.

I'll also admit that I still love getting up in the morning and reading the morning newspaper over a cup of coffee before I start my day.

I admit it, I'm a relic.

Which brings me to the subject of this column. Over the past few years, it has become more and more difficult to justify the cost of a printed newspaper. Many military newspapers and magazines across the country have already switched to on-line versions, while others are struggling over funding issues that really have no solution.

Last month, these issues caught up to us.

Still, while acknowledging that I feel a sense of melancholy writing about the change in the newspaper, I also feel excited and hopeful about what the future will bring as we transform this newspaper into what I hope will be the *Prairie Soldier* of the 21st Century.

Today, we live in a wired world. The vast majority of people between the ages of 18-30, which coincidentally is our primary target audience, receive their news via electronic means. All indications are that this trend will continue to grow and evolve over the coming years.

Because of this trend, the *Prairie Soldier* probably wasn't near as effective in reaching this target audience as we should have as indicated by numerous discussions I've had with younger Soldiers and Airmen over the past couple years.

Beginning next issue, the *Prairie Soldier* will be available only on-line for downloading at www.ne.ng.mil.

We are currently developing a system that will allow our current readership to receive an email from the public affairs office when the latest edition is available.

For current members of the Nebraska National Guard and other members of our readership, primarily our retiree community, we are asking you to log onto www.ne.ng.mil where you will see a button entitled: "Subscribe."

There we will ask you to fill in your information as well as a few other items to help us better ensure that we are reaching our full audience.

In short, while the ending of the printed version of the *Prairie Soldier* is obviously a sad time for me, I'm also excited for what the future holds as we develop a publication that I hope will make the members of the Nebraska National Guard proud.

Thanks again for all of your patience and understanding.

Nebraska Guard Soldiers complete grueling ruck-march marathon

By David Nore

Staff Writer

High plains desert, dry heat, sand and scrub brush was the scene for Nebraska National Guardsmen participating in the grueling 23rd Annual Bataan Memorial Death March at White Sands, N.M., March 25th.

One of the most demanding and unique marathons National Guard marathon runners attend, this annual event is much more than just a race, it is a tribute to both the living and passed-on survivors of the American and Allied forces who endured extreme life-threatening hardships during a forced march by Japanese captors in the Philippine jungles during World War II.

"It is really humbling to witness the Bataan Death March survivors that are present welcome you and see you off, and then welcome you back at the finish line" said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hagen, Nebraska's marathon coordinator.

"You put a whole new perspective on the race," said Hagen. "They do what is called a roll call that kicks off the event where they read (all the Bataan survivors) name's, then the guys will get up and say 'Here!'"

"Then they will read the people that between last year and this year who have passed away," he added. "You think about what they have endured during the march and you also think about those that have passed since that time."

The route and conditions they endured in the Philippine jungles killed thousands of the original American and Allied Forces as they marched for days to what would be deadly prisoner of war camps. Among the original group of prisoners were nearly 2,000 New Mexico Guard members of the 200th Coast Artillery.

"What meant most to me was realizing the history of the Bataan Death March and actually seeing how far they actually went," said first-time participant, Sgt. Travis Benda, 72nd Civil Support Team member. "It was way more than the 26.2 miles that we went, I believe it was 65 – 100 miles depending on where they were located, and the fact that they did it without food or water, it is amazing that any of them survived."

The commemorative race is 26.2 miles of sandy trail, dusty air and inhospitable terrain. Individual training for the event takes weeks and even months for some to try to match the environmental conditions and mental conditioning needed to complete the event.

"We started training in January with 12-mile ruck marches and added two miles every week until we hit 20 miles and then took a couple of weeks off before the Death March," Benda said. "The elevation became an issue because the air was very thin and as we completed the Death March we realized the effect it had on us."

"The weather was going to be 82 degrees but it was in the low 90s on the road and you get a lot of reflection off of the sand." said Maj. Kevin Hurtt, also a member of Nebraska's 72nd CST, who completed the race.

"You meet the actual Bataan survivors," said Hurtt. "Along the way I met Vietnam veterans supporting the runners also, handing out water, cheering you on. There is a lot of sand, some compact trails, but typical desert terrain."

It's Legit: Sgt. Travis Benda (left) and Capt. Sean Thurmer, both members of the 72nd Civil Support Team, weigh-in their rucksacks following the Bataan Death March, held at White Sands, N.M., March 25. For the military 'heavy' division, participants must carry at least a 35-pound pack for the 26.2 mile event, but some packs weigh 5 – 10 pounds more at the end due to absorption of sweat.

The heat and terrain took its toll on the participants.

"For me, an unusual thing happened around mile 24 or 25. I came across a person passed out from the heat," Hurtt said. "I cooled him down with water and he got back up and finished the marathon."

The Guardsmen that participated agreed that it was difficult terrain so mental toughness was needed get through.

"There is a spot about Mile 21 that is a mile of deep sand and after climbing a big hill and coming back down there is deep sand that is 8 – 12 inches and you can't get good footing in it. That mile just tears you up because you are already almost spent from running the 21 miles before and it takes a lot of internal motivation to get through it," said Hagen. "No matter if you are in the full 25 or the 15 (mile race) you still come across that sand."

Courtesy Photos

What Heat?: Sgt. Travis Benda and Capt. Sean Thurmer compete in the New Mexico Bataan Death March at the White Sands Missile Range, N.M., March 25. With temperatures from the 50s to 90s in the thin desert air, participants experienced a wide range of demanding conditions during the grueling event.

All things considered, the participants experienced a camaraderie and sense of fulfillment commemorating the thousands of Soldiers that were forced to march for their life in the jungles of the Philippines in 1942.

"I would recommend this to anyone else. You have to push yourself," said Benda. "But it is a fun event and you can learn about the history of the Death March. It is probably something Soldiers should do in their life."

New Guard event at 2012 Cornhusker State Games

Air Guardsman calls out Nebraska's Soldiers: 'Let's settle this fitness debate on the field'

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

Forgive Staff Sgt. Jarell Roach if he has a little bit of a chip on his shoulder.

A member of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Civil Engineer Squadron who works fulltime for the Nebraska National Guard's Counterdrug Office's drug civil operations, Roach is also a physical fitness advocate who typically scores extremely well during his annual physical fitness tests.

Still, Roach said, he's constantly aware of the good-natured ribbing that he's taken from his Army National Guard counterparts. He adds, with a laugh, that he's not going to take it anymore.

"I'm tired of the Army talking stuff about the Air Force," he said, smiling widely as his voice picks up in volume. "My PT scores are excellent and I know a lot of people who score excellent as well."

"We want to settle the score," he added. "We want to tell the Army, 'Show up on the track… bring it because we've got what it takes.'"

"The Air Force is calling out the Army."

While Roach's comments might seem like one of the countless good-natured debates that occurs whenever members of the Army National Guard compare their physical fitness program to the Air National Guard's, or vice versa, he's actually taken the debate a step further.

Roach has helped create a challenge that will allow members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard to settle their physical fitness debates on the competition field this summer during the annual Cornhusker State Games.

According to Roach, the competition will feature a number of different multidisciplinary track and field, and nontraditional events designed to foster camaraderie, bring awareness to the Nebraska National Guard and promote physical fitness in a fun and healthy competitive environment.

Oh, and there will be a trophy awarded to the organizational winner, too.

A longtime track and field competitor who has also supported the annual Cornhusker State Games in a number of other ways, Roach said the idea of creating a Nebraska National Guard physical fitness challenge seemed like a natural offshoot of both organizations' constant focus on fitness.

"I love what we in the National Guard have to offer," he said. "I love how National Guard personnel are devoted to running… they have like this 'run fever' going on."

"I thought, why not create some type of competition where the National Guard can have its own inner competition where we're going head to head with each other?"

The Cornhusker Games, he added, seemed like the perfect venue for this idea. According to Cornhusker State Games coordinators, the annual event is designed to provide quality competition for amateur athletes of all ages and abilities and to promote healthy and active lifestyle choices.

Founded in 1985, the event is a statewide amateur sports festival for all Nebraskans while providing top-quality amateur competition in a wide range of activities.

In 2011, the Cornhusker State Games attracted 11,511 participants in more than 60 competitive and participation sports. Participants came from 78 counties; the oldest official participant was 87 years, the youngest was 5 months.

The 2012 Games are scheduled for July 20-29 at more than 70 sites.

Roach, who has competed in a variety of sprint and field events during the games' annual track and field competition, said he has grown to love what the Cornhusker State Games represent.

"It represents community, which I believe is at the heart of Nebraska's history," he said. "It's diversity."

"So, when you see the Cornhusker State Games, you see a snapshot of competitiveness, athleticism, talent and skill from across Nebraska," Roach said.

Under Roach's plan, the National Guard challenge will be part of the July 21 track and field meet held at Lincoln High School in Lincoln, Neb. Guard competitors will have the opportunity to compete against other athletes in the sprint, distance or field events, with their scores contributing to the overall Army or Air Guard scores. Athletes will also compete in Guard-specific sprint and distance-relays and a tug of war competition.

The goal, said Roach, is to get the maximum amount of participation possible from both the Army and Air National Guard, with points going to not only how well individual and teams of Guardsmen place, but also in the level of participation that each organization is able to muster.

Additionally, because the Guard athletes will be competing in their organizational physical fitness uniforms, Roach said it will give the Guard the opportunity to better bring awareness to the Guard's overall "fit to fight" fitness campaigns.

According to Nebraska Sports Council Executive Director Dave Mlnarik, the Guard competition seems like an obvious offshoot of the Cornhusker State Games.

"We have had a longstanding relationship with the Nebraska National Guard based upon the mutual respect we have for each other and what we both stand for," he said. "So, when Sergeant Roach approached us with this idea, it just seemed to make a lot of sense."

"It's relatively unique," said Mlnarik, adding that he's not sure that another military-type competition exists within the state games community, which consists of more than 30 state-level competition. "We really think this competition has the potential to be a great event for the Cornhusker State Games. We also think that it has the possibility to grow into an event that's open to all branches of the military to compete in."

According to Roach, a travelling trophy designating the year's winning team will be presented to the senior leader of either the Nebraska Army or Air National Guard.

"We would love to see that trophy displayed in the winning general's office," Roach said. "It would be a sign of bragging rights."

Roach said he's also working with the Cornhusker State Games to develop a publicity program to get Guardsmen interested in competing this summer. He added additional details, including registration information, are available at the Cornhusker State Games website.

Roach said he's excited to be able to help lay the groundwork for a challenge he hopes will become a major annual event for Nebraska Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

"This is really a great opportunity to settle some stuff on the track and field and have a great time," he said. "This also gives us a chance to spark some old flames for those people who used to compete and would like a chance to get back on the track and field again, or those newer members of the organization who would like the chance to compete as part of their respective service team."

"It should be a lot of fun," he added, "but I'm still calling the Army out. Let's get out there and settle this argument on the track and field."

For more information, contact Staff Sgt. Jarell Roach at (402) 770-1188.

Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Future Pro: Jacob McClellan, 6, swings a golf club during the Month of the Military Child Golf Clinic at Wilderness Ridge in Lincoln, Neb., April 7.

Military Child Month begins with golf clinic

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

Approximately 40 kids from preschool to high school age took advantage of unseasonably warm spring weather to learn about chipping, putting and full swings during the Military Child Golf Clinic held at Wilderness Ridge Country club in Lincoln, Neb., April 7.

"We want to recognize the military kids because they serve, too," said Dave Hall, state youth coordinator for the Family Program Office. "So it's just an opportunity to try to bring recognition to the military kids and how they've sacrificed and what they've done."

Wilderness Ridge held the event to show their support for members of the military, but mostly for the kids.

"The main goal is to say thanks to the kids of the families that serve and protect the country," said Chris Thomson, PGA head golf professional at Wilderness Ridge.

Brig. Gen. Jon Fago, chief of staff for the Nebraska Air National Guard, said he shares a passion for golf with his two sons and knows how kids sacrifice when a parent is away on deployment.

"Parents will miss birthdays and special events at school while they're deployed," said Fago. "So this is a chance to pay them back for some of that sacrifice."