

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Chinook company welcomed home from Afghanistan

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

After a yearlong separation from her husband, the final 24 hours were definitely the longest for Kecia Spofford.

"I was up at 5 a.m. this morning cleaning," said Spofford as she and her daughter, two-year-old Addisyn, stood in a growing crowd of families and friends waiting for approximately 65 members of the Grand Island-based Company B, 2-135th General Support Battalion, to return home May 25 from a mission to Afghanistan. "And then we decided to come out early because I couldn't clean anything else in my house."

Spofford wasn't the only one excited for the return of the Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers either. She said she met up with a group of five other unit wives who went out and had breakfast and pedicures together.

"It was fun," said Spofford, who also works full-time for the Guard at Grand Island's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2. "We're very, very excited. This is a big day."

Tess Bayne echoed those thoughts. Standing with her son,

Grand Island aviators honor fallen comrade

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Amidst the revelry that erupted around the Nebraska Army National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 was a sense of profound sadness.

Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, was returning home to Nebraska from its mission to Afghanistan with one less Soldier.

Patrick Hamburger, a highly thought-of CH-47 crew chief, was killed in Afghanistan on Aug. 6, 2011, when the helicopter he was flying in was struck

See HAMBURGER on 7.

Deacon, Bayne said it was hard to describe the emotions she was feeling as she counted down the

See GSAB on 7.

Final members of second agribusiness team return

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

This was a very special Memorial Day for several Nebraska National Guard families.

Every member of the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 2 is now safe-and-sound at home after 11 members of the team were welcomed home during a ceremony at the Pentamer Army at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 29.

The eight Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers and three Air National Guard Airmen were the

final members of the team to return after a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan. Forty-six of the team's 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, April 6.

The 11 troops made up the team's agricultural specialist team. They stayed in Afghanistan after a restructuring made them a part of a U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team. The 46 Soldiers and Airmen who returned in April made up the ADT's security and headquarters

See ADT on 6.

Air refueling wing witnesses changing of guard

By Senior Airman Mary Thach
Staff Writer

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing conducted a change of command ceremony, June 3, on the parade grounds of the Nebraska National Guard air base.

Col. Richard Evans III of Lincoln, Neb., relinquished command of the 155th ARW to Col. Keith A. Schell, also of Lincoln. Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general presided over the ceremony.

Lyons thanked Evans for his work during his more than four years as commander of the 155th ARW.

"Colonel Evans, your leadership during

your tour as wing commander has made my job easier as the adjutant general," said Lyons. "But most importantly, you make your Airmen proud and the citizens of Nebraska proud of the wing and the Nebraska National Guard... You delivered every time the wing was called upon to serve the state or our nation."

Evans, the eighth officer to command the 155th ARW, is originally from Omaha, Neb., where he graduated from Northwest High School and the University of Nebraska-Omaha. He has been a member of the Nebraska Air National Guard since 1984. Before taking command of the 155th, he commanded the Nebraska Air National Guard's 170th Group at Offutt Air Force

Base, Neb.

Following the change of command, Evans was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. He is now assigned to Headquarters, U.S. Strategic Command at Offutt AFB, Neb., where he serves as the mobilization assistant to the director of Global Operations.

Evans reflected on the accomplishments of his tenure as commander and thanked his family and the Airmen of the 155th ARW for their hard work.

"The proof is in the pudding," said Evans. "When the calls came, whether it was for a state or federal mission, we were ready to go. We responded, sometimes on hours'

See 155TH ARW on 4.

Fire and Water



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Helping Out The Environment: (Above) Pfc. Marco Flores, 317th Engineer Detachment Firefighting Team, lights grass and underbrush during an April 25 controlled burn operation designed to help Camp Ashland's environment while also allowing members of the Nebraska Army National Guard firefighting team to receive valuable wildfire training.

Making it Rain: (Right) Sgt. James Nordman, a crew chief with Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, releases water from a "Bambi Bucket" over a section of land during a controlled burn at Camp Ashland, April 25.



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Guardsmen prepare for firefighting season while boosting Camp Ashland's environment

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

If there's one thing that members of the military will agree on, it's that mission success is often dictated by realistic training.

Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's firefighting community received that in April when they practiced battling a wildland fire with actual flames, April 25, while supporting a controlled burn at Camp Ashland's east training area.

According to Larry Vrtiska, state environmental program manager, the burn was designed to accomplish two things.

"We have an integrated wildland fire management plan at Camp Ashland and part of its goal is to reduce the

risk of causing a wildland fire due to training," said Vrtiska. "In order to accomplish this, we wanted to conduct a controlled burn to eliminate the vegetation – or fuel – that is in the training area at Camp Ashland."

"We were able to safely reintroduce fire into the Camp Ashland environment while also giving our Guard Soldiers valuable firefighting training."

— Larry Vrtiska, state environmental program manager

"A fire is a natural thing in the environment. The environment responds well to fires," he said. "So, in order to create a healthier ecosystem in the training area, we wanted to reintroduce fire as a way to eliminate much of the invasive plants and problem trees that have grown up in the area."

The second goal, Vrtiska said, was to give members of the Nebraska Army Guard's 317th Engineer Detachment Firefighting Team from Norfolk and the crews of two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters the opportunity to practice fighting an actual blaze.

See FIRE AND WATER on 3.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Passing the Flag: Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, passes the 155th Air Refueling Wing colors to Col. Keith Schell during a change of command ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base, June 3.

Inside

Air Guard crews practice survival skills in June
See story and photos on 9.



Guardsmen refine disaster response at Crisis City
See story and photos on 10-11.



Index

- News Briefs 2
- Family News 16
- Editorials 17
- We Salute 18
- Sports 20-22

NEWS DIGEST

■ Defense Department leaders: Possible sequestration threatens military's successes

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – The nation's military has logged historic achievements in the past 12 months, but faces a future clouded by financial threat, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said June 29.

The secretary and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both spoke about the topic of sequestration during a briefing with Pentagon reporters. Panetta summed up the department's main activities since he became Defense Secretary last summer, noting that the Iraq War has ended, a "responsible drawdown" of U.S. forces in Afghanistan has begun, and the NATO mission in Libya concluded alongside the fall of Moammar Gadhafi.

The department has also "maintained a relentless focus on al-Qaida" and put in place a new defense strategy and a budget request focused on the future force and rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East, the secretary said.

DoD has also maintained faith with troops by protecting pay and benefits, and has increased employment opportunities for veterans and spouses, he noted.

"We implemented the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" Panetta said. "We've also opened up 14,000 military positions to women and we've put in place enhanced measures to prevent sexual assault."

The biggest threat to all of those accomplishments and initiatives is sequestration, he said.

Sequestration is a mechanism built into the Budget Control Act that will trigger an additional half-trillion-dollar cut to defense spending over the next 10 years if Congress doesn't otherwise identify spending reductions the act requires.

Panetta said the uniformed men and women he's met in war zones, and the wounded warriors he's visited in military hospitals and rehabilitation centers, "deserve better than the threat of sequestration."

"Too often today, the nation's problems are held hostage to the unwillingness to find consensus and compromise," the secretary said.

He noted the approaching 4th of July holiday was an opportunity to reflect on the military's sacrifices. "It is a time for our leaders and for every American to recognize that the blessings of freedom are not free," Panetta said. "They come from a legacy of sacrifice, of courage and of leadership. That legacy is now our responsibility to fulfill, so that hopefully our children can enjoy a better life in the future."

Dempsey said his travels in recent weeks, as well as over the past year, have brought him into contact with a wide range of service members.

"At every stop... I was struck by their tremendous sense of pride and commitment," the chairman said. He praised service members' courage, selflessness, intelligence and dedication to the mission.

"They'll do anything to take care of this country," he said.

Dempsey said he was also struck by troops' concern over the budget.

"I find it encouraging, on the one hand, that our military family is informed and interested," he said. "But it's unfortunate that it weighs so heavily on their minds. Frankly, they have enough to worry about."

The chairman noted, "We have to remember, too, that the force of the future — that is, America's sons and daughters who may be out there contemplating a military career — are also watching."

Dempsey said as Panetta has made clear, "We simply have to come together to prevent this across-the-board, unbalanced cut that could jeopardize our ability to deal with the very real and serious threats that we face."

■ President nominates Grass as next National Guard chief

ARLINGTON, Va., (AFPS) – President Obama has nominated Army Lt. Gen. Frank J. Grass, deputy commander of U.S. Northern Command, to receive his fourth star and serve as the 27th chief of the National Guard Bureau, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced, June 29.

Grass, who was confirmed by the Senate on July 26, will succeed Air Force Gen. Craig R. McKinley, the first four-star general to hold the assignment. McKinley also became the first Guard Bureau chief to serve as a statutory member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

At a Pentagon news conference, Dempsey said McKinley "has done an outstanding job as the chief of the National Guard Bureau, helping to make sure our National Guard is tightly integrated with active duty personnel," and he offered congratulations to both generals.

Grass was commissioned in 1981 after 12 years of enlisted service in the Missouri Army National Guard. In civilian life, he worked in the Army Corps of Engineers.

He has served in a wide variety of command and staff positions as a traditional Guard member, in the Active Guard and Reserve Program and on active duty.

"I am thrilled and humbled by the opportunity, if I am confirmed, to lead the best National Guard in our nation's history - a force of more than 460,000 men and women proven on the battlefield and during domestic crises," Grass said.

"It is further humbling to be asked by the secretary of defense and the president to follow in General McKinley's footsteps," he continued. "I look forward to ensuring the investment the American people have made in the National Guard as a ready and reliable operational force continues to pay dividends."

Grass has served as Northcom's deputy commander and as vice commander of North American Aerospace Command's U.S. element since 2010.



Grass

Nebraska helicopter crew helps fight Colorado blaze

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Members of a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew had the opportunity to help out their neighbors to the southwest when they deployed to Colorado to provide assistance as officials there fought a major wildfire near Fort Collins, Colo.

According to Chief Warrant Officer 2 David Flores, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilot with the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation Battalion, the four-person crew dropped nearly 56,000 gallons of water during their nearly 10-day mission to assist Colorado officials in fighting the High Park fire in Larimer County.

"It's a good feeling to be help out another state," said Flores on June 29 after completing the mission. "You know, its neighbors helping neighbors. We joined the Guard because that's what we do. It's what we train for."

The helicopter crew was sent to Colorado after Nebraska received a request through the emergency management assistance compact, a multi-state agreement that facilitates emergency response requests between states. It's the same type of request that Nebraska made last year during flooding on the Platte and Missouri Rivers that required the state to seek assistance from Colorado and Illinois helicopter crews.

Flores said the scale of the Colorado fire, during which 17 helicopters and additional fixed wing aircraft worked with ground firefighting crews to battle the blaze, was truly astonishing.

"It's a pretty bad feeling to see all these homes that were destroyed," he said. "It motivates you to do what you can to help." "Probably the most significant thing I



Photo by Staff Sgt. Tate Petersen

Hotspot: Nebraska National Guard crewmembers of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, dump water from a "Bambi Bucket" onto flames of the High Park fire approximately 15 miles west of Fort Collins, Colo., June 18.

will remember will be the effort," he added a short time later. "It's a huge national effort.... There's firefighters from all over the nation, they're all focused on doing what they're doing."

Sgt. James Nordman agreed. "Our main role is to create a line that the firefighters can work back to," said Nordman, a UH-60 Blackhawk crew chief who helped drop water on to the various hotspots using the helicopter's 660-gallon Bambi Bucket that can scoop water from local sources and then spread it on flames as designated by ground firefighting crews. "It's a safe barrier for them."

"We're creating a 'Burn No Further Past This' line. So, it takes a lot of coordination from the ground guys and the air guys all the way down to us," he added. "We dropped that water exactly where they wanted us to drop it every single time. It was difficult at times with a lot of conversations going on at once... it was a challenge."

■ Officials say progress must continue on PTSD treatment

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Great strides have been made in treating service members with post-traumatic stress disorder, but progress must continue, military and medical leaders told an audience, June 27.

The military's three surgeons general and the Army's senior sergeant major spoke at an event to mark the third-annual National Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day.

Sgt. Major of the Army Raymond Chandler III called himself the poster child of someone with PTSD who is concerned about the stigma associated with seeking treatment, something which he says is an on-going issue for many.

His first brush with a life-threatening event in Iraq became life-altering, he said, adding that it caused him to do things that led to a "downward spiral." For example, during his post-deployment health risk assessment, he wasn't completely honest about his situation because he was being redeployed.

"I felt that if I said truthfully what happened and what I was feeling, I wouldn't be able to succeed and move on. I've come a long way since 2005," he added, noting that he had turned off a good part of his life — the emotional, spiritual and physical elements to deal with being the professional soldier.

Chandler finally entered a two-week behavioral health program, which he said made a significant difference.

In 2011, when he interviewed with then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. for the job as Sergeant Major of the Army, he said Casey was glad to have him onboard with his experience in PTSD counseling, because Chandler could speak to the challenges and treatment.

Chandler got the job and went on to tell his story to service members and families.

"I think we've made a difference," Chandler said. "I know in many of our Soldiers' lives and the many challenges of the past 10 years, we've made tremendous strides in our behavioral health care access, and our care and quality of care, (but) we still have a long way to go."

Dempsey details challenges during visit to Offutt

OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, Neb. (AFPS) – Likening the global security environment to strong winds such as those that come with severe weather in the central plains, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff spoke June 26 about challenges buffeting the nation.

Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke with about 300 service members, Defense Department civilians and family members on Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha, Neb., June 26, 2012. Dempsey's wife, Deanie, participated in the event.

"It's a pretty challenging time, and we only get through it because of perseverance," Dempsey said, noting that the past decade has seen the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the global terrorism threat and emerging security and economic challenges.

The chairman's town hall meeting included a cross-section of Offutt Air Force Base, home of the 55th Wing, U.S. Strategic Command and the Air Force Weather Agency.

Stratcom is responsible for the U.S. legacy nuclear command and

control mission, space operations, global strike, Defense Department information operations, global missile defense, and global command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

Dempsey talked about his focus on three major defense transitions. The first transition the chairman described involves resetting the force for different kinds of security challenges.

"We spent 10 years focused like a laser beam on counterinsurgency," Dempsey noted. "We've got to still do some of that,... as well as confronting global terrorism for the foreseeable future."

But most of the force will be resetting itself, the chairman said, "rekindling skills that maybe have been sidelined," to get ready for the challenges expected in the second half of this decade.

The second major transition will be from a bigger budget to a smaller budget, Dempsey said.

"The question we will answer with your help is how much smaller will that budget become and still allow us to preserve the resources necessary to live up to the respon-

sibility we have... to prevent the United States of America from being coerced in any domain. We are a global power," the chairman said.

"I think we can figure that out with your help," he added.

The third transition, of a military at war to a more peaceful time, may be the most challenging of all, Dempsey said.

The Defense Department must do it right, he added. "(We must) make sure that we don't abandon someone who has served their country in time of war and toss them over the transom," he said.

The challenge will come from trying to merge the processes the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments, as well as trying to reach out to the civilian sector and academia to help service members who, in increasing numbers, will become veterans.

"Over the last 10 years, what has kept us together is a bond of trust, probably unique in any profession at any time," Dempsey said.

Seeing these transitions through, he told the audience, will help to sustain that trust, even through uncertainties of budget or security.

Prairie Soldier

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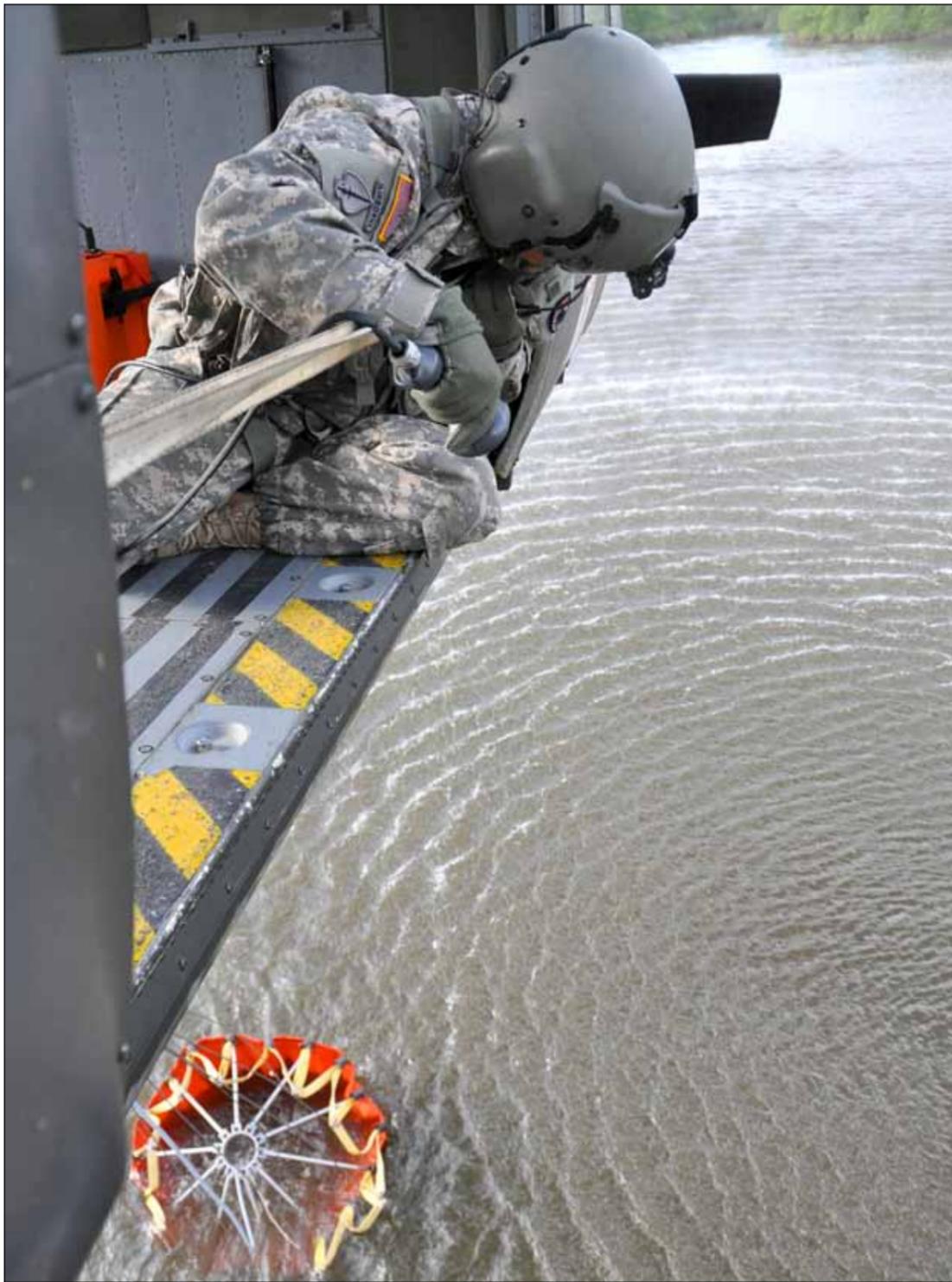


Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Fill 'er Up: Sgt. James Nordman, a crew chief with Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, keeps an eye on a "Bambi Bucket" as it fills with water from a reservoir. The crew then released it on a nearby controlled burn at Camp Ashland, April 25.

FIRE AND WATER continued from page 1.

"We were approached by the aviators and the firefighters from Norfolk about incorporating their training needs into our plans at Camp Ashland," Vrtiska said. "They were looking for a good opportunity to train on their wildland firefighting skills before the wildland fire season starts in Nebraska."

The April operation took approximately four hours and involved roughly 15 acres of training area that had been inundated by grasses, weeds and stubbles of cedar trees.

Firefighters from Norfolk assisted Vrtiska in lighting patches of the training area on fire while a helicopter crew, utilizing a bright orange "Bambi Bucket," and the remainder of the 317th Firefighting Team helped keep the fire within its designated area by placing water around the perimeter.

According to Staff Sgt. Reggie Barent, 317th Firefighting Team chief, the controlled burn was an excellent opportunity to give his newest team members the experience and confidence they need to battle the real thing.

"The advantage to doing it this time of year is that we're not going to have the fire activity that we would have later in the year," said Barent, a civilian firefighter at the Lincoln Municipal Airport.

"It gets the younger guys more familiar with the equipment and basically gets them used to real fire and real wildland conditions, but in a more crawl, walk, run fashion," he said.

That's particularly important considering the various forms wildland fires can take, said Sgt.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Checking Conditions: Sgt. Michael Wilkins, 317th Engineer Detachment Firefighting Team, uses a wildland weather kit to check wind speed, relative humidity and temperatures, to help him predict the fire's behavior.

Michael Wilkins, 317th Firefighting Team lead firefighter.

"It's much safer for us. It can be much more controlled," said Wilkins, who works as a paramedic with Rural Metro Ambulance and serves with the Ralston Fire Department. "Whereas in June and July, they tend to get out of control, such as what happened during the real fires in Valentine and Chadron."

Wilkins speaks from experience. Back in 2006 he was a new member of the newly established firefighting unit when he received a call that he was being mobilized to state active duty to help battle

a blaze threatening to burn part of Valentine. A few weeks later he was again called up to fight a fire, this time near Chadron.

Wilkins said he can still remember the feelings encountered then.

"I was scared," he said. "I had no training. I had never been told to pack your bags and be here within three hours. Reality came at you pretty hard."

Wilkins said he feels the experience gained training at Camp Ashland will undoubtedly help the team's youngest members better understand what's required of them should they get a call this year.

"Now that we're adding more training, I think we'll be much more calm, much more prepared," he said.

"If I could go back in time, I would've loved to have had this training, however, (2006) was one of the best experiences I ever had, going in trial by fire," Wilkins said.

According to Barent, another advantage of the Camp Ashland training was that it allowed the ground crews to be able to watch how the helicopter crews operate and the capabilities they bring with their Bambi Buckets, which are able to drop water onto fires with almost pin-point accuracy.

"We've been on wildland fires in the past, but we've been pretty far away from where they were operating," said Barent as he watched a Black Hawk pass by, trailing a stream of white water that landed onto a nearby fire. "So, this is good to be able to see how they can drop (water) exactly where we want to see it and then see what that does to the fire."



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Trail Of Fire: Larry Vrtiska, Nebraska National Guard state environmental program manager, lights grass on fire at Camp Ashland's training area, April 25. According to Vrtiska, the exercise was designed to provide Nebraska National Guardsmen with realistic firefighting training while also revitalizing the Camp Ashland environment.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Dousing The Grass: Members of the 317th Engineer Detachment Firefighting Team use their firetruck to lay down water on the still-smoking grass at the end of a controlled burn operation at Camp Ashland, Neb., April 25.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Smokey Walk: Pfc. Marco Flores inspects the Camp Ashland, Neb., training area for hot spots after the conclusion of a controlled burn operation designed to rid the training area of invasive plants.

Overall, Vrtiska said he was pleased with the results of controlled fire operation, adding he would like to see it become an annual event with the continued goals of increasing the health of Camp Ashland's ecosystem, enabling Guard officials to better access overgrown training areas while also preparing Guard firefighters for possible emergency missions.

"This was the first time that we've done this here since I arrived in 2003 and overall I thought

it went really well," he said. "We were able to safely reintroduce fire into the Camp Ashland environment while also giving our Guard Soldiers valuable firefighting training."

"It was really successful," Vrtiska added. "The comments we received during the after action review were extremely positive and I think we met the goals that we set for ourselves. We would definitely like to see this become an annual training event."

Transportation Soldiers 'get real' during annual training

■Real-world mission continues while Nebraska Guardsmen concentrate on developing Army warrior skills, battle drills

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

Approximately 400 members of the 734th Transportation Battalion completed their 2012 annual training, recently, at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

The goal of the June 2-16 annual training was to exercise battalion staff to provide command and control of multiple units while conducting individual and collective training on convoy operations, crew-served weapons qualifications, Army warrior tasks, and battle drills. In addition, all crew-served weapons teams were expected to attain 100 percent qualification and all Soldiers receive validation on select Army warrior tasks and battle drills with no injuries or vehicle accidents.

Mission accomplished and then some.

The multiple companies that make up the 734th also completed combat life saver courses, future leaders reaction courses, military operations in urban terrain training, a confidence course and convoy operations to the Smokey Hill range complex near Salina, Kan., and Fort Riley, Kan.

"You want to make sure they're tracking on exactly what is their job, not only as their (military occupational specialty) as a truck driver, but basic Soldier skills," said Capt. Ed Davis, 734th support operations officer. "We're focusing heavily on the (noncommissioned officer) leadership like we typically always do, but they're the ones, the NCOs are the ones, that are running the lanes ensuring that their sergeants and below understand troop-leading procedures in what their job is and training them...so they know how to react and how to lead their Soldiers."

"It's been hard, the operations tempo has been very, very high," said Davis. "Soldiers have been working, I would say, on average 14 to 18 hour days nonstop, in some heat. But Soldiers are happy, Soldiers are busy, they're learning a lot of skills...they've had a good time doing good quality training - relevant, realistic training."

And despite the heat and long hours, the Soldiers enjoyed themselves and learned a lot.

"It's been pretty good," said Spc. Anthony Svoboda, a chemical operations specialist with the 1057th Transportation Company. "We got



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Move Back: Spc. Dylan Recek, a truck driver with the 1075th Transportation Company, tells a "civilian" to move back during convoy operations in the 734th Transportation Battalion's annual training at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 14.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Through the Haze: Members of the 734th Transportation Battalion make their way through a smoke screen during convoy operations at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., as part of their annual training, June 14. The unit used the AT to sharpen its skills in convoy operations, crew served weapons qualifications, Army warrior tasks, leaderships skills and battle drills.

to shoot weapons that we don't usually get to touch during drill."

"So far my favorite part has probably been taking apart and really going into the weapons systems and putting them back together when we had to clean them," he added. "I just really like firearms."

Svoboda said he also learned quite a bit about Fort Riley, but the most important thing he'll take away from the training is leadership.

"Going to AT, specialists get put



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Real Life Scenario: Members of the 734th Transportation Battalion get ready to enter a building during the clearing tactics part of their annual training on June 14. Soldiers assigned to the Nebraska Army Guard's 734th Trans. Bn. put their skills to the test when they conducted their annual training, June 2-16.

"The most important thing so far is learning how to react when things go berserk," she added. "Just to stay calm and do what you're told and do what you've learned."

Spc. Trevor Munster, a truck driver with the 1195th Transportation Company, said the training was great, adding everything they had been doing was very close to what they would be doing while on a real mission.

"To me it's preparation for when I would get deployed," said Munster. "So I kind of have a pretty good idea of what to do - get your head into the game a little bit."

And although the training was geared towards checking items off of their mission essential task list, members of the 734th also got a chance to handle a real-life transportation mission.

Davis said that during a 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion exercise in South Dakota, a wrecker truck broke down. The 734th was tasked with getting a functioning truck to them and bringing the broken-down truck home for maintenance.

"It was a true real-life mission for us," said Davis. "I got a call one day from a maintenance chief that said 'Hey, I got a truck that's broke down, can you help me get one from Lincoln to Rapid City?' In less than probably 12 hours we had all the paperwork done, we had the vehicle loaded and we were moving."

Members of the 734th also got to show off some of their training

to employers and civic leaders from Columbus and Kearney when they coordinated with Nebraska's Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve for a "Bosslift."

The purpose of the Bosslift was to give the 31 employers and civic leaders an opportunity to better understand the training and preparations Soldiers go through while away from their civilian jobs.

Davis said they wanted to use the Bosslift as a culminating event to their annual training. The employers got to ride on a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter, see multiple drills Soldiers participate in, learn about equipment Soldiers use to train, and enjoy a staple of military dining: a Meals, Ready to Eat.

And now that the 734th's AT is over, many of the Soldiers said they would have good stories for their friends and families.

"I'm going to tell them it's a good time," said Munster.

He added that this training shows the range of the modern Guard Soldier. Although the majority of 734th Soldiers' MOS is a truck driver, they are capable of handling many different jobs and they are always a Soldier first.

Svoboda said he would most likely have a different message for his friends versus his family.

"I'm probably going to tell my friends how I got to shoot all these awesome weapons they don't get to touch," he said. "And then my mom, I'm just going to tell her I was a good kid."

155th ARW continued from page 1.

notice, to do things around the world and every time we excelled."

"I couldn't be prouder of what we've done and I really enjoyed the opportunity to watch you and learn from you throughout my tenure," he added.

Evans said he has no doubt Schell will succeed as commander of the wing.

"I know that you and Lisa are ready for the challenge and will do extremely well in taking this wing to the next level."

Lyons also expressed his belief in Schell.

"I'm confident that Colonel Schell will continue to deliver excellence day-in and day-out and will build upon the tradition of success in the wing," said Lyons.

"The challenge will be to continue to focus on the federal mission while simultaneously keeping an eye on our state mission, all the while ensuring that the wing is ready and able. And I have no doubt that Colonel Schell is up to the challenge and is eager to embrace the challenges of wing command."

After accepting the wing's flag, officially signifying his assumption of command, Schell spoke to the formation of 155th ARW members and guests about what assuming command of the organization meant to him.

"To me that means that I have the confidence to lead this organization," said Schell. "I have the confidence to serve this unit because of the members out there...I have the confidence in them doing their jobs here within the state and around the world."

Schell is originally from Malcolm, Neb., where he graduated from Malcolm High School. He is also a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has been a member of the Nebraska Air National Guard since 1981. Prior to his new assignment he served as commander of the Air Guard's 155th Maintenance Group, which is part of the 155th ARW.

The 155th ARW is the Nebraska Air Guard's largest organization with more than 850 personnel assigned, an annual economic impact

in charge of more because we're getting ready to become sergeants eventually, so we get more responsibility and our leadership skills are getting sharpened here," he added. "It's more of an NCO-type role."

For Pvt. Crystal Roy, a truck driver from the 1195th Transportation Company, this was her first annual training after completing her advanced individual training in December, and she took full advantage of all the training.

"It's fun," said Roy. "I like it."



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Shining Star: Rick Evans III is promoted to the rank of brigadier general by Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, and Evans' wife, Joy, along with the Evans' two sons, John and Jeffrey, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., June 2. Evans relinquished command of the 155th Air Refueling to Col. Keith Schell and is now assigned to Headquarters, U.S. Strategic Command, at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., where he serves as the mobilization assistant to the director of Global Operations.

of more than \$100 million and assets worth more than \$850 million. The unit operates eight KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft, which travel

around the world supporting routine and contingency air refueling, cargo, passenger and aeromedical evacuation missions.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Vet hiring effort comes to Omaha

Military veterans hoping to land meaningful employment had the opportunity to speak with potential employers, June 12, when a Hiring Our Heroes job fair was held at the DC Centre in Omaha, Neb. According to Guard officials, more than 260 veterans had the opportunity to speak with more than 80 employers.

Right place, right time

Nebraska Army Guard aviators first on scene of civilian aircraft accident

By Spc. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

Warrant Officer Courtney Miller and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Stephen Gonifas of Company D, 1-376th Aviation Battalion, were out on a basic training mission in a LUH-72 helicopter, March 28.

Their plan was to fly over a couple different areas and practice some emergency procedures, get familiar with the local area, and conduct various training.

What they didn't realize when they took off from the Grand Island Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 was that they would soon be the first on the scene of a real emergency before they could practice their emergency procedures and training.

As the two Lakota pilots approached the Broken Bow Municipal Airport, located right outside of Broken Bow, Neb., they made a radio call to anyone in the area saying they were at the Broken Bow airport and were planning to land.

Because Broken Bow doesn't have a control tower, the pilots have to communicate on a specific frequency.

Right as Miller and Gonifas were getting into position to land on the runway, a different radio call came in. The radio call was on the same frequency, but from a different aircraft.

"It basically told us that there was an aircraft in the area that needed to make an emergency landing at the Broken Bow airport and if anyone else was around that area that they needed the space to be able to do an emergency landing," said Miller.

"We acknowledged their call and basically broke away from what we were doing to get out of the way to allow them to get to the airport," she added.

The Army pilots moved their helicopter a safe distance away.

"We let him know we were going to be in the area and if they needed any help to let us know," said Gonifas. "But we didn't hear anything back from him."

"I was concerned," added Gonifas. "We wanted to stay around to help out if we could in any way."

The pilots stayed in the area after not hearing back from the other aircraft. Then came an ominous sound.

"We heard over our radio network the emergency locator transmitter sent out a quick burst of the emergency signal with a slight pause and then it came on steady," said Miller.



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Helicopter Crew: Warrant Officer Courtney Miller and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Stephen Gonifas of Company D, 1-376th Aviation Battalion, stand next to a LUH-72 Lakota helicopter. On March 28, the two pilots responded to an airplane crash near Broken Bow, Neb.

"At that point we knew something was wrong," Gonifas added.

Miller and Gonifas could see a big black cloud of smoke above the horizon and fire on the ground. "We saw an aircraft on fire north west of the airport," said Gonifas.

"We knew that would have had to be them," said Miller.

The aircraft crashed just short of the runway near a row of trees.

"We took our aircraft over and set it down

"We were doing what anyone in that situation would have done. I know in my heart we did our best and that's what matters most."

—Warrant Officer Courtney Miller

on the ground a few hundred yards away from where the crash scene had taken place," said Miller. "Mr. Gonifas did the shut down procedure to shut the aircraft down. While he was shutting it down, I got out of the aircraft and contacted 911 on my cell phone. I told the dispatcher what had gone on and to send help."

"By the time I got off the phone with the dispatcher, Mr. Gonifas had finished the shut down and was getting out of the aircraft,"

said Miller.

The pilots couldn't imagine anyone surviving this plane crash, but both Miller and Gonifas noticed a person walking toward the wreckage away from the nearby row of trees.

"As soon as Mr. Gonifas realized what was going on, he yelled back at me to grab the first aid kit out of the aircraft," said Miller. "We realized the person was actually part of the wreck."

Gonifas ran as fast as he could over to the survivor to see if he could help the man out as Miller followed a few seconds behind with the first aid kit.

"We both then accessed the situation as quickly as we could; trying to figure out first of all how badly injured he was, what we could do to help and what we had available to help," said Miller. "We realized he was very badly burned. He was conscious and he didn't seem to have any other major injuries. So our biggest concern was him going into shock."

"We could kind of tell already he was in shock because of the way he acted," added Miller. "We went through the first aid kit and considering the extent of his burns there was really nothing in that kit that was going to do any good."

According to Gonifas, the man was coherent and talking, but was really concerned about the other person in the aircraft.

"We sat with him, reassured him, continued to talk with him and kept him involved in conversation so we knew he was conscious," said Miller. "By that time we started to hear the ambulance."

"As soon as the trained personal got there with the ambulance and fire crew, we basically transferred the situation over to them," added Miller. "It was definitely something I learned a lot from, just managing a situation that had a lot going on. Our minds were running a hundred miles an hour, making sure we stayed safe and that we kept our aircraft safe."

Miller and Gonifas both agreed that their military experiences helped them manage and take control of the situation.

"We were just doing our job," said Miller. "We were doing what anyone in that situation would have done. I know in my heart we did our best and that's what matters most."

The pilot of the aircraft was the only survivor and was rushed to the hospital. The survivor's passenger died in the crash.

"It was incredibly unexpected," said Miller. "But at the same time I really felt like we were put in that situation for a reason. We were in the area because that is where

Army Guardsman rushes into burning house to rescue family

By Spc. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

"When I came over the overpass I saw dirty, black smoke that reminded me of fires when I deployed."

That was the moment when Capt. Russell Bartholow's instincts kicked into gear and resulted in saving the lives of a family from a porch fire.

Bartholow, commander of Company A, Recruiting and Retention Command, was driving to the 'Spirit of 67' armory in Lincoln, Neb., for a battalion recruiting meeting when he came over an overpass and saw the smoke. He then had to decide whether he should check it out or be on time for his meeting.

"I knew if I came down and turned left to check it out, I'd be late for the meeting," said Bartholow. "But if I went right, I'd be on time, (but) I'd feel morally guilty for not going to check out something where people could be injured."

He decided to turn left.

As Bartholow turned the corner, he saw a one story house on

fire and realized he was the only one there. "I was in shock that the whole front of the house was on fire," said Bartholow. "I clicked into go. I parked the car, put the hazards on and on the way running to the porch, I called 911."

"I was kind of like 'Uh-oh,' I am the only one on the scene, this house is on fire and there could be people inside that are getting ready to die," said Bartholow. "The only decision I had to make, I remember as I was running up to the porch, was should I try and put out the fire or do I try and save lives?"

Then, it clicked in Bartholow's head, he wasn't a firefighter.

"I thought I better not try and fight the fire," said Bartholow, "because something could explode or who knows. I could get hurt and they could all die."

His Mission Plan

"Kids first," said Bartholow, adding that he knew if there were any children in the house, they would most likely be scared or unable to know what to do. "Adults second and then if there was time and I'm safe enough I'll hook up the pets."

Once Bartholow decided he wasn't going to try and fight the fire, he checked the front door.

"It was locked," said Bartholow. "Then I kicked in the door and rolled. I went through the house yelling 'Fire! Fire! Get out!' looking for kids."

"I found the family asleep in the

basement," said Bartholow. "I woke them up and told them to get out."

According to Lincoln Fire and Rescue Capt. Chad Roof, a woman, her boyfriend and the woman's 12-year-old son were inside.

"They were in shock," said Bartholow. "I could imagine they were like, 'Wow the Army is in my house.' I'm yelling fire and I'm sure they were waking up sort of like 'Fire? What fire?'"

"The male tried coming up to the front. I grabbed him and told him to get out of the house out the back," he added.

With the fire burning fast, Bartholow said he knew he needed to make sure everyone, including every creature, was out of the house.

"When I went back through the second time, the cats were running out the back and the dog was the first one out," said Bartholow. "But then on my way out I heard a 'meow meow.' I was like oh, no. I turned around and this little cat comes crawling out of the dog food bag. It's like they cut the top of the dog food bag and kicked it over so the dog could eat when he wants and the kitty was in that little bag."

"I was like, 'I've got to get the kitten,'" he added. "All this would be a complete failure if a kitten dies." Bartholow said he grabbed the kitten and put it on his shoulder.

"They don't know how to control their little claws," he said. "I knew if I put him on my shoulder and if I run and he falls off, I tried. So I

put him right there and he latched on to my shoulder and I ran out."

At this point, Bartholow was out of the house with whole family including the family's five cats, one kitten and three-legged dog.

Aftermath

Once Bartholow was out of the house, the rescue crew was there and put him in the ambulance where they took him to the burn unit at Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center.

"At this point I was puking and coughing," said Bartholow. "My eyes were all watered. When I went back through the front of the house and swept for pets, that's what probably got me sick."

"In the ambulance, they were like 'Is there anyone to notify?' and I was like 'Yeah,'" said Bartholow. "Then they asked 'If I was married' and I said 'Yes.' Then they said would you like for us to notify your wife and I was like 'No, she's at a job interview but you can notify my commander.'"

The ambulance crew called Lt. Col. James Murphy and told him Bartholow was in a house fire, kicked in a door and saved people from burning.

Both the ambulance crew and Murphy agreed it was a legitimate reason for him to miss the meeting.

Bartholow was treated for mild smoke inhalation and released from the hospital a few hours later. Bartholow went to another meeting

that afternoon where he saw all his colleagues.

"None of them would have not done the same," said Bartholow. "I think that's the Guard's men and women pride that we share."

Bartholow said he learned a certain process or approach to risky situations from his 22-month deployment in Afghanistan.

"I led an Effects Team in the nine provinces of northern Afghanistan, so just being in and out of combat every day for two years, you just adopt a certain approach or process," he said. "First you access the situation, your environment, what the risk is, and then you roll. That's kind of what I did."

"The risks are if I don't do something these people may die of smoke inhalations," said Bartholow. "I called 911. They are the professionals and I didn't avoid that. But I did what I should do."

Bartholow said he's since had some time to think about the morning's activities. He said he's proud of what he accomplished.

"I feel like I did something worthwhile for my community," he said.

"That's what makes the Guard great. We don't have any other motivation or desire to do the right thing, simply because that is what we signed up for and that's what we are in love with."



Bartholow

Small Guard detachment deploys to Afghanistan to perform enormous mission

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Distinguished guests, families, friends and fellow Soldiers gathered for a sendoff ceremony for six Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers of the 43rd Operational Support Air Command Detachment. The sendoff ceremony was held June 15 at the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Flight Facility No. 1 to honor the Soldiers deploying for a nine-month mission to Afghanistan.

"I'm excited to go, but apprehensive to leave the family behind," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dale Dishman, a C-12 pilot with the 43rd OSA Det.

"It's going to be hard," said Gail Dishman, the Nebraska Army Guard pilot's wife. "It's not so much the Fourth of July or the summer I'm worried about. It's more like Christmas and Thanksgiving. Once we are six months in, how I am going to deal with it?"

Gail and their two kids, 22-month-old Macy and 5-year-old Parker, will be experiencing Dishman going on his first deployment.

According to Parker, he thinks dad is going to fly across the world for chief America.

The deploying Soldiers consist of full-time pilots, both military and commercial, and traditional, part-time Soldiers. One Soldier is making his fifth deployment while others are marking either their first or second.

According to Chief Warrant Officer 5 Gene Coppersmith, commander of the 43rd OSA Det., the unit has been training constantly for the mission since receiving notice that they would be deploying to serve as "the eyes and the ears" of commanders serving in Afghanistan.



Proud Dad: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brandon Hill watches his daughter as she waves an American flag during the 43rd Operational Support Air Command Detachment's sendoff ceremony on June 15 at the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Flight Facility No. 1 in Lincoln, Neb.

"Intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance... that's what we are going over there to do," said Coppersmith. "Another way of saying it is scouting."

"We are still out there providing battlefield intelligence so commanders can make timely decisions," added Coppersmith. "We are hearing back from the command groups



Family Photo: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Dale Dishman, a C-12 pilot with the 43rd Operational Support Air Command Detachment, poses for a family photo with his wife, Gail, and their two children, Parker and Macy, on June 15. This will be the first deployment for the Dishman family.

around that the assets we bring to the fight are very much in demand."

State and local leaders all agreed that no matter the size of the unit, its overall mission is extremely important.

"Even though you are a small group, the work you will be doing is so very important," said Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy. "I know you have trained for this mission, I know you are ready to execute this mission and I know you will do it efficiently and effectively. I look forward to your return to Nebraska in about nine months."

Senior Nebraska leaders echoed those comments as they spoke to the Soldiers and their families. "The detachment maybe small, but their mission and the importance

of their mission is enormous," said Brig. Gen. Scott Gronewold, director of Joint Staff for Nebraska Joint Force Headquarters. "They will be directly responsible for the mission success and safety of thousands of troops on the ground and indirectly responsible for our safety back home."

"They have trained hard and they are ready," added Gronewold.

According to Coppersmith, the unit is indeed ready to tackle their mission. He had just one final request for those in attendance: "Finally, there is only one more thing to ask for," said Coppersmith. "I want to see you all back here in March for our welcome home, but to get there I'm going to ask for prayers from each and every one of you."

ADT continued from page 1.

sections. The members of ADT No. 2 were replaced by the Nebraska National Guard's ADT No. 3, which was wished farewell, April 10.

Prior to the troops' actual arrival, emotions ran high.

"I'm excited just to have him home," said Rachelle Jones, wife of Maj. Richard Jones. "I'm just excited to get him home in his house with the dog."

Rachelle was joined by their eight-year-old daughter, Cora, 10-year-old son, Henry and Jones' mother Linda. Rachelle said they had made a paper chain to count down the days until their family was reunited, taking a loop off every day. Cora was given the honor of taking the last one off.

Linda Kroupa and her four kids also eagerly awaited the return of Lt. Col. Gary Kroupa, but had more sinister plans in mind to welcome home Kroupa. Kroupa's 12-year-old daughter Izzie had a large cooler of water balloons waiting in their backyard for her father when he finally got home. And her plan was simple.

"Lure him into the backyard and give him no ammunition and drench him," said Izzie.

Marilyn Huttes said she was excited and anxious to see her husband, Chief Master Sgt. Bob Huttes, after the yearlong mission. She added that the internet and social media helped them stay in touch.

"I'm just so thankful that we had email and Skype," said Marilyn. "I can't imagine having to rely on the regular mail. It was good to still have the connection. I still felt connected to him."

After several tense moments a bus rolled to a stop near the back door of Pernterman Armory to the delight of the assembled crowd. After tearful reunions the crowd funneled inside for a ceremony officially welcoming home the troops.

"Welcome home to each and every one of you, we're very proud of you," said Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman. "We appreciate your



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

A Mother's Love: Spc. Ashley Koehler receives a hug at the Penterman Armory on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 29, after returning from a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan as part of Nebraska's Agribusiness Development Team No. 2.

mission, we understand it and we are enormously grateful for the sacrifices that you make for our state, for the National Guard and for the United States of America."

During their deployment to Afghanistan the Guardsmen assisted Afghan agricultural officials and local farmers in redeveloping their agricultural infrastructure. It was also a historic mission because it marked the first time the Nebraska National Guard sent a joint Nebraska Army and Nebraska Air National Guard team on an overseas deployment.

"As I look out in the crowd here and you look at the Soldiers and the Airmen that are represented here you can't tell the difference and that's what's unique about this team," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general. "This was the first time that we deployed

a joint formation of Air and Army National Guard men and women to accomplish a mission and accomplish it you did."

Lyons also thanked the family members in attendance for their support and said what the ADT missions mean to the National Guard.

"This agribusiness development team mission is a uniquely National Guard mission. We're the only ones performing it," said Lyons. "Truly the Citizen Soldier concept comes into play here. You put down your muskets and picked up your plowshares."

"You brought professionalism, honor, integrity and a sense of duty to what you did to help Afghanistan be a more secure and stable country."

Members of ADT No. 2 reflected on the unique mission they had performed while working on a joint team.

"We had a lot of nice meetings and met hundreds and hundreds of times with the local Afghans," said Huttes. "We did a lot of good trainings on everything from forestry and poultry, livestock and everything like that."

Huttes added that working with the Army Guardsmen in a joint environment was not without its bumps, but in the end everything worked out and, "to be with the Army was really cool – great group of guys."

"At first it was very segregated, but once we got to know each other we worked as a team and there were never any issues from, I would say, the first month on," said Sgt. Chelsea Kramer, a poultry specialist. "Once we got together as a team, we were one team."

Now most members of ADT No. 2 will take some time off to relax and reintegrate with their families. Jones said they are planning a family trip to North Carolina to see more family. He summed up his feelings following the day's emotional events.

"It's good to be home," he said. "God bless America. Go Big Red."



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Finally: Maj. Richard Jones gets a long-overdue hug from his 10-year-old son, Henry, and eight-year-old daughter, Cora, at the Penterman Armory on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 29, after returning from a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan as part of Nebraska's Agribusiness Development Team No. 2. Jones was one of 11 Soldiers and Airmen who returned and made up the final group of ADT No. 2 to return after assisting local Afghan farmers rebuild their agricultural infrastructure.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Holding On: (from left) Spc. Owen Karre receives a kiss from his wife, Tiffany, while Spc. Chris Gilland is welcomed home to Nebraska with a leaping hug from his wife, Jessie, during a homecoming ceremony for members of the 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb., May 25.



He's Really Here: Amy Brandenburg reacts as a bus carrying her husband, Sgt. Ricky Brandenburg, pulls up in front of Grand Island's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 on May 25, ending a nearly yearlong mission to Afghanistan for the Soldiers and families of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.



Finally! Staff Sgt. Rick Carter, Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, hugs his two children tightly shortly after arriving in Grand Island after a nearly yearlong mission to Afghanistan while his wife, Jessica Greenwald, looks on. Carter was among approximately 65 Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers who returned to Nebraska, May 25.

GSAB continued from page 1.

last few minutes before the arrival of the Guardsmen.

"It's been the longest year of my life, so it's pretty exciting. We haven't been able to sleep... we've been wired all day," she said.

According to Bayne, the biggest key during the year was staying busy. "We did a lot of extracurricular activities... sports and a lot of housework," she said. "We got a new house, so I had a lot to keep me busy."

Finally, buses carrying the Soldiers from the nearby airport pulled up in front of the AASF No. 2, causing pandemonium to reign as children and spouses rushed through a line of flag-holding Patriot Guardsmen in search of their returning Soldier.

One of those Soldiers to be swamped in a flood of hugs and kisses was Staff Sgt. Rick Carter, who quickly scooped up his two children in a massive bear hug.

"I'm very happy to be able to hug two wonderful children," said Carter as he dabbed tears from his eyes. "I'm very glad to be home."

"It's been a long day with a lot of delays. It's been a long time getting here, but it's made all worth it getting to see these wonderful faces," Carter said, smiling.

Staff Sgt. Rick Brandenburg agreed.

"I'm just happy to be here... been waiting to see these three for a long time," said Brandenburg, hugging his two daughters, Hayley and Emily, and wife, Amy.



Sweet Moment: Sgt. Ricky Brandenburg receives a tight hug after arriving in Grand Island after a mission to Afghanistan.

"He's been away too long," said Amy Brandenburg, her eyes welling with tears. "I'm just so happy he's home and I get to have help again. There's just so many emotions... I just don't know how to describe any of it."

According to the unit's commander, Capt. Marcus Wilhelm, the Soldiers and families definitely have a lot to be proud of after the company, which also included detachments of Soldiers from other units within the 2-135th GSAB, recorded remarkable feats during their time in Afghanistan.

"What these 'Muleskinners' accomplished in Afghanistan is

HAMBURGER continued from page 1.

by a rocket propelled grenade and crashed in the Wardak province. He was among 30 American and eight Afghan service members killed in the crash.

Hamburger, who was posthumously promoted to the rank of staff sergeant and buried with full military honors at Lincoln's Wyuka Cemetery on Aug. 20, is survived by his fiancée Candie Reagan, their two-year-old daughter Payton, and step-daughter Veronica.



Hamburger

Coincidentally, the return of

nothing short of phenomenal," said Wilhelm, using the nickname of the CH-47 Chinook unit. "Unlike any other CH-47 company, we deployed to three separate locations and took on one of the most difficult mission sets the Army has to offer."

Wilhelm said the statistics recorded by the company speaks volumes about the importance of their mission. The crews airlifted 65 million pounds of cargo, transported more than 58,000 passengers and recorded around 6,250 combat flight

Co. B, 2-135th GSAB, occurred on what would've been Hamburger's 31st birthday.

According to Capt. Marcus Wilhelm, unit commander, the crash, which also took the life of Chief Warrant Officer David R. Carter, a member of the unit's detachment from the Colorado National Guard, affected the entire company.

"It happened so early in our deployment. It was just a large event in all of our lives," said Wilhelm. "It really brought us all together closer and united us in this drive to serve with commitment to his memory and do all of the things that Staff Sergeant Hamburger would've wanted us to do and to strive for."

During Wilhelm's welcome home speech, he took time to remember Hamburger and Carter.

"Nothing could've prepared us for the events of August 6th when we lost two of our brothers," Wilhelm told the hushed crowd. Wilhelm then asked the crowd to join him in singing happy birthday in memory of the fallen Soldier.

It was perhaps the saddest happy birthday song ever sung.

According to Gov. Dave Heineman, Hamburger's sacrifice will be forever remembered.

"We will always remember what he did for the state of Nebraska and the United States of America," said Heineman, who held a small U.S. flag during his speech.

"He defended this flag. He made the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our freedoms and our liberties."

hours... more than 2,000 hours more than any other CH-47 unit in Afghanistan.

The unit also delivered combat troops, including special operations forces, to battlefields through some of the most difficult terrain imaginable, including traversing mountainous valleys bordered by 14,000-foot mountains, through "moonless and starless nights."

"This team did it all," said Wilhelm, who credited much of the unit's success to its mechan-

ics, refuelers and flight operations specialists. "Our Nebraska Soldiers worked circles around their peers. Our aircraft were old and tired, but with a lot of Nebraska elbow grease, we made them new and they worked like clockwork."

"There's a saying in aviation that I would rather be lucky than good," Wilhelm added moments later. "This past year we had our fair share of luck, but there is no doubt in my mind that these Soldiers are as good as they get."

National Guard footprint at Mead getting bigger

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers soon will have a new home that literally is steps away from their training grounds.

On June 12 state, federal and Guard leaders gathered on a dusty stretch of prairie near the Nebraska National Guard's Camp Ashland/Mead Collective Training Center near Mead, Neb., to formally break ground on the new \$9.1 million Mead-Titan Readiness Center.

The future 43,000-square-foot facility, which takes its name from a type of missile that used to be stationed there in the 1960s, will become home to elements of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) and the 1167th Brigade Support Company.

The center, which is expected to be complete by summer 2014, is actually a sister facility to a similar readiness center that is being constructed at Mead. The Mead-Atlas Readiness Center will become home of the 402nd Military Police Battalion when it's completed next summer.

According to Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, the construction efforts are part of a continuing process designed to replace the Guard's aging armories with newer, energy-efficient readiness centers that better fit the needs of an operational reserve force.

"This ground-breaking ceremo-



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Breaking Ground: Governmental, Nebraska National Guard and construction leaders throw the first ceremonial scoops of dirt for the new \$9.1 million Mead-Titan Readiness Center at the Nebraska National Guard's Camp Ashland/Mead Training Center near Mead, Neb., June 12. The new readiness center, which will be home for elements of the Guard's 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) and the 1167th Brigade Support Company, is scheduled to be completed by summer 2014.

ny really does represent our efforts to recapitalize our facilities for our Soldiers and Airmen and provide them with high quality and energy-efficient facilities that replace aging facilities," Lyons said. "To be able to do ground-breakings like this, and to see buildings going up like the Mead-Atlas next door here that will allow our Soldiers to literally step out of their readiness center and

right on to their training areas... from an efficiency standpoint, this is really smart business for us as we ask so much of our men and women who serve, either here in Nebraska or overseas."

The Mead-Titan center will become home to 120 full- and part-time Soldiers.

Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy said the facility is a continuing sign of the

importance the nation has placed upon its National Guardsmen.

"This is an exciting moment," said Sheehy. "I think this is a true testament to providing great facilities and great training grounds for the men and women who wear the uniforms of our armed services."

Sheehy said that's particularly important considering how much the nation and Nebraska depend



Taking Shape: The Nebraska National Guard's Mead-Atlas Readiness Center is already taking shape at the Nebraska National Guard's Camp Ashland/Mead Training Center near Mead, Neb.

upon the National Guard, both overseas and during such domestic missions as last year's response to flooding on the Missouri and Platte Rivers. By locating the new readiness centers near the 1,200 acre Camp Ashland/Mead Collective Training Center, Guardsmen will be able to receive important hands-on training closer to home.

"It will also allow them to spend more time with their families," he added.

Ultimately, said U.S. Representative Jeff Fortenberry, the new readiness center is a demonstration of the U.S.'s continuing commitment to ensuring that its military members are prepared for whatever mission they're assigned.

"This readiness center here, as a part of our armed forces – an evolving armed forces that has the National Guard structure as an instrumental part of the defense of this nation – is an effort on the part of all of you to position ourselves and our country to project leadership across the world and to give hope to people in other places."

Officials break ground on state's second largest Guard complex

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

Nebraska National Guard officials were joined by Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman and other state officials to formally break ground on the Nebraska National Guard's new Grand Island Readiness Center near the Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb., June 21.

The \$21.9 million building will have 92,000 square feet and house elements of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation Battalion (Security and Support), 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, and administrative support functions for the Nebraska Army National Guard's AASF No. 2, located at the same site.

Planning for the readiness center began in 2010 and construction is scheduled to be completed in summer of 2014. Approximately 260 full- and part-time Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers will be supported by the readiness center.

"This readiness center is important to the Guard," said Heineman.

"Every time we've had a tornado, every time we've had a blizzard, every time we've been faced with wildfires, last summer's flooding and most recently helping with the Colorado wildfires, the National Guard has been there for us and they've done an outstanding job," he added. "So these men and women perform many different missions and in order to do those missions properly, you have to have a training center, you have to have a readiness center so they can practice, so they can train."

"At the end of the day, this is making sure they're prepared to do their domestic missions as well as what we do in terms of national security."

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska's adjutant general, said the



Proud Governor: Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman speaks during a groundbreaking ceremony for the Nebraska National Guard's new \$21.9 million Grand Island Readiness Center near the Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb., June 21.

Grand Island readiness center will be a great way to connect Nebraska National Guard with families and the community.

"This groundbreaking ceremony is significant," said Lyons. "It represents our continuing effort to offer our men and women who serve in the Guard high-quality, energy-efficient facilities as they continue to train for serving here in Nebraska and overseas."

"Readiness centers like this one in Grand Island... really become focal points for what the Guard is all about and that's community-based service," he added. "They become centers where our Soldiers and their family members can come and get access to resources that they need as their loved ones respond both here at home and overseas. And really (they) also become focal points for community outreach and we're so grateful for the partnership with this community of Grand Island and our Guard here in Nebraska."

Lyons said that community support from Grand Island has been paramount.

"It's something we never take for granted," said Lyons. "Without our community support the men and women who serve and wear the uniform each and every day, along



Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Final Product: An artist's rendering of the Nebraska National Guard's new \$21.9 million Grand Island Readiness Center is displayed during a groundbreaking ceremony near the Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb., June 21. The 92,000 square foot building will house elements of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation Battalion (Security and Support), 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, and administrative support functions for the Nebraska Guard's AASF No. 2, located at the same site.



Flying Dirt: Governmental, Nebraska National Guard and construction leaders formally break ground on the Nebraska National Guard's new \$21.9 million Grand Island Readiness Center near the Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb., June 21.

with the support of their loved ones, we just couldn't do it."

"The investment here is significant for the readiness of the Guard," he added.

According to Col. Timothy Zegers, Nebraska construction and facilities management officer, the Grand Island Readiness Center will be the second largest Guard complex in the state behind the Joint Force Headquarters building

in Lincoln, which is scheduled to be completed later this summer. He said the building will have special aviation touches.

"The architects did a really good job of incorporating a lot of the aviation aspects into the facility itself," said Zegers. "Some of the accents of the building mirror aviation pieces that you would see on helicopters."

"Some of the railings look like some of the cable that would be

strung inside of the helicopter and so forth," he added. "So when the building is dedicated, those things will really be on display."

The readiness center will replace an aging armory across town, putting Soldiers closer together, thus making the mission that much easier.

"Since 2005 when the battalion stood up, we've been making due with the facilities we have and that's what the National Guard does... we make things happen," said Sgt. 1st Class Jamie Frey, the 1-376th operations and training noncommissioned officer in charge.

"With the new facilities there are definitely new training opportunities," said Frey. "We have more room for Soldiers to conduct better training, and more so it will be a pride thing for the Citizen Soldiers we have drilling out here."

"It's good for morale," he added. "Definitely a sense of pride... for the Soldiers. Something new. Something to call their own."



Smoked Out: Maj. Jeff Towne (left), and Lt. Col. Mike Hoskins, both with the Offutt Air Force Base's 170th Group, burn flares during a survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.



Survival Skills: Lt. Col. Chris Collins, commander of the 155th Operations Group, flashes a signal mirror during a survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.



Paint by Numbers: Tech Sgt. Isaac Cepek, a boom operator with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, applies face paint during a survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

Survival 101

■ Air Guard aircrews receive survival skills refresher training during June field exercise

By Master Sgt. Vern Moore
Staff Photographer

Amidst the tall green prairie grass blowing from rotor wash of the Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk rescue helicopter, Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen found themselves like fish out of water.

Accustomed to flying aircraft, the last place aircrew want to be is on the ground in a hostile environment, navigating to a distant rendezvous point, after surviving an aircraft going down. Still, despite the rarity of an aircraft going down in enemy territory, this scenario is something every pilot, navigator, boom operator and aircrew member must be prepared for.

Recently, Nebraska Air Guard aircrew flight equipment staff and ground personnel from the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing assisted in training approximately 75 Airmen from the Omaha-based 170th Group and the 155th ARW in a survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb. They received assistance from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C, 2-135th General Support Battalion.

According to members of the Nebraska Air Guard's Aircrew Flight Equipment section, this year's training concentrated on several different things, part of a three-year retraining requirement. While at the Mead Training Site, the life support specialists taught the Guard aircrews about land navigation, evasion, signals and recovery, personal protection, combat intelligence and an overview of water survival.

Crews also worked to refresh themselves on reading GPS systems, applying camouflage, using flares safely and properly, and what to do if they are captured.

"We try to give them field training and give emphasis either on water or combat. This year we are doing combat, so that's



Set it Straight: Maj. Chris Shannon, instructor pilot with the 170th Group, applies a splint to Tech. Sgt. Brian Wood, a boom operator with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, as Maj. Kent Leonard, a pilot with the 155th ARW, watches during a survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

why we are doing field training," said Senior Master Sgt. Sarah Dawson, aircrew flight equipment superintendent.

"Today we are emphasizing the combat side of the house," she added. "We will be doing some evasion techniques in the field and we will be doing some personal protection and shelter building."

A big part of the training for this section was helicopter extractions by the Nebraska Army National Guard Company C, 2-135th GSAB's UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew.

"The helicopters are going to come out and hoist the crews so they can put an emphasis on recovery and how that works," said Dawson. "They will use the radios; (they) will be 'camo-ing' up and getting dirty today."

Participants also had a chance to apply their knowledge during a practical exercise. Groups of four to six aircrew members were given a scenario, a vest filled with basic first aid supplies, a GPS system, camouflage face paint, and a radio. They were then told when and where to meet their rescue helicopter.

Hostile forces – in this case, members of the Nebraska Air Guard's Survival Equipment section carried M-16s with blank rounds. The aircrews were told that they may meet hostiles, friendlies or just someone who would not even acknowledge them.

Once the group made it to their designated point they were required to make radio contact with the rescuing pilot and then wait to be rescued. Individuals hid patiently in the woods for their turn to run from the protection of the woods to a clearing where they strapped on to the "penetrator" and were quickly hoisted to safety.

Maj. Chris Shannon, instructor pilot for



Need a Lift? A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, hoists a troop during the Nebraska Air National Guard's survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb. Aircrews used the training to refresh their skills if they encountered a real-life survival situation.



Don't Look Down: Master Sgt. Mike Mayfield, a boom operator with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, prepares to be hoisted into a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, during a survival skills refresher course, June 2, at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

the 170th Group, said the helicopter hoist was interesting.

"In the event that the aircraft went down, it's good to be current in understanding the proper procedures when the guys come to get us out and how to do that," said Shannon.

Dawson said the purpose of the day's events was simple. "This is an important

training. They only get it every three years," said Dawson. "It is safety, in the event that something would go wrong. You always have to plan for when things go wrong. If they were to end up in a survival situation, whether in a combat zone or in a non-combat zone, how they would take care of themselves until rescue came."

Filling It Up: Sgt. Charlie Wilkens, a Nebraska Army National Guard firefighter with Norfolk's 317th Engineer Detachment Firefighting Team, uses a firetruck hose to fill up a 2,500-gallon drop tank to give members of the Nebraska National Guard chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear enhanced response force package — more commonly referred to as a CERF-P — the water they need to conduct decontamination operations.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Helpful Hints: Dr. (Maj.) John Massey, 155th Medical Group, talks to 2nd Lt. Katheryn Score (right) and Senior Airman Amy Callahan about things to look for when conducting a triage on a patient at the Kansas National Guard's "Crisis City" training site near Salina, Kan.



Preparing for a Nightmarish Mission

Searching Through The Rubble: A member of the Wahoo and Hastings-based 623rd Engineer Company searches through a massive pile of broken concrete, rebar, demolished cars and other debris during a training exercise at "Crisis City," Kan. The Nebraska National Guard's chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear enhanced response force package — more commonly referred to as a CERF-P — spent several days in May training at the Kansas facility to help prepare itself for many different disaster scenarios.

Nebraska Guard team sharpens skills at 'Crisis City'

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The scene resembled a nightmarish scenario that few people would've ever wanted to see themselves engaged in: searching for casualties amongst tons of concrete, metal and wooden rubble; decontaminating people suspected of having come into contact with a deadly agent; triaging the wounded and disoriented.

Fortunately for members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard's chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear enhanced response force package — more commonly referred to as a CERF-P — the disaster was just an exercise designed to test their readiness and capabilities.

Still, that didn't detract from the seriousness of the exercise conducted May 14-16 at the Kansas National Guard's "Crisis City" training site near Salina, Kan. Far from it, in fact.

"This is extremely important for us," said Lt. Col. Steve Petersen, commander of the Omaha-based 126th Chemical Battalion, who also serves as commander of the Nebraska Guard's CERF-P. "The goal is to get better at setting up the equipment, establishing the communication systems and then going out and doing search and extraction, decontamination, and medical triage and treatment to ensure that we really are capable

of doing this mission in the event that there is a real crisis."

In order to maximize realism of the exercise, which was conducted at the end of the 126th Chem. Bn.'s two-week annual training, the CERF-P traveled to Crisis City where they were put through several different scenarios designed to test the Soldiers and Airmen in a variety of conditions.

According to Kansas National Guard officials, Crisis City was developed in April 2007 as a way to enhance Kansas' abilities to defend against terrorism threats and respond to disasters and emergencies. It is now a multi-use facility designed to prepare local, state and federal responders for a variety of scenarios including collapsed structures, an aircraft accident, train derailment or activities within an urban landscape.

Petersen said Crisis City gave his team the opportunity to work on rapidly setting up their equipment and begin functioning within an emergency environment while also allowing unit leaders to more fully train members of CERF-P's search and extraction team.

"There is a lot of focus on the 623rd Engineer Company, which just returned home from a deployment to Afghanistan," he said. "It's really important for us to get them retrained for the search and extraction mission... we're trying to get them spun up as fast as possible."

In order to facilitate that training, members of the Nebraska Army

Guard's 1075th Transportation Company, which had served as the search and extraction team during the 623rd Eng. Co.'s deployment, served as mentors for the engineers during the exercise, working closely with the Soldiers to help them better learn how to efficiently and safely operate in potentially dangerous environments.

According to Sgt. Katherine Nolan, a member of the 623rd Eng. Co., that guidance was crucial in helping her and her unit mates adjust back into the CERF-P mission after spending nearly two years preparing for and then operating in Afghanistan.

"It's going pretty good... we're learning a ton," said Nolan as she waited to process through the CERF-P's decontamination center after having led her teammates as they worked to extract a simulated wounded child from a pile of rubble consisting of massive chunks of concrete, metal, wire and car parts. "We're getting a lot of information and hands-on experience, which is awesome."

"I think the biggest part is we're learning," Nolan added. "When we were preparing to deploy and then deployed to Afghanistan, we didn't spend much time working on our state mission. This (exercise) is teaching us how to do the things that the state might need us to do. We're thrilled with the hands-on training."

She wasn't the only one either. According to many members of the

CERF-P, which consisted of Soldiers and Airmen from the 126th Chemical Battalion Headquarters, the 754th Chemical Reconnaissance and Decontamination Company, the 155th Medical Group and the 317th Engineer Detachment Firefighting Team, the training was an important part of maintaining readiness to respond to a wide array of possibilities.

"It's going pretty good," said Capt. Yolanda Canter, a clinical and operating room nurse with the Lincoln-based 155th Med. Group, Nebraska Air National Guard, as she helped triage patients through her medical tent. "We've got all the support and supplies we need. We've already seen eight or nine patients."

According to Canter, the biggest benefit of the exercise was the ability of the Air Guardsmen to set up and then conduct operations away from pre-existing medical facilities.

"Personally, being able to experience things that you normally don't get to do, like setting up a tent in minutes and then being able to begin treating patients, it's exciting to do this kind of work," said Canter, who works as an electronic medical records analyst with Catholic Health Initiative at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Lincoln, Neb.

"It's important to exercise with the equipment," she added. "If this was a live event and we hadn't exercised on this equipment, it could put peoples' lives at risk. This is giving me the tools I need to help save lives."

Cadet Mikael Penaherrera, a member of the 754th Chem. Co. who was helping decontaminate members of the search and extraction team agreed, saying that the more experience a person gets, the more capable he or she becomes.

"It's going great," said Penaherrera. "It's a little hot, but we're all motivated... we're all trying to get through this."

"I'm getting a lot of hands-on training. It's helping me get the muscle memory I need so that if I'm called upon to do this for real, I'm ready to go out and decontaminate patients."

"It's getting a little better each day," added Spc. Jacki Bouray, a member of the 623rd Eng. Co. who was responsible for tracking Soldiers and Airmen as they went through the decontamination and rest cycles. "It's getting speedier because everyone is starting to learn his or her job."

Which is exactly what Petersen said he envisioned occurring during the exercise.

"The goal was to make the CERF-P better by exercising," he said, adding that the motivation and positive attitude of the individual unit members was especially important considering the hot, muggy conditions. "Everybody has been real positive. Everybody wants to get out here as soon as possible in the morning and knock it out as quickly as possible because of the heat."

"That attitude has definitely made this a successful exercise."

Keeping Track Of Her Soldiers: Spc. Jacki Bouray, 623rd Engineer Company, updates the whiteboard that tracks how long members of her unit are operating in the contaminated area and where they are within their rest cycles. Keeping track of the various Soldiers and Airmen operating within the contaminated environment is crucial to keeping the Guardsmen safe and mission-effective.



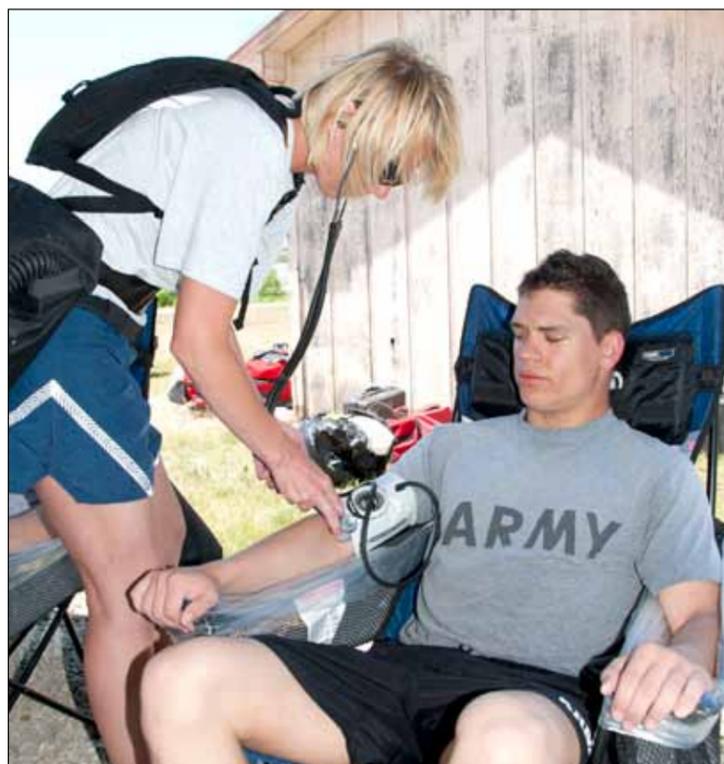
Even The Boots: A patient has his boots scrubbed during the decontamination process.



Careful Touches: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 623rd Engineer Company work together to carefully pull a mannequin, which simulated an injured child, out from underneath a pile of concrete rubble. Members of the Wahoo and Hastings-based unit practiced learning how to locate and evacuate patients from underneath rubble during the 'Crisis City' exercise.



Scrub Down: Spc. Kal Kasselder, 623rd Engineer Company, is scrubbed down by a member of the Nebraska National Guard during the decontamination process. Kasselder, who was playing the role of a casualty, said he learned a lot about the entire decontamination process, particularly that the water used is extremely cold. "That high-pitched scream you heard was a real scream," said Kasselder, laughing.



Taking Care Of The Force: Senior Airman Samantha Hunt, 155th Medical Group, takes Pfc. Michael Manske's blood pressure after the 623rd Engineer Company Soldier completed a tour working in the 'hot zone' at the Kansas National Guard's 'Crisis City.' Medical officials kept a close eye on the Guardsmen to ensure that they weren't being adversely affected by the exercise, just as they would in a real operation.



Final Preparations: Pfc. Kaytlyn Johnson, 754th Chemical Reconnaissance/Decontamination Company, places protective tape around Pvt. Brianna Moss' mask as she prepares to take her turn working on the decontamination line. According to Lt. Col. Steve Petersen, commander of the 126th Chemical Battalion and officer-in-charge of the Nebraska National Guard's chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear enhanced response force package – more commonly referred to as a CERF-P – the May 14-16 at the Kansas National Guard's "Crisis City" training site near Salina, Kan., was designed to prepare the Soldiers and Airmen for possible homeland defense missions.



Crisis City: Members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard's chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear enhanced response force package – more commonly referred to as a CERF-P – practice decontaminating patients at the Kansas National Guard's "Crisis City" training site near Salina, Kan.

Smoke-Eaters

Nebraska Air Guard firefighters get valuable hands-on training in May

By Senior Airman Mary Thach
Staff Writer

Smoke filled the early May morning sky as it billowed from the roof of an aging building while the humid air and a scorching sun beat down on the Nebraska Air National Guard firefighter's silver suits. The firefighters took turns in teams of two entering the burning building and controlling the fire.

The 155th Civil Engineer Fire Department conducted a controlled exercise on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 5, by setting combustible materials on fire inside a building, which would later be demolished. The goal of the exercise was to train firefighters how to control fire and learn how it acts and grows within a structure.

Master Sgt. Carla Miranda, deputy fire chief, said the training was designed to provide the Guardsmen with critically important skills.

"We are doing some training burns, not attempting to burn it down, just burns in one room so all the guys can get an idea of the evolution of a fire and how it grows," said Miranda.

"We are running crews of two in on the attack line and going into the room," Miranda added. "They'll be ready with the hose and they will see how the fire grows. It will start to roll over on the ceiling over their head and they will knock the fire down, but not put it out."

Because there is always a chance of injury, she added, especially with the ambient temperature and temperature inside the building, safety throughout the exercise was



Dressed For Success: Staff Sgt. Tracy Tyrrell, a firefighter with the 155th Civil Engineer Squadron, takes part in a firefighting exercise at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 5.

paramount.

"We do have a safety officer inside and outside and have a backup plan in the event something does go wrong," said Miranda. "That is how we always do it. We always have double and triple back up."

Staff Sgt. Tracy Tyrrell, a civil engineer firefighter, participated in the live burn training and said she learned a lot about how fire behaves.

"This is excellent," said Tyrrell. "This is for us, this is hands on. I think people learn the best from this."



Photos by Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen

Ready For Action: Firefighters with the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Civil Engineer Squadron participate in a firefighting exercise at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 5. During the exercise firefighters set combustible materials on fire inside a building, which would later be demolished, with the goal of training firefighters how to control a fire and how it acts as it grows within a structure.

Staff Sgt. Rene Arriola, a firefighter crew chief, said the training was good because of new Airmen in the squadron. He added that he was glad to be able to conduct the training on base.

"We normally have to travel to have this kind of training," said Arriola, adding that the main point of the exercise was to expose the Airmen to a live fire and teach them how to keep the fire under control.

Nebraska family named 2012 National Guard family of year

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Writer

When her two oldest sons, Shad and Taylor Siebrandt, were mobilized and deployed to Afghanistan as members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 623rd Engineer Company in October 2010, Jill Kuzelka, mother of four, set to work mobilizing the remaining members of her family in a state-wide effort to enhance community participation in military family readiness.

For their volunteer efforts and community participation, Jill Kuzelka and her family—husband Jamie Kuzelka, sons Shad, Taylor and Chance and daughter Natasha—were named the 2012 Army Guard Family of the Year by the National Guard Family Program for their outstanding and exceptional service to the Family Program.

The Guard Family of the Year Award is a national award that is presented to one Air Guard and one Army Guard family who shows outstanding and exceptional service to the Family Program.

Jill's family was one of four families nominated from Nebraska this year and the first Nebraska family to receive the award. Other nominations for the award came from all 54 states and territories.

The Kuzelka family is particularly deserving of the award said Maj. Robert Kadavy, State Family Program director.

"Often when you see a good (family readiness group) leader, it's a spouse or an uncle or a brother... it's not necessarily a whole family," said Kadavy.

He added there are probably hundreds of families that help out with military family readiness, but Jill and her family exhibited a volunteer effort that was reflective of a "tight family bond."

According to officials, Jill, now the family readiness support assistant for the Nebraska National Guard, served as an outstanding FRG leader and advocate for unit families. Her husband, Jamie Kuzelka, supported every FRG meeting and event by helping with set up, tear down, and the overall organization of each event. Natasha and Chance Siebrandt also sup-



Courtesy Photo

Family of the Year: (Back row left to right) Spc. Shad Siebrandt, Chance Siebrandt, Spc. Taylor Siebrandt. (Front row left to right) Brittany Weichel (Shad's Fiance), Jill Kuzelka, Jamie Kuzelka and Natasha Siebrandt.

ported meetings and events for the children of the 623rd Engineering Company families.

The family personifies "pay it forward" through their dedication to families, Soldiers, and the general community, said Brandi Gettert, nominator of the award.

To Jill, the saying "pay it forward" is self-explanatory when it comes to volunteering.

"If your family and community are important to you, you just do it," she said. She said giving back is a family value she learned as a young girl and a value that she hopes to have instilled in her own children.

When her two oldest children joined the Army National Guard, Jill said she didn't have to coax her two youngest children to help out.

The family's cohesion, dedication, and hard work created a unique dynamic of volunteerism inspiring many more family members to participate in FRGs, said Kadavy. As a result, their FRG had one of the highest attendances rates across the state.

Having a deployed family member can be stressful for all parties involved. Jill said she helped lighten that stress-load by making herself available to family members of the deployed personnel in her community 24/7 making sure any needs

were being address.

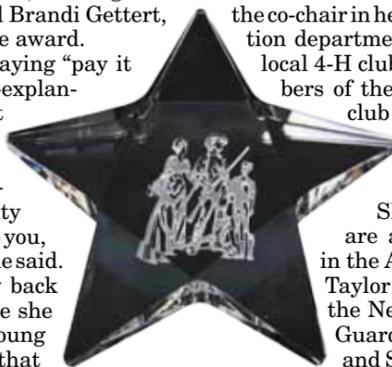
It's not just military families that the Kuzelka family helps out. The entire family also finds the time to promote social equity throughout their local community as well. Jill is the co-chair in her church's education department and leads the local 4-H club. They are members of the athletic booster club and Jill serves as the volleyball parent representative. Both Shad and Taylor are actively involved in the American Legion, Taylor is a member of the Nebraska National Guard's Honor Guard, and Shad has been involved in the local

volunteer fire department. Where do Jill and her family find the time to be so actively involved in her family and community? Forget the latest episode of "Modern Family" or "Dancing With the Stars," the Kuzelka family has sworn off watching television at home, which frees up a "ton of time" to focus on the things that are truly important in life, Jill said.

The award came as no surprise to Spc. Taylor Siebrandt, the younger of the two deployed Siebrandt brothers.

"I was not too shocked," he said. "Mother is always volunteering her time in one way or another."

Taylor said that it's easier to deploy knowing that everything is



Region's best Guard Soldiers compete in Nebraska

■ Cornhusker Guardsmen host second stage of national Best Warrior competition

By Spc. Jason Drager
Staff Writer

The Army National Guard's regional Best Warrior Competition was hosted by Nebraska, April 17-19, with the winners going on to represent the region at the nationwide competition for the Army National Guard.

The participants, representing Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Texas and Nebraska, tested their physical and mental prowess throughout the competition at Camp Ashland and the Greenleaf and Mead Training Sites in Nebraska.

The contest featured two separate categories: one for noncommissioned officers and another for junior enlisted Soldiers. Each competitor had won either their state's best warrior competition or came in second with the original winner unable to compete.

"The competition was designed to test the competitors physically, mentally and emotionally," said Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, Nebraska state command sergeant major.

The competitors were tested in several events including the Army Physical Fitness Test, an eight-mile road march, day and night land navigation, a written exam and an essay. The individual in with the most overall points at the end of the entire competition in the enlisted and NCO categories moved on to nationals.

"The great thing about this type of competition is that just because you're great at one event doesn't mean you'll win the competition," said Spc. James Heatherly of Missouri. "If you're not a well-rounded Soldier, then you might as well not show up."

All of the competitors, though thrilled to be at regionals and honored to represent their state, were by no means satisfied with just making it to regionals.

"I came here to win," said Spc. Nicholas Burns, Texas Army Guard.

Spc. Michael Block represented Nebraska in the enlisted division.

"It feels great to represent the state," said Block. "It's going to be nice to see how Nebraska Soldiers rank amongst the other states' best."

Each participant also had a sponsor with them throughout the



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Concentration: Pfc. Kenneth Nickols, Kansas Army National Guard, uses a protractor to find grid coordinates during the day land navigation portion of the regional Best Warrior Competition at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb., April 18.



Photo by Spc. Jason Drager

Good Form: Spc. Michael Block, Headquarters Detachment, 126th Chemical Battalion, Nebraska Army National Guard, performs push-ups during the Army Physical Fitness Test portion of the competition on April 17. Block was competing in the enlisted division of the regional Best Warrior Competition.



Photo by Spc. Jason Drager

Going Deep: Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy, of the 209th Regional Training Institute, representing Nebraska in the noncommissioned officer division of the regional Best Warrior Competition, throws a grenade during warrior movement drills at the Greenleaf Training Site, near Hastings, Neb., April 17.



Photo by Spc. Jason Drager

Ready, Aim, Fire: Spc. Jevon Daubigny, of the Louisiana National Guard, places a claymore mine during Army Warrior Tasks drills April 18 at Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

competition. The sponsor was responsible for helping their competitor study before each event, giving advice when needed, and keeping them motivated. Some even went as far to complete the road march with their Soldier.

"The sponsor is the most important part of this whole competition," said Spc. Jevon Daubigny, of Louisiana.

"When I'm not thinking right, he's thinking for me."

The last day of the competition included combatives and a command sergeant major board, which was worth the most points of the entire event.

Although it was a close race throughout the entire competition and the overall leader changed sev-

eral times, in the end Spc. Joshua Glass of Arkansas came out ahead and was named the region's Best Warrior in the enlisted category.

Beating out Burns by just 36 points, Glass said he was able to win because of good instruction and a great support staff back in Arkansas.

Fierce competition helped, too.

Glass credited a rivalry with Burns, who finished second in the enlisted division, for forcing both of them to perform better. With nationals looming, this is a good thing for Glass. The young infantryman illustrated this by quoting a verse from Proverbs.

"As iron sharpens iron...so one man sharpens another," he said.

Arkansas Soldiers dominate standings during regional competition

By Capt. Andrew Nelson
Staff Writer

Nebraska may brim with Cornhusker college football pride, but it was the hog call of the University of Arkansas Razorbacks that echoed in the dining facility at Camp Ashland on the evening of April 19.

Two young Soldiers from the Arkansas Army National Guard won their respective categories during the regional Best Warrior Competition, which took place at three Nebraska Guard facilities, April 17-19.

To hear Sgt. Matthew Howard tell it, there is nothing special in the water or in the soil of the so-called "Natural State." He and Spc. Joshua Glass swept the competition because they trained hard and had extensive support back home. In Howard's case, he gave much of the credit to his sponsor, Staff Sgt. Eric Evans.

"From the beginning he has helped me with studying... He is continuously monitoring my training, seeing how I'm going," Howard said. "He is very important. I don't believe I would be at the level I am without him."

Howard took the NCO category following an intense competition with Nebraska competitor Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy. There was no clear winner until Howard defeated McCoy after several rounds in the final contest, combatives.

Howard said he could tell the Nebraskan would be a tough competitor as early as the so-called mystery event, which took place the afternoon of the first day at the Greenleaf Training Site. The mystery event was an individual

movement techniques course that ended with competitors having to flip a Humvee tire over and over for 50 yards before sprinting to the finish line. McCoy won the event.

"It was a smoker, I mean it was tough," Howard said. "At that point I knew that (Staff Sgt.) McCoy was going to be a very challenging competitor."

McCoy, who came in a close second overall, was magnanimous to Howard and the other competitors, describing it as an honor to be able to compete at such a level. "It's humbling," he said. "It's an (incredible) privilege to be here."

Thoughts like that were aired frequently throughout the competition. Each contender had already won at the state level. Each was the best their state had to offer. Each was well aware he - or she, in one case - had stepped up to the big leagues.

"With each stage we ramp up the expectations and the events become harder," said Sgt. Tiara Carr of Missouri. "I believe these guys are the best we have."



Photo by Spc. Jason Drager

Last Leg: Spc. Joshua Glass, Arkansas National Guard, finishes the last leg of an eight-mile march alongside Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Veazey, who carried the state's flag at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb., April 18.

Gregory of Texas. "We are all on the same team."

Case in point was the grueling IMT lane Tuesday afternoon. The contestants went down, two at a time. The first were Staff Sgt. Thomas Dubose of Louisiana and Gregory, who grunted as he flopped the heavy tire over the line, then sprinted to the finish. Dubose was about 10 seconds behind and congratulated Gregory once the men had caught their breaths.

"Somebody beats your time, you showed 'em what it takes," Dubose said.

All the events were grueling in different ways. The written exam, for example, is twice as long as the state competitions. "We've turned

it up a notch and its more difficult because the level of competition, or the competitors, is higher," said Sgt. Maj. Mark Felker, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of Regional Best Warrior.

Felker said the competition drives Soldiers to get better. In turn they take what they learn here back to their units. More people competing means more people getting better at warrior tasks, which are critically important for any occupational specialty in the Army. The occupational specialties at Camp Ashland ran the gamut, including Aviation, Signal, Military Intelligence, and Military Police in addition to Infantry. Howard came from a Field Artillery unit.

And it isn't just hooah-hooah macho tasks that the Soldiers are tested on. Military writing and knowledge of Army history are part of being a non-commissioned officer, Dubose pointed out. He said not being prepared for events like the essay hurt him last year when he did not make it out of state. But in 2012 Dubose could be found with his face in a manual in his spare time, boning up on those subjects.

"It's actually a mental game, too. The mental game is even bigger," he said. "Not knowing that stuff last year hurt me."

For Howard and his fellow Razorback, the training did not end. "We'll continue training and getting ready," he said, predicting things would pick back up again after a week off for recovery. "We'll begin running and road marching and studying and all the things that is going to require."

Mission: Bosslift

Transportation Soldiers give bosses chance to learn more about National Guard duties

By Spc. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

As a civilian what could possibly be better than being able to see military training in action?

Having the opportunity to fly in a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, ride in a military vehicle and getting to watch, learn and get hands-on experience on how Nebraska Army National Guard transportation Soldiers train definitely is a good place to start.

Approximately 30 employers and education officials had the opportunity to get an eye-opening firsthand look at how Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers of the 734th Transportation Battalion train when they travelled to the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 14. The employers and education officials were participants of a "bosslift" conducted by the Nebraska National Guard and the state Employer Support for

the Guard and Reserve committee.

"The 'bosslift' is used to show our employers and education officials throughout our units what we do as Guardsmen," said Capt. Chad Thomson, operations and administrative officer for Kearney's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 734th Trans. Bn. "It's giving them an opportunity to see how they are helping us by allowing their Soldiers to give up their work time to come do training with us, especially for two weeks in the summer and the extended weekends each year."

"It gives them an opportunity to really see how it's beneficial to us and how we are using that time to our benefit," Thomson added.

The participating employers and educators were each nominated by individual Soldiers from the battalion.

According to retired Maj. Gen. Walter Zink II, state chair of the ESGR, the bosslift allows service members to bring their employers to training areas and different types of training

so the civilian leaders can learn more about what Guardsmen do when they're away from their civilian jobs, while also demonstrating the skills they develop during training and bring back with them to their civilian careers.

"It also is kind of a thank you to the employers for allowing the service member the time off and allowing them to deploy," said Zink.

While at the Greenleaf Training Site, the participants had the opportunity to ride in a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, watch as Soldiers trained on a Humvee Egress Assistance Trainer and an Engagement Skills Trainer, and then participate in a convoy ex-



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Let's Talk Truck: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Blake Bivona, 734th Transportation Battalion, talks with Todd Bissell of AJ Sheet Metal, Inc., about the different trucks the Nebraska National Guard's transportation unit operates. Bissell was one of approximately 30 employers chosen for the battalion's "bosslift" on June 14, at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

This Is My Rifle: Lora Hastreiter, Central Community College, receives a lesson on weapons qualification from Staff Sgt. John McCrory, an operations noncommissioned officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 734th Transportation Battalion, during an Employer Support for the Guard and Reserves "bosslift" at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 14.



Photos by Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen

Strong Foundation: Members of the Lincoln-based 155th Civil Engineer Squadron install rebar before pouring the foundation for a new training facility at the Nebraska National Guard air base, May 5. The facility will be a joint-use skills training building intended to provide a training location for multiple career fields throughout the base.

Nebraska Air Guard civil engineers begin work on new training facility for air base

By Senior Airman Mary Thach

Staff Writer

The 155th Civil Engineer Squadron put their hands and heads together to develop a hands-on training project by beginning the construction of a new training facility on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 5, with a goal to teach Airmen every aspect of the engineering career field.

During the project, the Airmen will learn core tasks in a real-life environment by building a structure from the ground up. Among other things, they will learn how to pour a foundation, build structural walls and install an air conditioning unit, electricity and plumbing.

Senior Master Sgt. Kevin Daehling, 155th CES operations superintendent, said the facility will be a joint-use skills training building intended to provide a training location for multiple career fields throughout the base.

Airmen often have to travel off base to receive training in simulated environments to stay current on their skills. Having the CE Airmen build the facility from the ground up also provides an opportunity for them to practice their skills.

1st Lt. Ryan Watson, an engineering officer, said the focus of this project was an effort for CE to construct a building incorporating all engineering trades and to cross train the Airmen.

"As the evolution of this project is going to continue, some of those shops are going to be tasked pretty heavily," said Watson. "The idea is... it's going to be all hands on deck. We are going to pull everybody on and get some cross (Air Force Specialty Code) training."

Watson said the squadron deploys often, but rarely as an entire unit. That's why, he added, he's excited about being able to train the entire squadron on one project.

"The one thing we are taking away from this is a singular project we can all work on together," said Watson. "That is very rare anywhere, given the types of things we have to accomplish. Not a lot of projects or environments where we can all be together."

Maj. Barry Veen, 155th CES commander, said the project is designed to challenge the Airmen to gain core AFSC training. It will also allow CES leaders to draw the plans, collect building materials, maintain their shops and manage the project all at the same time. Veen said the project will only be worked on during drill weekends, so the challenge will be on-going.

"We've got a lot of work to do and my guys are up to the task," said Veen. "I know they will get it done in good fashion like they always do. My role in this is providing the opportunity for these guys to get some good training."

Veen said the structure will provide a training facility for the base Fire Department to do search and rescue, smoke training, and recovery and extraction. It will also allow Security Forces personnel to conduct breach and combat training.

Col. Richard J. Evans III, then-commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing, said the project is a cost-effective way to provide valuable training to the 155th CES members and a quality building for the rest of the base to use.

"The concept is to give us an opportunity to do training on the base, which is good, because we don't have to go someplace, and it doesn't cost us a lot," said Evans.

"What a great way to use the space, to use the equipment we already have here, and the expertise of our Airmen to do something that is fun," said Evans. "It practices their actual skills they would have to use, whether on a federal or state mission. To see it go up on the base and be able to use it for a training ground, we jumped on it right away and said, 'Let's go for it.'"



Measure Twice: Staff Sgt. Daniel Cadenbach surveys the worksite of a new training facility on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., May 5.

Nebraska units claim gold in national supply competition

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers joined Soldiers and civilians from 54 units, 21 states, two territories and two countries in Washington, D.C., June 5, for the 8th Annual Chief of Staff of the Army, Combined Logistics Excellence Awards ceremony.

The Combined Logistics Excellence Awards, otherwise known as the CLEAs, is the single point of recognition from the Department of the Army for excellence in maintenance, supply and deployment. The CLEAs include the winners of the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence, the Supply Excellence Awards and the Deployment Excellence Awards.

The awards program recognizes field-level units and organic depot-level programs in the National Guard, Army Reserve and active Army that have shown the highest levels of outstanding achievement in logistics and logistics management.

Nebraska Army National Guard units took top national honors in two supply categories of the Army's Supply Excellence Awards.

Recognized were the Lincoln-based 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion in the unit Military Table of Organization and Equipment level and the Camp Ashland-based 209th Regional Training Institute in the unit Table of Distribution and Allowances level.

The Army's Supply Excellence Awards, or SEA, was created in 1986 to recognize excellence in supply operations. The program is cosponsored by the deputy chief of staff of the Army for logistics and the National Defense Industrial Association.

The objective of the SEAs is to enhance logistical readiness of all Army units, enforce the Command Supply Discipline Program and provide official recognition of group and individual initiatives.

The awards program is a three-tiered competition – state,



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Award Winners: (From left) Col. Mark Stockstell, Staff Sgt. Scyler Foos, Sgt. Jeremy Rinehart (now Staff Sgt.), Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, Staff Sgt. Owen Kramer, Master Sgt. Pamela Whisenhunt and Command Sgt. Maj. Boyd Navratil pose after receiving awards for their performance in the 2012 Chief of Staff of the Army's Combined Logistics Excellence Awards. The winners were honored during a ceremony, June 5, in Washington, D.C.

regional and national. Every unit represented had already won their state and regional competition. Regional winners then compete on the national level where winners and runners-up are chosen.

The competition was intense, as the number of units competing was the highest in the eight years of the CLEAs.

"It was up 10 percent from the past year," said Lt. Gen. Raymond V. Mason, deputy chief of staff for Logistics. "I think that speaks volumes to our Army's focus on getting back to the logistics basics. It also indicates just how tough the competition was."

"It certainly kept our judges and our evaluation teams busy," he added.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Roseanna Smith, an evaluator from the U.S. Army Quartermaster School, knew from her three years experience as an evaluator that Nebraska units are always very competitive.

"I thought they were very thorough and very informative," said Smith. "The unit they are inspecting can understand why they are doing something and how to do it."

"They have one of the better programs I have seen, I think, doing this evaluation," she added.

Two Soldiers from each unit attended the ceremony to take home the national titles. Representing the units were Master Sgt. Pamela Whisenhunt and Staff Sgt. Owen Kramer from the 110th MMB, and Staff Sgt. Jeremy Rinehart and Staff Sgt. Scyler Foos from the 209th RTI.

"This is actually my third time winning," said Kramer, supply sergeant for Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th MMB, who was recently reassigned to the 267th Maintenance Company. "The first year was with the 209th RTI, last year I won at the parent level when (Master Sgt. Pam) Whisenhunt competed and I was

her subordinate unit. Last year we won, but this is the first year that it has been my show."

"I was in charge and complete control of it," added Kramer. "It feels really good to finally be acknowledged."

Rinehart, supply sergeant for 209th RTI now currently assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, was recognized last year as a runner-up, but this year brought home first place for the 209th RTI.

"It's pretty rewarding that the unit has faith in my abilities that I have brought to the table," said Rinehart.

The 209th RTI has a tradition of winning consecutive years. "Eight out of the 11 times they have ran, they have won," said Rinehart. "So being an addition to that and being able to bring home another win for the RTI was a plus."

The Nebraskans that attended

the ceremony said they were honored to be presented the awards, but felt even better knowing that all of their hard work had paid off and they were able to represent their units and state.

"You have to pay attention to details," said Kramer. "The small things are what will get you here. Everyone can do the major things. If I can do it, anyone can do it. That's the only thing I got over anybody is maybe I work harder. So, if they just work harder, anyone can do it."

"But I couldn't have done it without the support of my family," added Kramer.

All the Soldiers plan on bringing their knowledge from winning this year and the previous years to their new units.

But there was a surprise to this year's event. The Army officials added the Best of the Best Awards. The Best of the Best Awards were presented to the very top unit or organization from each of the three award programs. The winners received the highest overall evaluation score within their award program.

Even though neither Nebraska National Guard unit won this award, ceremony officials told the Nebraska representatives that they would like to see Nebraska up there next year receiving the Best of the Best Award.

"They were very close," said Smith. "They were a contender for the Best of the Best award. It was just that the unit that won had a percentage point higher than Nebraska."

"But before they left, I did tell Colonel (Mark) Stockstell (Nebraska's director of Logistics) that I think that Nebraska does have a very good chance in the future of being on that stage and accepting the award," she added.

Knowing officials see a lot of potential in them left the Nebraskans with good feelings, they said.

"It makes me feel really proud," said Kramer. "After talking with the evaluators from the past, this year and last year, they know about Nebraska. Everyone that comes to this knows about Nebraska."

Transportation battalion welcomes new commander

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 734th Transportation Battalion welcomed new commander Lt. Col. Curtis L. Abendroth during a June 3 change of command ceremony held at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

Abendroth took command from Lt. Col. Kevin Garner in front of Soldiers of the 734th Trans. Bn., distinguished guests, friends and family.

Garner was commissioned as a second lieutenant through the University of Nebraska at Lincoln Reserve Officers' Training Corps program in 1992 as a distinguished military graduate. He served as a field artillery officer on active duty for a little more than 10 years with service in Babenhause, Germany, Fort Sill, Okla., and Lawrence, Kan.

He transitioned to the Nebraska Army National Guard in 2003 and has served full-time for the last nine years as the assistant professor of military science at UNL, battalion

executive and administrative officer of the 867th Quartermaster Battalion and 402nd Military Police Battalion, command group executive officer of Joint Force Headquarters, executive officer and administrative officer of 92nd Troop Command, and comptroller for Nebraska Army National Guard.

Garner deployed in 2006 to Iraq as the executive officer of the 867th Corps Support Battalion and was mobilized in 2008 for Operation Gustav Provider as part of the Nebraska National Guard State Support element that coordinated operations across the state of Louisiana for Hurricane Gustav and Hurricane Ike.

Abendroth began his military career as an enlisted Soldier. He achieved the rank of sergeant before receiving his commission in 1991 from the UNL-ROTC program. He served as an armor officer and quartermaster officer in the Army Reserves.

Abendroth transferred to the Nebraska Army National Guard in 2000 and served as the battalion supply officer with the 168th Quartermaster Battalion. He also served stints as a personnel officer and training and operations officer for the 867th Quartermaster Battalion.

In 2006 he deployed to Iraq as the support operations officer of 867th Corps Support Battalion. Abendroth then served as the assistant inspector general for the Nebraska Army National Guard and battalion commander of 3rd Battalion, 209th Regiment, before taking command of the 734th Trans. Bn.



Abendroth



Garner

Surveillance brigade recognizes top physical fitness performers

By Spc. Jason Drager
Staff Writer

All too often Soldiers, who should be in top physical condition, are barely meeting the minimum requirements to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test. The 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, however, is taking steps to motivate their Soldiers to perform better.

A newly-built APFT Excellence Board now hangs in the 'Spirit of 76' Armory in Lincoln, Neb., recognizing individual excellence in physical fitness and achievement.

The brigade's top male and female performer of each APFT event get their name displayed on the board and receive an Army Achievement Medal. The overall winner who scored the highest on the extended scale obtains the title of "Hero." In addition to bragging rights for the next six months, the "Hero" receives the Army Commendation Medal and a 67th BfSB coin.

The idea to use the board to spawn competition and motivation came from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Reserve Officer's Training Corps program, according to Lt. Col. Troy Paisley, administrative officer of the 67th BfSB. ROTC uses competition to get the best APFT performance out of its cadets.

"Not only does it give a little bit of competition, there is now an incentive to do well," said Paisley.



Photo by Spc. Jason Drager

Fit To Fight: (Left to Right) Spc. Anthony Noyes, Pvt. Katrina Brock, Warrant Officer Candidate Hunter Isley, Sgt. Amber Delancey and Spc. Craig Hoppes pose by the newly-built Army Physical Fitness Test board at the 'Spirit of 67' Armory in Lincoln, Neb., June 10.

"The awards are a carrot for doing well on the APFT."

Although the winners this time around didn't know about the competition and awards before hand, they all agreed that it would push everyone to do better next time.

"It's necessary for everyone to try to do their best anyways, anytime you can get an award though it's definitely worth pushing yourself to get it," said Spc. Craig Hoppes, a signal support systems specialist with the 1-134th Cavalry.

Of the 1,499 Soldiers eligible for awards, the overall winner and Hero of the 67th BfSB APFT was Warrant Officer Candidate Hunter Isley, 1167th Brigade Support Company.

The top male and female push-up performers were Spc. Anthony Noyes, 67th Brigade Headquarters Company, and Pvt. Katrina Brock, 192nd Military Police Battalion. The top male and female sit-up performers were Capt. Jason Barber, Headquarters Company of the 1-376th Aviation Battalion, and Sgt. Amber Delancey, 1167th BSC. The top male and female 2-mile runners were Spc. Craig Hoppes, and 1st Lt. Amanda Homes, 1-376th Aviation Battalion.

"This will definitely motivate me to stay in shape," said Brock. "It's like a piece of candy at the finish line."



Guard Family **NEWS** You Can Use



Defense Department expands family network

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Much has changed in the 20 years since the Defense Department ramped up its family support programs by providing policy and guidance from the Pentagon to installations.

And that support is continuing, with many more programs and a broader reach. DoD's senior official for family support said July 13.

"I'd like to thank our families for their service because our families do serve, too," said Robert L. Gordon III, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy. Gordon spoke with American Forces Press Service and The Pentagon

Channel to offer a reminder of the many support opportunities available to families in light of recently reissued family support guidance.

"We need to ensure we have services available for families to deal with the challenges of military life," Gordon said. "And military life is unique. As result, we need to focus on programs that our families can attend and use to ensure they're meeting those challenges."

Two decades ago, that meant beefing up brick and mortar offices on installations and equipping and manning them to respond to people who walked in, Gordon said. And while DoD still supports family support offices — and such offices now serve National Guard and

reserves, as well — it has greatly expanded other options, such as around-the-clock, seven-days-a-week phone lines for free counseling and a plethora of websites in an effort to appeal to however many families want to receive information, he said.

"The support is available no matter what access they have to installations," Gordon said. "They have a network of support — no matter where they live."

Today's military is "a multigenerational force and now we have the technology to reach out to everyone," he added. "Our families will find that regardless of the time of day, regardless of where they are, we have support for them."

The department's hub for support programs outside of installation offices is Military OneSource, which sponsors the 24-hour call line at 800-342-9647. Service members and their families can access the call line and immediately speak with a professional counselor about topics ranging from financial to career to social/emotional to child advocacy issues, Gordon said. Counselors will not discuss medical or substance abuse issues, but will give referrals, he said.

Military OneSource's website offers information on various aspects of military life and deployment, family and recreation, health and relationships, financial and legal, crisis and disasters, and

community. The most popular support among families today, Gordon said, is in relocation services and spouse education and employment opportunities.

"We want to make sure that regardless of the type of assistance families need, we have got the services and architecture available for them," he said.

The department wants to hear back from families about their experiences with its support programs and would also like them to share that information with others, Gordon said.

"Share your stories," he said. "We've got great programs in our communities and people do not know the programs exist."

Railroad industry announces job opportunities for veterans

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines may seek employment options in the railways industry, which became the latest to pledge jobs to veterans on July 10.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced the 5,000-job pledge in a conference call with reporters, making rail the latest industry to offer jobs as part of the Joining Forces campaign. He was joined by Ed Hamberger, president and CEO of the Association of American Railroads, and Navy Capt. Brad Cooper, director of Joining Forces, which First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, created to help service members, veterans and their families.

Obama and Biden announced the hiring campaign last summer, with a goal of hiring

100,000 veterans or military spouses by 2013. Today, Cooper said, 1,600 companies have signed on to the Joining Forces challenge, hiring 90,000 veterans and spouses with pledges to hire 170,000 more in the coming years.

What is unique about the recent announcement, Cooper said, is that the 5,000 rail jobs are open now or in the very near future. They are listed on the association's website, <http://www.aar.org>.

The jobs, offered by about 500 companies, range from operating locomotives to working in signaling and telecommunications. "It's the whole spectrum of work," Cooper said. Most of the jobs are in freight rail, but also with Amtrak, commuter rails and rail supply companies, he said.

The industry is hiring because it's growing, Hamberger said, with some \$23 billion

in investments at the same time that nearly a quarter of the freight rail workforce will be eligible to retire by 2015.

"We want to reach out and let veterans know that we're hiring," he said.

The industry has actively recruited veterans since it sought out military academy graduates to build the first railroad system more than 200 years ago, Hamberger said.

"We've learned that the skills service members learn in the armed forces translate very well to our industry," he said. "We, first and foremost, are focused on safety. You learn in the armed services that if you don't follow the rules, bad things happen."

"We need teamwork, dependability, and high tech," he added, noting that military experience builds those skills.

The rail industry made more than 20,000

new hires last year — which was more than 5,000 than it expected — and one in four are veterans, Hamberger said.

Improving the nation's railways and hiring veterans are two of President Barack Obama's priorities, LaHood said. "Today's generation of heroes has made the United States safer and more respected around the world," he said. "The president has asked that we serve them as they have served us."

About 15,000 veterans work for the Transportation Department, LaHood said, and 3,000 of those have disabilities, many from their military service. The department recently created a Web portal — <http://www.dot.gov/veterantransportationcareers> — "that tells our returning warriors what jobs are available and how they can become certified," he said.

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.

Keeping Survivor Benefit Plan current extremely important

Welcome to summer in Nebraska. It seems like it turned hot and steamy, but at least we've had some rains to keep everything somewhat green.

Speaking of green, 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: www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/managingyourretpayacct.html

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

■ Prairie Soldier goes to online edition only

As many of you know, the Prairie Soldier will no longer be printed. The only way you will be able to access it is through the web. Go to www.ne.ng.mil to get your online copy.

If you know of someone in your area who does not have internet access, consider printing a copy for them to read.

The decision to not print the PS any longer was a difficult one and related strictly to the budget and high cost of printing. Maj. Kevin Hynes and his crew will still produce a quality product for us.

■ Retiree information

Our website, www.neguard.org

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

holds a treasure trove of information for you as a retiree. We have numerous links to websites that are of interest to you. If you find there's a website that would benefit all of our retirees, please let us know and we'll add it to the site. Thanks.

■ Retiree Breakfasts

As always, for those who like to rise early to meet fellow retirees 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 S. 48th Street (Van Dorn plaza.)

North Platte area retirees: second Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., Village Inn, North Platte

■ From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Austin 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 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.

The only office that can process a claim for Survivor Benefits Program (SBP) is Human Resources Command (HRC) in Fort Knox, Ky. All Soldiers and retirees are encouraged to maintain a personal copy of their election, and other related documents. This will assist your surviving dependents with processing claims.

It is extremely important that you keep your SBP file up to date. If you are divorced we need a copy of the divorce decree. If a court requires that a former spouse receive SBP, we need copies of those documents.

If your spouse is deceased and you remarry, you have up to one year from the date of the marriage to provide a copy of the marriage

license and make a new election.

If you were not married or had no dependents when you received your 20-Year Letter, you are authorized to make an election should you marry or gain dependents. You must provide HRC the required documentation within one year of the marriage or adoption.

Failure to keep your file updated may result in denial of the claim or that the annuity is awarded to someone for whom you had not intended to provide an annuity.

Please contact Sgt. Short or me immediately if you have any life changing events so that we can ensure your file is up to date and accurate.

Finally, here's a list of helpful list of numbers for your use as needed: **DEERS/ID card stations within Nebraska.**

♦ G1 – 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 Penteman Armory at NEANG 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 S 1st St. Norfolk (402) 309-8908 or (402) 309-8900.

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

Enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

Street Talk

“What is the most important lesson you’ve learned since basic training?”

Question courtesy of Pvt. Rowdy Jensen



Spc. David Matson
1-376th Aviation Battalion
“Listening is a major key to being a good Soldier and even lower enlisted Soldiers can be leaders.”



Airman 1st Class Daniel Ellis
155th Air Refueling Wing
“Follow the technical orders, don’t stray from them.”



Sgt. John Moore
1-376th Aviation Battalion
“The more education you get, the more rounded of a person and Soldier you will be.”



Spc. Andrew Yeager
1167th Brigade Support Company
“Attention to detail. A lot of people overlook minor details. Noticing the little things can help save a life.”



Airman Devin Alt
155th Air Refueling Wing
“Always be patient with any and everything.”



Pfc. Rebecca White
67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade
“Communication. If there is something wrong, it can help you.”

Avoiding the ‘CAN Trap’

Complacency, Arrogance, Negligence can put individuals, entire Nebraska National Guard at risk

I recently attended the Air National Guard Executive Safety Summit where we had the opportunity to listen to a number of speakers address a variety of safety issues and offer their approach to them.

One of the speakers offered up what he called the “CAN” Trap. We all are vulnerable to it, particularly those of us who might have been around a while.

The “CAN” Trap puts individual Soldiers and Airmen, and the entire Nebraska National Guard organization, at risk for more than just safety violations.

This trap can put us at risk for ethical violations, fiscal law violations, policy violations, social etiquette violations, etc., etc.

The “CAN” Trap is particularly deadly because it combines three potent traps into one single vulnerability. Any one of these traps is sufficient to cause problems, but combine them and you have a surefire recipe for problems.

In fact, the combination of these three items will certainly lead to problems for the individual and the organization. It will put the organization at risk and therefore puts the individual at risk.

The elements of the “CAN” Trap

Another Voice

Brigadier General

Daryl Bohac



are Complacency, Arrogance, and Negligence. Complacency often leads to arrogance, which in turn can lead to negligence. By the way, negligence does not have to be willful. Again, any one of these is problematic, but the combination of all three is certainly deadly.

The real issue is avoiding the “CAN” Trap.

Avoiding this trap starts with not becoming complacent, or satisfied with the current state of affairs. The red flag for complacency is the phrase, “We’ve always done it that way.”

We should periodically examine what we do and how we do it. We should take full advantage of inspections and the opportunity it affords us all to be better. If we don’t succumb to complacency we can avoid arrogance.

But even if we find evidence of complacency, we should seek humility in letting others exam-

ine what we do and how we do it.

I wonder if we often confuse humility with humiliation; related words that have distinct meanings. If we are humble about our achievements, processes and results, we are then more likely to seek im-

provement. If we are so wedded to our achievements that we are not open to improvement, our arrogance may lead to humiliation.

Finally, if we are negligent in applying standards, then we certainly will be negligent in taking care of the organization so that it can take of the individual.

The “CAN” Trap can be avoided by applying principles of risk management and using constructive criticism in evaluating what we do.

We can be engaged in continuous process improvement by asking questions such as, “Why do we do this?”, “Can we improve this?” or “Are we in compliance?”

We can be better and will be more efficient and effective with the resources we are given.

Let’s all avoid the “CAN” Trap so we can ensure the organization is ready to meet the mission and take care of the individuals within this organization.

Prairie Soldier’s digital transition ushers in exciting new possibilities

Well, here we are... the very first solely digital Prairie Soldier newspaper.

Hopefully, as you have passed through this edition, you’ve noticed a few changes from the traditional printed version of the Prairie Soldier. That’s because by going completely digital, it has enabled the staff of the newspaper to begin doing things that simply weren’t possible or cost-effective in the old, traditional method.

They won’t be the last changes, either.

One of our plans is to transition the Prairie Soldier into something different than we’ve ever attempted before. One of our goals for the newspaper is to become more interactive, allowing the readers – particularly our younger, 18-30-year-old target audience – to gain a better understanding of all that the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard is doing through more dynamic, interactive means.

However, like everything else in life, this will take some time as we learn more about how to present the Prairie Soldier through digital means.

As the editor of the Prairie Soldier, I still feel a little sad to see the printed Prairie Soldier pass into history as I wrote in the April edition. Still, as we enter this new era it’s hard not to feel excited about what we hope we’ll be able to accomplish.

Probably the biggest challenge, however, will continue to be ensuring that we don’t lose the readership we had prior to the change.

As such, I again encourage ev-

My Turn

Editor, Prairie Soldier

Kevin J. Hynes



everyone to logon to www.ne.ng.mil where you will see a button where you can subscribe to the Prairie Soldier. By filling out the form there, this will ensure that you receive a Prairie Soldier promptly each time we publish it online.

Also, I’ve received several letters and phone calls from a number of readers since we announced the change to the digital newspaper. I’d like to thank all of you for your kinds words – and there were way more than I would’ve ever expected – as well as those that have raised concerns. I would also like to encourage anyone else interested in writing to me, to please do. You can either reach me via email at kevin.hynes@us.army.mil or via traditional mail at Maj. Kevin Hynes, Public Affairs Office, Nebraska National Guard, 1300 Military Road, Lincoln, NE 68508-1090.

Again, thanks for your patience as we continue this transition.

Looking at other subjects, it’s an exciting time to be a member of the Nebraska National Guard as recent training and operational missions have indicated.

Of particular interest was the Nebraska Army National Guard’s recent support to the Colorado fire-fighting mission.

Looking at the photos and

listening to the stories that have emerged from that mission, it’s hard not to be proud of what this UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew was able to accomplish during their mission supporting our neighbors to the southwest, especially

after helicopter crews from Colorado assisted Nebraska last year during our historic flooding on the Platte and Missouri Rivers.

It was also interesting to have watched as members of the Nebraska National Guard’s firefighting community have put to use skills they exercised this past April when Nebraska National Guard environmental officials conducted a controlled burn at Camp Ashland’s eastern training site to reinvigorate the local environment while also enabling aerial and ground firefighting crews to get some realistic, hands-on training before the “fire season” began in earnest.

This summer has also been interesting in that we’ve already conducted a number of exercises designed to prepare our organization for a number of extremely important missions, including homeland defense, while also beginning or continuing on a number of construction projects designed to provide our Soldiers and Airmen with the facilities they need to accomplish today’s and tomorrow’s missions.

You know, there are a lot of reasons for taking pride in the Nebraska National Guard... in fact, there’s far too many to adequately count or describe. And that list, as this summer has already shown, continues to grow.

Receiving the digital version of the Prairie Soldier

You can subscribe to the digital paper by following these steps:

1. Log onto www.ne.ng.mil
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4. Choose subscription type
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7. Enter password and confirm it if you

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PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Major
Clint R. Kinman
Reuben D. Rieke Jr.

Captain
John F. Ayers
Steven W. Thomlison

Chief Warrant Officer 5
Eugene H. Coppersmith

Chief Warrant Officer 3
Torrey J. Baker

Chief Warrant Officer 2
Brandon M. Hill
Ryan J. Wullschleger

Sergeant Major
Monte A. Kerchal

Master Sergeant
Pamela R. Whisenhunt

Sergeant First Class
Emmet E. Barta
Jeffrey C. Connelly
Michael P. Freeman
Eric S. Gettert
Brian T. Hiller
Adam J. Kosch
Christopher J. Marcellio
Colby L. McCoy
Jason T. Meyer
Robert A. Page
Jonathan H. Terry
Robin J. Trospen

Staff Sergeant
Javier R. Arias
Randall W. Barnason
Jason R. Cherry
John M. Ferguson
Ryan R. Houser
Cory G. Nielsen
Koan L. Nissen

Drew P. Scott
Shawn C. Sheets
Lynn M. Weiland
Jeremiah J. Zwiener

Sergeant
Chad M. Allely
Nicholas J. Anderson
Tyler J. Anderson
Christopher M. Breisch
Ryan C. Buck
John A. Carothers
Anthony W. Coppedge
Mario A. Delgadoledezma
Barry L. Erb
Amber S. Foreman
Zachary A. Freauf
William R. Furlow
Kyle J. Giger
Corey C. Handley
Clay S. Johnson
Justin L. Johnson
Randy L. Lee
Matthew J. Lueninghoener
Nicole M. Miller
Kyle D. Mstrom
Katherine S. Nolan
Travis C. Patch
Alex D. Peyton
Enrique Rodriguez
Fernando Rodriguez
Allen R. Root
Adrian L. Sanders
Christopher A. Schmid
William M. Sons
Jordan W. Stutzman
Anthony L. Wilcox
Lucreita L. Wilcox
Devin H. Wilson
Derek R. Winkler

Specialist
William S. Cornish
James C. David IV
Mark A. Diaz Jr.
Austin C. Dutcher
Austin J. Edeal

Troy D. Francis Jr.
Brian L. Georges
Joel G. Jones
Jeffrey B. Lowery
Nikolaus J. McCracken
Seth C. McDougall
Schuyler D. Schoenhofer
Pablo Solorio
Nathan J. Vodicka

Private First Class
Joshua P. Blomstedt
Clinton D. Fauss
Brett J. Johnson

Private
James A. Struss Jr.

Benjamin R. Prater
Derrick W. Stratman
Jordan A. Wadkinsmeyer

Private Two
James A. Struss Jr.

Air National Guard
Chief Master Sergeant
Frank J. Albrecht

Master Sergeant
Sarah A. Bredthauer
Jay D. Dyer

Mark D. Nelsen
David L. Williams

Technical Sergeant
Nicholas J. Bethune
Adam T. Clements
Adam J. Wochnick

Staff Sergeant
Joshua R. Barker
Christopher Castle
Evan E. Littrell

Senior Airman
Kristopher P. Bousquet
Dustin D. Bowder
Darren D. Davlin
Zachary J. Olsen

Airman First Class
Dylan S. Exstrom
Japheth J. Hartmann
Melinda A. Hoelsing
Melanie L. Petersen
Noelle A. Robbins

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Legion of Merit
Col. Douglas C. Ladd
Command Sgt. Maj. Donald F. Davids
1st Sgt. John E. Quinn

Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Kevin L. Garner
Lt. Col. Steven P. Petersen
Maj. David K. Cooper
Maj. Martin E. Neal
Capt. Scott R. Henrickson
Sgt. Maj. Dennis D. Carroll
1st Sgt. Joseph J. Wren
Master Sgt. Allen R. Gabel
Sgt. 1st Class Austin J. Behnk
Sgt. 1st Class Gerald D. Bouska
Sgt. 1st Class Troy S. Lewis
Sgt. 1st Class Gregory A. Liberty
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas L. Poppe
Sgt. 1st Class Shawn E. Vater
Sgt. 1st Class Patricia Vostades
Staff Sgt. Shane P. Varejcka

Army Commendation Medal

Capt. Brandon S. Burton
Capt. Jeremy D. Chancellor
Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy Anderson

Sgt. 1st Class Bonnie D. Frazier
Sgt. 1st Class Daniel R. Malizzi
Sgt. 1st Class Robin J. Trospen
Staff Sgt. Kelly S. Alexander
Staff Sgt. Timothy T. Beckmann
Staff Sgt. Adam J. Borer
Staff Sgt. Jacob A. Kohlman
Staff Sgt. Herschel B. Talley
Staff Sgt. Mark A. Vanderheiden
Sgt. Michael H. Root
Spc. Ronnie J. Larmeu

Army Achievement Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Jeffery A. Holbrook
Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Hunt
Staff Sgt. Richard C. Pedersen III
Sgt. Benjamin Hodge
Sgt. Nathan F. Mihm
Sgt. Daniel J. Tenorio
Sgt. Patrick J. Williams
Spc. Wade K. Bradley
Spc. Clarisa S. Hazen

Nebraska National Guard

Legion of Merit
Master Sgt. Robert S. Weatherly

Nebraska National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal
Sgt. 1st Class Deric D. Day
Sgt. 1st Class Samuel A. Malone
Sgt. 1st Class Douglas D. Stephens
Staff Sgt. Bryan J. Campbell
Staff Sgt. John Inthavong

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal
Staff Sgt. Gregory A. Brown

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal
Master Sgt. Troy L. Armstrong
Master Sgt. Ryan E. Sullivan
Sgt. 1st Class Jason P. Sharp
Staff Sgt. Christopher S. Deters
Staff Sgt. Emily J. Maass
Staff Sgt. Justin D. McCoy
Staff Sgt. Andrew M. Siemek
Sgt. Stephen M. Graham
Sgt. Nicole M. Miller
Pfc. Amanda C. Schlund

Nebraska National Guard

Recruiting Achievement Medal
Sgt. 1st Class John B. Jurgensen

Sgt. 1st Class Nicole D. Kordik
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew L. Starkey
Sgt. 1st Class David E. Strobbehn
Staff Sgt. Joseph L. Strack

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Maj. John A. Wilson
Chief Warrant Officer 4 John A. Geistlinger
Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy J. Greiner
Command Sgt. Maj. Brian T. Folts
1st Sgt. Richard R. Aldag IV
1st Sgt. John E. Quinn
1st Sgt. Joseph J. Wren
Master Sgt. Dorrance E. Atherton
Sgt. 1st Class Michael S. Edmundson
Sgt. 1st Class Gregory A. Liberty
Sgt. 1st Class Jared J. Logan
Sgt. 1st Class Tamara L. Schmeling
Sgt. 1st Class David K. Waggoner
Staff Sgt. Scott H. Leach
Staff Sgt. Daniel A. Paxton
Staff Sgt. Chris J. Troshynski
Spc. Gary R. Bellmyer

Shorttakes



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Yes Sir: Jacob Lee receives the rank of second lieutenant from his wife, Andrea, as their son, Isaiiah, watches during a ceremony, April 14, at Camp Ashland, Neb., for Soldiers who graduated from Accelerated Officer Candidate School. Three Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers completed the challenging eight-week course in Alabama.

Nebraska graduates three Soldiers from Accelerated Officer Candidate School

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Two Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were commissioned as second lieutenants and one accepted his certificate of completion during the accelerated Officer Candidate School graduation ceremony, April 14, at Camp Ashland, Neb.

The National Guard Bureau Accelerated Officer Candidate School is a challenging eight-week, three-phase Alabama-based commissioning program.

“These young Soldiers have taken a large step in their military careers,” said Col. Mark Stockstell, commander of the 209th Regional Training Institute. “They challenged themselves and completed eight weeks of vigorous training down in Alabama.”

“I’m sure some of the families have heard about it,” added Stockstell. “It wasn’t all fun in the sun, but I know they were challenged both physically and mentally. But

the reward is well worth it.”

The two accepting commissions were Jacob I. Lee and Nathan J. Reicks. Accepting his certificate of eligibility was Staff Sgt. Matthew M. Boring.

New 2nd Lt. Jacob Lee is going to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation, as an executive officer and new 2nd Lt. Nathan Reicks is going to Detachment 1, 189th Truck Company.

According to the candidates, it felt good to finish the course.

“I feel relieved,” said Reicks. “I



Reicks



Boring

mean it feels good to be done. It was challenging and a lot of sleep deprivation.”

Reicks was a former staff sergeant and squad leader before being commissioned, which he said helped him through the course and prepared him to become an officer.

“I’m ready to learn the other side; more of the training and planning,” said Reicks. “I don’t get to work as much hands-on with the Soldiers, which I’m going to miss, but I get to lead and influence the Soldiers.”

Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, Nebraska National Guard assistant adjutant general, Army, gave the graduates some words of wisdom.

“I couldn’t be more proud of these three officer candidates,” said Navrkal. “I had the opportunity to visit them down in Alabama and I can tell you I was very proud. They made Nebraska proud.”

“But what the greatest thing is what they are going to accomplish,” added Navrkal. “I know it’s going to be tremendous. I know our organization is going to be better for it.”

New aeromedical evacuation company activated in April

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

The Nebraska Army National Guard formally activated Company D, 1-376th Aviation Battalion, June 10, during a ceremony at Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb. “Delta” Co., 1-376th Aviation Battalion, was officially activated on April 1.

The new unit will fly the UH-72 Lakota helicopter.

“It’s truly a great day as we gather to recognize the formation of a new Army medical evacuation company in Nebraska,” said Lt. Col. Richard Gray, battalion commander of 1-376th Avn. Bn.

“This transformation is very historic for the Nebraska Army National Guard,” added Gray. “It isn’t just marked by today’s Delta Company activation, but we took a very proud and historic organization – our air cavalry troops – (and transformed them) into our security support aviation battalion.”

“We have a tremendous group of people who are very dedicated and serve a lot,” said Gray. “I’m exceedingly proud of all Nebraska Army aviation members from every (Military Occupation Specialty).”

Gray also gave praise and advice to the commander, Capt. William McGreer, and company first sergeant, Sgt. 1st Class Richard Schneider: “To Captain McGreer, congratulations on your selection as commander,” said Gray. “It is well-deserved. It will be challenging, but I know you are up for the task. Remember to consistently seek the wise counsel of our warrant officers and your noncommissioned officers... that will make your company and you very successful.”

“To Sergeant Schneider, congratulations to you as well as



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

New Colors: Lt. Col. Richard Gray, commander of the 1-376th Aviation Battalion, holds the new company guidon as Capt. William McGreer and Sgt. 1st Class Richard Schneider reveal it during an activation ceremony for Company D, 1-376th Aviation, June 10, in Grand Island, Neb.

your selection as company first sergeant,” added Gray. “You, too, are very deserving of this assignment and I’m happy to see you are diving into the role so quickly. Keep in mind mission first and Soldiers always.”

McGreer enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1997. He was commissioned through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Army Reserved Officers’ Training Corps in 2003. He has served as a platoon leader; aeromedical evacuation section leader; company commander; and assistant operations officer.

“It’s a great honor and privilege for me to take command of this company,” said McGreer. “The commander has done a great job and put together probably the most experienced team that they could of for the unit.”

“We will have challenges, but we have the staff I think to meet those challenges,” added McGreer. “The medical evacuation mission is always something I look forward to. We are very honored to be able to do this mission. We are looking forward to getting in the aircraft, performing the mission and saving lives.”

Sentinel Duty: A member of the Nebraska Army National Guard stands guard near the grave of the late Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Hansen who died on Aug. 27, 2006, after being involved in an accident in Iraq.



Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Michael Caha

Keeping Vigil

■ Five years after comrade's death, fellow Guard cavalymen continue their annual Memorial Day tribute

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

When the late Staff Sgt. Jeffrey J. Hansen died at a U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, on Aug. 27, 2006, six days after the Humvee he was riding in slipped off a road and submerged in a canal during a patrol near Camp Anaconda, Iraq, the 31-year-old Nebraska Army National Guardsman's death sent tremors throughout his unit.

Almost every Soldier knew him. Many had served with him in Bosnia or back in Nebraska where Hansen had gained a reputation among his peers as a driven, yet friendly, noncommissioned officer who seemed destined for greater things.

Staff Sgt. Michael Caha was one of those Soldiers. According to Caha, his friendship with Hansen developed over time.

"I knew him from Bosnia when we deployed, but he was in a different platoon," said Caha this past June. "I knew of him... but I wasn't that close."

However, prior to their Iraq mission, Caha said, the two Nebraska Army Guardsmen were among three 1-167th Cavalry Soldiers selected to attend a training course in Oklahoma City, Okla., to become forward observers. After successfully completing that course, Hansen and Caha were selected to attend the Joint Fires Observer School, a two-week follow-on course that actually prevented the two Soldiers from departing with the rest of the cavalry squadron when it departed Camp Shelby, Miss., in March 2006.

By the time they caught up with their comrades at Camp Anaconda, Caha said, the two were close friends.

"(He) and I became really close, because that wasn't an easy school," said Caha.

However, when the two arrived in Iraq approximately two weeks



Staff Sgt. Jeffrey J. Hansen

after the rest of the organization, they found out that the cavalry's mission had changed and, as such, the forward observer mission was no longer needed.

Caha said he was assigned to base defense with Troop C, 1-167th Cavalry, at the sprawling military installation's northern gate, while Hansen was assigned to Troop B, 1-167th Cavalry, which was responsible for conducting patrol missions around the facility.

Caha said that the news of Hansen's accident and later death took approximately three days to reach him. The news, however, stunned him to the core.

"I ran a gamut of emotions," said Caha.

"I was devastated. I really was," he added. "The whole troop was just in shock."

"And then we lost Debro," Caha said, referring to the late Spc. German L. Debro, a member of Troop B, 1-167th Cavalry, who was killed on Sept. 4, 2006, when an improvised explosive device detonated next to his Humvee during a patrol near Balad, Iraq.

While sharing in his unit's grief, Caha said he also began thinking about what he and the others could do to keep the memory of Hansen from fading. "I started kicking



Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Michael Caha

Standing Guard: Retired Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Mathine stands guard at the tomb of the late Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Hansen on Memorial Day, May 25. This year marked the fifth-straight year that Hansen's former comrades have gathered at the Mullen, Neb., cemetery to honor their fallen friend.

this idea around shortly after he passed," said Caha. "As you know, we got extended while we were over there, so we had a lot of extra time."

"I knew I had to come up with something," he added.

The more Caha thought about the problem, he said, the more he realized he had the answer. Having long been interested in the U.S. Army's "Honor Guard" that conducts around-the-clock duties at the Tombs of the Unknown Soldiers at Arlington Cemetery near Washington, D.C., Caha said he decided Hansen deserved similar attention at his graveside in Minden, Neb., for at least one day a year.

"I thought, 'Why can't we do this for Jeff?'" Caha said.

By the time the 1-167th Cavalry returned to Nebraska in 2007, Memorial Day had already passed, so Caha set the first observance for Memorial Day 2008, during which members of Hansen's unit spent 30 minute shifts standing at attention next to the fallen Soldier's gravesite from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. Caha said, the turnout for the first year's effort was "huge."

"It was a lot of the Alpha Troop guys," said Caha, referring to the Hastings and Grand Island-based unit that Hansen had spent most of his military career with prior to transferring into the squadron's headquarter unit.

Among those who stood at the gravesite was Sgt. 1st Class Chad Rowe, who currently serves as the administrative aid to the Nebraska Army National Guard chief of staff. Rowe, who had served with Hansen in Bosnia and during the unit's stateside training, remembers Hansen as a Soldier who was "going places."

"He was the epitome of a great Soldier, a great leader, a great friend," said Rowe. "I always saw

him as that guy right next to me... my counterpart... the guy that I was going to be competing for the next rank with. He had a future written all over him.

Rowe, who wasn't with Hansen in Iraq because he was just completing his own deployment there as a member of Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry, said the news of his death was devastating just the same.

"It was gut-wrenching," said Rowe. "This was a guy that I'd known for a year. When we were in Iraq, you knew people who one day you were sitting with them in the chow hall and the next day, you know, so-and-so passed away. But (when Hansen) passed away... it's still hard to even think about."

"You know, that could've been any single one of us," he added. "It was an accident. I truly believe to this day that there was a reason why Sergeant Hansen... he was ultimate leader until the very end."

According to Rowe, standing next to his friend's gravesite made a lasting impression on him.

"It's important because it's my way of saying thank you to the veterans who have come before us," said Rowe. "I'm a veteran myself and it helps reaffirm that what he sacrificed wasn't in vain."

Since 2008, the Soldiers have returned each Memorial Day to stand vigil over Hansen's gravesite in all types of weather ranging from chilling rain to windy and hot conditions. This past year they marked the fifth anniversary of the effort. Rowe credits Caha and retired Sgt. 1st Class Kenneth Mathine with keeping the effort going.

"The thing that Sergeant Caha does, he ensures that none of us forget," said Rowe. "He gets it going again and each year its gotten a little better."

According to Caha, he typi-

cally shows up at the cemetery around 5:30 a.m. to ensure that everything is in place before the mission starts at 6 a.m. He then is in charge of making sure that the Soldiers understand the drill and ceremony that will take place and then monitors the progress of the effort throughout the day.

He most recently started a Facebook page to help organize the event.

Rowe and Caha both said the event is both somber and friendly, as current and former unit mates meet to reminisce about Hansen, their service in Iraq, Bosnia and elsewhere, and simply spend time together as friends.

"You hear a lot of old stories over and over again, which is nice because it helps you remember. And seeing some of the other Joes... it kind of helps give you that rejuvenation in that, you know what, there is a reason why we do what we do, there is a reason why you have friends," said Rowe.

According to Caha, probably the most emotional part of the day typically occurs around 11 a.m. during the community's annual Memorial Day commemoration ceremony when Hansen's widow, Jennifer, who has since remarried, and his father, Robert, stop by to spend time at the gravesite.

"That's when it hits me pretty hard," said Caha, "although it has been getting easier."

According to Caha, the mission continues to be about wanting to ensure that Hansen's sacrifices aren't forgotten.

"I... just feel like we should do it," said Caha, who now works as a truck driver instructor at Camp Ashland, Neb.

Rowe agreed.

"I'm never going to miss this unless Uncle Sam sends me overseas."

Aerial Honors

Tanker crew resumes annual Memorial Day salute to Nebraska's fallen veterans

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

After a year's break, the Nebraska Air National Guard returned to the air on Memorial Day when it resumed its annual salute to the state's fallen veterans.

This year a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker flight and maintenance crew volunteered to support a mission that took the aircraft over 60 Nebraska cemeteries ranging from Lincoln and Omaha into northeastern and central Nebraska. Last year's aerial salute was cancelled when the 155th Air Refueling Wing's available aircraft were ordered overseas to support operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and

other world-wide locations.

According to then-Col. Rick Evans III, 155th ARW commander at the time, the crew was excited to be able to resume its traditional Memorial Day salute.

"The unit in general and myself in particular were disappointed we had to sit out last year and are glad this year's operations tempo allows us to resume flyovers," said Evans prior to the May 28 mission.

Following the flight, Evans said the mission went off without a hitch, adding that cemeteries within the flight path seemed to have many visitors this year.

"It was an absolutely fantastic flight," said Evans.

"It was also really heartening to see the response at the cemeteries we visited," he said. "You could really see that there were a lot of people out at the cemeteries and that there really seemed to be large turnout."



Photo courtesy of the 155th Air Refueling Wing

Honoring Nebraska's Vets: The shadow of a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker passes by a Nebraska cemetery during the 155th Air Refueling Wing's annual Memorial Day salute, May 28.

Beatin' the Heat



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Cold Shower: Command Sgt. Maj. Marc Petersen of the Alaska National Guard gets a quick, cold shower from Chief Master Sgt. Sue Spence, a member of Joint Force Headquarters of the Nebraska Air National Guard, at the Nebraska Air National Guard's aid station near Holmes Lake in Lincoln, Neb., May 6, during the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon. Heat and humidity throughout the day made running conditions difficult for 216 National Guard runners from 46 states and territories who joined nearly 10,000 other running enthusiasts for the annual race.

Guard runners compete in annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon

By Senior Airman Mary Thach

Staff Writer

The rainy, humid morning air left a haze as lightning flashed across the sky and thunder rolled. A record crowd of thousands gathered in the streets outside of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Memorial Stadium, mentally and physically preparing themselves for the storm that was brewing within and the challenge that lay ahead.

Two hundred sixteen National Guard members representing 46 states and territories joined nearly 10,000 other running enthusiasts on the streets of Lincoln, Neb., May 6, as they competed in the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon. And although lightning rarely strikes the same point twice, for one National Guard member it did, while another brought the thunder.

Army Capt. Robert Killian Jr., a member of the Colorado Army National Guard's 5-19th Special Forces Group, set the pace for all National Guard participants for the second year in a row by completing the 26.2-mile course in 2 hours, 37 minutes, 35 seconds, less than a minute shy of his 2011 time. His time was good enough to place fifth overall and first among all National Guard runners.

"I'm feeling good. There was bad weather this morning and I was expecting the course to be pretty tough," said Killian. "Last year was my very first marathon I have ever done. To come out and run it two years in a row and win is great."

Running a rugged race is nothing new for Killian, who follows a rigorous training program by logging 40-50 miles per week at elevated altitudes, participating in bi- and triathlons – including the Ironman competition in Hawaii – and running a marathon in San Francisco. His goal is to continually improve.

"I want to come back next year," said Killian. "I want to try to get in the top three."

Killian said the weather during this year's race was a little rough in the morning, as the rain and wind created challenging conditions. Still, Killian said, the wind actually worked in the runners' favor as a tail wind.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

And They're Off: More than 200 National Guard runners join nearly 10,000 other runners for the start of the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon held in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. Morning thunderstorms gave way to hot humid conditions during the race.

Eventually the sun came out, quickly increasing the temperature. Killian said he enjoyed the course and was glad he finished before it got too hot.

"It was a great course, but it's easy to just give up and be satisfied with seventh or sixth," said Killian. "You just have to keep up and try to get the Guard's name out there for a top five finish."

Also representing the National Guard well was Army Capt. Sara Day of the North Carolina Army National Guard who used her leave from a deployment to Kuwait to run in the marathon. Not only did she top all National Guard women, she came in second place for all female competitors with a time of 3:02:22.

Day said she joined the active Army as a professional runner. Initially, she focused on her occupation, but decided to change her focus back to running. She joined the Guard in 2008 and later tried out for the National Guard Marathon Team.

According to Day, she has competed in marathons previous to the Lincoln National Guard Marathon, but during this year's race she notched her second fastest marathon time.



Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Top Guard Finishers: Army Capt. Sara Day, North Carolina National Guard, took top honors for Guard females and second place among all females with her time of 3:02:02, while Army Capt. Robert Killian Jr. of the Colorado National Guard set the pace for all National Guard participants for the second year in a row with his time of 2:37:35, good enough for fifth place overall.

That time didn't come easy though. Actually, she said, it was far from it.

"I was feeling a lot of things. When I was

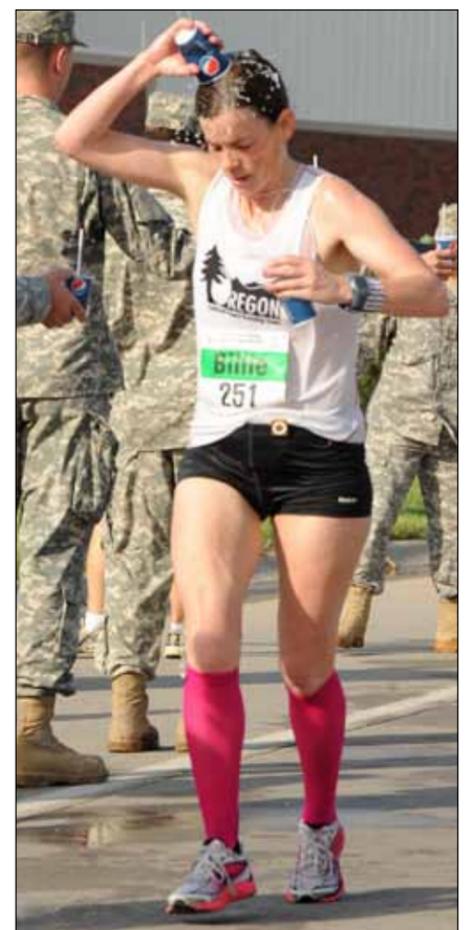


Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Keeping a Cool Head: Army Capt. Billie Cartwright, Oregon National Guard, tries to keep cool at a Nebraska National Guard aid station during the Lincoln National Guard Marathon held in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. Morning thunderstorms gave way to heat and humidity making running conditions difficult.

running in Mile 13, I was thinking 'I have not done nearly enough training in Kuwait to finish this marathon,'" said Day. "I was like, 'I can't quit.'"

When deployed, Day said she woke up every morning at 4 a.m. to run, then went to work for 8-10 hours. She said she wouldn't entertain the idea of quitting because of all the support she has back in Kuwait.

See MARATHON on 21.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Good Stride: Army Capt. Sara Day of the North Carolina National Guard runs in the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon held in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. Day used her leave from a deployment to Kuwait to compete in the race and took top honors for Guard females and second place among all women with her time of 3:02:02.

North Carolina Soldier uses 'R & R' from Kuwait to run Lincoln Marathon

By Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

The 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon played host to a variety of Soldiers, Airmen and military retirees from around the world in Lincoln, Neb., May 6.

Usually, the National Guard Bureau picks up the tab for runners traveling from their respective states to compete in the marathon. However, this year's event found one of its participants migrating from the sands of Kuwait while still on Title 10 status.

Army Capt. Sara Day, a deputy officer in charge and operational contract and support officer with the 113th Sustainment Brigade (currently deployed to Kuwait), was on mid-tour "R and R" and paid her own way to make an appearance to compete in her first Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

"We were not allowed to be funded with NGB money because we're Title 10," said Day. "I had to work a lot of emails with my chain of command back in Kuwait, but it finally came down to not being able

to work it out."

Nonetheless, the dedicated Guard Soldier was not about to let her hard work and discipline go to waste. She just treated this obstacle as a small bump in the road to her first National Guard Marathon.

Day, a former professional runner and member of the U.S. Army's World Class Athlete Program, is no stranger to hard work and dedication. It was her dedication to physical fitness and mental stamina that helped her compete in this year's event – even from halfway around the world.

"I have to get up at 4 a.m. every morning," said Day. "Then I would have to go into work for eight to 10 hours."

Day, who first enlisted in the active U.S. Army to do nothing but run, said she had spent the last few years focusing on her officer's career with the North Carolina Army National Guard. But with the encouragement of a fellow Soldier, it wasn't long before she was lacing the running shoes back up.

"I met one of the young Soldiers in my brigade, who actually happens to be very talented as well," said Day. "He was like 'Hey you should do this again' and I was like 'Okay, maybe I'll give it a try.'"

But the 33-year-old runner did more than just give it a try here; she won the race among all other female Guard runners and placed second out of all women finishers. Her strong finish also earned her a coveted spot on the All-Guard team. Finishing with a time of 3 hours, 2 minutes, 22 seconds, she said this was her second best marathon time.

Day said she couldn't have competed, let alone won the race on the Guard side for women, without the help of her chain of command. She said they were extremely supportive from day one and made every attempt to help her along the way.

"I have an incredible chain of command," said Day.

Day recognized that her chain of command was willing to go the distance with helping her, not just because she is who she is, but because she excels in the physical fitness category – something that gives her a slight advantage in life.

"Physical fitness has taken me through my career," said Day. "It's not always been my intelligence, it's been my perseverance."



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Strong Finish: Army Capt. Sara Day, of the North Carolina National Guard, finishes the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon at the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. Day used leave from a deployment to Kuwait to compete in the race.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Military and Marathon Veteran: Warrant Officer 4 Art Dechent, a data processing technician for the Joint-Force Headquarters of the Virginia National Guard at Fort Pickett, Va., runs in the Lincoln National Guard Marathon in Lincoln, Neb. May 6.

30 marathons and counting

By Spc. Riley Huskey
Staff Writer

With 41 years of military service, 30 marathons to-date and 10 completed time trials for the All-Guard Marathon Team in Lincoln, Neb., Chief Warrant Officer 4 Art Dechent knows a thing or two about hard work and perseverance.

Serving as a data processing technician for the Joint-Force Headquarters of the Virginia National Guard at Fort Pickett, Va., Dechent may be retiring this year from the Virginia Army Guard shortly before his 59th birthday. Joining his state marathon team in 2001, Dechent has never qualified for the All-Guard Marathon Team. Still, according to the long-time runner, the honor of just being a part of the program has been enough for him to stay motivated and drive ahead.

"This has helped me to stay battle-focused and ready for deployment," he said. "I have considered it an honor to come out to the national try-outs for the last 10 years."

See DECHENT on 22.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

The Home Stretch: Runners in the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon run into the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium to finish the race on the 50-yardline in Lincoln, Neb., May 6.

MARATHON continued from page 20.

As if the marathon was not challenging enough, Day faced logistical and funding challenges just to be able to participate because of her deployment to Kuwait. Fortunately, she said her chain of command showed their full support and bent over backward to help her in any way they could.

The same could be said for the Lincoln race, said Day. She said although the temperature was a lot warmer than she wanted it to be, the course was perfect. She said the volunteers were very helpful and the water points were great, all helping her have a strong race.

She added that what she gains from running overflows into her work in the military.

"Physical fitness is the one thing that has taken me through my career," said Day. "Running has given me perseverance."

In the team event, the Pennsylvania National Guard won first place with their top three runners averaging a time of 2:52:30. The Wisconsin National Guard team followed in a close second with Oregon finishing in third place.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael

Hagen, National Guard Bureau marathon coordinator, said while the day was challenging because of the weather, it was ultimately another successful running of the annual race.

"This was a very tough course; some said they need to train on more hills," said Hagen. "It was very hot and it took a toll on their bodies. I don't think anyone doesn't feel that they didn't run hard today."

"The day started off with a big thunderstorm and high humidity," he added. "Overall, the heat came up and affected a lot of people today, but it did not affect their determination to try to make the team. All in all, a great day."

Hagen said the National Guard was well represented throughout the day on the course.

"I couldn't ask for anything better. They were out there giving 110 to 150 percent the entire time. I am overwhelmingly proud of what they did today," said Hagen. "They definitely represented the National Guard in the utmost highest fashion."

Hustlin' Huskers



Photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Coleman

In Good Spirits: Army Staff Sgt. Tarissa Batenhorst, a human resource sergeant with the 209th Regional Training Institute, enjoys running the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon held in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. Batenhorst joined 215 other National Guard runners from 46 states and territories for the event.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen

Team Spirit: Members of the Nebraska Marathon Team pose for a team photo prior to the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon held in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. The team placed 11th out of 38 teams, with their top three performers averaging a time of 3 hours, 18 minutes, 22 seconds.

Nebraska team performs well during National Guard Marathon

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Predicted rain and hot weather couldn't keep the Nebraska National Guard Marathon Team from performing their best at the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon and half-marathon held May 6 in Lincoln, Neb.

Eleven members of the Army and Air Guard made up the 2012 Nebraska National Guard Marathon team.

"It's a group that has a lot of first time runners combined with some veteran runners," said Sgt. 1st Class Bill Norris, Nebraska's team captain

and state marathon coordinator for the Nebraska National Guard.

Norris said although runners have to be able to achieve a certain time to make the state team, it may not be as difficult as other states to compete. Most runners from other states and territories are paid for by the National Guard, however, the Nebraskans don't have to worry about jumping through those financial and logistical hoops.

Norris, himself a first-time runner in a full marathon, has run eight half marathons before.

"I'm kind of in the best shape of

my life, so I thought if I'm going to do it I'm not getting no younger," said Norris.

Another member of the team, Air Force Master Sgt. Sarah Bredthauer, a member of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Civil Engineer Squadron, brought a lot of experience as part of the Nebraska National Guard Marathon team before. Along with her marathon experience, Bredthauer also brought her experience as a long distance coach for Sterling, Neb.'s, High School's track team.

"I set four goals for myself," said Bredthauer. "My first goal was to get a (personal record), in which my previous time was 3 hours and 46 minutes, I wanted to make the All Guard Team... and get 3:30."

The Nebraska National Guard Marathon team all had goals of their own like Bredthauer, but overall they just wanted to do their best. The team placed 11th out of 38 teams, with their top three performers averaging a time of 3 hours, 18 minutes, 22 seconds.

Bredthauer finished the race by exceeding all of her goals and getting even more than she planned.

"It feels great to be done,"

said Bredthauer. "Obviously my first couple goals were easier to achieve, but overall my hardest goal was to get 3 hours and 30 minutes and I got that plus (a few) seconds."

"I met all my goals and was very fortunate and thankful that the weather cooperated," she added.

But what Bredthauer didn't plan on was winning the award for the top spot for her age group of 30- to 34-year-old females with her time of 3:30:05.

"I was really surprised that I placed in my age group," said Bredthauer. "The last time I ran in 2007 I don't remember them doing the age

awards then. I didn't know I was going to get an award, so I was very surprised."

According to Norris, he was hoping for three of the Nebraska National Guard Marathon team members to make the All Guard team, but would be very happy if one of them made it.

As it turned out, Bredthauer was the only Nebraskan that qualified to be a part of the All Guard Marathon team.

Overall the Nebraska National Guard Marathon team was happy with their performance this year, but wanted to get the word out to other Nebraska National Guardsmen about the Nebraska National Guard Marathon team.

"For next year I would really like to market the program," said Norris. "I want to work with the recruiters and talk to high school kids that are in track that are seniors so they know about this. I just want to get the word out. And from there I think everything else will take care of itself."

"I would like to get to the point where every member on my team has a very good chance of making the All Guard team."

Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

All Guard Team: Master Sgt. Sarah Bredthauer, a member of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Civil Engineer Squadron, runs in the 35th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon in Lincoln, Neb., May 6. Bredthauer finished with a time of 3:30:05, which placed first for her age group of 30- to 34-year old females and made her the only Nebraskan on the All Guard Team.

DECHENT continued from page 21.

Dechent's personal record stands at 4:02:00 and while his competing in races with the National Guard may be coming to a close, his sights for the future remain: Finishing the JFK 50-miler in November, qualifying for the Boston Marathon and continuing to run one marathon each year are all future endeavors. "My advice for those interested

in running marathons or competing for a spot on the All-Guard Team is this: Don't treat it as a job and start slow," Dechent said. "They are not just paying us to come out here and finish the trials—it's about the commitment—and through that, we serve and replicate."

Dechent said he believes using the team as a recruiting and retention tool at the events where

the Guard is represented has been smart. However, he added, the largest misconception is that even those that don't make the team are not precluded from recruiting. His personal missions are trying to get people into the Guard and retaining noncommissioned officers lacking upward mobility.

In all, Dechent said he has enjoyed returning to Lincoln each year

to compete and said he will find a way to come back again.

"Every year that I come back for the time trials, it almost feels like coming home," he said. "Everybody is open here, the pace is slower than that of big cities and people have time to talk. The people of Lincoln are genuine and sincere, and this is the ideal place to have the All-Guard try-outs because of the locale and

the people."

Dechent thanked the adjutant general of Nebraska, All-Guard Marathon Team Coordinator Sgt. 1st Class Mike Hagen and the National Guard Bureau for believing in this program and allowing service members the chance to compete and run.

"I would have never done this if not for this opportunity."