

Happy Holidays Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

American troops leave Iraq after nine years of war

■ Obama says all U.S. troops out of Iraq by year's end

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

After nearly nine years of war in Iraq, President Barack Obama announced Oct. 21 that all U.S. service members will leave Iraq by the end of the year. According to Obama, the U.S. service members that are still in the country will be "home for the holidays."

"Today, I can report that as promised, the rest of our troops in Iraq will come home by the end of the year. After nearly nine years, America's war in Iraq will be over," the president said in October.

"The last American Soldiers will cross the border out of Iraq with their heads held high, proud of their success and knowing that the American people stand united in our support for our troops," he added. "That is how America's military efforts in Iraq will end."

The president made the announcement after speaking with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Since American forces went into Iraq in March 2003, more than 1

million Americans have deployed to the Middle Eastern country – many multiple times. And the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard have played a large role in that effort since the war's beginning.

"Since Operation Iraqi Freedom began, the Nebraska National Guard was engaged early on and we've had a number of units and individual Soldiers and Airmen that have been called to duty since 2003," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, adjutant general for Nebraska. "We've been engaged from the start of the war to the end of the war and our Guardsmen and women have just performed in a completely excellent manner."

Nebraska Guardsmen have successfully supported the entire gamut of the needs in Iraq throughout the entire war.

"We've really seen our forces engage in the full spectrum of operations," said Lyons. "It's been a variety of missions in Iraq ranging from the spectrum of convoy security missions to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support, to medical evacuations, to kinetic operations – direct combat operations."

And although there will no longer be U.S. combat troops in Iraq, it doesn't mean U.S. involvement is over, the president said.

The United States will main- See IRAQ on 5.

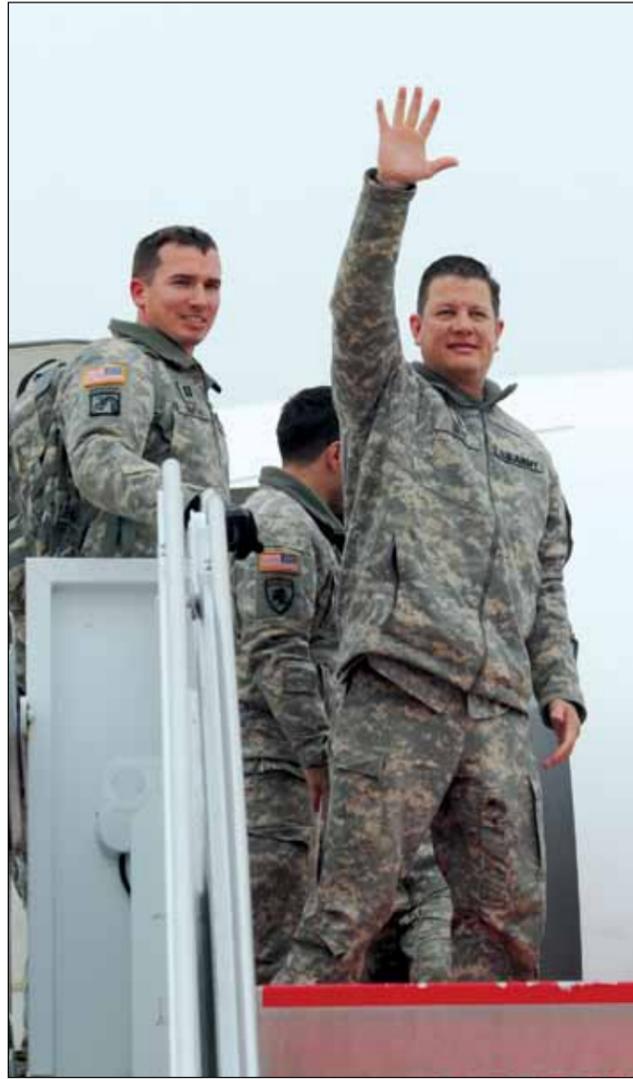


Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes
Finally Home: 1st Sgt. Tomas Ortiz, senior enlisted Soldier for the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, waves to his families and friends shortly after stepping off a plane that brought his unit back to Nebraska after being the last Nebraska Guard unit to be stationed in Iraq.

Last Soldier of final Nebraska Army Guard unit to be stationed in Iraq returns home with feelings of accomplishment

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

On Feb. 10, 2003, members of the 41st Rear Operations Center made history when they were mobilized for what would become Operation Iraqi Freedom and eventually became the first Nebraska Army National Guard unit to deploy into Iraq.

Nearly nine years and thousands of deployments later, 1st Sgt. Tomas Ortiz of Lincoln's Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, made history of a different sort, Nov. 9, when he stepped off of an aircraft at the Nebraska Guard air base and became the last person of the last Nebraska Army Guard unit stationed in Iraq to return to Nebraska.

According to Ortiz, the senior enlisted Soldier during his unit's deployment to northern Iraq, he and his unit didn't fully realize the significance of their unit's Nov. 19 return to Nebraska. They were simply happy and extremely proud to have completed their year-long medical evacuation mission in Iraq, the unit's second in barely four years.

"Actually, it's news to me," said Ortiz about the historic nature of his unit's See END OF ERA on 6.

Air Guard doctor adds title of 'author' to resume

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Scott McPherson never expected to become an author. First of all, his schedule was busy... extremely busy.

Along with being a family practice physician in Lincoln, Neb., he also serves as the state air surgeon for the Nebraska Air National Guard as a member of the Joint Force Headquarters. Those two alone make for some pretty busy days, as well as some occasional busy nights.

Second, he'd never really been

trained as a professional writer. Granted, he has written more than his share of medical reports in both his military and professional careers, and he'd also written some papers while attending the seminary years ago. But writing a book? McPherson said he had never really given the idea much thought.

So, how does McPherson, a colonel in the Nebraska Air National Guard, account for the fact that on Aug. 1 he published his first book, "A Step Ahead of Death"?

"I've tried to figure that out myself," said McPherson during his Nebraska National Guard drill

in November. "I didn't ever think of myself as a novelist."

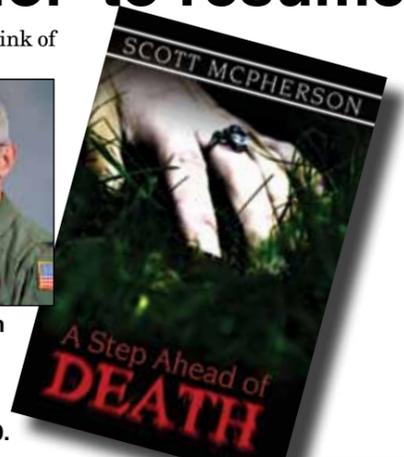
The answer, he said, really goes back to his military career and his travels with the Air National Guard.

"During deployments, I would send home newsletters every few days with photographs and an explanation of what we

See BOOK on 19.



McPherson



New helicopters enhance Guard's capabilities

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska Army National Guard welcomed the newest helicopter into its inventory, Nov. 22, when Nebraska's first two UH-72A Lakota helicopters were unveiled during a ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb.

According to state and military leaders, the helicopter – which is being fielded throughout the Army National Guard – is a welcome addition to the state's inventory.

"These new helicopters will bring with them a critical new capability to our state's ability to respond to a wide spectrum of emergency situations," said Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy.

According to Sheehy, the Guard's ability to respond to various different man-made and natural disaster's – particularly with aviation assets – is a critical part of the state's preparedness plans, as was witnessed this past summer during flooding on the Missouri and Platte Rivers. The Lakota, he added, will enhance those capabilities.

"Today, we welcome a new important tool to the Guard's aviation tool box," Sheehy said. "The UH-72 Lakotas that Nebraska is receiving today are state-of-the-art helicopters that were designed specifically for the wide spectrum of missions that our Guard is expected to be ready and able

See LAKOTAS on 2.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes
Blessing: Myron Long Soldier, a full-blooded enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, conducts a Native American blessing on the Guard's new UH-72 Lakota.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Lincoln, Omaha, Wahoo Army Guard units return from yearlong deployments

Stories and photos begin on Page 4.

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INSIDE

■ Army Guard cooks compete for national title 3

■ Remembering Nebraska National Guard's role during the War in Iraq 7-17

■ Army, Air National Guard units welcome new commanders 18, 22

■ We Salute 22

■ Sports 23

NEWS DIGEST

■Citizen-Warrior unemployment rate unacceptable, Panetta says

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. (AFPS) – Reintegration, family support, attacking Guard member unemployment and minimizing uncertainty about deployments are key parts of taking care of Citizen-Warriors, the secretary of defense said, Nov. 8.

“As secretary of defense, I consider it my highest responsibility to protect those who have defended this country, and I want you to convey to all of your Guardsmen back home that I will fight for them in Washington, just as they have fought for us wherever duty has called,” Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told the National Guard’s 2011 Joint Senior Leadership Conference.

The secretary has been fighting for Guard members beyond Washington: He fights for jobs for Citizen-Warriors when he travels, including during a recent meeting with employers in New York.

Unemployment among members of the National Guard and Reserves was at 13 percent earlier this year.

The unemployment rate among junior enlisted Guard members and Reservists has hit 23 percent.

“The Department (of Defense) is working hard to connect employers with talented service members, supported by more than 4,700 volunteers who help communicate with our men and women in uniform about employment resources,” Panetta said.

Safeguarding Guard members’ jobs when they are deployed also is critical, he said.

“Our employer support programs work hard to make sure that those called to duty have the peace of mind that their job will still exist when they return home,” he said.

Uncertainty about deployment can affect employment. Sometimes, Guard units are mobilized and Guard members leave jobs or school, end leases and move families – only to find their deployment is cancelled because of changed operational needs, a practice known as “off-ramping.”

“I know how disruptive it is for Soldiers and Airmen who have made major commitments when they are mobilized,” Panetta said.

“I am committed – along with the leadership of the National Guard – to avoiding this practice where possible and to provide suitable alternative missions and other mitigation for units and individuals whose lives are disrupted.

“These men and women have made a major commitment to our country and we owe it to them to avoid unnecessary hardship and ensure their quality of life. That is the sacred obligation the American people owe to all our Guardsmen.”

■Secretary of Army says Guard cure for civilian-military divide

WASHINGTON (ARNEWS) – Secretary of the Army John McHugh told members of the National Guard, Nov. 15, that military leadership is concerned about the divide between society and the less-than-1-percent

that serve in uniform.

“Not only is this 1 percent a small segment of the population, there are those who understandably worry it is an increasingly isolated part of the population, becoming increasingly apart from America,” McHugh said during the 2011 National Guard Joint Senior Leadership Conference.

McHugh said former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates had noted that the U.S. Army’s forces are concentrated in just five states. And while Alabama, with a population of less than five million, has 10 reserve officer training programs, Los Angeles, with more than 12 million, has just four such programs. Chicago, with a population of nine million, has only three.

“Gates went on to say there is a risk over time of developing a cadre of military leaders that politically, culturally, and geographically have less in common with the majority of the people they are sworn to defend,” McHugh said.

The secretary said the National Guard is an answer to that concern.

“That’s where you come in,” McHugh said. “I certainly don’t need to tell you the men and women of the National Guard and the Air National Guard are in every zip code in America. That means you are in every city, you’re in every town, village and hamlet. And unlike our major military installations, you’re in every congressional district all across this great land.”

Whether Guard members are on or off the job, McHugh said, “you, the members of the Guard, are the military’s connection to every segment of American society. You show all this great nation the goodness of duty, and honor and country.”

■Senate confirms new Army National Guard director

WASHINGTON (NGNEW) – On Veterans Day (Nov. 11) came word of the confirmation of a new director for the Army National Guard, Army Maj. Gen. William Ingram, former adjutant general of the North Carolina National Guard and current special assistant to the Army vice chief of staff.

Ingram, who also was confirmed for appointment to the rank of lieutenant general on Nov. 10, will succeed Army Maj. Gen. Raymond Carpenter, who has served as acting director of the Army National Guard for 29 months, since his appointment by McKinley on May 29, 2009, following the retirement of Army Lt. Gen. Clyde Vaughn.

Ingram will be the 19th director and the third three-star general to fill the position.

The director is responsible for formulating, developing and coordinating all programs, policies and plans affecting the Army National Guard and its more than 350,000 Citizen-Soldiers.

Ingram already has almost 40 years of service as an Army National Guard officer.

No date has yet been announced for Ingram’s formal promotion and assumption of responsibilities at the Army National Guard.

Panetta: Reserve-active relationship forever changed

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. (AFPS) – The relationship between the active duty and the reserve components has fundamentally changed in the past 10 years, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said on Nov. 8.

“All told, more than 370,000 Guardsmen have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan since 2001, many of them multiple times,” he said to the National Guard’s Joint Senior Leaders Convention. “It’s a simple and widely recognized reality that we could not have sustained this war effort without the service and contributions of our Guardsmen – more than 670 of whom have paid the ultimate price for their service.”

The Guard and other reserve components are integral parts of the finest military in the world, the secretary said, and Guard members and their families have borne a heavy burden.

“These men and women have written a new chapter in this institution’s storied legacy and firmly established the Guard as a vital operational arm of our military – a force far different from the strategic reserve many envisioned during the Cold War,” he said.

The Air National Guard provided 50 percent of the tanker capability for U.S., NATO and allied aircraft operating over Libya, the secretary said. “Having responded to the call at a moment’s notice, Air National Guard tanker assets from 10 states were in place and ready to operate the same day that the U.N. Security Council passed the authorizing resolution,” he said.

And the National Guard also has a large stateside mission. “When Hurricane Irene hit the eastern seaboard this year, nearly 8,000 Guard members from 18 states deployed, with equipment pre-positioned to ensure it was available for use,” he said.

The storm marked the first time the military designated dual-status commanders in response to an emergency, Panetta noted.

The secretary touted the move toward bolstering the Guard’s capability to respond to the horrific possibility of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident. The Guard has stood up 10 homeland response forces prepared to deploy within hours to save lives and provide essential command and control and security capabilities.

“Whether engaged in these domestic support missions or serving on the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan, the men and women of today’s National Guard have proven themselves to be an extremely effective operational force over a decade of great demand,” Panetta said.

The Guard’s equipment is often the same or even ahead of their active-duty counterparts, the secretary said, and the quality of personnel has skyrocketed.

“The Guard and reserve are increasingly indistinguishable from the active component,” he said. And active and reserve component personnel of all services have worked together closely for a decade. That experience “of fighting alongside each other,” has built trust and respect across the force, he said.

The military must not forget the lessons learned about the National Guard’s central role and relevance in the military of the 21st century, Panetta said.

“A decade of war has honed the Guard into an effective, lethal fighting force and it would be a tremendous mistake, in my view, to put that capability back on the shelf,” he said.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

State-of-the-Art: Warrant Officer Joshua Schaaf, a newly trained pilot, shows off the helicopter’s state-of-the-art cockpit, Nov. 22, at the Nebraska Army Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb.

LAKOTAS continued from page 1.

to respond to.”

The UH-72A Lakota is a twin-engine, four-blade helicopter designed for homeland defense missions.

The helicopter, a militarized version of the Eurocopter EC145 built by American Eurocopter division of EADS North American, is replacing the National Guard’s aging fleet of UH-1H/V and OH-58A/C helicopters nation-wide.

Nebraska’s first Lakotas are two of the four medical evacuation UH-72s that will be stationed as part of a new medevac unit based in Grand Island.

According to Lt. Col. Rick Gray, state director of Army aviation, the Guard is expecting to receive an additional four UH-72s configured for Homeland Defense missions in early 2013. Those four aircraft are scheduled to be stationed at Lincoln’s AASF No. 1. Each of the Lakotas costs between \$6-7 million based upon the aircraft’s configuration, he said.

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, said the Lakotas send an important signal to Nebraska about the Guard’s commitment to be prepared for natural and man-made emergencies.

“As the lieutenant governor alluded to, this really is a fantastic day for Nebraska and the Nebraska Army National Guard as we welcome these helicopters,” said Lyons as he gestured toward the Lakotas that, along with a pair of OH-58 Kiowa helicopters, flanked the stage.

“When you compare them with the aircraft that we are replacing them with, you really can see the quantum leap we’ve made.”

The helicopters, which will typically fly with a crew of two or three Soldiers, feature modern, state-of-the-art avionics equipment packages that will enable the aircraft to be able to fly in worse weather

than now possible, said Gray.

The Lakotas are also much cheaper to fly, costing roughly 60 percent of what it costs to fly a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, although it does not have quite the lifting capability that the larger Black Hawks have. The aircraft should also be cheaper to maintain, Gray added.

Lyons said the helicopter’s arrival signals another important message, as well.

“Don’t be surprised if you hear more than a few of our Nebraska Army National Guard aviators talking about the fact that these Lakotas still have that ‘new helicopter smell,’” Lyons told the audience. “We’re receiving these helicopters directly from the factory and I think that represents how important the National Guard is to our state and homeland defense missions.”

“I think it also sends a message to both our current Soldiers and those considering joining our ranks that they will work and train on state-of-the-art helicopters and will be members of the only component in the military with a dual federal and state mission: the Nebraska Army National Guard,” Lyons said. “We’re unique among the military and we’re very proud of that fact.”

Lyons wasn’t the only person proud of the new helicopters. Grand Island Mayor Jay Vavricek said the central Nebraska community is also very proud to be able to host the first Lakota unit in Nebraska.

“This is a great investment in emergency response preparedness and we’re honored in Grand Island to be part of it,” said Vavricek, who was mayor of Grand Island in March 2003 when the community was selected to become home of the Guard’s AASF No. 2.

“Once again it’s just an extension of the Guard’s service and we’re proud to be a part of it.”

Prairie Soldier

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

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Photos by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Homemade Brownies: Pfc. Tiffany Brown, a cook with the 267th Support Maintenance Company, pours eggs into a brownie mix during the Philip A. Connelly national cooking competition Oct. 21, at Forward Operating Base Husker at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb. The 267th SMC advanced to the national-level cooking competition by winning state and regional cooking contests.



Teamwork: Pfc. Tiffany Brown and Sgt. James Wieting, both cooks with the 267th Support Maintenance Company, pour brownie batter during the national level of the 44th annual Philip A. Connelly Competition, Oct. 21, at Forward Operating Base Husker near Mead, Neb. The Soldiers worked together to ensure the brownies and six other entrees are prepared and made under the time constraints of the cooking competition.

Top Chefs

■Nebraska Army Guard cooks combine talents, efforts while competing in prestigious national contest

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Often cooking from scratch and incorporating fresh ingredients – especially from a new recipe – can have disastrous results. But that wasn't the case when a Nebraska Army National Guard food service team started fresh after a recent deployment.

Since putting together a new food service team only eight months ago following a deployment to Iraq, the Lincoln-based 267th Support Maintenance Company has accomplished a lot. They competed in – and won – both the state and regional levels of the 44th annual Philip A. Connelly Competition.

By winning the regional competition, they advanced to the national-level competition.

That portion of the contest occurred, Oct. 21, when a team of U.S. Army evaluators graded the Nebraska team at Forward Operating Base Husker on the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

There, the Nebraska Soldiers were required to prepare a full meal within time constraints while always ensuring proper food temperatures, cooking techniques and following standard operation procedures.

According to the Nebraskans, their food service team was ready for the competition, having successfully prepared the meal at least a dozen times during drills and prior competitions.

That preparation allowed the

team to not only perfect their cooking skills, but also their unit cohesion.

"It's much more than just a food service competition," said Sgt. Maj. Mark Warren, Joint Culinary Center of Excellence sergeant major from Fort Lee, Va., and Connelly Competition evaluator. "It's 70 percent food service and 30 percent unit."

"It's a great opportunity and the unit has done a wonderful job on explaining what they were doing as a unit, to include what they are doing for battle tasks and warrior drills," he added.

The national-level competition was graded on a 1,000-point evaluation list.

Everything from entry control points, site security and command support, to the actual food service

and field sanitation was evaluated.

During the competition the team prepared seven entrees to feed 70 Soldiers under the same circumstances they would face in a real deployment environment. The menu included French onion soup, Salisbury steak, garlic roasted potatoes, brown gravy, glazed carrots, cucumber and onion salad, and brownies.

Evaluators said they quickly saw several things that made the Nebraska unit stand out among the seven finalists competing in the national competition.

"The stand out things that I see with this unit would definitely be the unit as a whole with how cohesive they are, the leadership by how engaged they are and the command support by how you can

see an emphasis on training," said Warren.

"The commander and the command team did an excellent job at projecting what the mission's focus was," he added.

Evaluators were also impressed to see that after assisting with the Nebraska National Guard's flood response this past summer, the unit was able to quickly put together a new food service team, prepare for the competition and have such well-prepared leadership.

"What makes the unit succeed is the small-unit cohesion and with teamwork everyone is able and wanting to get the same common goal," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tollie Yoder, 267th SMC food service officer. "Everyone is staying very positive and they're not being asked for any more than what they would do ordinarily."

"But now they are able to do it and understand it more because it's more of a practical exercise," he added.

Evaluators also praised the Nebraska team for their ability to get the individual team members to perform at such a high level – especially those coming from a different career field.

"We have active duty noncommissioned officers that never get to this level of competition or evaluation through a whole career," said Warren, adding that he was equally impressed in the senior food service sergeant who had only been on the job for six months.

"You have a dining facility manager and because of the uniqueness of the National Guard he has transferred from a different career field into food service," added Warren. "It's a great point that Chief Yoder has been able to work with him as closely as he has and has gotten him up to a level of a DA finalist this fast in the game."

According to organizers, one of the positive aspects of the competition is how realistic it is for the Soldiers. It prepares them for what



Fast as a Speeding Bullet: Sgt. James Wieting, a cook with the 267th Support Maintenance Company, uses his knife skills to chop walnuts for a brownie dessert during the Philip A. Connelly national cooking competition, Oct. 21, at Forward Operating Base Husker.



Checking the Temps: Pfc. Kevin Crable, a field sanitation team member with the 267th Support Maintenance Company, watches a thermometer to make sure Salisbury steaks are cooked to the proper temperature during the Philip A. Connelly national cooking competition, Oct. 21, at Forward Operating Base Husker on the Mead Training Site. The field sanitation team helped ensure everything was kept, handled, prepared and cooked properly.

it would be like if they were cooking at a deployed location.

It also gives the unit valuable field experience training, officials said.

Evaluators stressed that although the competition is only one day, training and preparations are extensive.

"The challenge of the competition is that it's not a one-day event," said Warren.

"Many people see it as a one day event, but when you peel back the

layers of the onion, you see that it's taken this team, or any team that competes at this level, months of preparations, training and work to get to this level they are at today."

Regardless of the outcome, the unit was pleased with the training, knowledge and experience they've gained from the competition.

"The goal... is realistic training," said Capt. Scott Henrickson, commander of the 267th SMC. "That's what you want. This is about as real as it gets."

Military policemen welcomed home from Afghanistan

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Hundreds of friends and families in Nebraska had much more than usual to be thankful for this Thanksgiving. Braving dipping temperatures and a chilly wind at the North Omaha Readiness Center Nov. 23, they turned out to welcome home approximately 140 Soldiers of the Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion following a nearly yearlong deployment to Afghanistan.

The Soldiers arrived in two waves. The first half flew into Omaha's Eppley Airfield on the first of two chartered jets around 7:15 p.m., with the second half arriving about two hours later. From Eppley, each wave boarded buses and headed to the readiness center receiving a hero's escort complete with a civilian law enforcement helicopter lighting the way.

There, waiting in the parking lot, family and friends of the Soldiers stayed as patient as they could until they had their loved one back in their arms. Emotions were understandably high.

"I've been feeling a lot of anxiety, nervousness, readiness to have him home," said Cora-Leigh Seaman, fiancée of Sgt. Cameron Araujo, as she fought back tears. "There are so many emotions that I can't even explain, but thankful would be the one – to have him home before Thanksgiving."

And Seaman's plan once her fiancé was home would make any Nebraskan happy.

"We're going to take him home and feed him whatever he wants and as much as he wants," she said. "Then we're heading to the Husker football game on Friday."

"My hands were sweating the whole time driving here," said Kelsey Harre, wife of Spc. Matthew Harre, as she waited with the couple's two sons, 2-year-old Brayden, and seven-month-old Chance. Kelsey said she wanted Harre to see the difference a year made in their children.

"I'm just excited for him to see the boys and how much they've changed," said Kelsey. "They've gotten bigger and (Brayden) is



Welcome Home Love: Sgt. Blake Sohl gets a long overdue hug from his wife, Sara, and their son Caden, 4, Nov. 23, at the North Omaha Readiness Center after returning from a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan with the 402nd Military Police Battalion.

talking a lot."

Others were happy to have the missing part of their family back.

"It just means a lot to just have the family together again...and become the family we were before she left," said Curtis Hillgren, husband of Sgt. Amanda Hillgren, as he waited with the couple's children and Amanda Hillgren's mother.

Finally the first buses rolled in to the delight of the assembled crowd. Following their long-overdue welcome home, the Soldiers struggled to put their emotions into words.

"Just so much anxiety and just happiness," said Sgt. Hillgren. "So glad to be back and

see the family."

"We've worked really hard to do what we've done and everyone supported us and pushed us through, so it's just an amazing feeling – it's hard to explain," she added.

"Overwhelmed," said Sgt. Blake Sohl, as he hugged his wife and son. "Just happy to be home...I'm at a loss for words right now."

Being away for a year had the Soldiers missing a lot of different things about home.

"Fresh air, green grass, family, friends – everything," said Hillgren.

"You can't pick one thing that you miss the most about missing home," said Sgt. Cameron Araujo. "It's the family, it's the friends, it's



Photo by David Nore

Waiting: Families and friends of Soldiers from the 402nd Military Police Battalion headquarters wait for their loved ones to arrive, Nov. 23, at the North Omaha Readiness Center. The Soldiers were returning from a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan.

the food, it's home, it's animals, it's the air, it's drinks, I mean it's everything. It's pretty much missing the American life."

While in Afghanistan, the members of the 402nd MP Bn. operated a theater internment facility. Due to their late arrival, no welcome-home ceremony was held. An official ceremony to welcome them home will be held at a later date, which allowed the Soldiers to depart immediately with their families to begin their Thanksgiving holiday.

And being home in time for Thanksgiving and other upcoming holidays was appreciated by the Soldiers and their families.

"I just want to hang out with my family and I look forward to tomorrow having Thanksgiving dinner with them and turkey and mashed potatoes and stuffing and the whole works," said Maj. Chris Running. "It's just great to be back. It's been a long journey."

"We didn't know when we'd be home for sure and to be home for Thanksgiving makes it that much better," said Araujo. "It's a holiday and we're not stuck anywhere and I get to be with family so it's a very big deal."

Special operations Soldiers complete successful mission to Afghanistan

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Bethany Weich missed a lot of things about her fiancé while he was gone on a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan. But she admits one of the biggest things might seem silly.

"Actually, it's kind of funny," said Weich. "I don't like taking out the trash, so actually him taking out the trash all the time was a huge one."

Thankfully for Weich, and hundreds of other families and friends, approximately 100 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) were welcomed home, Dec. 7, at the Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln following a nearly yearlong mission in Afghanistan.

Weich's fiancé, Spc. Brady Marksmeier, was among them. Of course taking out the trash wasn't the only thing Weich missed about Marksmeier, a mechanic with the 195th FSC.

"Just him being there," said Weich. "Coming home to an apartment by yourself is kind of lonely. You don't have someone to talk to, so that's one of the main things."

On the 70th anniversary of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, the members of the 195th returned to Nebraska via chartered airplane and reunited with their loved ones on a chilly snow and ice-covered tarmac. Cheers of joy and excitement turned into tears of happiness and warm embraces.

"I'm just overwhelmed to be home," said Sgt. Wesley Newton as he hugged his wife, Anne, while providing his son, Noah, a ride on his shoulders. "It's just great to see my family."

Anne echoed Newton's feelings and said how difficult it was to have a 4-year-old at home missing his father. "It's just great to have him home



Wait Is Finally Over: Spc. Jacob Kuehl, a medic with the 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations), gets a long-overdue hug from his fiancée, Meghan Duryea, Dec. 7, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

and good to be a family together once again," said Anne. "I missed having him here to help with Noah and play with Noah. It's hard listening to him miss his dad so much."

Others struggled to grasp the reality of the long-awaited homecoming.

"It's not real right now," said Spc. Michael Kuss. "It will sink in once I go home, but this is crazy. It's been a long year."

Kuss, a member of the electrical assessment team, said his wife was two-months pregnant when he left, eventually giving birth to the couple's daughter, Izabella.

His wife was also struggling with the fact that the year was over and her husband was home.

"I'm overwhelmed," said Jamie Kuss. "I'm excited. I just can't believe it. It seems unreal and I have no idea where the year's gone."

She added that, looking back, it seems like the year went fast for her, especially with the added stress of being pregnant while her husband was away.

Thankfully, Kuss was able to return home on leave to witness the birth of their daughter.

Following the long-overdue welcome home, the assembled crowd made their way inside the AASF No. 1 for a ceremony welcoming the Soldiers home and officially ending their deployment.

Officials started the ceremony by pausing for a moment of silence to remember Sgt. Robert Schlote. Schlote, a communications specialist with the 195th, died of an unexpected medical episode, May 14, in Omaha, Neb., while on leave to witness the birth of his first child.

Speakers then thanked the Soldiers for their service and their families for lending their Soldiers out for the yearlong deployment.

"To the Soldiers of the 195th, welcome home," said Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman. "Nebraska's proud of you, America's proud of you, and we're especially glad to have you back right before Christmas."

During their time in Afghanistan, the Soldiers had a very unique mission, providing logistics, transportation and direct support maintenance for Army Special Operations Forces. Guard officials put their unique mission into perspective.



Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Together Again: Sgt. Wesley Newton, a supply specialist with the 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations), kisses his wife, Anne, while providing a shoulder ride for son, Noah, Dec. 7

"Of the entire Army National Guard – over 350,000 Army National Guardsmen – there's a grand total of two of these types of units and the 195th is one of those two," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska's adjutant general. "That's how unique this unit is."

"We could not be more proud of what the 195th has accomplished in the last year," he added.

The unit's commander said friends and family should be proud of their Soldiers because the 195th's contributions were instrumental during a crucial time in the war in Afghanistan.

"I think that when we look back on this deployment you will find that your Soldiers were an integral part of maybe the most pivotal summer in the war in Afghanistan with unprec-

edented growth in the combined joint special operations task force Afghanistan," said Maj. Ted Hanger, unit commander. "We supported two infantry battalions that came in to support special operations forces for the first time in history and your Soldiers did just an outstanding job everywhere they went."

"As a matter of fact I think people got tired of sending emails to me saying how great these guys were," he added.

And now, with a successful deployment behind them, the Soldiers and their loved ones can concentrate on their next duty. "It's just time to be with family," said Marksmeier. "Catch up on all the things I've missed, celebrate Christmas and just reintegrate myself back home."



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Patriotic Hug: Spc. Barry Erb, 623rd Engineer Company, is welcomed home by his wife, Tami, Oct. 28, at the Wahoo High School Football Field. Erb and the 623rd had just returned from a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan.

Engineers welcomed back to Wahoo after Afghan deployment

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

More than 1,500 people, bundled up in hats, gloves, scarves and coats, filled the football field grandstands of Wahoo High School in Wahoo, Neb., on a chilly Oct. 28 night, for a welcome home ceremony for the Wahoo-based 623rd Engineer Company.

Family members, friends, fellow service members and distinguished guests officially welcomed the 623rd Eng. Co. home following a year-long deployment to Afghanistan.

Among the family and friends waiting for their Soldiers to arrive was Spc. Jeff Thoman's wife, son, parents and three young cousins who dressed in Army uniforms and held balloons to welcome Thoman home.

"I've missed him since I've seen him last," said Caleb Labig, cousin of Thoman. "Jeff got me and my cousins these uniforms last Christmas and we wear them every time he comes home. I'm ready to see him."

While Thoman was deployed, his wife, Dixie, gave birth to their son, Levi.

"Me and my wife have been able to see Levi more than (Jeff) has," said Scott Thoman, Thoman's father, who drove all the way from Oregon for the welcome-home ceremony. "So he has some catching up to do."

Another family ready for their Soldier to be home was that of Sgt. Ben Smith. Smith's wife, Megan, and their two daughters, 4 year-old Payton and 2-year-old Kennedy were ready to see him after counting down the yearlong deployment with M&M's and a calendar. Each girl would eat an M&M each day

tomark another day off the calendar until their dad was home.

"I'm going to be crying with a big smile when I see him," said Megan Smith. "We plan to get some family pictures together now that he is back."

After the Soldiers reunited with family and friends in the parking lot, they filled the stands for the welcome ceremony. Leaders thanked the Soldiers and expressed their gratitude for their service.

The 623rd's accomplishments during the deployment speak volumes about the unit's Soldiers, said the unit's commander.

According to Capt. Chris Pelchat, Soldiers completed more than 284 structures in a 300-day span. "That is completing a structure every two days," said Pelchat. "Not only in good weather. We actually shoveled snow to complete some of the structures."

Soldiers flew on 188 aircraft



Saluting the Crowd: Capt. Chris Pelchat, commander of the 623rd Engineer Company, salutes the Wahoo, Neb., crowd for the support they gave his unit during its yearlong deployment.



Signs of Pride: Members of the welcome crowd hold signs of support for the Soldiers of the 623rd Engineer Company which completed a deployment to Afghanistan, Oct. 28.

flights and 233 helicopter flights equaling 1,022 Soldier movements throughout Afghanistan. That averaged moving four Soldiers per day from one location to another.

The company was also accountable for \$25 million in equipment. Their maintenance section kept the unit's rolling stock operational at a rate of more than 95 percent during the deployment.

They also conducted command and control in two separate regional commands.

Thanks to their hard work and dedication, the 623rd was nominated for the best engineer company in the nation. But, according to Pelchat, that may not have been the most important accomplishment.

"Those are all tremendous accomplishments, but the most rewarding part of the deployment for me was being told by one of the battle space owners that one of (the structures we built) withstood a direct hit by a rocket," said Pelchat. "Inside that facility you could not tell it was hit. That's the type of quality that the 623rd was known for."

With their mission complete, Pelchat said he was proud of what the 623rd had accomplished over the last year and in the five years since the 623rd was established.

"I am proud of all the Soldiers and the jobs that they have done," said Pelchat. "I am honored to be a part of the 623rd and the history they have made."



Dressed for the Occasion: Brooke Steiner decorated her sweatshirt with the largest yellow ribbon she could find during the welcome home ceremony for members of the 623rd Engineer Company, who returned to Wahoo, Oct. 28, after a yearlong deployment.

"The last day we were in Sharanana, Afghanistan, we were going through the transfer of authority ceremony and our brigade commander walked up to the incoming company commander and he told him this: 'I would hate to be in your shoes, the 623rd is a tough act to follow.'"

"I don't think he was completely right," Pelchat added. "The 623rd is an impossible act to follow."

IRAQ continued from page 1.

tain a close alliance with Iraq, the president said, and the withdrawal means the relationship between the countries will be just like that between the United States with any other country. Obama said it will be "an equal partnership based on mutual interests and mutual respect."

"This will be a strong and enduring partnership, with our diplomats and civilian advisers in the lead; will help Iraqis strengthen institutions that are just, representative and accountable; will build new ties of trade and of commerce, culture and education, that unleash the potential of the Iraqi people; will partner with an Iraq that contributes to regional security and peace, just as we insist that other nations respect Iraq's sovereignty," Obama said.

The United States will offer to help Iraq train and equip its forces, just as the United States offers assistance to countries around the world.

"There will be some difficult days ahead for Iraq, and the United States will continue to have an interest in an Iraq that is stable, secure and self-reliant," the president said. "Just as Iraqis

have persevered through war, I'm confident that they can build a future worthy of their history as the cradle of civilization."

The end of war in Iraq reflects a larger transition in world affairs, Obama said.

"The tide of war is receding," he said. "The drawdown in Iraq allowed us to refocus our fight against al-Qaida and achieve major victories against its leadership, including Osama bin Laden."

The United States is also reducing the number of troops deployed to Afghanistan. He noted that when he took office in January 2009, more than 180,000 U.S. service members were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

"By the end of this year, that number will be cut in half," the president said. "And make no mistake, it will continue to go down."

According to Lyons, despite the reduction of troops, the years of war in both Iraq and Afghanistan have forever changed the National Guard — especially the way the organization is trained and equipped.

"Pre-9/11 you have a National Guard that's fully prepared to respond, but their equipping levels

and resource levels were certainly less robust," said Lyons. "While we were still engaged in our domestic mission — our homeland security, homeland defense missions responding to the needs of our citizens here in Nebraska — really the National Guard was viewed and operated as a strategic reserve in a Cold War kind of mission set."

"9/11 occurred and that changed everything for the Guard," added Lyons. "It really transitioned us into an operational reserve — an operational force. So what we saw was an increased reliance and demand for the reserve component and specifically the Army and Air National Guard."

According to Obama, although the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is dwindling, the impacts the service members have made leave us in a good position.

The president said the United States is moving forward from a position of strength. The war in Iraq will end in December. The number of Americans in Afghanistan will continue to go down. As these actions continue, there will be fewer deployments and more time for training, Obama said.

It will also leave the Nebraska National Guard more ready than ever to respond to emergencies within the state, said Lyons.

"Every time we would deploy a unit...those units come home, they bring with them that experience," said Lyons.

"Those skill sets, those leadership traits that have been forged in arduous environments in Iraq and Afghanistan, we bring those back here so that when instances occur, such as the flooding this last summer, you can see it on the ground...noncommissioned officers and enlisted Soldiers bringing that combat theater-related experience and applying that maturity and judgment and skill set and leadership into supporting our citizens here at home," Lyons added.

In laying out his exit strategy, the president said the debt owed to those who've sacrificed on behalf of the U.S. can't be forgotten.

The nation still has the responsibility and duty to provide America's newest veterans and their families "the care, the benefits and the opportunities that they have earned," the president said. "This includes enlisting our veterans in the great-

est challenge that we now face as a nation — creating opportunity and jobs in this country," he added. "After a decade of war, the nation that we need to build and the nation that we will build is our own, an America that sees its economic strength restored, just as we've restored our leadership around the globe."

And that leadership is easily found by looking at the members of the Nebraska National Guard, said Lyons.

"As we look forward here at whatever the nation's requirements will be, we've got such a seasoned force that we'll be able to respond," said Lyons. "I think that's really just a direct byproduct of what we've done since 9/11 and how the Guard has really transformed here in Nebraska."

"As they're called here to respond to a natural or a man-made disaster here in Nebraska they have a level of maturity and judgment that as we support our citizens it just enhances that effort," he added. "It continues to represent what's best about Nebraska."

(Editor's Note: Jim Garamone of American Forces Press Service contributed to this article)

Home for the Holidays

■ Despite bone-chilling weather, Nebraska's last Army National Guard unit to be stationed in Iraq receives warm welcome home in November

By Spc. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

It's never soon enough for a band to get back together and play again.

But for 5-year-old Justin, 8-year-old Joslyn and 10-year-old Edward McConnell, a yearlong deployment kept them separated from the lead performer in their own family band: their father Spc. Mitchell McConnell.

"I made him a song while he's been gone," said Joslyn as she stood with her brothers and grandmother, Golda, at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1, at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Nov. 9. "It's called 'O'daddy.'"

McConnell was waiting for her father and the rest of the Soldiers of Companies C, D and E, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, to arrive home after spending the last year using helicopters to reach and treat sick or hurt Soldiers in Iraq.

Joslyn said her lyrics go something like this: 'O'daddy, o'daddy. I love you very much. I can't wait till you come home. When you come home we will make a band. I can't wait till you come home.'

Justin said he was happy they were going to have the family band back together as he waited impatiently for his father.

The unit's homecoming also couldn't have been timed better. Not only would McConnell and his fellow Soldiers make it home in time for Thanksgiving, but the homecoming was also the 10th birthday of McConnell's son, Edward.

And despite the cold and windy weather on that November morning, families and friends of the Soldiers gathered outside on the tarmac all bundled-up in warm clothes to wait for their Soldiers to come off the plane.

Finally, the plane arrived to the delight of the assembled crowd. After the long-awaited reunions, hugs and tears, the Soldiers, their families and friends made their way inside for a homecoming ceremony where distinguished guests welcomed the Soldiers home and thanked them for all they did.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Worth the Wait: Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeff Caniglia receives a warm hug after arriving in Lincoln, Neb., after a nearly yearlong deployment to Iraq with Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.

emony where distinguished guests welcomed the Soldiers home and thanked them for all they did.

"Now I know your goal is timely and efficient and that is what you have done towards your duties over the last year," said Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy. "That tradition even continues today by getting here early, which does not happen very often when flying on a commercial aircraft."

"I just wanted to be here personally to let you know how proud I am of your services to our state, to our nation during your time in Iraq," said Sheehy.

The Nebraska National Guard's impact in the nearly nine-year war in Iraq was tremendous. Nebraska National Guard troops were on the ground when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, and through the ups and downs, they remained in Iraq until the end when the U.S. turned control of the bases back to the Iraqis.

"In northern Iraq some of your Soldiers were the last men out," said Capt. Daniel Smith, commander of Company C, 2-135th GSAB.

During their deployment the Soldiers were often broken into small groups where they worked throughout northern Iraq treating and transporting the sick and injured.

"Our Soldiers are like the guidon," said 1st Sgt. Tomas Ortiz, first sergeant of Company C, 2-135th GSAB. "As we stood in front of you a year ago, the guidon was brand new and full of color. As you can see now, the staff is remedial gray and the guidon has been switched up several times due to weathering from wind, sand and hot temperatures. Plus standing outside for a year."

"Singling up the Soldiers sitting next to me today, when we left we had brand new uniforms, fresh haircuts and new boots," added Ortiz.



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Cold Wait for a Warm Welcome: A crowd of flag-waving family members and friends wait for members of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion and other unit detachments to arrive in Lincoln, Neb., Nov. 9.

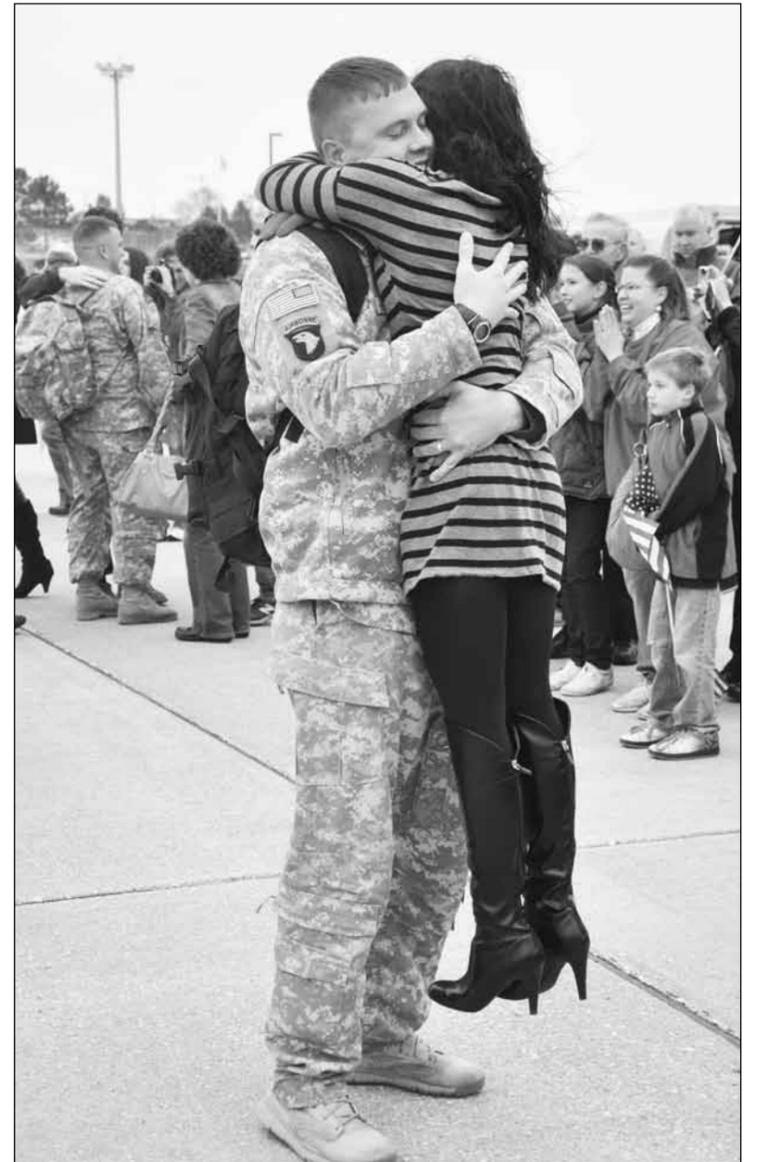


Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Need a Lift? Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ross Haselhorst gets a long overdue hug from his wife, Jenny, Nov. 9, at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. Haselhorst and the troops of Companies C, D and E, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, returned home from a yearlong deployment to Iraq.

"Like the guidon, they have endured hardships with wind, sand, hot temperatures and the hardest

part was leaving their loved ones. My job is done now and I have turned them back to you."

END OF AN ERA continued from page 1.

return. "I didn't realize that we were the last ones."

According to Nebraska Army National Guard mobilization officials, a total of 3,013 Nebraska Guard Soldiers have been mobilized and deployed to Iraq since early 2003 when then-President George W. Bush ordered the first mobilizations of Guard units across the United States prior to the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Nebraska Air Guard officials say that nearly 90 Nebraska Guard Airmen have also served in Iraq during the that same time, while hundreds of other Airmen have provided direct support to the war in Iraq from bases located within the Middle East and Central Asian region.

The arrival of Company C, 2-135th GSAB, and other supporting detachments on Nov. 19 meant that only one individual Nebraska Army Guard Soldier was still serving in Iraq. That Soldier returned to Nebraska in early December, effectively ending an era of Nebraska

Army National Guard history that virtually transformed every aspect of the organization in ways still being felt today.

According to Capt. Daniel Smith, commander of Co. C, 2-135th GSAB, the unit felt the impact of the drawdown long before President Barack Obama's October announcement that the United States would bring all American troops home by the end of the year.

Smith said his unit was responsible for providing aerial medical evacuation support for most of northern Iraq at four separate bases located north of Baghdad.

That meant that the unit was required to have 11 of its 12 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters ready to be flown within 15 minutes of an emergency call, 24-hours-a-day, rain or shine.

Unlike the unit's earlier deployment to Iraq in 2006-07, Smith said that the flying tempo was much slower. Still, the unit crews recorded 3,400 flight hours while transporting approximately 200 patients during 150 missions.

"It was slower than our last deployment, but for overall medevac, that's better because not a lot of guys are getting hurt," said Smith.

Ortiz, himself a veteran of the unit's recent deployments to Iraq

and Kosovo, said the differences between 2011 and 2006-07 was definitely noticeable.

"The first time we were there it was the heavy phase... the surge," he said. "This time the definite mission in Iraq was to shut it down. From the first moment we hit the ground, we had to start clearing all of the gear that had been left behind after nine years of war... and it was a mission."

"When we went over there, we knew that we were going to be the last medevac unit in northern Iraq. We took great pride in that," he said. "But you don't realize how much work goes into being the last medevac unit until you get on the ground and you have to start clearing up nine years of war."

Ortiz said the unit saw noticeable differences in Iraq.

"You could definitely see the difference from the first time we were there in 06-07 to now," said Ortiz. "There was a lot more electricity on when we were flying at night. The first time you hardly saw any lights out there... this time it was lit up everywhere."

"Agriculture-wise, you could see they were planting stuff and taking care of themselves," he added. "It was working. They were able to be self-sufficient. You could see the

changes from the first time until this time. It was a good feeling."

Along with providing medevac support, Smith said the Nebraskans were also responsible for turning in approximately \$2 million of equipment that would no longer be needed as American forces turned over final control of the bases to Iraqi troops.

"The whole mission was turning in equipment and downsizing," said Smith, adding that his crews were typically the last Americans to leave the bases before the Iraqi forces took over.

"As the deployment went on, (the bases) started shutting down and as they closed down, they of course wanted medevac support to the very end," said Smith, "which means we don't leave until you get a phone in the middle of the night saying you've got about an hour-and-a-half to get out of there."

Ortiz said that being essentially the last Americans on a base in Iraq was a surreal experience.

"It was really eerie when you were the last ones on an airfield, the last three aircraft and the Iraq army is moving in," said Ortiz. "You shut the lights off, you kill the power to the building, you walk out and get into an aircraft and you fly south."

That also meant that Smith and Ortiz had to be constantly aware of the different and changing situations that could have adversely affected the unit members and their ability to complete their mission in Iraq safely.

"You always have your normal concerns of safety and the welfare of the Soldiers, but we took that into our planning and we did the best that we could for risk mitigation," said Ortiz, adding that "Big Army" also kept safety and troop welfare at the top of its list of concerns during the drawdown of the bases.

According to Ortiz and Smith, the decision on who would be the last to leave the aircraft during the unit's homecoming in Nebraska was a subject of a little bit of debate during the organization out-processing at Fort Dix, N.J.

"We had talked about it," said Ortiz. "(Smith) wanted me to go first because he always likes to be the last, but I just felt that with customs and courtesies it was more important that I follow him. You go ahead and I will follow."

"That's how we decided who would be the last one off of the aircraft," Ortiz added.

And that's how Ortiz stepped his way into Nebraska Army National Guard history.



Ortiz

The End of the War in

March
2003

IRAQ

December
2011

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Operation New Dawn



Photo by Capt. Kevin Hynes

Feeling the Pain of an Early War Mobilization: Chief Warrant Officer 2 John Ayers, 105th Personnel Detachment, comforts his daughter Mollie shortly before his unit deployed in February 2003 for a mission that would eventually become part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Unlike recent mobilizations, Guardsmen in 2003 typically had only a few short days of notice before leaving on their deployments, adding additional stress on families and employers. Members of the 105th Personnel Detachment deployed to the Middle East in April 2003 and then spent their yearlong deployment in Jordan and Kuwait providing administrative support to American and Coalition forces deploying into Iraq.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Last To Serve In Iraq: Spc. Caleb Boender, a member of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, emerges from a chartered airplane with his company's guidon, Nov. 9. Members of the Lincoln-based helicopter medical evacuation unit, as well as detachments from Companies D and E, were the last Nebraska Army National Guard units to be stationed in Iraq. According to Boender, who was responsible for providing personnel support to the unit during the yearlong deployment, it was a "huge" honor to be asked to carry the unit's guidon back home to Nebraska after having served for much of the past year in northern Iraq as American military forces there drew down.

War in Iraq cast long shadow on Nebraska National Guard

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

After nearly nine years of constant mobilizations and deployments, countless acts of sacrifices, service and bravery, we now at long last have an end date to the war in Iraq.

When President Barack Obama announced on Oct. 21 that all American forces would be out of Iraq by the end of December, he effectively ended one of the longest wars in U.S. history.

He also brought to a conclusion a chapter of U.S. military history that historians and military specialists will undoubtedly study and debate for many years and decades to come. Simply put, the war that began on March 13, 2003, has changed and transformed the military and the country in ways that few could have foreseen.

The same could also be said of the transformation the Nebraska National Guard has undergone over that same time.

Looking back to the hectic and stressful days of February and March 2003, it's almost hard to

recognize the Nebraska National Guard of then and the Nebraska National Guard of today.

For example, in 2003 the Nebraska National Guard had slipped to probably the lowest membership in 50 years. Much of the equipment the state's Soldiers and Airmen were using were either antiquated or unproven, while many training methods and support mechanisms hadn't changed much in a generation.

More importantly, the percentage of combat veterans within the organization was extremely small, with few Guardsmen or families within the state ever having experienced a deployment lasting more than six months, if at all. Today, all that has changed.

The Nebraska National Guard of 2011 is the most highly trained, best equipped and fully tested organization since at least the years immediately following World War II.

Today, the majority of Nebraska National Guardsmen have experienced at least one if not multiple yearlong mobilizations. They've served in some of the most trying conditions this planet has to offer and they've proven their mettle

Special Report



Photo by Chief Master Sgt. Janice Beard

Ultimatum: Members of the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron listen from a deployed overseas location as President George W. Bush issues his March 17, 2003, ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and his two sons to leave Iraq.

during perhaps the most challenging era this country has faced in at least a generation.

Today, despite some predictions to the contrary, the Nebraska National Guard continues to experience exceptionally high recruiting and retention rates that have enabled this organization to be better prepared for the multiple federal and state missions its been called

upon to respond to.

Today, the Nebraska National Guard is much better equipped for a wide spectrum of state and federal missions as the nation has realized that threats to America won't come from just abroad, but also possible from within our borders as well.

Today, the Nebraska National Guard provides many more different support mechanisms for our families and our returning veterans, who have often sacrificed much while answering this nation's call.

Today, the majority of this organization's membership are combat-tested veterans who have performed absolute miracles overseas while tackling a wide array of difficult and often dangerous missions.

These Airmen and Soldiers have, and are, transforming the way we prepare for overseas and domestic missions and, as a result, have caused our capabilities to respond to unforeseen missions to grow by absolute leaps and bounds.

Today, this is a very different Nebraska National Guard than it was in March 2003.

But those changes didn't just happen. They are the result of thoughtful consideration, plan-

ning and initiative as well as hard-learned lessons. They are the result of community support that even today continues on. They are the result of commitment and resolution.

And they are the result of often painfully, heart-rending sacrifices on a scale too massive to really adequately describe.

In this issue of the *Prairie Soldier*, we look back at the past nine years through the use of photos, past issues of the *Prairie Soldier* and other sources to begin the task of putting this organization's collective experiences into perspective.

We've also asked a number of Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen who we've covered in the past or who played integral roles during the past years to give us their perspective as the war in Iraq draws to a close.

It is not meant to be the definitive history of the Nebraska Guard's role in Iraq, but rather a starting point from which to draw information and perspective of all that this organization has experienced and accomplished in an era that no one really foresaw nearly a decade to go.

Timeline of the Nebraska National Guard's role during the War in Iraq

Sources: Past *Prairie Soldier* newspapers, Nebraska Army and Air National Guard mobilization archives, and Department of Defense news services.

Bold items represent Nebraska National Guard specific events.

January 2003

21: Nearly 160 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 1057th Light/Medium Truck Company (Chadron, Scottsbluff, Gering) mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom.

28: President George W. Bush talks about disarming Iraq in his 2003 State of the Union Speech. "Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option."

February 2003

2: Forty-six Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 105th Personnel Detachment (Lincoln) mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom.

5: U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell address the UN Security Council and presents the United States' evidence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and links to terrorism. "I cannot tell you everything that we know. But what I can share with you, when combined with what all of us have learned over the years, is deeply troubling."

6: Four Nebraska Air National Guard supply specialists deploy to Souda Bay Naval Air Station, Crete, where they assist in supply operations. The Airmen will return to Lincoln, Neb., on June 18.

10: Approximately 120 Nebraska Soldiers assigned to the Guard's 1074th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (North Platte, Sidney, Ogallala, Broken Bow) mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom. Will remain at Fort McCoy, Wisc., supporting mobilization efforts until November 2003.

10: Forty-five Soldiers from Kearney's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 734th Transportation Battalion, mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom.

10: Twenty-seven members of the Nebraska Army Guard's 41st Rear Area Operations Center (Lincoln) mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom. Will become the first Nebraska Army National Guardsmen to step foot in Iraq as part of what would become known as Operation Iraqi Freedom.

11: Fifty-nine members of the Lincoln-based Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Medical Battalion, mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom.

15: Nearly 40 members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Civilian Engineering Squadron deploy overseas for Operation Enduring Freedom. About a dozen Air Guard Airmen from the 155th Security Forces Squadron also deploy.

March 2003

17: President Bush gives Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq. **(Members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Civilian Engineering Squadron watch the address from a deployed location.)**

19: "On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war," President Bush announces from the Oval Office at 10:15 p.m. Eastern time.

22: President Bush praises the efforts of U.S. and coalition service members in Iraq, but cautions that the campaign may take some time to conclude. "A campaign on harsh terrain in a vast country could be longer and more difficult than some have predicted."

April 2003

2: Nine members of Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion (Forward 2) (Lexington) mobilized to deploy with the Tennessee Army National Guard. The Soldiers – who would become known as the "Notorious Nine" – serve in Kuwait and Iraq until May 2004.

4: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 41st Rear Area Operations Center become the first Nebraska Guardsmen to step into Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi

Iconic early war photograph caused participants some angst

By Maj. Chris Ferdico

41st Rear Operations Center

It was 0-dark-30 and our Humvee was staged at Camp New York inside Kuwait. Our GAC (Ground Assault Convoy) looked more like a gypsy caravan as everything that couldn't be stuffed into the vehicles was stacked, strapped or otherwise tied to the outside.

Although we had a soft-sided Humvee (you go to war with what you've got) we were fully combat loaded. We each had at least 210 rounds of .556 and whatever else they would let us scrounge. We tried to get grenades, but the AHA (Ammunition Holding Area) was out—they were being too generous with those who got there before us. We did, however, manage to get two Javelin anti-tank missiles just in case.

We had enough water and food for at least a week.

Now it was just time to wait.

Our vehicle was the only one from the 41st Rear Area Operations Center. Sgt. Jason Sharp, Capt. Mark Marvin, Maj. Todd Stevens and I were the "lucky" four who were told to go forward, keep track of the chaos, and try to figure out what the mission would be once the rest of the unit caught up.

The Invasion of Iraq had begun and we were next. We were going to cross the Iraq Border with the support elements of the 101st Airborne Division as the invasion pushed north.

We were lined up and we just waited for the order to move.

We were to move north to Camp Virginia, link up with the rest of our convoy, and head towards the border crossing into Iraq.

As we waited in the relative cool of the desert night, I remember how quiet it was. I looked at awe towards the beautiful night sky—a view of the Heavens only desolation could provide. I remember the near paralyzing fear that festered because of the unknown that lay ahead.

I don't think that we were cognizant that we would soon be the first Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to enter Iraq during those early days of the invasion. Another two 41st RAOC vehicles would catch up to us at our first tactical pause near An Najaf, the division's first objective.

Soon after we would, in preparation for the entry into Baghdad, move forward to a town just outside the Karbala Gap—the division's jumping point into Baghdad—called Iskandariyah.

Iskandariyah would be our home for the next couple of weeks. Specifically, we lived on a recently liberated Iraqi Air Force base that was abandoned with such haste their battle plans were still laid out in the terrain models located inside their command

Freedom.

9: Iraqis, aided by U.S. Marines, topple a massive statue of Hussein in Baghdad's main square.

May 2003

1: Major combat operations in Iraq are over, and America and its allies have prevailed, President Bush announces from the flight deck of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier. "In this battle we have fought for the cause of liberty and for the peace of the world. Our nation and our coalition are proud of this accomplishment. Yet it is you, the members of the United States military, who achieved it. Your courage, your willingness to face danger for your country and for each other made this day possible."

13: Forty-five members of the Nebraska Army Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 734th Transportation Battalion, return to Kearney, Neb., after having spent their mobilization training at Fort Riley, Kan.

July 2003

13: The 25-member Iraqi Governing Council meets for the first time in Baghdad.

August 2003

21: Fifty-nine members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Medical Battalion, return to Lincoln after serving for 120 days in Kuwait and Iraq.



Iconic Image: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 41st Rear Area Operation Center pose for a photo in front of one of the thousands of portraits of Saddam Hussein that were on display throughout Iraq in March 2003. The Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were members of the first state Guard unit to be stationed in Iraq. Pictured are: (Back row from left) Sgt. 1st Class Allen Sedlak, Sgt. 1st Class Robert Sabatka Jr., Maj. Patrick Bauer, Maj. Todd Stevens, Staff Sgt. Jason Sharp. (Front row from left) Capt. Chris Ferdico, Master Sgt. Tom Rouselle and Capt. Stephen Martin. The photo was used frequently by national media outlets during the initial days following the invasion of Iraq.



Ferdico

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

building. Our focus was the Hateen Munitions Complex, the largest in Iraq.

What really caught our attention, however, was the mural of Saddam Hussein that was on the road outside the front gate.

As we squatted in our new home—a bombed out building that we gutted to make livable—we openly talked about that mural and how we would have to get a picture of us with the Husker flag in front of it. I was carrying the flag with the hope of these opportunities.

After the first week, we finally had an opportunity to get everyone together and we left the gate to pose for the picture.

Iraqi vehicles slowed to watch us. Some honked, we hoped in support. Cameras switched hands as everyone made sure they had the photo they wanted.

Within the next few days, I would e-mail that photograph to a very select group of friends and family. I was merely doing what each of us was probably thinking, but with very limited connectivity, I apparently ended up with the first opportunity. Unbeknownst to me, a friend forwarded the e-mail and the photograph to the *Lincoln Journal Star* newspaper and we were soon plastered on the front page. The picture went viral, as we would find it in papers and on internet blogs across the world. Husker Nation was alive and well.

The photograph, however, was not without its controversy. The photograph that was be-

ing celebrated caused significant angst among some members of the unit.

In those early days of the war the "rules" weren't yet written. Do we tell our families we are in Iraq – do we not tell our families? The truth is that everyone was handling it differently.

For me, it wasn't something I was thinking about. We were a part of history and I wanted those close to me to know. I was confident it wasn't an OPSEC (operational security) issue as the whole world knew American Forces were in Iraq — and the whole world was watching the Battle of Baghdad that was currently raging.

The enemy knew we had kicked them out of the air base we called home and Iraqis that drove by everyday knew we were there to stay.

My carefully worded e-mail merely said we were safe.

In those early days of the war, however, some took the approach that what others didn't know would keep them from worrying. I didn't take that approach, but I also didn't consider that some others might.

In hindsight, I probably should have – but I also think I would do it again. That photograph put the 41st RAOC on the map of history – documenting that yes, we were the Nebraska National Guard troops in Iraq. The good news is that soon such worries would be novel as units would soon be posting blogs and Facebook pages to keep family informed.

The bad news is that Nebraskan's would spend the next eight years in Iraq.

(Editor's Note: Maj. Chris Ferdico deployed to Iraq again in 2010 as a judge advocate general for the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade. The brigade returned back to Nebraska this past summer.)

principal at Norfolk Junior High School and a member of the 41st Rear Operation Center, works with local Iraqi kids at a northern Iraq elementary school.

November 2003

14: The *Prairie Soldier Newspaper* receives an email from Staff Sgt. Mark Lewien, 41st Rear Area Operation Center, detailing the work the unit is doing in Mosul, Iraq, including the remodeling of 40 schools and three medical clinics in the local area through the use of World Humanitarian Organization funds.

December 2003

7: Approximately 185 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to 267th Ordnance Company (Direct Support Maintenance) (Lincoln, Hastings and Gering) mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom. After training, the unit would deploy to Tikrit, Iraq, until February 2005.

14: 4th Infantry Division Soldiers capture Saddam Hussein in a raid near Tikrit, Iraq. The former Iraqi president is found at the bottom of an 8-foot-deep "spider hole."

25: Approximately 250 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers spend Christmas overseas, the most since World War II.

25: The senior U.S. civilian in Iraq, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, and Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both say continuing U.S. and Coalition casualties in Iraq, including recent Baghdad bombings of the Jordanian embassy and U.N. headquarters, point to terrorists' determination to create chaos and sabotage rebuilding efforts in Iraq.

September 2003

9: Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, adjutant general for Nebraska, announces that he has received information that Army National Guard units deployed into the Iraqi-Kuwaiti theater of operations will remain in those locations for one year from the date they arrived, essentially the beginning of the "One-Year Boots On Ground" policy.

22: The Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing reorganized into the new Air Force combat wing structure designed to make it easier for the unit to function in a deployed environment.

October 2003

20: The last of 120 yellow ribbons are placed outside the Nebraska National Guard armory in North Platte in honor of the 1074th Transportation Company.

27: Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hart, an assistant



Photo courtesy of the 267th Ordnance Company

Tough Mission in an Unforgiving Environment: A 267th Ordnance Company Soldier mans a .50 caliber machinegun from the back of a unit truck during a mission along a four-lane highway in northern Iraq outside of Tikrit.

Nebraska Guardsmen, families sacrificed much for mission in Iraq

By Retired Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Roger Lempke
Former Nebraska Adjutant General

Operation New Dawn succeeding Iraqi Freedom on Sept. 1 didn't faze me. But a newspaper story in November about American forces leaving Camp Speicher near Tikrit did.

Speicher is special. Not only is it named for Navy aviator Scott Speicher who was shot down during Gulf War I and never found, but Linda and Jeremy were stationed there with the 267th Ordnance Company.

Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess and Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fischer were killed on July 11, 2004, Nebraska's first National Guard casualties. The 267th built a sturdy, classy recreation center at Camp Speicher in their honor. Now it is in Iraqi hands. What will happen to it and the base is anybody's guess, but chances are no Nebraska National Guardsman will set eyes on it again.

My thoughts turn to other Nebraska heroes. Sgt. Jacob Schmucker was our last Guard member to die in Iraq on July 21, 2007. July was a tough month for Nebraska. Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson would be killed on July 14, 2005, just three days and a year after Linda and Jeremy. Sgt. Josh Ford would lose his life a year later on July 31. Two more Guard members would be killed in 2006—Staff Sgt. Jeff Hansen and Spc. Germaine Debro.

The "Surge" announced in January 2007 by President Bush would weigh heavily on the Nebraska Guard. Sgt. Randy Matheny would die in February, Spc. William Bailey III in May, and Jacob in July.

Families would also suffer. I recall telling families gathered at Penteman Armory that their loved ones, mostly in the 1-167th Cavalry, were being extended six months. The CAV had already undergone the longest period of training and deployment of any Nebraska unit (they would spend 22 months on active duty).

The war had not gone well in 2006. Rumsfeld was fired right after November elections gave Democrats control of the



Remembering the Fallen: Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke stands next to a photo display honoring the late Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess and Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fischer at a recreation that was built in their honor on Camp Speicher, Iraq.



Photos courtesy of retired Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Roger Lempke

Unit Memorial: Following the July 11, 2004, deaths of Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess and Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fischer, their unit mates in the Nebraska Army Guard's 267th Ordnance Company constructed a recreation center in their honor at Camp Speicher, Iraq.

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

House and Senate. Though the families that evening cried and protested, I sensed they understood something had to be done to regain momentum to end the war. By September it was clear the surge was working.

That night recalled a similar circumstance in September 2003 when DoD surprisingly extended all Army unit deployments to one year. The 110th Medical Battalion had just returned in August and everyone was hopeful all troops would be home during the fall. The adjutants general weren't "in the loop" back then, so I found out via the media like everyone else. It was time to visit the troops.

Just about any senior officer could visit Iraq except an adjutant general. It took a bit of yelling, but I was honored to be in the first group of AGs to visit Iraq in November 2003 (I was privileged to visit three more times).

Do I have opinions about the war—most certainly! Historians and pundits will spend many years evaluating what was, or was not, accomplished.

I pray every day for our nine brave Soldiers who were lost in Iraq and their families. I think of what might have been for each of them. And I think of how the Nebraska National Guard responded to the first extensive call up of the all volunteer force. Every single Guard member and unit answered the call with enthusiasm and purpose.

They were truly part of what many are beginning to call "The Second Greatest Generation."

January 2004

13: More than 130 Soldiers assigned to Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion, (Kearney, Lexington and McCook) mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Members of the unit would serve in Kuwait and Iraq until demobilizing in March 2005.

20: President Bush praises military for taking on the "hardest duty" during his State of the Union address. "I want you and your families to know America is proud of you. And my administration and this Congress will give you the resources you need to fight and win this war on terror."

March 2004

14: Members of the Army Guard's 105th Personnel Detachment return to Lincoln after nearly a year overseas in Jordan and Kuwait.

15: Members of the "Notorious Nine" receive information that their return to Nebraska may be delayed by nearly three months as part of an extension announced by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

20: Members of the 41st Rear Operations Center return to Nebraska to begin demobilization activities, part of an initiative designed by the Nebraska National Guard to return mobilized Soldiers back to their families sooner.

31: Four U.S. contractors ambushed and killed in Fallujah, Iraq. Their burned bodies are dragged through the city's streets and then hanged from a bridge over the Euphrates River. Five U.S. Soldiers also killed in Fallujah. Army Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy operations director for Combined Joint Task Force 7, promises an appropriate, if not immediate, military reaction.

April 2004

13: Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tells reporters that problems in Iraq can be solved, but they will take time. "We've been there just a year. We've got a country that lived for decades under the rule of a dictator that ruled by fear. The thought that you can turn things around in a year, or two years, is unreasonable. It's going to take a lot longer than that."

20: The first members of the 1057th Light/Medium Truck Company arrive back in Nebraska to begin demobilization activities. The final 20 members of the unit will return on April 27.

28: Defense Department announces the arrest of six Soldiers accused of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison.

28: Gov. Mike Johanns officially presents the Bronze Star to 10 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Rear Area Operations Center during a ceremony at the "Spirit of

1776" armory in Lincoln, Neb.

May 2004

21: Members of Lexington's "Notorious Nine" receive a massive welcome home after returning from a mission to Iraq that lasted nearly 400 days. While in Iraq, the Soldiers worked with members of a Tennessee Army National Guard transportation unit.

25: Members of the 1057th Light/Medium Truck Company treated to a welcome home parade in Chadron, Neb.

June 2004

15: Coalition officials say they expect more violence leading up to and after the June 30 handover of authority in Iraq.

July 2004

11: Sgt. 1st Class Linda Tarango-Griess, 33, and Sgt. Jeremy Fischer, 26, of the 267th Ordnance Company, become the first two Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to die in Iraq when the Humvee they are driving is hit by an improvised explosive device near Samarra, Iraq. Also injured in the attack is Spc. Michael Stineman. Tarrango-Griess and Fischer will both be posthumously promoted.

21: The late Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fischer is buried with full military honors in Ong, Neb.

The War in Iraq By the Numbers

Deployments

Nebraska Army National Guard: 3,013 Soldiers mobilized either individually, in small or groups or as members of the following units:

- ♦ 1057th Transportation Company;
- ♦ 105th Personnel Detachment;
- ♦ 1074th Transportation Company;
- ♦ 734th Transportation Battalion Headquarters;
- ♦ 41st Rear Area Operations Center;
- ♦ 110th Medical Battalion Headquarters;
- ♦ 267th Ordnance Company;
- ♦ Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion;
- ♦ 1075th Medium Truck Company;
- ♦ 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance);
- ♦ Detachment 2, Company F, 238th Aviation;
- ♦ Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry;
- ♦ 67th Area Support Group Headquarters;
- ♦ 189th Transportation Company;
- ♦ 1-167th Cavalry Squadron Headquarters;
- ♦ Troop B, 1-167th Cavalry;
- ♦ Troop C, 1-167th Cavalry;
- ♦ 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance);
- ♦ Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion;
- ♦ Detachment 1, Company D, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion;
- ♦ Detachment 1, Company E, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion;
- ♦ 734th Transportation Battalion Headquarters;
- ♦ 867th Quartermaster Battalion Headquarters;
- ♦ 1074th Light/Medium Truck Company;
- ♦ 755th Chemical Company;
- ♦ 600th Truck Company;
- ♦ 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion Headquarters;
- ♦ 1195th Transportation Company;
- ♦ 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance);
- ♦ 192nd Military Police Detachment (Law and Order);
- ♦ 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade Headquarters;
- ♦ 1167th Brigade Support Company;
- ♦ Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion;
- ♦ Detachment 1, Company D, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion;
- ♦ Detachment 1, Company E, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.

Nebraska Air National Guard: A total of 88 Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen served in Iraq, while hundreds of others provided direct and indirect support to the operations in Iraq from bases located within the Middle East, Europe and the Pacific region.

24: The late Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess is buried with full military honors in Sutton, Neb.

August 2004

9: More than 170 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1075th Medium Truck Company from York and Columbus, Neb., are mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

September 2004

30: Nebraska Army National Guard recruiting ends year positively as the organization grows to 3,402 members – two above its 2004 goal.

October 2004

5: Nearly 80 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Lincoln-based 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

28: The first of around 230 Nebraska Air National Guardsmen from the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing, deploy to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The Airmen will remain at the base until Dec. 4.

November 2004

5: Eleven Soldiers assigned to Detachment

TIMELINE continued on 10.



Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Stacy Michaelsen



Photo by Spc. Zachariah Schnare

Mean Streets of Baghdad: Staff Sgt. Stacy Michaelsen prepares to work on an improvised explosive device while members of the U.S. Army provide defensive cover for him during a February 2004 mission in Baghdad. Michaelsen, an explosive ordnance disposal technician with the Nebraska Air National Guard, spent 120 days serving in Baghdad during this particular rotation.

Away for the Holidays: 1st Sgt. Glen Muhr poses by the 1057th Light/Medium Truck Company's Christmas tree in December 2003. When the unit was mobilized in January 2003, few in the unit expected to still be serving in Iraq by the time Christmas rolled around.

Guard unit faced numerous challenges during early deployment

By Maj. Chris Weskamp

267th Ordnance Company

In November 2003 as company commander for the 267th Ordnance (Direct Support Maintenance) Company, I was on a trip to Washington, D.C., escorted by my spouse Lori, 1st Sgt. Marty Baker and his spouse Sue to receive an award for strength maintenance. Within minutes of landing at Reagan International Airport I received several phone messages instructing me to call the adjutant general.

That is where reality set in that our unit was headed to war.

The 267th Ord. Co. is and always has been a unit filled with a tradition of excellence. Soldiers within the unit typically have been a part of the unit for years and are experts in their field.

This tradition of excellence continued throughout our deployment. We mobilized on Dec. 7, 2003, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We were moving into the Iraqi Theater as part of the second rotation of troops during the buildup phase. Our primary mission was to provide direct support maintenance and supply support to the 835th Corps Support Battalion and backup support to 1st Infantry Division, "Big Red One."

In February 2004 we arrived in Kuwait and had approximately 10 days to prepare for our onward movement into Iraq. During this early stage of the war we didn't have all heavy armored vehicles that we are accustomed to seeing today. We scrounged any additional barrier material that would help protect us during our two-day road march to Forward Operating Base Speicher.

Regardless of job description or military occupational specialty, all Soldiers were doing their best to harden their vehicles by hanging additional body armor on doors of Humvees or welding additional steel around the outside of their vehicle as a shield.

Luckily we made this long road trip with 65 vehicles and only had one traffic accident



Photo courtesy of Maj. Chris Weskamp

Two-Time Iraq Veteran: Maj. Chris Weskamp smiles for a photograph during a helicopter flight during his second deployment to Iraq in 2010-11. Weskamp, who commanded the 1167th Brigade Support Company during its recent deployment, also commanded the 267th Ordnance Company during its 2003-04 deployment to Iraq.

in downtown Baghdad.

During 2004 the 267th Ord. Co. provided maintenance support to the 1st Infantry Div. in Tikrit and Baghdad as well as the 25th Infantry Div. in Kirkuk.

The maintenance and supply workload was extremely heavy. The units we provided direct support to were conducting daily convoys to locations throughout Iraq. Those convoys were under attack on a daily basis and repairing battle-damaged equipment was hard to keep up with. As the Army procured new armor systems to better protect our Soldiers; it was part of our mission to install this armor.

We took on this additional challenge and our Soldiers installed thousands of armor kits, bullet-proof windshields and new air conditioning systems.

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

The unit was also tasked to provide area vehicle recovery. Our recovery teams were dispatched on a daily basis if not more than once per day. These guys and gals spent a lot of time on the road and recovered a tremendous amount of damaged equipment off the main supply routes throughout our area of responsibility.

On a somber note, we lost two Soldiers and one wounded to an improvised explosive device on July 11, 2004, during a routine logistics run between Logistical Support

Activity Anaconda and FOB Speicher. We lost Master Sgt. Linda A. Tarango-Griess and Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Fischer; they will live forever in our hearts.

In March of 2008 I assumed command of the 1167th Brigade Support Company, a multifunctional logistics unit organized to provide logistical support to the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and its subordinate units. Two years later, June 2010, I was leading a second organization off to war.

We arrived in Iraq as Operation Iraqi Freedom was shifting into Operation New Dawn. This shift in operations drastically reduced the operational tempo of U.S. Army Soldiers conducting missions off U.S. bases, better known as "outside the wire missions."

Again, I found myself commanding exceptional "Nebraska Logisticians" and having to scatter them across the battlefield in order to accomplish our mission.

Our brigade consisted of two military intelligence battalions and their teams were located at 46 locations throughout Iraq. We were able to strategically locate our logistical support forces from four major hubs within Iraq and from there provided on-site support as required.

Because of the reduced operational tempo of our supported units our Soldiers went out of their way in true fashion to provide assistance to whoever needed help. In many cases our Soldiers were repairing U.S. Navy trucks, U.S. Army boats, and U.S. Air Force forklifts.

Unlike my first combat command, there were many extracurricular activities sponsored through the United Service Organization (USO) or Army Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR). Soldiers participated in 5-kilometer runs, gym activities, attended concerts, movies and in some cases went to the swimming pool.

I am extremely honored to have been afforded the opportunity to lead two fine organizations and am confident we contributed significantly to the greater good of the country of Iraq.

TIMELINE continued from page 9.

2: Company F, 238th Aviation Regiment, from Lincoln, Neb., mobilize for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

8: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld tells reporters that Iraqi elections, scheduled for January, are key to stability in the country.

8: Around 15,000 American troops launch Operation Al Fajr, the Iraqi word for dawn, to secure the city of Fallujah. On Nov. 15 U.S. Marine officials announce that Fallujah has been secured.

December 2004

4: Members of the 267th Ordnance Company's family support group march during the Star City Parade in Lincoln, Neb., while wearing the uniform of their deployed family member and carrying an American flag.

25: Members of the Nebraska National Guard spend Christmas overseas while deployed to a combat zone.

28: Medics assigned to the Nebraska Army National Guard's 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) working at Forward Operating Base Warhorse called upon to help treat 16 patients wounded in an attack on Iraqi Soldiers. The medics had only been at FOB Warhorse for five days.

January 2005

16: Sixty-two members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry, (Hastings, Grand Island) mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom. They are the first Nebraska Army National Guard combat troops to be mobilized for a combat mis-

sion since World War II. The Soldiers will be stationed in Ramadi as part of the 2/28th Brigade Combat Team of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard.

18: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 267th Ordnance Company survive a close scare when their convoy is targeted by an improvised explosive device while departing Iraq.

24: The Defense Department's senior medical advisor says service members returning from combat zones should suffer no stigma for seeking help for emotional problems.

29: Spc. Kelsey Lamb survives an improvised explosive device explosion targeting her truck during a convoy mission. Lamb's convoy would be attacked again the next day by small arms fire while passing near Samarra, Iraq.

30: Iraq holds its first competitive elections in 50 years. Despite widespread threats of violence, turnout is high, however many Sunnis remain at home.

February 2005

15: Members of the 267th Ordnance Company welcomed back to Nebraska during a ceremony in Lincoln.

28: Coalition forces from the Polish-controlled Multinational Division Central South respond to a suicide bombing in Hilla, Iraq. A coalition spokesman in Baghdad reports that MND CS troops responded with a quick reaction force and medical assistance after the blast, which civilian press reports say killed at least 125 people south of Baghdad.

March 2005

17: The global war on terror has created a new paradigm for the nation's National Guard and Army Reserve warriors, according to Defense Department's senior reserve official. No longer a strategic reserve, today's Guard and Reserve are "true operational forces" that are making a critical difference in Iraq and other places around the world, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs Thomas Hall said.

20: Four members of the Columbus and York, Neb., -based 1075th Medium Truck Company wounded during an ambush on their convoy near Salmon Pak, Iraq. The Soldiers successfully help fend off an overwhelming force of insurgents during the gun battle, earning four Nebraska Soldiers the Bronze Star with "Valor" device, including Spc. Jennifer Beck, the first female Soldier to earn the award in the history of the Nebraska National Guard.

26: Members of the Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion, welcomed home to Kearney, Neb., after a yearlong deployment to Kuwait and Iraq.

31: A convoy of 1075th Medium Truck Company vehicles and Soldiers cross over the Tigris River in Iraq, one of the more than 400 combat convoy missions the unit would complete during its tour of duty in Iraq.

April 2005

1: Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tells a gathering of 45 state adjutants general that the Total Force is working, especially "overseas where the rubber meets the road."

4: President Bush awards the first Medal of Honor of Operation Iraqi Freedom to the family of the late Sgt. 1st Class Paul Smith, who died saving the lives of at least 100 Soldiers who were badly outnumbered by enemy forces during a battle near Baghdad's International Airport.

5: Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness David S.C. Chu tells a Senate Armed Services subcommittee that the Army will "aggressively attack" potential recruiting shortfalls after the Army falls short of its recruiting goal for March by 2,100. He predicts that the Guard and Reserves will also have recruiting problems.

May 2005

2: Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, U.S. Army chief of staff, approves the creation of the combat action badge as a way to recognize those Soldiers who personally engage or are engaged by the enemy.

10: Troops fighting in Iraq's northwestern Anbar province are facing a sizable and skilled insurgency, with some members seen fighting in military uniforms and protective vests, the Joint Staff's director of operations tells Pentagon reporters. Marine Lt. Gen. James T. Conway said the effort, dubbed Operation Matador, is focused on eliminating insurgents and foreign fighters occupying the region, a known smuggling route and sanctuary for foreign fighters. The area also is used as a staging area where foreign fighters receive weapons and equipment for their attacks in the more populated key cities of Baghdad, Ramadi, Fallujah and Mosul.

18: Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke addresses fel-

Harsh Climate: A Soldier from Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion, struggles to walk across a Kuwait compound during a dust storm that reduced visibility to zero in May 2004.



Photo courtesy of Company B, 735th Main Support Battalion



Photo from a video provided by 1st Lt. Charles Gilkey

Heroic Efforts: Spc. Jennifer Beck, a member of the 1075th Medium Truck Company, shouts instructions to Sgt. Terrence Ricketts, March 20, 2005, when a Nebraska Army National Guard truck convoy was caught in a massive ambush near Salmon Pak, Iraq. Beck would become the first female Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier to earn the Bronze Star with "Valor" device for her efforts that day.

Perspective on war changed on one single tragic day

By Sgt. Jeffrey Alexander

313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance)

I was in the same boat as my peers; I graduated high school, three short years ago. I was now 21 and anxious about a future that presented many unknowns.

The reasons behind the apprehension would be where I differed from my classmates. They were all about to graduate from college and embark into the world of job hunting, striving to set themselves apart from coworkers, and paying off their college loans. I was departing on an adventure of countless hours on the road, dodging bullets and bombs, and saving lives to include my own.

I was going to war!

I spent the majority of my time in Iraq on the road in the vast open deserts of the Al Anbar Province of Iraq. Stationed in Al Asad (about an hour west of Fallujah), we provided medical support to convoys bringing fuel into Iraq from the Jordanian border. Our mission, when it went without any hiccups, was a nine-hour trip each way.

I did make the trip in nine hours and 40 minutes once. I also made the same trip in 28 hours. It was a mission that would take a toll on the morale of the members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance).

I remember the summer months of 2005 to be very hot in the Al Anbar province and I'm not talking about the temperature, although I did see it spike 130 degrees Fahrenheit. The enemy activity was so bad that you were almost guaranteed to get attacked with small arms fire, an IED, or roadside bomb, or at least spot one before it detonated on 90 percent of your missions.

For me, personally, it was a little over the halfway point when it started to drag on my morale. There was nothing we could do to avoid the enemy. Driving through the darkness of night would still not deter their efforts.

What we needed, with only a few short months to go, was something to motivate us. We would get it in the form of Staff Sgt. Tricia Jameson.

I remember being in a slightly above normal agitated mood one morning knowing that my turn in the rotation to head out west by the border for two weeks was drawing near. The station out west, Camp Korean Village, was a two-week rotation in which the convoy would hand off the fuel trucks to us and we drove them the rest of the way to the border

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

and then return to Camp Korean village.

I was not excited to spend two weeks of boredom in an isolated location. I stumbled up to the hospital for formation to see a staff sergeant I hadn't seen before, Staff Sergeant Jameson.

I didn't think too much about it as we had visitors frequent our platoon area. However, when they introduced her as an add-on member to our unit, I knew she wasn't just another visitor.

We all talked after formation and she had a spark that we had all lost months ago. She was excited to be here, thrilled about the opportunity to hit the road and finally practice for real what she had been training for all of her military career. It was like a halftime pep talk from my high school football coach. She motivated all of us again.

We realized our purpose and our importance as combat medics all over again. In fact, she was so ecstatic to be there she was volunteering herself for the mission that I had been dreading: Camp Korean Village.

Days later I would walk into the hospital for duty and things were very quiet. Quiet was not the normal day-to-day routine.

Having survived eight months of combat, you notice real fast when things are out of the ordinary. It could mean the difference between life and death.

Here in the hospital the stakes weren't quite that high, but something was definitely going on. Within hours our commander and first sergeant would be flown to our location in Al Asad and a platoon formation was held. The next words that would come from our commander, Capt. Craig Strong, would be a punch in the stomach that took the air away from all of us.

Solemnly he told us, "Staff Sergeant Jameson has been killed in action by a secondary IED attack on her convoy."

What seemed like days had passed before many had questions. I'd be lying if I said it was the first time any of us had seen the most hideous side of war. We were, after all, medics.

This was different, though.

She was one of ours. If only ours for a short time, she was ours!



Photo courtesy of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance)

Convoy Duty: Spc. Jeffrey Alexander, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), takes a break in the desert while on convoy duty in northern Iraq in May 2005.

Things happened very quickly from that point.

Again, within hours I was packed up and on a convoy out to cover down for Staff Sergeant Jameson and her ambulance partner, Spc. Rachelle Spors, who was evacuated to Germany for injuries sustained in the blast.

Thoughts were racing through my head. At the forefront was how I could be so selfish to be dreading this mission because I didn't want to be away from the confines of my room and my peers.

During the two weeks I spent out there covering down for Staff Sergeant Jameson, my vehicle would be hit by a vehicle-borne IED in a detonation that the Explosive Ordnance Detachment team would later say should have taken all of us in our vehicle. It would also be determined by grid coordinates to have happened within a mile of the attack on Staff Sergeant Jameson.

I still think about it to this day. There are too many "what ifs" to put in this one article. Would it have been my turn in the rotation

had Staff Sergeant Jameson not come when she did? I had, after all, been the one that replaced them.

How did we escape a blast that should have taken our lives with no more than minor injuries?

Maybe I read into the story more than most because I was involved, but in my opinion she was sent to save me. I can only imagine, being a religious man, that she was looking out for me the day I was attacked.

There isn't an easy answer for it and I'm sure I will think about it for the rest of my life and for this reason I owe everything to a true hero in Staff Sergeant Jameson.

I can only hope to one day be able to say thank you.

With the drawdown in Iraq nearing and a time to reflect upon the question of how I feel about my experiences were in Iraq, I can only be sure of one thing: I would not have changed it for anything. I realized a lot about life and did more maturing in one year than the previous 20 of my life.

low adjutants general during a conference in Omaha about the challenges facing the National Guard. "Today the National Guard faces a strange paradox. At a time when the nation needs us more than ever to defeat terrorism here and away, we are also facing some of the greatest challenges ever."

18: Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum addresses the same conference, telling the adjutants general the Guard has proven much since 9/11. "There's nobody who even thinks about using the word 'relevant' anymore when they talk about the Guard. We are now the essential force. When the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff tells Secretary (Donald) Rumsfeld that you could not fight the war on terrorism without the National Guard... we have arrived."

June 2005

6: Sgt. Heath Blackwell, Spc. Jennifer Telecky and Pfc. Dustin Hansen help distribute soccer balls during a mission to help bring supplies to two villages near Forward Operations Base Speicher.

11-12: The Nebraska National Guard hosts its first Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program seminar in Lincoln, Neb., helping couples separated by military deployments readjust to married life. 25 Army and Air National Guard couples attend.

16: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asks for patience as America helps establish democracy in Iraq. "It is work that requires that we as Americans reach down in ourselves and look for the kind of patience and generosity that we have exhibited in the past in understanding that

democracy takes time."

July 2005

13: Sgt. Jessica Hoelting Reed, a communications specialist with the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), honored in Washington, D.C., as the *Army Times* Service Member of the Year.

14: Staff Sgt. Tricia Jameson, 34, a member of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) is killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq while attempting to treat wounded Marines near Trebil, Iraq. Jameson would be promoted to the posthumous rank of sergeant first class. A second Nebraska Soldier, Spc. Rachelle Spors, is also injured in the blast.

17: More than 130 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Lincoln-based Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th Area Support Group, mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

17-18: Members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) hold memorial services in Iraq for the late Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson.

20: More than 1,000 family and well-wishers fill the Nebraska State Fair Park's open air auditorium to wish farewell to members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Area Support Group before the start of their Operation Iraqi Freedom mission.

23: The late Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson is buried in Omaha, Neb., with full military honors.

24: Spc. Jeffrey Alexander, a member of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), survives an improvised explosive device explosion while supporting a convoy near Trebil, Iraq. He would write about the experience for the October 2005 *Prairie Soldier*.

August 2005

22: Thousands fill the football stadium at Wayne State College as families and friends wish 171 members of the Norfolk and Wayne, Neb., -based 189th farewell before the unit deploys for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

28: A draft constitution is presented to the Iraqi Parliament. It lays a foundation for a democratic system in which all citizens' voices may be heard, human rights are protected, rule of law is respected and women are full political partners, says U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

September 2005

2: The first of approximately 300 Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen begin to deploy to New Orleans and other locations along the Gulf Coast as Hurricane Katrina leaves a large swath of destruction.

9: Pfc. Mujahid Kuwa, a native of Sudan, becomes a U.S. citizen during a ceremony at the federal courthouse in Kansas City shortly before deploying overseas to Iraq as a member of the 67th Area Support Group.

14: Logistical Support Area Anaconda re-names its Combat Medical Training Center in honor of the late Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 313th Medical Company (Ground

Ambulance).

30: Members of the 1075th Transportation Company welcomed back to Nebraska during a ceremony at the Central Community College in Columbus.

October 2005

1: President Bush outlines the strategy for Coalition victory in Iraq during his weekly radio address, adding that the increased numbers of trained, equipped and capable Iraqi troops have enabled U.S. and Coalition troops to hand over territory rescued from terrorists to Iraqi troops.

12: More than 1,000 friends and family members fill the Lancaster Event Center to say farewell to approximately 300 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry and 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance) who are deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Soldiers are from units in Lincoln, Grand Island, Hastings, Fairbury, Fremont, Beatrice and Wahoo.

15: Iraqi voters approve a new constitution.

19: Trial begins for Saddam Hussein and seven co-conspirators for crimes against humanity. Hussein and the others are charged with the torture and murders of more than 140 men from of DuJail, following an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hussein.

November 2005

1: Members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) welcomed home from Iraq during a ceremony at Lincoln's Seacrest

TIMELINE continued on 12.

TIMELINE

continued from page 11.

Field. The unit observes a moment of silence for the late Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson.

12: A sellout University of Nebraska Memorial Stadium crowd gives a standing ovation to more than 180 Nebraska National Guardsmen before the start of the annual Veterans Day Game between the Nebraska Cornhuskers and the Kansas State Wildcats.

December 2005

1: Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, Nebraska adjutant general, announces that recruiting and retention will be the Nebraska National Guard's top priorities in 2006.

January 2006

20: Maj. Gen. Thomas R. Turner II, U.S. officer in charge of operations in northern Iraq, predicts fewer Sunni ties to terrorists in Iraq while speaking to Pentagon reporters via satellite. "The Iraqi people fully realize that the goals of al Qaeda are not compatible with the Iraq of the future that they envision."

February 2006

22: The al-Askari "Golden Mosque" is bombed in Samarra, Iraq. The mosque is one of the holiest Shiite mosques.

22: Seventeen Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers honored during a medal presentation at the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln. Among the Soldiers honored are Spc. Jennifer Beck, Spc. Joshua Birkel, Spc. Richard Delancey and Spc. Michael Sharples who each receive the Bronze Star with "Valor" device for the heroism they displayed during a March 20, 2005, ambush of a 1075th Medium Truck Company convoy near Salmon Pak, Iraq. Other Soldiers are presented with Purple Hearts or the Army Commendation Medal with "Valor" device.

March 2006

13: During a speech at Washington University, President Bush says after defeats in Fallujah and Tal Afar, Iraq, insurgents realized they couldn't face American and Coalition forces in open combat, so they turned to improvised explosive devices, "a weapon that allows them to attack from a safe distance without having to face our forces in battle."

16: After months of training at Camp Shelby, Miss., and Fort Polk, La., members of the 1-167th Cavalry (Reconnaissance, Surveillance, Target Acquisition) are wished farewell during a rainy ceremony in Mississippi. The Nebraska Soldiers deploy with 3,900 Soldiers assigned to the 1/34th Brigade Combat Team of the Minnesota Army National Guard.

24: Approximately 90 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to Company C and other units of the 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion wished farewell before the start of Iraq deployment.

May 2006

20: The new Iraqi national unity government is approved and begins its functions.

22: 1st Lt. Nicole McCoy, a member of the Nebraska Air National Guard who is serving as the chief of protocol for the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing, has an opportunity to spend time with her father, Master Sgt. Donald Nuss, at Ali Al Salem, Kuwait. Nuss, a member of the 67th Area Support Group, who was traveling through Kuwait on his way back to Nebraska for his two-week leave.

26: Around 50 Soldiers assigned to the Kearney-based 734th Transportation Battalion Headquarters mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

30: Lt. Col Douglas Ladd, deputy commander of the 67th Area Support Group and a Vietnam veteran, serves as the keynote speaker during a Memorial Day ceremony at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq.

(Late May) The first of approximately 200 Nebraska Air National Guardsmen deploy to Incirlik, Turkey, in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. While in Turkey, the Air Guardsmen help provide aerial refueling support for aircraft moving supplies and personnel into Iraq. They joined 50 other members of the unit who were deployed around the world in support of multiple operations.

June 2006

7: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the al-Qaeda mastermind behind some of the bloodiest attacks against American, Coalition and Iraqis in Iraq, is killed during an airstrike north of Baghdad.

21: Around 65 Soldiers assigned to Omaha's 867th Quartermaster Supply Battalion



Remembering the Nebraska Nation



Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess
July 11, 2004



Staff Sgt. Jeremy Fischer
July 11, 2004



Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson
July 14, 2005



Sgt. Joshua Ford
July 31, 2006



Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Hansen
Aug. 27, 2006



Photo by Capt. Kevin Hynes

Shoulder To Shoulder: Hundreds of Nebraskans from throughout northeastern Nebraska line the edge of road leading to Rosehill Cemetery on the outskirts of Pender, Neb., in honor of the late Sgt. Josh Ford, a member of the 189th Transportation Company, who was killed July 31, 2006, by an improvised explosive device during a convoy mission to Tallil Air Base, Iraq.

wished farewell during a ceremony.

22: Members of Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry, welcomed home from Iraq during a ceremony in Lincoln, Neb.

July 2006

17: Around 160 Soldiers assigned to the 1074th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) (North Platte, Broken Bow, Sidney, Ogallala) wished farewell during a ceremony in North Platte, Neb.

31: Spc. Joshua Ford, 20, dies when the truck he is driving is struck by an improvised explosive device during a convoy mission to Tallil Air Base, Iraq. A member of the 189th Transportation Company, Ford is posthumously promoted. A second 189th Trans. Co. Soldier, Spc. Benjamin Marksmeier, is severely wounded in the blast.

31: Around 185 Soldiers assigned to the 755th Chemical Company (O'Neill) mobilize.

August 2006

4: Members of the 189th Transportation Company hold a memorial service for the late Sgt. Joshua Ford at Tallil Air Base, Iraq.

10: The late Sgt. Joshua Ford is buried with full military honors in Pender, Neb. Hundreds come out to form a continuous line along the road to the cemetery.

27: Staff Sgt. Jeffrey J. Hansen, 31, dies at

Landstuhl Medical Center, Germany, after being injured in an Aug. 21 Humvee accident near Camp Anaconda, Iraq. He was a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-167th Cavalry.

September 2006

4: Spc. Germain L. Debro, 33, is killed when an improvised explosive device detonates near his Humvee during a mission at Balad, Iraq. He was a member of Troop B, 1-167th Cavalry.

5: The late Staff Sgt. Jeffrey J. Hansen is buried with full military honors in Minden, Neb.

18: The late Spc. Germaine L. Debro is buried with full military honors in Omaha, Neb.

October 2006

28: Members of the 189th Transportation Company welcomed home from a deployment to Iraq during a ceremony in Norfolk, Neb.

December 2006

6: The Iraq Study Group releases their final report, outlining 79 recommendations covering military, political and diplomatic issues designed to stabilize Iraq.

25: Nebraska National Guardsmen spend another Christmas deployed overseas in a combat zone.

29: Saddam Hussein is executed by hanging



Photo courtesy of 1st Lt. Jacques Smith

Iraqi Cache: (From left) Sgt. Dan Walford, Sgt. Randall Barnason, Sgt. Tom Scanlon and Staff Sgt. Tyler Powell, members of Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry, pose with a pile of weapons found on March 30, 2006, when they discovered a huge weapons cache hidden in a field near Ramadi, Iraq.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Lee Straube

Pre-Flight Inspection: Tech. Sgt. James Daberkow, a member of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Maintenance Squadron, inspects the underbelly of a KC-135R Stratotanker following an aerial refueling flight during the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Oct. 28 - Dec. 3 deployment to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. While in Turkey, members of the Nebraska Air National Guard supported on-going missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

at an Iraqi military facility in northern Baghdad.

January 2007

5: British Army Maj. Gen Simon Mayall, deputy commander of Multinational Corps Iraq, predicts that 2007 will be a battle of wills in Iraq.

9: Members of the Nebraska Army Guard's 1-167th Cavalry respond to an aircraft accident when an airline crashes in heavy fog near Camp Anaconda, Iraq. The crash claims 34 civilian lives.

10: President Bush announces the deployment of five additional U.S. Army brigades to Iraq to support Iraqi Army operations in and around Baghdad and two U.S. Marine Corps brigades to Anbar Province to assist in operations against al-Qaeda. The deployments will become known as "The Surge" and will cause troop levels in Iraq to exceed 160,000 for several months. The announcement affects Soldiers assigned to the 1-167th Cavalry Squadron and the 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance) who were informed that their deployment might be lengthened by an additional 125 days.

11: New Defense Secretary Robert Gates announces that the Defense Department will reduce the time Reserve Component members are mobilized to 12 months.

16: Sgt. Steven Stieneke, a member of the

National Guard's warriors lost in Iraq



Spc. Germaine Debro
Sept. 4, 2006



Sgt. Randy Matheny
Feb. 4, 2007



Spc. William Bailey III
May 25, 2007



Sgt. Jacob Schmuecker
July 21, 2007

Nebraska's other fallen warriors:
The following Soldiers died while mobilized for active duty in support of Nebraska's other overseas commitments since the start of the war in Iraq:

- Bosnia:**
• Spc. Blake Kelly
- Afghanistan:**
• Spc. Raymond Heuck
• Sgt. Robert Schlote
• Sgt. Omar Jones
• Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger



(Left) **Leaving Their Mark:** Sgt. Jeff Moore, a member of the 1074th Transportation Company from Benedict, Neb., decided to put his time waiting for a convoy to be unloaded to "constructive" use when he painted the name of his unit on the outer wall of the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) in December 2004.

Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Steve Harris



(Right) **Home At Last:** Sgt. Darren Braithwait, 1057th Light/Medium Truck Company, kisses the tarmac in Lincoln, Neb., after arriving in Lincoln, Neb., on April 18, 2004, after serving more than a year in Kuwait and Iraq.

Photo by David Nore



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Schultz

On Patrol: Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Vater, Troop B, 1-167th Cavalry (Reconnaissance, Surveillance and Target Acquisition), inspects a grassy field during a reconnaissance mission in December 2006 while an armored Humvee crew provides cover. Members of the 1-167th Cavalry made Nebraska Army National Guard history when they were mobilized for 22-months in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Family Welcome: Dawn Forbes (left) checks out her daughter's face while sister Elizabeth Sievers hugs Spc. Lindsey Buckland shortly after she arrived back in North Platte, Neb., Oct. 12, 2007, following a yearlong deployment to Iraq as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1074th Transportation Company.

67th Area Support Group, receives the Soldiers Medal during a ceremony in State Capitol in Lincoln, Neb. Stieneke was honored for helping rescue Iraqi election workers from a burning tent on Oct. 10, 2005.

February 2007

4: Spc. Randy Matheny, 20, dies after his truck is hit by an improvised explosive device in Baghdad. He was a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Detachment 3, 1074th Transportation Company, based in Sidney, Neb. Matheny is posthumously promoted to the rank of sergeant.

13: Thirty-three Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers recognized for heroism and wounds they received in combat during a ceremony at the State Capitol in Lincoln, Neb.

16: The late Sgt. Randy Matheny is buried with full military honors in McCook, Neb.

March 2007

6: Members of the 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance) hand out the first of 290 soccer balls donated by Omaha-area elementary school students to Iraqi children in the small village of Al Jamiah.

8: The Nebraska National Guard teams with the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs and other state health care organizations to discuss ways to help treat Nebraska

veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with "hidden" mental health issues during a conference held at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, Neb.

30: President Bush vows to ensure troops will get the medical care they deserve.

April 2007

18: Car bombs in Baghdad kill 131 civilians.

18: Lt. Gen. Clyde Vaughn, director of the Army National Guard, tells Soldiers at the Army National Guard Readiness Center in Arlington, Va., that the Army Guard had reached its congressionally authorized end strength of 350,000 on March 30, six months earlier than projected.

May 2007

25: Spc. William Bailey III, 29, dies when an improvised explosive device strikes his vehicle during a convoy near Taji, Iraq. Three other Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers are also injured in the blast. Bailey was a member of the O'Neill, Neb., -based 755th Chemical Company.

30: Members of the 755th Chemical Company hold a memorial service at Camp Anaconda, Iraq, for the late Spc. William Bailey III.

31: More than 2,000 friends and family members fill the Nebraska State Fair Park's open air auditorium as they wish more than 180 members of the Nebraska Army National

Guard's Omaha-based 600th Transportation Company well before the start their deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

June 2007

5: The late Spc. William Bailey III is buried with full military honors during a funeral in Bellevue, Neb.

24: More than 4,000 friends and family members swell Lincoln's Haymarket Park to near capacity as they welcome members of the 1-134th Cavalry and the 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance) home from an eye-popping 623-day deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

July 2007

12: The Initial Benchmark Assessment Report is released, states that Iraq making progress in eight of 18 benchmark areas.

15: Spc. Heather Springer, a medic with Company C (Air Ambulance), 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, rescues wounded Soldiers while under fire during a mission in the Diyala River Valley of Iraq. She will become the second female Nebraska Army Guard Soldier to earn the Bronze Star with "Valor" device for her actions.

21: Sgt. Jason S. Schmuecker, 27, killed in Balad, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device is detonated next to his Humvee during a convoy escort mission. Schmuecker

was a member of the O'Neill, Neb., -based 755th Chemical Company.

30: The late Sgt. Jacob S. Schmuecker is buried with full military honors in Norfolk, Neb.

August 2007

10: Members of the Kearney's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 734th Transportation Battalion, welcomed home before a crowd of more than 1,000 at Kearney's Museum of Nebraska Art.

18: Sixty-five Soldiers assigned to the Omaha-based Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 867th Quartermaster Supply Battalion, welcomed home after a year-long mission to Iraq during a ceremony at Omaha's Burke High School.

24: Members of the Nebraska National Guard's Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, and other battalion Soldiers welcomed back to Lincoln, Neb., after a year of providing aerial medical evacuation support for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

September 2007

15: Defense Secretary Robert Gates tells reporters, "Getting the next part right" in Iraq is critical to America and forthcoming steps there must capitalize on opportunities created by the troop surge.

October 2007

1: Governor Dave Heineman announces that Tim Kadavy, 43, will be the next adjutant general for the Nebraska National Guard, replacing retiring Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke.

9: Gen. George W. Casey, U.S. Army chief of staff, tells Association of the U.S. Army attendees that reserve components are "performing magnificently, but in an operational role for which they were neither designed nor resourced."

12: Nearly 150 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 1074th Transportation Company from North Platte, Broken Bow, Ogallala and Sidney welcomed back to North Platte, Neb., after a yearlong mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

November 2007

3: Tim Kadavy promoted to the rank of brigadier general and sworn in as Nebraska's 31st adjutant general during a ceremony at Lincoln East High School. "Our nation has asked a lot of you over the past seven years," Kadavy tells assembled members of the Nebraska National Guard. "I state to you here today that I am committed to ensuring that every National Guardsman and family is given the support needed to deal with the sacrifices and demands of long mobilizations, deployments and the ugliness of war."

9: Thirty-five members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing wished well before the start of deployments that will take them to such places as Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kyrgyzstan, Italy and Germany.

December 2007

1: Forty-seven members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

1: Members of the 267th Ordnance Company receive the Army's Meritorious Unit Commendation for their service during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Two unit Soldiers, Staff Sgt. Michael Brickner and Sgt. Chase Davis, are also awarded the Army Combat Action Badge during the ceremony.

5: Members of the 755th Chemical Company welcomed back to a chilly Nebraska by friends and family members during a ceremony in Lincoln, Neb., after the unit spent a year supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

25: Members of the Guard's 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion are able to spend their Christmas at home during a break in mobilization training at Fort Lewis, Wash., thanks to contributions made by the Nebraska Nebraska Chamber of Commerce.

January 2008

8: U.S. and Iraqi forces launch Operation Phantom Phoenix, a joint offensive designed to corral remaining al Qaeda-aligned terrorists and other insurgents in Iraq.

February 2008

14: Marine Corps commandant, Gen. James T. Conway, says that al Qaeda has worn out its welcome with Sunni residents in western Iraq's Anbar province and, consequently, the terror groups influence there is over for good.

18: Members of the Nebraska Air National

TIMELINE continued on 14.

Skills learned in Iraq aided Soldiers in Afghanistan

By Staff Sgt. Joseph Dunlap

Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry

Looking back on my deployment to Ar Ramadi, Iraq in 2005 and 2006 with Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), it would be ideal to think that all of our hard work, personal loss and sacrifice have not been taken in vain.

However, it is un-nerving to see the work and loss of so many being caught up in the bureaucracy of multiple governments, often for personal gain and greed, and all too often at the expense of those who gave the most... their lives.

Looking back on 2005 and 2006, when our team would talk to locals as well as Iraqi police and our interpreters, there were always plenty of insecurities around troops leaving, what would happen if they did and when it would happen.

These same concerns can be seen all over headline news reports that have all built up to the pullout of troops. The Iraqis now have massive accountability weighing heavily on them, and them alone.

Because of the 1,000-plus missions our team ran during our time in Iraq, many on our

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

team were bonded by a very deep, necessary and unspoken commitment to each other. That level of dedication in a unit is rare and probably rarely duplicated. This bond is still felt today by the annual reminders of a friend's death, as well as the thousands of stories still shared five-plus years later with each other and with new team members.

These experiences have additionally provided A Troop, and the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron in general, with many of the daily business tactics and procedures, which were utilized in the squadron's latest deployment to Afghanistan.

Whether the tactics were on how to work and think outside the box in the Musahi Valley or in the rural areas of Paghman, our squadron was able to bridge and close gaps with local religious elders, police chiefs and most importantly the local civilians throughout rural Kabul.



Photo courtesy of Sgt. 1st Class Johnny Eynetich

Desert Reenlistment: Local explosive ordnance disposal technicians detonate captured ordnance while Sgt. Michael Dunlap (center) and Sgt. 1st Class Johnny Eynetich (right) reenlist into the Nebraska Army National Guard's Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), while deployed to Iraq from 2005-06.

One challenge is inevitable, for both Iraq and Afghanistan. Whether the Iraqis are ready or not, they are now up against the biggest challenge of their lives, which will either make or break them in regards to stability, security and peace for years to come.

The future of Iraqis is now solely in their hands. Right or wrong they must be world

players in their own destiny.

As far as the cavalry squadron, the rest of the women and men within the Nebraska Military Department and the rest of the U.S. are concerned, we can all hold our heads high knowing that we all served our state, country and the people of Iraq in an honorable manner.

Iraq assignment enabled Nebraskans to better understand Guard's role

By C. David Kotok

Managing Editor, Omaha World-Herald

Jeff Bundy and I stood with family and friends, looking out on the Camp Shelby parade ground as the men of Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry, stood at attention. We listened on that sweltering June day to Lt. Gen. Russell L. Honore pledge that these Guardsmen would go to war with the latest and best equipment.

As we landed in Kuwait on Sept. 11, 2005, on the fourth anniversary of the terrorist attack, we saw firsthand how important that pledge from Gen. Honore was to the Guardsmen headed to Iraq.

For much of their yearlong deployment running supplies from Kuwait to Iraqi bases, the men and women of the Nebraska Guard's 1075th Transportation Company drove unarmored or patched armored trucks that were below standards for regular Army units.

Unlike the Cav, these truckers didn't get the America's best equipment when they arrived nearly a year earlier. Many of the Guard units arriving during the early stages of the conflict complained of their inferior equipment.

The fall of 2005 and all of 2006 would prove a critical in the Iraqi war.

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

It was also a time of transition as the National Guard emerged as an integrated element of the United States military force.

When we joined up with the 1-167th Cavalry in Ramadi, we witnessed a Guard unit at the tip of the spear in the heart of the insurgency.

Our job – as it had been for World-Herald photographers and reporters in World War II, Korea and Vietnam – was to remind our fellow citizens back home about the sacrifices being made by our warriors and their families. One problem: Capt. Jeff Searcey called us into his hooch with 1st Lt. Shane York and 1st Sgt. Kevin Petersen and let us know that the families back home didn't know what a hellhole Ramadi was. They asked us to use care as we wrote and photographed his troops to avoid scaring the wives and mothers and girlfriends back in Nebraska.

But there was no avoiding the truth. Ramadi was a scary place.



Omaha World-Herald photo by Jeff Bundy

On Assignment: C. David Kotok, a reporter with the Omaha World-Herald newspaper, smiles for a photograph shortly before boarding a helicopter for a flight in Iraq. Kotok and photographer Jeff Bundy spent nearly two months covering Nebraska and Iowa service members' work in Iraq in 2005.

All we could promise was that we would not sensationalize the danger. What we did see and tell our readers was that the Guard was, in the words of Gen. Honore, "fit to fight."

We saw first-hand how the civilian and military training and experience of the men and women of Nebraska's National Guard units were uniquely suited for fighting an unconventional war in tough terrain. Boyhood experiences back home – sitting patiently in a duck

blind along Nebraska waterways – prepared these men for setting up an ambush in the dark of night.

Searcey's experience as a teacher and coach at Shelton High School provided him with the additional skills he needed to lead 18- and 19-year-old privates and specialists.

The awareness and observation skills that Staff Sgts. Lauren McConnell and Jeff Hestermann perfected as Grand Island cops served them and their men well as

they navigated the nasty streets of Ramadi.

We watched as Spcs. Shannon Biltoff and Alicia Reichmuth of the 313th Medical Company lugged 75 pounds of gear as they guided a regular Army gun truck unit through the IED-laden roads of Anbar Province during a fuel run to Jordan.

Our experience in Iraq with our National Guard troops was probably the most rewarding of our journalistic careers.

As I moved to management in 2008, I renewed *The World-Herald's* commitment to cover every tearful sendoff and every joyous homecoming.

We also have covered every funeral of our fallen warriors, as we make sure the people of Nebraska and western Iowa don't forget what is being done in their name by our men and women in uniform.

As the last units return from Iraq, we will not forget that we continue to call up our citizen soldiers for duty in Afghanistan or doing the critical duty here at home watching our levees to keep the flood waters away.

(Editor's Note: C. David Kotok and Jeff Bundy spent two months in Iraq in 2005 while covering Nebraska and Iowa military members serving in Iraq.)

TIMELINE continued from page 13.

Guard's 155th Civil Engineering Fire Department help train Iraqi firefighters during an exercise at Ali Base, Iraq.

19: Governor Dave Heineman and Nebraska National Guard military leaders sign the Nebraska Army National Guard Family Covenant during a ceremony at the State Capitol in Lincoln, Neb.

March 2008

20: Governor Dave Heineman honors 40 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers for their work while deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan during a ceremony at the State Capitol in Lincoln, Neb. Among those honored is Sgt. Heather Springer, a medic with Company C (Air Ambulance), 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, who along with receiving the Bronze Star with "Valor Device," is formally presented with a statue honoring her as the national DUSTOFF Medic of the Year. Five other Soldiers receive Bronze Stars with "V" device while others receive Purple Hearts or Army Commendation Medals with "V" devices.

May 2008

9: Approximately 180 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 600th Transportation Company from Omaha welcomed back to Nebraska during a ceremony at the Nebraska Army Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Lincoln, Neb.

14: National Guard Bureau chief, Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, calls 2007 a year of "historic proportions" for the National Guard during a testimony before the defense subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee. He adds that at one point in the War on Terror, National Guard members made up almost half of the ground forces in Iraq and calls the number of Guardsmen supporting the war overseas "staggering."

21: Defense Secretary Robert Gates says he supports recent measures being taken by the U.S. Congress to provide enhanced educational benefits for veterans. "We think our troops deserve to be rewarded for their service."

September 2008

1: Members of the Nebraska National Guard begin to deploy to Louisiana as Hurricane Gustav threatens the Gulf Coast. They are the first of more than 1,000 Nebraska Guard Soldiers and Airmen who will be deployed to the Gulf Coast, the largest domestic out-of-state emergency mission in the history of the Nebraska National Guard.

2: Sgt. James Wieting, a member of the Nebraska Army Guard's 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, meets Gen. David Petraeus, commander of Multinational Force-Iraq, at the Al-Faw Palace Rotunda at Camp Victory, Iraq, just days before Petraeus steps

down as commander. Wieting was selected to meet the general because of his work in helping tutor other members of his unit so that they could improve their GT scores.

October 2008

1: The Nebraska Army and Air National Guard both exceed their recruiting goals for Fiscal Year 2008. The organization enlists 494 new Soldiers and 96 Airmen.

November 2008

25: Members of the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion are welcomed back to Nebraska from a deployment to Iraq during a ceremony in Lincoln, Neb. The Soldiers' return marks a milestone for Nebraska: for the first time since March 2003, the Nebraska Army National Guard does not have a single unit serving in Iraq. Brig. Gen. Tim Kadavy, Nebraska adjutant general, calls the temporary milestone significant.

27: The Iraqi parliament passes the Status of Forces Agreement. Article 24 of the pact requires U.S. forces to withdraw from Iraq no later than Dec. 31, 2011.

December 2008

25: Nebraska National Guardsmen celebrate another Christmas deployed overseas.

January 2009

1: U.S. forces in Iraq hand over control the "Green Zone" in Baghdad to the Iraqi government, which is part of Status of Forces Agreement signed by the U.S. and Iraq on Nov. 27, 2008.

10: Members of the Kearney, Neb.,-based 734th Transportation Battalion headquarters receive the Meritorious Unit Citation for the work the unit accomplished during its deployment to Iraq. The battalion headquarters and its subordinate units were credited with completing 1,415 convoy security missions while traveling 2.4 million miles over the most dangerous roads in the world. They also experienced 754 combat-related incidents.

28: President Barack Obama pledges support for U.S. troops following a meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. "All of you who are serving in the U.S. armed forces are going to have my full support and one my duties as president is going to be to make sure that you have what you need to accomplish your missions."

February 2009

7: Members of the 1195th Transportation Company from Kearney, Lexington and

TIMELINE continued on 15.

Making History: (From left) Staff Sgt. Robyn Crow-Cousin, Spc. Courtney Nowling and Pfc. Brittney Doyle pose in their armored security vehicle in 2007 after making history as the 1074th Transportation Company's first all-female gun truck crew.



Photo courtesy of Maj. Steve Collins



Photo by David Nore

Lifesaving Hero: Sgt. Steven Stieneke, 67th Area Support Group, receives the Soldiers Medal from Governor Dave Heineman during a ceremony at the Nebraska State Capitol on Jan. 16, 2007. Stieneke received the award for saving the lives of Iraqi election workers during a tent fire.

Mission in, over Iraq began long before Operation Iraqi Freedom

By Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster

155th Air Refueling Wing

When I was asked if I would write a short essay discussing the end of eight years of operations in Iraq, I suppose my first thought was "You mean 20 years of combat operations in Iraq."

Generally, I consider my attitude toward that mission as "guarded optimism." I hope that the Iraqis have established a sustainable political and economic environment, and that they have their terrorism issues under control.

From my perspective, U.S. combat operations in Iraq began in 1991 and Air Force operational missions continued through the interwar period and continue as I type this essay.

Although I have forgotten many of the details, the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance



Forster

Group was forecast to rotate into theater during Operation Desert Storm; however, the active stage of that war ended too quickly for any members to be mobilized (with the 155th TRG).

I can vividly remember the day I heard news that Americans had fired their first shots in Operation Desert Storm. I was sitting in Old Father Hall (on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Campus) with another Guard member waiting for our Calculus class to start when the news broke on CNN.

I remember thinking about two things: First, before I deploy my fiancée Pamela and I need to get married, (we were married on Jan. 31, 1991). Second, if I was deployed, I could drop my Calculus class at UNL without penalty and retake the course after I returned from my deployment and hope for a better grade. It's funny what you think about when you face mobilization for the first time.

From the Feb. 28, 1991, cease-fire until

the beginning of hostilities in 2003 American forces were involved in constant operations keeping Iraqi Air Force assets out of no-fly zones during Operations Northern and Southern Watch.

When the 155th TRG converted from the RF-4C Phantom aerial reconnaissance mission to the KC-135R Stratotanker aerial refueling mission in 1994, we became part of these operations through our deployments to Turkey and Saudi Arabia, refueling fighter aircraft enforcing "No-Fly"

zones.

The refueling mission in U.S. Central Command changed following the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Although fighter and bomber aircraft still required fuel, missions out of Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, generally focused on refueling C-17 Globemaster aircraft.

Flying into Iraq loaded with resupply and out of Iraq loaded with U.S. troops and casualties (among other things), the C-17s (staging

out of Germany) were in constant motion.

The 155th's support of these missions were generally characterized by a high level of mission accomplishment and deployment commanders who wanted Nebraska to remain on station longer.

Unlike many of the Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors and Marines who joined the service after 9/11, I did not enter service while the U.S. was actively involved in combat operations. 20 years into the war in Iraq, my hope is that U.S. efforts will result in a free and democratic country for the people of Iraq. Until we've stabilized the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people have secured their own future, our mission is not done and regardless of U.S. troop withdrawal, that chapter of our history will remain open.

As I stated at the beginning, I have a guarded optimism.

(Editor's Note: Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster currently serves as 173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron program manager. He is a veteran of dozens of combat flying missions over Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations around the world as an aerial refueling specialist.)

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

Experiences in Iraq as platoon leader, convoy commander shaped leadership development

By Capt. Charles McWilliams

755th Chemical Company

Many members of my unit first learned of a potential deployment to Iraq with the 755th Chemical Company in late summer 2005.

Beginning that fall, we began the transition to the development and (eventually) execution of a training plan that incorporated elements of three separate companies from the 126th Chemical Battalion (173rd, 754th and 755th) into a cohesive unit assigned with a convoy security mission.

In early September 2006, the main body of the 755th Chemical Company went on active duty orders and assembled at Camp Ashland. Following a farewell ceremony in Lincoln, the entire unit arrived at Camp Shelby, Miss., two days later for three months of pre-mobilization training.

Due to the timing (December 2006) and location (Logistical Support Activity Anaconda) of our deployment to Iraq, it quickly became apparent to everyone in the unit that we would have a limited amount of "down time."

After the surge was initiated in early spring 2007, the frequency of our missions

increased significantly as a result of the need for supplies, equipment and military hardware to be transported to the Combat Outposts and Forward Operating Bases across the country.

In fact, our unit was tasked with some of the initial deliveries of supplies to FOB Hammer.

With the increase in op tempo also came an uptick in the number of enemy attacks, especially improvised explosive device detonations, which targeted our convoy missions.

Our unit lost two brave Soldiers during the period of heaviest insurgent activity, with Spc. Bill Bailey and Sgt. Jacob Schmuecker each making the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms in May and July 2007, respectively.

Despite the pain of losing dear friends and the unrelenting pace of mission requirements, the Soldiers of the 755th Chemical Co. never wavered in their commitment to successfully executing their assignments and returned to a reunion with friends, families and loved ones in early December 2007 at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

While my experiences as a platoon leader and convoy commander in Iraq are deeply rooted in much of my thinking, particularly



Photo courtesy of Capt. Charles McWilliams

On Duty: 1st Lt. Charles McWilliams stands next to one of his unit's armored security vehicles prior to a mission in Iraq. McWilliams served in Iraq with the Nebraska Army National Guard's 755th Chemical Company during its 2006-07 tour of duty.

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

with regards to my own subsequent leadership development, I'm somewhat surprised at my almost lack of any strong emotions about the conclusion of our formal military involvement there. I take great pride when looking back at the oftentimes grueling efforts that our unit made and in having had

the opportunity to see the seedlings of a developing democratic nation in one of the world's most troubled regions.

Recognizing the improved conditions among the Iraqi population in the form of greater security and better access to basic necessities such as electricity were also comforting to witness in late 2007. But, alas, it is their country and it is they who must now make the necessary sacrifices.

I pray that they succeed and that they never forget the sacrifices of the American military and their families.

TIMELINE continued from page 14.

McCook, Neb., prepare for their upcoming deployment to Iraq during a Soldier Readiness Processing procedure at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

27: President Barack Obama announces that U.S. combat troops will redeploy from Iraq by August 2010, leaving about 35,000 to 50,000 American forces there to attend to Iraqi troop and police training, counterterrorism and other duties. The announcement is in accordance with the Status of Forces Agreement signed by the U.S. and Iraq on Nov. 27, 2008.

March 2009

1: The Nebraska Army and Air National Guard announce that they experienced the best recruiting month in "roughly five decades." The Nebraska Army Guard enlisted 85 new Soldiers in February while the Air National Guard enlisted 25 new Airmen.

12: Spc. Heather Davey, a member of the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, honored during a Washington, D.C., ceremony where she is named one of the recipients for the national "Angels of the Battlefield" award for the work she did while working in Baghdad's IBN Sina hospital.

May 2009

2: Approximately 145 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1195th

Transportation Company (Medium Truck) from Kearney, Lexington and McCook, Neb., mobilized for Iraq.

11: Five American service members killed during a shooting at Camp Liberty, Iraq. An American service member is detained as the primary suspect.

12: More than 1,000 friends and family members turn out to wish farewell to members of the 1195th Transportation Company during a ceremony at the Kearney Event Ceremony.

17: Bellevue, Neb., renames a portion of 22nd Avenue in honor of the late Spc. William L. Bailey III who died on May 25, 2007, while serving in Iraq as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 755th Chemical Company.

June 2009

26: Members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) prepare for their upcoming deployment to Iraq during a training exercise at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

August 2009

1: O'Neill, Neb., unveils a new memorial dedicated to the 755th Chemical Company and unit members Spc. William L. Bailey III and Sgt. Jacob S. Schmuecker, who died

during the company's deployment to Iraq.

7: Governor Dave Heineman selects Col. Judd Lyons to be the 32nd Nebraska adjutant general. He is selected to succeed Maj. Gen. Timothy Kadavy, who was earlier selected to be the new deputy director of the Army National Guard.

23: Judd Lyons becomes the 32nd Nebraska adjutant general during a change of command ceremony held at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

September 2009

1: The Nebraska National Guard announces that it enlisted nearly 600 new Soldiers and Airmen during Fiscal Year 2009. The Army Guard ends the year with a strength of 3,783 or more than 99 percent overall strength, while the Air Guard ends the year with a strength of 1,000, or 103 percent overall strength.

October 2009

17: Sixty-seven Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom. They are wished farewell during a ceremony at Lincoln's North Star High School.

25: More than 150 Iraqis die and hundreds more

injured as a result of two massive blasts that targeted the Iraqi justice and municipalities and public works ministries and a provincial headquarters building in downtown Baghdad.

28: Dozens of Nebraska employers sign an oath supporting National Guardsmen and U.S. Reservists during a ceremony at the Faith Regional Medical Center in Norfolk, Neb.

November 2009

5: Members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) put on "lock down" during training at Fort Hood, Texas, when a person opens fire at the Soldier Readiness Processing Center, killing 13. Two other Nebraska Army Guardsmen heading to Afghanistan are also located at Fort Hood when the attack occurs. No Nebraska Guard Soldier is injured during the incident.

7: Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen enjoy the annual Veterans Day Game hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Soldiers and Airmen watch as the Nebraska Cornhuskers beat the Oklahoma Sooners, 10-3.

7: Dan Whitney (aka "Larry the Cable Guy") made an honorary command sergeant major by Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch in

TIMELINE continued on 16.

Heroic Medic: Spc. Heather Springer, Company C (Air Ambulance), 2-135th General Support Battalion, smiles for the camera before a mission in Iraq in October 2006. On July 15, 2007, she earned the Bronze Star with "Valor" device for rescuing wounded Soldiers in the Diyala River Valley. She later was named the national DUSTOFF Medic of the Year.



Photo courtesy of Sgt. Heather Springer



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Honoring the Fallen: A memorial plaque honoring two fallen members of the 755th Chemical Company is unveiled during a statue dedication in O'Neill, Neb., Aug. 1, 2009. The statue was purchased with donated funds in honor of the 755th Chemical Co.'s deployment to Iraq and the late Spc. William Bailey III and Sgt. Jacob Schmuecker, who died during the mission.

Nebraska Soldiers, Airmen should be proud

By Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy

Former Nebraska Adjutant General

As our nation closes out our military operations in Iraq two words come to mind: Dedication and Sacrifice.

As historians write the book on the war in Iraq there will be many different thoughts on whether it was worth the price and if we were successful. But, I think they will agree



Kadavy

that the American Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airmen and their families responded to the nation's call in the finest fashion, befitting our long and great history.

The Nebraska National Guard was a significant part of our military effort and we should be very proud of our accomplishments.

Most of the Nebraska National Guards units have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, thousands of Nebraskans have served and deployed overseas on operational missions. We have fought, bled and, in a few tragic instances, died for our country.

Nine of our fellow Soldiers lost their lives while serving in Iraq; we should always remember their

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

sacrifice and their families.

While in Iraq myself, I had the duty to represent the National Guard leadership at three of their memorial services.

You cannot attend one and not remember the love, loss and hurt. I believe I speak for us all when I say "they will be remembered".

The service of our Soldiers and Airmen is what I will remember

most about our time in Iraq. Also, during my time in Iraq I had the opportunity to visit Nebraska units in Balad, Adder, Baghdad, Ramadi and many other places.

I was very proud of our Soldiers/Airmen performance, attitude, professionalism and commitment to the mission.

We should all be very proud of our service and performance; it was truly second to none.

During my time as the adjutant general of Nebraska, I attended many farewells and return ceremonies. They were all a testament to the support and love provided by our families and the communities of our great State.

Deployments are hard on Sol-

diers and families; many sacrifices were made by both.

We could not have been successful without the support of our families and the responsibilities they bore during our many deployments.

The Nebraska National Guard is a truly magnificent force that represents the best of Nebraska, its citizens and its values. Job well done.

I look forward to continuing service as part of our great Nebraska Team.

(Editor's Note: Maj. Gen. Tim Kadavy served as the Nebraska adjutant general from November 2007 until August 2009. He currently serves as the deputy director of the Army National Guard.)

Iraq deployment one of life's worst, best experiences

By 1st Sgt. James Morbach

732nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron

In 2006, I volunteered for a deployment in Iraq where I was assigned to the 732nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron. I was the first sergeant for more than 400 Security Forces Airmen, who were imbedded with Marine, Army and Iraqi military and police units, performing missions outside of the wire in more than 30 locations throughout Iraq.

My first couple of days in Iraq were quiet. I remember thinking to myself, "This is really Iraq? Seemed like people were more concerned about wearing a reflective belt than wearing body armor on base."

On my third day, sirens started going off and we received a rocket attack and small arms fire, causing us to go into Delta. My fifth day in country, I was woken up at 0330 and notified two of my Airmen were wounded by an IED, during a security patrol in Baghdad.

My second week in country, I started to travel throughout Iraq, most often by helicopters and up-armored Humvees. I spent three to five days a week with my Airmen in the field and going on missions with them in such cities as Baghdad, Fallujah, Mosul and Tikrit to name a few.

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

The other times were spent working staff issues such as emergency leave, counseling Airmen, processing decorations, Article 15s, resolving logistical issues and everything else a first sergeant does.

I can honestly say I never had a day off and most days were 16-19 hours long.

Most of my Airmen were on a 365 day deployment. Living conditions varied by location, however, my Airmen living on the Iraqi Forward Operating Bases had it the roughest. Power only a few hours a day, poor sanitation, untrustworthy environment and limited supplies.

In 2002, I was a Security Forces ground combat instructor at Camp Bullis, Texas. Five years later, in Iraq, I ran into three former instructors. We caught up and had a great chat. A few weeks later, I visited one of them in the hospital at Camp Anaconda.

His team responded to a suicide bombing in Baghdad. While performing security, a secondary explosive device went off, seriously injuring him.

By then end of my deployment, we had three Airmen killed in action and 11 wounded.

I personally logged over 3,000 miles outside of the wire and went on numerous missions with members from the Air Force, Army, Marines and the Iraqi Military and Police. We had rocket and mortar attacks every few days and I experienced a range of emotions and physical stressors that I never wish to feel again.

People often ask me if we belonged there, if we were making a difference, etc. During my experience, I know we did things ethically right and went above and beyond for the Iraqi people. In the end, regardless of politics, it's all about taking care of the people around you and making sure you do everything you can to take care of the people you are responsible for.

In all of my deployments and military experiences, I have learned that no matter where you are, priority one is taking care of our fellow Airmen and Armed Forces members.

My deployment to Iraq was the best and worse experience of my life.

(Editor's Note: James Morbach works fulltime for Werner Enterprises where he is the military recruiting manager.)



Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. James Morbach

Iraq Beat: 1st Sgt. James Morbach poses for a photograph during a security forces patrol in Iraq. Morbach, a member of the 155th Air Refueling Wing, logged more than 3,000 miles by ground and air during his four months in Iraq.

TIMELINE continued from page 15.

recognition of Whitney's work in supporting deployed Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

December 2009

10: Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates arrives in Baghdad to discuss plans to draw U.S. military forces in Iraq down to 50,000 by August 2010 with U.S. and Iraqi military leaders.

January 2010

1: Multi-National Force-Iraq becomes United States Force-Iraq.

February 2010

17: U.S. Senator Mike Johanns meets with families of Nebraska Army National Guardsmen deployed to Iraq during a visit to the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

20: More than 1,100 Nebraska Army Guardsmen and their families participate in a Yellow Ribbon Program pre-deployment workshop at the Qwest Center in Omaha, Neb. The event is the largest Yellow Ribbon Program event yet hosted by the Nebraska National Guard.

March 2010

10: Iraqi parliamentary elections held. U.S. officials say voting historic, paving way for drawdown to 50,000 American troops.

16: Members of the Lincoln, Neb., -based 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade prepare for an upcoming deployment to Iraq during a training exercise at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

April 2010

7: Nebraska military kids honored during a proclamation ceremony at the State Capitol in Lincoln, Neb.

16: More than 1,000 friends and family members gather at the Kearney High School to welcome approximately 140 members of the Kearney, Lexington and McCook, Neb. -based 1195th Transportation Company back from Iraq.

May 2010

8: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard provide support as Nebraska's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and subordinate units begin a massive eXportable Combat Training Capability (XCTC) exercise at Camp Guernsey, Wyo. The exercise is designed to prepare the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade for its upcoming deployment to Iraq.

22: Approximately 45 members of the Nebraska City, Neb., -based 192nd Military Police Detachment wished farewell before the start of an Operation Iraqi Freedom mission during a ceremony at the Nebraska City Elementary School.

June 2010

4: Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, commander of U.S. Forces Iraq, says he is comfortable drawing down U.S. forces to 50,000 by September.

July 2010

3: During a visit to Baghdad, Vice President Joe Biden says the United States is on track to end combat mission in Iraq by the end of the year and that the lack of a permanent government

there will not serve as a deterrent to the plan.

11: Approximately 300 Soldiers assigned to the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and the 1167th Brigade Support Company are wished farewell by around 2,000 friends and family members during a ceremony at Lincoln's Seacrest Field.

August 2010

6: Members of the Lincoln, Neb., -based 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) welcomed back to Nebraska from a mission to Iraq during a welcome home ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base.

12: Twenty-two members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Security Forces Squadron welcomed back to Lincoln, Neb., by families and friends following a six-month deployment to Iraq.

18: American combat operations in Iraq end as the last brigade combat team departs for Kuwait.

24: U.S. troop levels in Iraq dip below 50,000, fulfilling a promise made by President Obama on Feb. 24, 2009.

28: About a dozen Nebraska military kids participate in the Nebraska National Guard Youth Symposium held at the Hilton Hotel in Omaha, Neb. The event was designed to give military children an opportunity to spend some time with other kids experiencing the same types of stress brought on by deployments and other military duty.

31: President Obama announces that Operation Iraqi Freedom has come to an end during

a televised address to the American people. Operation New Dawn begins. "Operation Iraqi Freedom is over. The Iraqi people now have the lead responsibility for the security of their country."

September 2010

15: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade officially assume control of their mission in Iraq during a transfer of authority ceremony at Contingency Operating Base Adder, Iraq.

October 2010

11: Famed cartoonist, Mason Mastroianni, who produces the award-winning cartoon strip "B.C.", creates a special "Pike-themed" cartoon for members of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade serving in Iraq. Mastroianni was visiting Contingency Operating Base Adder as part of a USO-sponsored tour.

November 2010

12: Nebraska military members attend the annual "Veterans Day Game" at the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium.

26: Brig. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, presents Dan Whitney (aka: "Larry the Cable Guy") with the Nebraska National Guard Homeland Defense Ribbon following the Nebraska-Colorado football game in appreciation for the work that Whitney has done in support of Nebraska National Guardsmen.

28: Approximately 90 Soldiers assigned to

TIMELINE continued on 17.

Obama: Troops bear burden of success in Iraq

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – After nearly nine years the war in Iraq is ending and U.S. troops are returning home to a nation that should stand by those who fought, President Barack Obama said Dec. 15.

“In recent days, many of our troops have come home and been reunited with their families for the holidays,” he said. “Over the next few days, a small group of American soldiers will begin the final march out of Iraq.”

The president lauded American troops for their service and the sacrifices of their families.

“This moment of success is because of their sacrifice,” Obama said. “More than 1.5 million Americans have served in Iraq. More than 30,000 of these brave men and women were wounded. Nearly 4,500 gave their lives. America’s military families have borne a

heavy burden.”

Obama called on Americans to demonstrate their appreciation for the nation’s military veterans and their families.

“As we mark the end of this war, we need to show our veterans and their families that they have the thanks of a grateful nation,” he said. “Part of ending a war responsibly is standing by those who have fought it. It’s not enough to honor our heroes with words; we must do so with deeds.”

The president noted his and Michelle Obama’s continuing efforts to take care of veterans and their families following their service.

“That’s why we’ve worked to send 600,000 veterans and family members back to school on the Post-9/11 GI Bill,” Obama said. “That’s

why one of Michelle’s top priorities as first lady has been to support military families and why she’s worked with the private sector to get commitments to create 100,000 jobs for those who’ve served and their spouses.

“That’s why we worked with Congress to pass a tax credit so that companies have an incentive to hire vets and have taken steps to help veterans translate military experience to the private sector job market,” he added.

Citizens should realize that “our commitment to those who fight for our freedom and our ideals doesn’t end when our troops take off the uniform,” the president said.

“You can be a part of this effort to honor our heroes,” Obama added. “Help mark this moment. Write a quick note that troops and veterans all over the world will be able to see.”

By the Numbers

Since the start of the war in Iraq in March 2003, members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard have received the following military awards for action in Iraq and Afghanistan:

- 16 Bronze Star Medals with “V” device;
 - 20 Army Commandation Medals with “V” device;
 - 73 Purple Hearts;
 - 166 Combat Infantry Badges;
 - 612 Combat Action Badges;
 - 15 Combat Medic Badges.
- Additionally, approximately 80 percent of Nebraska Air National Guard qualifying aircrew members have been awarded either the Air Medal or Aerial Achievement Medal for combat operations.

Going home after completing Iraq mission was harder than expected

By Lt. Col. Curtis Abendroth
867th Quartermaster Battalion

With the withdrawal of the troops from Iraq, I sit in anticipation, wondering what the future will bring.

When I went to Iraq in 2006 as part of the 867th Corps Support Battalion, I did not know what to expect. At the time, there was a thought going in that there may be a drawdown at that time.

Our mission was to provide logistical support for Multi-National Division – Baghdad. Most of what we did was to plan convoys to move materials and equipment around in our area of responsibility. Within the first couple months we actually played a part in a drawdown action by moving materials and equipment to close Forward Operating Base Duke south of Baghdad.

That would be the end of drawdown activities for us, though.

By December of 2006, we were knee-deep in up-arming Humvees and getting ready to build a new FOB east of Baghdad to support the surge of troops, due to the high insurgent activity around the city.

Throughout the rest of our deployment the 867th CSB played a major role in supporting the surge of troops and building barrier walls for police stations and around communities within the city of Baghdad.

Nightly we would send out 300 to 500 Soldiers that would make up seven to 11 convoys on the road. Our convoys sometimes consisted of seven-day missions where the Soldiers would essentially live out of their truck and in other FOBs while completing their mission.

As for the up-armor mission, our Soldiers up-armed more than 1,100 M1114 and 1151 Humvees during that time as well. In the early days of the up-armor mission, the 82nd Airborne Division



Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Curtis Abendroth

Keeping the Supplies Moving: Maj. Curtis Abendroth, 867th Corps Support Battalion, pauses for a photograph during the 2006-07 “Surge” in Iraq, during which Abendroth help track hundreds of vehicles at any one time.

Personal Reflection on the War in Iraq

needed their 1151s done in less than a month. We completed more than 400 up-armed 1151s in two weeks with a mixture of Soldiers and contractors working side-by-side, 24-hours-a-day to get the job done.

As the months went by, the 867th CSB, completed well over 300 convoy missions and moved mountains of cargo to support the surge.

When it was time to leave, I thought it would be easier than it was. Turning your mission over to someone else was not an easy thing. The relationships with the units we led were very strong. It was like leaving family behind in someone else’s care. It did not feel right to be leaving as things were at a very rigorous pace when we left.

As the days went by and we finally arrived home that feeling subsided a little, but took longer to

transition back than I thought it would. I still continue to keep in contact with a few folks since the deployment and will see a few when I go to different schools.

So now as the troops withdraw, I wonder will our investment pay off? Will Iraq move forward?

There is no doubt in my mind that the surge of troops provided the push to gain ground on the insurgency in Iraq. The U.S. military and the Coalition did its part. It is now up to the Iraq people to take this opportunity and run with it.

I just hope that all the missions and all the sacrifices that our Soldiers made provided the new hope for the people of Iraq. I also hope in the long run that the world see this the right way as well... that the Coalition was there to provide stability to give the people of Iraq the chance they deserve to build a new chapter and to put in the history books the tyranny of the past.

I will also continue to pray that if I do have to go back, that again I can do it with as fine of people I was blessed with to be with on my last deployment.

Top U.S. general says Iraq campaign worth the cost

BAGHDAD (AFPS) – The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top U.S. military leaders observed the official end of U.S. Forces Iraq’s mission on Dec. 15 after nearly nine years of conflict that claimed the lives of nearly 4,500 U.S. troops, and created a sovereign nation from the destruction of a brutal dictatorship.

On a stage in a smoky courtyard on the military side of Baghdad International Airport, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, Army Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, commanding general of U.S. Forces Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq James F. Jeffrey addressed U.S. and Iraqi officials and more than 150 troops and media from around the world. Also on the stage was Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis, commander of U.S. Central Command.

For more than 20 years, Dempsey said, “Iraq has been a defining part of our professional and personal lives... Everywhere, at every level, we learned the power of relationships rooted in trust and respect with ourselves and with our Iraqi brothers.”

The chairman recalled when he deployed to Iraq in 1991 as part of Operation Desert Storm to end Saddam Hussein’s oppression of the Kuwaiti people.

More than a decade later, Dempsey deployed to Iraq again.

“I remember leaving my family again to end Saddam Hussein’s oppression of the Iraqi people,” the chairman said. “And now today I stand here with the very heart of my family, my wife, Deanie, to bear witness to what our sons and daughters — to what your sons and daughters — have achieved.”

Dempsey said he’s proud that the United States with its coalition partners and the Iraqi people teamed up to “set a course that befits the promise and spirit of

Iraq’s children.”

“I look forward to an enduring partnership between our countries,” the chairman added.

The Defense Department values the relationship with Iraq, Dempsey said.

“We will stand with you against terrorists and others that threaten to undo what we have accomplished together,” he said. “We will work with you to secure our common interests in a more peaceful and prosperous region.”

Everyone who served in Iraq will carry an image of that time, the chairman said.

“Today my image is of Command Sgt. Maj. Eric Cooke ... of the First Brigade, First Armored Division, who on Christmas Eve 2003 was killed by an IED ... in northern Baghdad. Probably the finest noncommissioned officer I’d ever met,” Dempsey said.

“We’ve paid a great price here,” the chairman added, “and it has been a price worth paying.”

Panetta also spoke at the event, expressing his appreciation to members of the Iraqi government and military.

“Thank you for your courage, for your leadership, for your friendship over these many years,” the secretary said. “More importantly, thank you for your loyalty to the future of Iraq. Your dream of an independent and sovereign Iraq is now a reality.”

“This is not the end,” he added. “This is truly the beginning.”

As U.S. Forces Iraq’s mission ends, Jeffrey said, it’s fitting to “look back at the sacrifices made by so many Americans and so many Iraqis.”

It’s also a time, he added, to “look forward to an Iraq that is sovereign, secure and self-reliant, an Iraq with whom the United States government will continue to work in every way possible, building on the successes of our colleagues in USFI led by Gen. Austin.”

TIMELINE continued from page 16.

Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, and other units within the 2-135th GSAB, mobilizing for Operation New Dawn are wished farewell by families and friends during a ceremony at Lincoln’s North Star High School.

30: Members of the Nebraska City, Neb., -based 192nd Military Police Detachment (Law and Order) support a mass casualty training exercise on the Victory Base Complex in Baghdad.

December 2010

7: Brig. Gen. Jeffrey S. Buchanan, director of strategic effects in Baghdad, says U.S. forces are re-doubling their efforts to advise, assist and equip Iraqi security forces in advance of the December 2011 deadline for all American troops to leave Iraq.

21: Spc. Tyler Klabenes, a member of the 1167th Brigade Support Company, has the opportunity to play flag football with and against former NFL greats at Joint Base Balad during a USO-sponsored game.

February 2011

20: Spc. Benjamin Hunter, 1st Lt. Tommy Vu, Staff Sgt. Hunter Isley and Spc. Holden Isley of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade win the “Inter-Service Fitness Challenge” at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. The four Guard Soldiers combined to do 488 push-ups in two minutes, 504 sit-ups in two minutes and recorded a combined time in the two-mile run of 55:30.

April 2011

28: Iraqi T-407 helicopter pilots fly their first mission without U.S. advisors. Among the Soldiers training the Iraqis is Chief Warrant Officer 3 Dan Hill of the Nebraska Army National Guard.

May 2011

7: Forty-five Soldiers from the Nebraska City, Neb., -based 192nd Military Police Detachment (Law and Order) welcomed

back from year-long mission to Iraq during a ceremony at the Nebraska City High School.

June 2011

11: Nearly 300 members of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade welcomed during a ceremony at Lincoln’s Seacrest Field.

October 2011

21: President Barack Obama announces all U.S. service members will leave Iraq by the end of the year. The U.S. service members that are still in the country will be “home for the holidays,” Obama said after speaking with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Since American forces went into Iraq in March 2003, more than 1 million Americans have deployed to the Middle Eastern country — many multiple times. More than 32,200 U.S. service members and civilians have been wounded in the country, and 4,482 were killed. “After nearly nine years, America’s war in Iraq will be over,” the president said. “The last American Soldiers will cross the border out of Iraq with their heads held high,

proud of their success and knowing that the American people stand united in our support for our troops. That is how America’s military efforts in Iraq will end.”

November 2011

19: Approximately 90 Soldiers assigned to Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, and other units from within the 2-135th GSAB, welcomed back to Lincoln by more than 1,000 friends and family members during a ceremony at the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1. They are the last Nebraska Army National Guard unit to be stationed in Iraq.

December 2011

8: The last Nebraska Army Guardsman to be stationed in Iraq returns to Nebraska.

25: Despite the end of the war in Iraq, around 170 Nebraska National Guardsmen spend Christmas overseas in locations such as Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Army Guard cavalry squadron welcomes new commander

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) bade farewell to the commander who led them through a successful one-year deployment to Afghanistan while welcoming a new leader who just returned from his own yearlong deployment to Iraq, Oct. 15.

During a ceremony before distinguished guests, family, friends and a formation of cavalry Soldiers, Lt. Col. Brent Flachsbart assumed command of the 1-134th Cavalry from Lt. Col. Thomas Rynders. Col. Michael Deger, commander of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, officiated over the ceremony.



Rynders

According to Deger, after completing a successful deployment to Afghanistan this summer, Rynders is leaving the 1-134th Cavalry in excellent position to continue meeting its upcoming challenges. While in Afghanistan, the organization was responsible for a massive mission of training members of the Afghan National Police Force in and around Kabul, said Deger, adding that those same police officers are now responsible for keeping the Afghan capital city secure.

"The challenges of command, by definition, are very difficult," Deger told Rynders. "And you met every one of them."

Deger said Flachsbart, who also recently completed a lengthy mission to Iraq as the senior operations officer for the 67th BfSB, is ready to lead the 1-134th Cavalry through the challenges ahead as it transitions back into its traditional, part-time status.

"Lieutenant Colonel Flachsbart, the colors have been passed to you," said Deger. "Your task is to continue through the transition."

In relinquishing the squadron's colors, Rynders said that he was filled with bittersweet feelings.

"You guys have helped me make my dreams come true," Rynders told the members of the assembled squadron, adding his additional thanks to his family, friends and fellow Soldiers for their work and sacrifices during the deployment.

Rynders began his military career when he enlisted into the U.S. Air Force Reserves in 1984. He



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Taking Command: Lt. Col. Brent Flachsbart (left) receives the colors of the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) from Col. Michael Deger, commander of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, during a change of command ceremony held Oct. 15 in Lincoln, Neb.

joined the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-195th Armor Battalion as a combat medic in 1987 before receiving his commission through the Reserve Officer Training Corps at the University of Nebraska-Kearney in 1990.

He has held a variety of staff and leadership positions in the 1-195th Armor, 1-167th Cavalry and the 1-134th Cavalry (R&S). He began an Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) tour at the National Guard Bureau in 2004, serving as an action officer and branch chief. He is currently assigned to the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs as the deputy director of Mobilizations in the Pentagon.

Rynders' overseas experience includes a 2001 mission to Kuwait with the 1-167th Cavalry where he served as the security forces executive officer, a 2003 deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina where he served as the senior operations officer for the 1-167th Cavalry's "Task Force Huskers," and a 2006 deployment to Camp Victory, Iraq, where he served as the senior Guard advisor to the U.S. 5th Corps.

Rynders and his wife, Kristine, have four children. They live in northern Virginia.

"You're now in the very capable hands of Lieutenant Colonel Flachsbart," Rynders said in his final remarks to the squadron, adding that he's known and worked with the incoming commander for many years and knows that he's now ready to successfully lead the unit through the upcoming months. "Lieutenant Colonel Flachsbart... the squadron is yours."

In accepting the colors, Flachsbart reaffirmed his commitment to

the Soldiers and their families, adding that he's excited to begin work. "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to command what I believe is the finest combat arms organization in the state," Flachsbart told Deger. "I will not let you down."

The new commander also promised to do whatever he can to ensure that the 1-134th Cavalry continues to be a successful organization.

"This squadron is our squadron," Flachsbart told the formation of cavalrymen. "It is up to us to continue this success."

Flachsbart's military career began in 1989 when he enlisted into the U.S. Army Reserves as a heavy wheeled vehicle mechanic. In 1990 he transferred to the Missouri Army National Guard while completing his commissioning requirements through ROTC. He received his commission in 1992.

Since then, Flachsbart has served in a number of leadership and staff assignments. These include several stints as a platoon leader in Missouri, Kentucky and Nebraska. He has also served as a company executive officer, detachment and company commander, and several staff assignments within the 1-167th and 1-134th Cavalry.

Flachsbart also served overseas with the 1-167th and 1-134th Cavalry during missions to Bosnia-Herzegovina (2003) and Iraq (2006-07). His most recent assignment was as the 67th BfSB's operations officer during its deployment to Iraq (2010-11).

Flachsbart currently serves as the Nebraska National Guard counter drug coordinator. He is married to Christine Gonzales and has three children.

help, he added.

"With the mix of seasoned Soldiers and several newer ones, Lieutenant Colonel Stevens and his team took on the challenge within a matter of hours," said Dahlman.

Dahlman thanked Stevens for his time with the unit and thanked Stevens' wife and kids for supporting him along the way.

Kadavy started his military career when he enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard as an attack helicopter maintenance specialist in 1987.

He was appointed as a warrant officer in August 1990. He was then reappointed as a second lieutenant in October

1995, serving as an aviation officer.

Kadavy's most recent assignment was as the State Family Program director for Nebraska.

"Major Kadavy, you are the right officer to take command," added Dahlman. "You will need to move the unit forward and know you can count on the set of Soldiers in front of you and they won't let you down."

Kadavy said his career in the Nebraska Army National Guard as an enlisted Soldier, warrant officer and officer, and the support he's received along the way, has helped him become who he is today.

"It's with the support of my family that I can be a Soldier," said Kadavy. "The home front is what keeps us able to wear this uniform more than this nation favors."

"The homefront affects all of us serving, remember that every day. This is why we do what we do and serve," added Kadavy.

"I am humbled to take command of this distinguished unit," said Kadavy. "I look forward to serving with such a fine unit."



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Accepting the Colors: Lt. Col. Craig Stong (left) accepts the colors of the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion from Col. Richard Dahlman, Oct. 23, during a change of command ceremony in Lincoln, Neb.

New leader takes helm at Nebraska Army Guard medical battalion

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

Soldiers assigned to the Nebraska Army National Guard's 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion welcomed a new commander to their ranks while wishing their former leader farewell during a change of command ceremony held Oct. 23 at the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

Standing before a formation of Soldiers representing the various units of the organization, outgoing commander, Lt. Col. Shawn Edwards passed the battalion's colors to Lt. Col. Craig Strong. Col. Richard Dahlman, 92nd Troop Command commander, officiated over the ceremony.



Edwards

According to Edwards, she's extremely proud of all the major accomplishments Soldiers within the 110th MMB made during her tenure.

"You have met every challenge," Edwards said shortly after relinquishing the battalion's maroon colors. "I can't help but recognize the battalion's outstanding accomplishments."

Edwards, who was born in Lincoln, Neb., and graduated from Omaha North High School in 1982, received her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Bellevue University in 1995 and a master's degree in Information Technology Management from Touro International University in 2006.

She began her military career on Sept. 12, 1985, when she enlisted as a private first class in Company A, 135th Signal Battalion, as a radio teletype operator. Edwards received her commission as a second lieutenant after graduating from the Nebraska National Guard's Officer Candidate School at the Camp Ashland Regional Training Institute in July 1992.

Since then, Edwards has served in numerous leadership and staff positions including platoon leader and executive officer in Co. A, 135th Signal Bn.; alcohol and drug coordinating officer in Headquarters, State Area Command; company commander and supply officer for Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 126th Chemical Bn.; communications and electronics officer for the 67th Area Support Group; chief of the Personnel Systems Section and chief of the Mobilization Readiness Sec-

tion at National Guard Bureau; armed forces manager at Camp Victory, Iraq; and division operations officer for the Chief Officer Management Branch at National Guard Bureau.

Edwards has two children and a granddaughter.

In assuming command of the 110th MMB, Strong – who had earlier in his career served as commander of the Nebraska Army Guard's 313th Medical Co. (Ground Ambulance), said he was excited to lead the organization before laying out his three goals for the organization. Excerpts of these goals included: "First, be good. Live up to the Army values and do what it is morally and ethically right, be accountable, be honest, display unimpeachable integrity and character," said Strong.

"Second, learn something. Your country depends on you to be well-trained professionals and agile thinkers," he added. "This requires you all to continuously learn through mentoring, training, reflection and study."

"Finally, have fun. You probably joined the military based upon a combination of factors such as loyalty, duty and opportunity," Strong added. "But in my experiences... what keeps Soldiers in the military is because they truly enjoy what they are doing and it is coupled with camaraderie, teamwork and lasting friendships."

Born in York, Neb., Strong is a 1986 graduate of Silver Creek High School and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he received his bachelor's degree in Political Science in 1990. In 1995 he earned his master's degree in Economics from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln before receiving his Juris-Doctorate from the University of Nebraska's College of Law.

Strong's military career began in 1986 when he enlisted into the U.S. Navy Reserve as a construction electrician. He transferred to the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1993 and received his commission through the Nebraska National Guard OCS program in July 1995.

Strong has served in numerous leadership and staff positions during his time with the Nebraska Army National Guard to include: platoon leader and company commander of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance); supply, intelligence and operations officer for the 110th MMB; and deputy state surgeon.

A veteran of two deployments to Iraq, Strong currently works as the full time comptroller for the Nebraska Army National Guard.

He and his wife, Jennifer, have two children.

Army Guard unit receives new boss

By Spc. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

The 41st Rear Operations Center conducted a change of command, Oct. 16, at the Armed Forces Readiness Center at Greenleaf Training Site as Maj. Robert J. Kadavy took command from Lt. Col. Todd D. Stevens.

Stevens had served as commander of the 41st ROC since August 2009.

"The 41st ROC is a unique organization, with the diverse set of highly specialized Soldiers," said Col. Richard H. Dahlman, 92nd Troop Command commander and presiding officer.

According to Dahlman, the unit's Soldiers' skills were put to the test when they were needed this summer during the Missouri and Platte River floods.

"Soldiers and their leaders were put out to support our fellow citizens and the effects of the floods that struck the Midwest," said Dahlman. The answer was clear that the 41st ROC was there to



Stevens



Kadavy

Holiday memories, experiences timeless

In 1966, Dr. Seuss created a story that has become a staple for the holiday season. "The Grinch" is the "Start your engines!" signal for the flurry of spending, decorating and stressing begins and builds during the holiday season.

According to Mental Health America, the top six holiday stressors are: finances (40 percent), too much to do (34 percent), time with family (17 percent), over-indulgence (28 percent), being alone (27 percent), and memories (37 percent). (Representative sample of 3,040 aged 18 and older polled between Oct. 10 – Nov. 1, 2006.)

Of this surveyed group, parents are the most stressed by finances and complain that they have too much to do. When adding the wobbly economy to all of this, our focus is even further removed from what really matters and is absorbed by how we can afford more stuff.

We are conditioned to put a monetary value on making priceless memories. But, with the shaky national economy, many have reconsidered and rebalanced savings and debt through sheer necessity.

As a nation, we've been forced to find a realistic spending goal for our families thus reducing average credit card debt to just under \$5,000

Healthy Coping

By Brandi Gettert
Family Readiness Support Assistant
92nd Troop Command

for the first time in eight years. Delinquent payments more than 90 or more days past due have dropped to less than 1 percent...down by more than 21 percent since 2009. (www.psychologytoday.com/print/51139)

So, I started thinking...is it possible to refocus and redefine what the holidays mean? Permanently? Shouldn't the holiday season be about the shared experiences of family and friends and not about the abuse to our bank accounts?

Grinch: "How could it be so? It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes or bags!"

When I asked my 10-year-old son what his favorite Christmas memory was, I assumed the only answer could be "presents!" but his answer surprised me. "I like when me, you and dad decorate Christmas cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve and when we put out the reindeer food." (Oats, a lot of silver glitter and raisins is what they seem to like best.) It was the traditions we created for our

family that he enjoyed most.

Thinking about his answer, I wondered if he remembered what presents he received just last year. Did I even remember?

I do remember spending the first Christmas Day in our own home in Nebraska. I remember cooking a lot and staying in pajamas for most of the day. And I remember the presents looked beautiful under the tree, but not what was in them.

The cookie decorating was a favorite for me, too, and trekking out into the snow to put out that reindeer food with a giggling little 'helper' wearing pajamas and boots always will be a sweet memory.

What I realized was my child already got it. I just needed to change my way of thinking.

If you remember one thing from this article, remember experiences become memories and memories become priceless as time passes. All that stuff? Clothes wear out. Jewelry gets lost. Games and electronics quickly become outdated.

But experiences and time? Priceless and irreplaceable.

Grinch: "He puzzled and puzzled till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas, perhaps...means a little bit more!"



Guardsmen lend hand to holiday wreath laying project



Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Bringing Some Holiday Cheer: Capt. Matthew Bartling, operations officer with the 72nd Civil Support Team, lays a wreath at the grave of a veteran at Lincoln's Wyuka Cemetery, Dec. 10, as part of the Wreaths Across America program. Bartling and several other Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen joined civilian volunteers to lay 645 donated wreaths on the graves of veterans at Wyuka. Wreaths Across America is a national program with three goals: remembering veterans, honoring their service and teaching others about their sacrifices.

BOOK continued from page 1.

were doing as well as descriptions of where we had been," he said. "And we've been to quite a few places."

"Really it was just a way of expressing myself," he added.

Over the years, McPherson said he developed a desire to express what he saw and experienced in the world around him in words. Often those words took the form of prose and short essays. One of McPherson's many subjects came from his near-daily walks along the trail that passed by his medical offices in Lincoln.

One day during one of those walks, McPherson said he began imagining what it might be like to find something unexpected and how he would react to such a surprise.

"I came up with this idea of, what if you came upon something really interesting in the ditch?" he said. "And that really interesting thing, in my mind, was a murdered body."

McPherson said the idea continued to swirl in his mind until one Saturday morning he decided to start writing.

"I had already done this writing about the bike path, so I just started in," McPherson recalled.

Several hours later, he said, he had completed the first couple of chapters.

McPherson said he was surprised at the ease in which the words poured from his fingers and onto his computer screen. He also discovered that his writing skills were especially sharp during the early hours of the day.

"I found that I have a lot more ability to focus on something like that in the morning," he said. "With my schedules, mornings are filled up with work most days. It had to come before I went to work."

"So, I shifted my wakeup time," said McPherson, adding that instead of waking up at 5:50 a.m. each day, he began waking up at 5:15 a.m., which gave him approximately 30 minutes of uninterrupted time most days to work on his writing.

McPherson started writing in the autumn of 2007. Almost one year later, the book was completed.

McPherson said the plot of his novel involves a 50-something-year-old Lincoln physician who discovers a body along a trail in Lincoln. Investigators soon find this doctor to be a "person of interest" in the crime, which begins its own trail that takes many twists and turns before the final resolution.

McPherson said his ideas for the novel came from many different directions. Some came from the various medical cases he'd worked on or been apart of. Others came from various movies, TV shows and books he'd enjoyed over the years.

Other parts came from discussions he had with local experts, including Lincoln law enforcement officials.

"I talked with a member of the local police force and was told that the person who reports the body certainly has to be considered a person of interest until they find another suspect," said McPherson. "That is certainly not unusual."

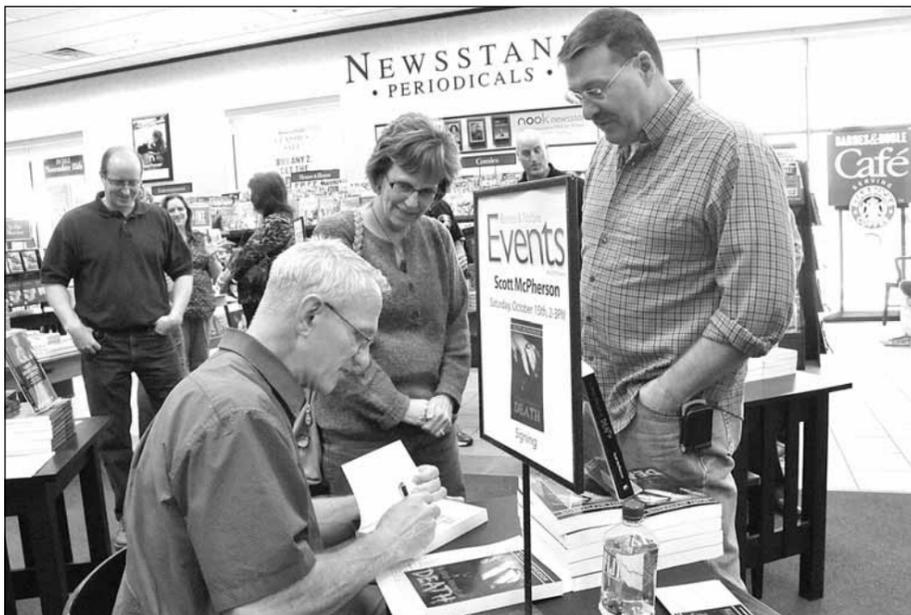


Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Signatures: Col. Scott McPherson signs a copy of his newly published book, "A Step Ahead of Death," during a book signing event at a Lincoln, Neb., book store in October. A family physician in civilian life, McPherson also serves as the Nebraska Air National Guard's state surgeon.

Other ideas, McPherson said, simply came from his own imagination.

After months of near-daily writing, McPherson finally began to let his family members and close friends in on his secret.

"Once I was pretty sure it was moving along, I told people," he said, adding he wanted to make sure he was going to be able to finish the book before letting people know.

After completing the book and then spending months self-editing, he finally began to let some of his family and a few friends read it with the goal of taking their inputs and incorporating those into the final manuscript. He said the feedback was almost universally positive and constructive.

The biggest challenge, McPherson said, came when he gave a copy to his father to read.

"Your parents tend to scrutinize things that you do," he said. "And to have my father tell me that he liked the book and that it worked pretty well – and of course he had some critiques about the book, too – that was probably enough to tell me that it was worth continuing."

"I definitely give him that credit," he added. "I figured that if he didn't like it, I wouldn't continue."

McPherson said after completing the writing, he soon found out his job was only half-finished. Finding a company to publish the book, he added, would become more work than actually writing it.

"I think if you talk to most people who have written a book, or are trying to, getting a publisher is the hardest part," said McPherson.

Just learning how the publishing industry works was a test in itself, he said. "It's a complex system and I didn't know what to do

exactly," he said, adding he received advice from several different people, including a number of local authors.

"The main thing was finding out who the publishers are," McPherson said, adding that he purchased a "two-and-a-half-inch book called 'The Writer's Market' that contains the names of most of the publishers in the United States and Canada, and also spent hours online doing research. He soon narrowed his search to those publishers who specialized in the mystery genre.

"I tried to pick out the ones that were most likely to be interested in this book style," he said.

"There were a lot of publishers back then who weren't taking any new submissions. Some weren't interested in taking on new, unpublished authors while others wouldn't work with anyone who didn't have a literary agent," McPherson said.

Once he'd narrowed his search, McPherson found out that the job still wasn't even close to being finished. Some publishers required authors to submit their entire book for consideration. Others required the first three chapters while others simply wanted a one to four-page synopsis of the book.

"Every publisher has a different method," he said. "I read several books on the process, too... and one of the things that most publishers want is a query letter that contains information about the book and my biography all on a single page."

McPherson said he sent dozens of query letters out, yet no one seemed interested in taking a chance on a rookie writer from Lincoln, Neb.

Finally, after about year, McPherson said he received a letter back from a publisher

to whom he'd sent the entire manuscript months earlier.

"I think that was probably the most helpful because they read the entire book instead of just the first, second or third chapters," he said.

McPherson said the company, Comfort Publishing, showed definite interest in his book, but they still wanted some more information. He said he filled out his last questionnaire for the company on a summer evening in 2010 during a National Guard exercise in Salina, Kan. McPherson found out shortly after sending in the questionnaire that the company had wanted to publish the novel.

McPherson's book came out in paperback on Aug. 1. It is now available at Barnes and Noble bookstores, on-line and at local book stores. McPherson said it is also available on Kindle and Nook at this time..

Since August, McPherson has attended several book signings in Lincoln and Omaha, signing dozens of copies of the novels for friends, family members and other people who have purchased the book. He said the feedback continues to be positive.

"It's exciting because everyone who talks to me about the book likes it," he said, before adding with a chuckle: "Of course, there could be people out there who are reading it who don't like it... but they haven't expressed it to me."

"You have to be careful, though, not to build yourself up high in your own mind," said McPherson, "because I know that I am not a major novelist. I'm not a John Steinbeck... I know that I'm not a major novelist because I look at the word order and the choices that I made and I know that I am no wordsmith."

"Still, I don't think I did too badly."

The writing bug hasn't ended there, either. McPherson recently completed a second book – which is a prequel to the first – and is currently working on a third book, which he says takes place someplace in time after the conclusion of the original "A Step Ahead of Death." McPherson said that neither book has been submitted for publication yet, but he's hopeful.

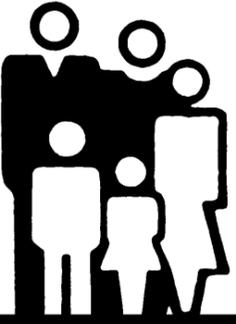
"My daughter is helping with the structural editing of the second book and she says she thinks it's better than the first," he said, smiling.

And yet, even if those books never find their way to a bookshelf, McPherson said he feels real satisfaction in knowing what he's accomplished.

"I was pleased that I actually wrote a book, that had a complicated plot that fit together well, that had a character that I enjoyed writing about and a storyline that I thought worked well," he said. "I'm pleased that it all worked... I was actually surprised that it did."

And that, McPherson added, was what kept him engaged in this story from cover to cover.

"For me, the whole process was fun. That's probably the biggest thing I've enjoyed," he said. "I think if I didn't have fun, I just wouldn't have done it."



Guard Family NEWS You Can Use



Winter maintenance on homes, cars can save future headaches

The following are suggested checks and services for the home and auto recommended by the Nebraska National Guard's Logistics Maintenance staff.

■ Housing checks, service

- **Roof:** Check the roof and around vents, skylights and chimneys for leaks. Repair as necessary.
- **Attic:** If there is no ridge vent, keep gable vents open year-round to ensure proper ventilation.
- **Gutters:** Clean the gutters and drain pipes so leaves won't clog them and be sure they drain away from the house. (Fall: In cold-climate areas, drain outside faucets.)
- **Fireplace:** Clean the fireplace of ashes. Check the chimney for loose or missing mortar in the fall. Have the chimney professionally cleaned. Make sure the damper closes tightly. In spring, leave the damper open for improved ventilation if the home is not air-conditioned.
- **Filters:** Remember to clean or replace filters once a month, or as needed. Check and clean the dryer vent, air conditioner, stove hood and room fans. Keep heating and cooling vents clean and free from furniture and draperies.
- **Safety Equipment:** Ensure that all smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers are in good working order. Replace batteries in appropriate devices as needed, or at least twice each year.
- **Air Conditioner:** Remove window air-conditioners in the fall, or put weatherproof covers on them.
- **Refrigerator:** Make sure your refrigerator door seals are airtight. Test them

by closing the door over a dollar bill. If you can pull the bill out easily, the latch may need to be adjusted or the seal may need to be replaced.

In addition, if you have a coil-back refrigerator, vacuum the coils at least twice each year. Your refrigerator will run more efficiently with clean coils. Also, stock up. A full refrigerator uses less energy than an empty one.

- **Faucets:** Check for leaky faucets in the kitchen and bathroom(s). Replace washers as necessary.
- **Windows and Doors:** Seal drafty doors and windows. If you added up all of the small cracks where heating and cooling escapes from a home, it would be the same as having a window open. Replace seals as needed.
- **Storm Windows and Screens:** Take down screens (if removable type) and replace with storm windows in the fall. In the spring, remove, clean and store storm windows (if removable). Check and patch all door and window screens. Put screens up (if removable type).
- **Siding and Paint:** Look for cracks and holes in house siding or paint. Replace caulk if necessary. A carpet knife can work well for cutting away old caulking from house siding. Slice down alongside it from both directions with the hook-like blade, then use the knife to lift out the old caulk bead intact.
- **Basement:** Check the basement walls and floor for dampness. Be sure to clean the dehumidifier regularly, if you have one.
- **Heating System:** Have the heating system serviced in the fall. Change filters.
- **Hot Water Heater:** In the fall, drain the hot water heater. Remove sediment from the bottom of the tank.

■ Automotive checks, service

Mechanical failure can be more than an inconvenience in the winter. Especially in areas with colder winters and dangerous road conditions because of snow and ice - preventive maintenance is a must.

A well maintained vehicle helps guarantee your safety and getting to where you need to be in one piece. Some of the following tips can be performed by any do-it-yourselfer; others require the skilled hands of an auto technician.

- **Engine Performance:** Get engine driveability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a good repair shop. Cold weather makes existing problems worse. Replace dirty filters-air, fuel, PCV, etc.
- **Fuel:** Put a bottle of fuel de-icer in your tank once a month to help keep moisture from freezing in the fuel line. A gas tank which is kept filled helps keep moisture from forming.
- **Oil:** Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual-more often (every 3,000 miles) if your driving is mostly stop-and-go or consists of frequent short trips.
- **Cooling Systems:** The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. (A 50/50 mix of antifreeze and water is usually recommended.) Never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled! The tightness and condition of drive belts, clamps and hoses should be checked by a pro.
- **Windshield Wipers:** Replace old blades. If your climate is harsh, purchase rubber-clad (winter) blades to fight ice build-up. Stock up

on windshield washer solvent - you'll be surprised how much you use and it's not worth getting caught without it. Carry an ice-scraper.

- **Heater/Defroster:** The heater and defroster must be in good working condition for passenger comfort and driver visibility.
- **Battery:** Batteries can fail any time of year. The only accurate way to detect a weak battery is with professional equipment. Routine care: Scrape away corrosion from posts and cable connections; clean all surfaces; re-tighten all connections. If battery caps are removable, check fluid level monthly. Avoid contact with corrosive deposits and battery acid. Wear eye protection and rubber gloves.
- **Lights:** Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean road grime from all lenses. To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.
- **Exhaust System:** Your vehicle should be placed on a lift and the exhaust system examined for leaks. The trunk and floor boards should be inspected for small holes. Exhaust fumes can be deadly.
- **Tires:** Worn tires will be of little use in winter weather. Examine tires for remaining tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. Check tire pressures once a month. Let the tires "cool down" before checking the pressure. Rotate as recommended. Don't forget your spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition.
- **Emergency Gear:** Gloves, boots, blankets, flares, a small shovel, sand or kitty litter, tire chains and a flash light. Put a few "high-energy" snacks in your glove box.

ESGR nomination season begins for Employers Support Freedom Award

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense agency, is now accepting nominations for the 2012 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award. The Freedom Award is the DoD's highest award for civilian employers supporting Guard and Reserve members.

The DoD encourages all Guard and Reserve members to nominate employers who have provided exceptional support of their military service. Nominations may be submitted by service members, or a family member acting on their behalf, at www.FreedomAward.mil through Jan. 16.

"Employers who go above and beyond in their support of Guard and Reserve members are providing a tremendous service to our country; they are contributing to the resiliency and peace of mind of the more than one million men and women who stand ready to serve when our nation's calls on them," said David McGinnis, acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs.

"Guard and Reserve members who feel their employers have gone the extra mile in supporting their military service should nominate them for the 2012 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award to show their appreciation and highlight their support as an example for others to follow."

Previous recipients garnered recognition for supportive measures including organizing colleagues to provide dinners to a deployed employee's family, covering extra shifts during an employee's military training, taking a deployed service member's children to sports practices and other family events, and establishing robust military support networks.

The 2012 recipients will be announced by early summer and honored in Washington, D.C., during a special ceremony next fall.

For questions or interviews regarding the Freedom Award, please visit www.FreedomAward.mil or contact Beth Sherman, ESGR Public Affairs, at (703) 696-1171, ext. 539 or by email at ESGR-PA@osd.mil.

Life's major events require careful planning

Happy Holiday season to everyone.

I recently had to contact DFAS and Social Security when my father passed away. Let me tell you, it is absolutely imperative that your surviving family members have all of your military and Social Security information when notifying these agencies.

Forms will be sent to you, either on line or via USPS, which will require completion and a copy of a death certificate.

As you know, if you pass during the middle of a month, your retirement pay automatically stops upon notification and your surviving spouse will have to file for payment of the number of days you were alive in that month. DFAS will also send the paperwork to initiate the Survivor Benefit Program (SBP) at that time.

Social Security will send information to initiate SS benefits if your benefits were greater than your surviving spouse's entitlement, as well as the information to process the one-time lump sum death payment.

In order to assist you with compiling this information, we will be posting a checklist on the Website after the first of the year which will help your surviving family members when they start the process. This form may be downloaded and used as often as you need.

Your monthly electronic Retiree Account Statement (eRAS) is now available on myPay. Go to this link to log in and access your eRAS: <https://mypay.dfas.mil>

While you're logged in to your account, please also take a few moments to verify that all of your contact information is correct.

DFAS will issue your 1099-R tax statement, annual RAS and a Retiree Newsletter in December.

Please make sure both your mailing address and email address are up to date.

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By Retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

■ Monthly National Guard retiree breakfast schedules:

As a courtesy, for those who like to rise early to eat and share stories, here's the breakfast site information for those in the immediate areas:

• **Lincoln: Army National Guard retirees:** First Monday of each month, 8 a.m., T&R Garden, 5250 Cornhusker Hwy. *Air National Guard retirees:* Last Monday of each month, 8 a.m., The Pantry, 3939 N. 48th Street.

• **North Platte area retirees:** Second Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., Village Inn, North Platte, Neb.

If other groups meet, please contact Bill Nelson at (402) 309-7105 or william.nelson1@us.army.mil to publish the information.

■ From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Mary Moss:

Not reporting a divorce in a timely manner can affect retirees.

If a retiree gets divorced it is imperative to update Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) (ID card system) in a timely manner. Delayed reporting and incorrect information in DEERS (ID card) can affect benefits.

A former spouse could have access to services that the former spouse might not be entitled to leading to a debt to the retiree for TRICARE medical and pharmacy benefits the former spouse received, but was not entitled to.

It is important to note that some former spouses are still entitled to TRICARE even after a divorce.

The basic qualifications are: (1) 20 years of marriage; (2) 20 years service for retired pay purposes performed by the military member and (3) 20 years marriage occurring during the military member's service time.

This is known as the 20/20/20 rule. There is also a 20/20/15 rule which entitles a former spouse to 365 days of continued TRICARE eligibility.

The following are phone numbers for 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 Penterman Armory at Nebraska National Guard air base (402) 309-1749 or (402) 309-1739
- Air Guard (Lincoln Air Base) Bldg 600 Room E209 (402) 309-1452
- Offutt Air Force Base (402) 294-5019
- Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney (402) 309-7743 or (402) 309-7758
- Norfolk Armory 817 S 1st St Norfolk (402) 309-8908 or (402) 309-8900
- The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552. If you need to find a DEERS/ID card office outside of Nebraska, you can call DEERS.

The other piece that is so important to remember if you ever divorce is the Survivor Benefit Plan. Updating your divorce in DEERS does not update your SBP.

Also, the new piece of information that I learned today is that if a former spouse receives TRICARE medical or pharmacy benefits that he/she is not entitled to due to divorce, it could cause a debt to the retiree.

Enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

Street Talk

“What does the end of the Iraq mean to you?”



Master Sgt. Paul Buss
155th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
“Everyone did the job that they were asked to do... We made a lot of headway in getting (Iraq) fit for a democracy. The mission was completed in that aspect, so it is just a matter of seeing how things sustain themselves from here on out.”



Spc. Iain West
Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion
“It feels good to come to a close, that we are out of Iraq and for them to support themselves.”



Spc. Stasia Whisenhut
313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance)
“I’m glad that more of my fellow Soldiers will be home instead of overseas.”



Sgt. James Wieting
267th Support Maintenance Company
“When I was overseas, I missed my family the most and I’m glad the troops can finally be home with them.”



Senior Airman Marty Oborny
155th Maintenance Squadron
“We are going to be focusing our energy elsewhere; focus on new things. It’s going to be good to be done there and move on.”



Capt. Christy Fetzer
155th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron
“All of our Soldiers that are in harm’s way will come home... hopefully it will bring hope to the American people what the military does, what it provides for them, as well as a sense of national security and peace being upheld.”

375-year-old oath helps National Guard chart path

Recently members of the Nebraska National Guard came together in our historic Memorial Hall at Camp Ashland to celebrate a very important milestone: the 375th Birthday of our National Guard.

Today’s National Guard draws its lineage back to Dec. 13, 1636 when the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony formed three militia regiments to defend the colony against enemy attack and to preserve its newly established settlements.

That decision – and the oath that those early militiamen made to their communities and to each other – formed the bedrock on which our National Guard stands today. It was a promise that they would be ready and prepared to serve their community in whatever capacity was needed.

It was a commitment that, though tested time and time again by the crucible of war, natural disasters and civil strife, has made us into what we are today: the most ready, trained and equipped National Guard our nation has ever seen.

For Nebraska National Guard men and women, this commitment was what helped guide us through the killing fields of the Civil War, the jungles of the Philippine Insurrection, the trenches of World War I, the bloody hedgerows of Normandy, the snowy battlefields of the Ardennes and the sandstorms of the First Gulf War.

This promise saw us through our deployments to Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations around the globe where we’ve served.

It also helped guide us through our recent domestic call-ups to the

The Adjutant General

Major General

Judd Lyons



combat injuries that were sustained while they were mobilized to active duty.

The memories of these Nebraska National Guard Soldiers will stay with us forever. They will not be forgotten.

Around 170 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are still deployed as we celebrated our National Guard’s birthday and the holiday season. We thank them and their families, too, for their continued service and sacrifices that they are making on behalf of all us.

As the Adjutant General, I’ve been blessed to serve with the best Nebraskans this state has to offer. I’ve also had numerous opportunities to visit with our Soldiers and Airmen, their families, their employers and members of their communities.

There hasn’t been a time when I haven’t been awestruck by the feelings of patriotism and self-sacrifice that exist across this state. These values are exhibited by both our community and service members.

I also know that we will need to rely on these important characteristics, as well as all of the hard-learned lessons of the past decade, as we continue to prepare and be ready for whatever our future holds.

As we celebrated our National Guard’s 375th Birthday, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride knowing that we, as National Guardsmen and women, walk in the footsteps of those heroes that have come before us.

I also couldn’t help but feel a sense of incredible comfort and confidence in the fact that we all march shoulder-to-shoulder with the heroes who occupy our ranks today.

My wife Amy joins me in wishing each of you and your families a very happy holiday season.

Gulf Coast following hurricanes and an oil spill, to neighboring states where we’ve assisted fighting wildfires, and across our great state in response to blizzards, ice storms, tornados, fires and last year’s devastating Platte and Missouri River floods.

It is this commitment that continues to guide us today as we chart our course into the future.

I think that what made this year’s birthday celebration especially memorable is the fact that it comes just as the war in Iraq has ended.

The war in Iraq – as well as Afghanistan – has been a transformational experience for the Nebraska National Guard.

Since March 2003 we have sent more than 3,100 Soldiers and Airmen to Iraq where they have served honorably and performed brilliantly in ways too numerous to count. They have truly made a difference.

But these missions and accomplishments weren’t completed without the countless sacrifices made by these Soldiers and Airmen, their families, their employers and their communities.

Some of our comrades gave their lives for their nation and their fellow Soldiers.

Since March 2003, we have lost nine Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to hostile action while serving in Iraq and one Soldier in Afghanistan. We have also lost four other Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to non-

Long year filled with multiple challenges finally comes to end

And so 2011 comes to an end – a year that saw momentous changes overseas in Iraq, a continued presence in Afghanistan and a new mission in support of the revolution in Libya.

It was a year that saw us faced with enormous challenges as the Nebraska National Guard was called upon to respond to a months-long historic flood along the Missouri and Platte Rivers. It was also a year in which we said farewell to three Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who died while mobilized for overseas federal missions as well as several long-time civilian employees who dedicated the better part of their lives to this organization.

Personally, 2011 was a year in which I said farewell to my father-in-law, who passed away last month, and happy retirement to my long-time mentor, Lt. Col. Dale “Bob” Vrana Jr., who retired from the Nebraska Army National Guard after serving in this organization for more than three decades, the last of which as the state public affairs officer during one of the most turbulent eras the Guard has ever experienced.

As we end this long, long year, it’s hard not to feel a sense of exhaustion as there have been numerous times throughout the past 12 months where it has felt like we are all running a marathon that has no finish line in sight. It’s also hard

not to feel a sense of melancholy as this past year has had the definite feeling, at least to me, of an era coming to an end.

This year I celebrated my 25th anniversary of graduating from Crofton High School in northeastern Nebraska. It also marked my 25th year of wearing a military uniform.

A quarter of a century. Where has the time gone? It seems like that thought has popped into my head more than a few times this past 12 months.

Recently, I completed a project in which I constructed a timeline detailing the Nebraska National Guard’s role in the war in Iraq, which was designed to put this organization’s work into perspective with the world around it as it compared to the mission in Iraq.

Working on that timeline brought a lot of memories streaming back into my head about all the things that have occurred, both to this organization and to me personally, since March 2003. At times, it was difficult to go back and read through those headlines because they brought back some pretty emotional memories.

challenges that would pop up both here in Nebraska and the United States, or abroad in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Turkey, Germany, Kyrgyzstan or in the skies over Libya.

What I don’t think would come as a surprise, though, was the fact that despite all of these enormous and unforeseen challenges, the members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard were ready, time and time again, when the call came.

It also gave me a sense of confidence going into the next year knowing that no matter what fate throws at us, we’re going to be able to take it in stride and complete our mission.

I think that’s something each and everyone of us, regardless of our age, rank, position or experience can take pride in because each and everyone one of us had had a role in our past success and our current preparedness.

Hopefully you all else feel that same way.

From my family to all of yours, Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays. May the new year bring you all blessings and happiness.

My Turn

Editor, Prairie Soldier

Kevin J. Hynes



PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Colonel

Lynn M. Heng
Kevin D. Lyons

Major

Matthew S. York
Ryan A. Oneal

Captain

Bernadette J. Brownclerk
Brandon S. Burton

Chief Warrant Officer 2

Carrie L. Monismith
Gregory L. Nun
Sean M. Omalley
Vally J. Robinsonmcdonald
Joshua A. Schaaf
Boe J. Searight

Sergeant Major

Scott M. Hansen

Master Sergeant

John R. Willis

Sergeant First Class

Travis D. Arner
D. J. Johnson
Jeffrey S. Mashek
David M. Nanfite
Maritza J. Pearl
Joseph G. Serkiz Jr.
Lucas J. Smith
Shawn W. Young

Staff Sergeant

Troy A. Bear
Jessee R. Daberkow
Dennis R. Hatfield
Diana K. Krepel
Bret A. Liermann
Christopher E. Moulton
Jody M. Worm

Sergeant

Jacob R. Borgmann
Anthony L. Clark
Matthew D. Johnson
Robert J. Jones

Lauree R. Lenz
Jesus Magana Jr.
Chase D. Maurer
Mitchell E. McConnell
Christopher S. Mitchell
Ellen M. Ross
Ashley B. Ryun
David W. Sautter
Micah J. Schroeder
Andrew R. Scobie
Matthew M. Stern
Ryal E. Wood

Specialist

Brittney M. Backstrom
William L. Bruce
Jeffery J. Daniels
Chelsie A. Deaver
Michaela R. Fitzgibbon
Benjamin A. Gillingm
Miquel Gonzalez
Seth A. Gorham
Ronald E. Home II
Kayla R. Johnson
Kyle D. Klein
Christopher M. Marshall
Amanda M. Martinez
Brian J. Mckay
Michael J. Ogarro
Sheri A. Pence
Tyler D. Petty
Taylor D. Quinn
Cooper W. Rasmussen
Jessica Sanchez
Quintin T. Siemek
Arik J. Swartzfeger
Brittany J. Taylor
Michael R. Ubelhor

Private First Class

Johnathon A. Albaugh
Andrea D. Alleyne
Kayla M. Bledso
Jessie C. Budd
Cameron A. Davis
Austin C. Dutcher
Joshua N. Eaton
Kristina C. Epsteinsutton
Bryce J. Fowler
Troy D. Francis Jr.
Jonathan E. A. Hedges

Dion W. Hixson
Betzabet Jimenez
Meloney R. Mevicker
Donald R. Moore
Benjamin M. Moyer
Aaron E. Murphy
Anthony W. Reinhard
Kathy H. Reyes
Christopher D. Rohde
William J. Robb
Matthew J. Sivill
Pablo Solorio
Benjamin K. Stewart
Jeptha R. Willoughby

Private Two

Matthew S. Allen
Joel M. Amaya
Jerry A. Bowen Jr.
Shawna R. Brymesser
Harrison A. Dale
Clinton D. Fauss
Ryan M. Gardner
Brandon T. McMullen
Tyler J. Miller
Jacob M. Ohl
Nicholas J. Payer
Kenneth N. V. Reyes
Jacobi D. Spencer
Julia L. Webster
Zachary A. Wickersham
Dakota L. Wilson

Air National Guard

Major

Ingolf D. Maurstad

Captain

Troy M. Martin

First Lieutenant

Matthew T. Fisher
Tyler L. Piening
Trey W. Robinson
Brian D. Wall

Second Lieutenant

Alex R. Salmon

Technical Sergeant

Mark A. Baden

Dustin L. Day
Jamison M. Nitz
Steven M. Saalfeld
Teresa M. King

Staff Sergeant

Vinessa M. Boice
Amanda A. Colborn
Philip J. Francis
David T. Schildman

Thomas M. Wilson

Senior Airman

Samantha A. Hunt
Cheva Jumnongnart

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Combat Action Badge

Sgt. 1st Class Ryan K. Faulkner
Sgt. 1st Class David R. Fink
Sgt. 1st Class Timothy S. James
Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Kozak
Staff Sgt. Jeffrey L. Meyers
Staff Sgt. Philip J. Wemhoff
Sgt. Joshua A. Armon
Sgt. John M. Ferguson
Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Sgt. Whitney M. Ritter
Spc. David J. Barrett
Spc. Robert J. Bell
Spc. Mario A. Chavez
Spc. Michael C. Jarvis
Spc. Jonathan L. Jerry
Spc. James R. Koch
Spc. Katie T. Lopez
Spc. Colton C. Magill
Spc. Jacob A. Martinez
Spc. Troy E. Parra
Spc. Zachary W. Spurgeon
Spc. Brandon L. Waltemath
Spc. Matthew D. Wetjen
Pfc. Sarah K. Byrne
Pfc. Robert A. Rasmussen

Army Commendation Medal

Maj. James A. Allen
1st Lt. Daniel S. Claessens

1st Lt. Andrew B. Iler
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Shawn P. Leckenby
Sgt. 1st Class Christofer J. Alt
Sgt. 1st Class Christopher H. Kidd
Sgt. 1st Class Jacob W. Robinson
Sgt. 1st Class Patrick S. Sitter
Sgt. 1st Class James C. Uhing
Staff Sgt. Andrew D. Arnold
Staff Sgt. Jason C. Brooks
Staff Sgt. Joseph J. Dunlap
Staff Sgt. Andrew J. Filips
Staff Sgt. Corey A. Hackbart
Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Marcello
Staff Sgt. Nicholas C. Reis
Staff Sgt. Casey N. Sorensen
Sgt. Joshua A. Armon
Sgt. Randall W. Barnason
Sgt. Cody L. Barry
Sgt. Cody S. Carlson
Sgt. Stephen P. Dorcey
Sgt. Justin J. Eickmeier
Sgt. John M. Ferguson
Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Sgt. Michael J. Gillott
Sgt. Cody A. Graff
Sgt. Joshua C. Johnson
Sgt. Justin L. Modrell
Sgt. Christopher E. Moulton
Sgt. Whitney M. Ritter
Sgt. Jason E. Sautter
Sgt. Drew P. Scott
Sgt. Jay M. Steadman

Sgt. Jedediah J. Struck
Sgt. Michal C. Swanson
Sgt. Ray C. Underwood
Sgt. Timothy J. Vanlaningham
Spc. Taylor R. Ashcraft
Spc. Melissa N. Becci
Spc. Ethan C. Case
Spc. Christopher M. Casey
Spc. Mario A. Chavez
Spc. Manuel S. Molina
Spc. Travis M. Morrison
Spc. Brandon W. Rudloff
Spc. Zachary D. Saunders
Pfc. Jonathan M. Asbach
Pfc. Sarah K. Byrne
Pfc. William J. Seier

Army Achievement Medal

Sgt. Stephen P. Dorcey
Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Spc. David J. Barrett
Spc. Mario A. Chavez
Spc. Mark A. Marta
Spc. Jacob A. Martinez
Spc. Caleb T. J. Mcleod
Spc. Matthew J. Pawley
Spc. Joseph E. Prichard
Spc. Narciso Sanjuan
Spc. Zachary W. Spurgeon
Pfc. Jonathan L. Jerry
Pfc. Robert A. Rasmussen

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Col. Kevin L. Neumann
Lt. Col. Martin R. Aprich
Lt. Col. Matthew R. Parsley

Lt. Col. Dale R. Vrana J.
Command Sgt Maj. Randall A. Schulz
Sgt. Maj. Gregory J. Ford
Master Sgt. Stephen M. Foster

Master Sgt. Alan E. Holka
Sgt. 1st Class David L. Anthony
Sgt. 1st Class Melinda J. Gonzales
Staff Sgt. Calvin L. Munsinger
Sgt. Jonathan V. Bethard

Shorttakes



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Airmen Honored: Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, places a streamer on the Air National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters guidon in recognition of the unit's Air Force Organizational Excellence Award.

Nebraska Air Guard's Joint Force Headquarters staff receive national honor

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters staff was recognized for its work, recently, when they were officially presented with the Air Force Organizational Excellence Award, Nov. 19.

The award recognizes the achievements and accomplishments of those U.S. Air Force organizations or activities that are entities within larger organizations. The Nebraska Air National Guard staff was honored for the work it completed between August 2008 and the end of July 2010.

"Joint Force Headquarters - Nebraska successfully employed unit members in support of Homeland Defense, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and United States Air Force Europe operations," the citation reads. "The Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear Explosive Enhance Response Force Package and Civil Support Team performed brilliantly in the execution of state and nationwide missions of vital importance to the safety and interests of our state

and nation."

"Joint Force Headquarters-Nebraska also excelled in supporting numerous community outreach programs, including the State Partnership Program with the Czech Republic, Operation Starbase, the 2010 Special Olympics, USA National Games, the National Guard Marathon and Service Academy Day," the citation continues. "In addition, outstanding results and awards from Compliance and readiness Inspections, Public Affairs media contests, and Financial Management performance are tangible evidence and well-deserved indicators of the excellence of the Joint Force Headquarters-Nebraska personnel."

According to Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, assistant adjutant general, Air, the award is well deserved.

"This award recognizes the complexity of missions and issues that Joint Force Headquarters is involved with on a day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year basis," said Bohac, "ranging from domestic operations to policy oversight to supporting units within the state and helping them achieve their missions."

New commanders welcomed



Photo by Staff Sgt. James Lieth

New Commander: Maj. Barry R. Veen (right) accepts the colors of the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron, Nebraska Air National Guard, from Col. Wendy Johnson, 155th Mission Support Group commander.

155th Civil Engineer Squadron

By Airman 1st Class Mary Thach

Staff Writer

The 155th Civil Engineer Squadron welcomed Maj. Barry R. Veen, as their new commander during a formal ceremony held Oct. 1 in Lincoln, Neb.

Veen enlisted in the North Dakota Air National Guard in 1995 and worked as an aircraft armament systems specialist maintaining the F-16 Fighting Falcon weapons system. Veen transferred to the Colorado Air National Guard in 2000 and was commissioned in 2002 and began his civil engineer career in the 240th Civil Engineer Flight.

Veen joined the Nebraska Air National Guard in January 2011 as the deputy base civil engineer for the 155th Civil Engineer Squadron. Veen has been the acting squadron commander since July, when the civil engineers traveled to Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., for a Silver Flag exercise.

155th Communications Flight

By Airman 1st Class Mary Thach

Staff Writer

The 155th Air Refueling Wing's Communication Flight welcomed Maj. Spencer D. Hansen as their new commander during a formal ceremony held Oct. 2 in Lincoln, Neb.

Hansen enlisted in the Nebraska Air National Guard five days short of his 18th birthday, in 1989.

He was assigned to the Communications Flight in the MultiMedia office as a still photographer.

Hansen received his commission through the Academy of Military Sciences in Knoxville, Tenn., in 1998 and was assigned to the Intelligence Office of the 155th Operations Group, serving there for 13 years.



Photo by Staff Sgt. James Lieth

New Commander: Maj. Spencer D. Hansen (right) accepts the colors of the 155th Communications Flight, Nebraska Air National Guard, from Col. Wendy Johnson, 155th Mission Support Group commander.

Husker Salute

Memorial Stadium thanks military veterans during annual observance

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

In what has become an annual tradition at the University of Nebraska, members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard were treated to a wild football game when they were invited to attend the Nebraska Cornhuskers' Big 10 matchup against Legends Division foe Northwestern University, Nov. 5.

And even though the hometown Huskers lost the divisional game against the visiting Wildcats, the Nebraska Guardsmen said they still had the time of their lives.

"It's pretty amazing, especially considering last year we were in Iraq watching the game in the middle of the night or hearing it on the radio," said Spc. Kelley Sabata, a signal intelligence specialist with the Guard's Lincoln-based 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, her eyes sparkling as she looked around the capacity Memorial Stadium crowd midway through the third quarter of the annual



Smiling Welcome: Capt. Hank Piening, a KC-135R Stratotanker pilot and former Nebraska Cornhusker football player, smiles after being introduced to the Memorial Stadium crowd, Nov. 5. Piening was part of an Nebraska Air Guard crew that flew the pre-game flyover during the playing of The Star Spangled Banner.

"Veterans Day Game."

"It's nice to be down here with the players and watching it," she added, smiling.

Sabata was one of dozens of Nebraska Guardsmen, Reservists and active duty military members who received complimentary tickets to the game courtesy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Athletic Department.

Sabata spent most of the game standing on her tip-toes next to her boyfriend, Sgt. Stuart Mason, a maintenance production controller specialist in the Guard's 1167th Brigade Support Company.

Like Sabata, Mason said he, too, was enjoying the game designed to thank Nebraska veterans for their service to their state and nation.

"It's great," said Mason, who also deployed to Iraq last year where he spent a year ordering parts for his unit at Balad Air Base, "especially being down here close to the players."

"Hearing all the thank yous from the fans is also pretty neat," added Sabata, who spent her deployment at Camp Adder. "It's really appreciative of what everyone does for us, but we do it for them... so I guess it's thank yous all around."

Along with the complimentary tickets, the university also recognized 14 veterans of current and past wars as "Gate Sentinels" before the game.

The sentinels included four World War II, two Korean War, two Vietnam War and two Gulf War veterans. Among those honored was Sgt. Joshua Armon, a police officer with the Guard's 192nd Military Police Detachment from Nebraska City. Armon, a veteran of both Afghanistan and Iraq, said it was an extraordinary experience to be honored with veterans of so many past wars.

"It was unbelievable being in front of some of these World War II vets," said Armon shortly after he appeared on the stadium big screen. "It's a great experience to talk to a lot of them and they're just nice guys... really nice guys."



Veterans Honored: Sgt. Joshua Armon (second from left) and 14 other veterans of current and past wars salute during the playing of The Star Spangled Banner before the start of the Nov. 5 Nebraska - Northwestern football game at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb. The game served as the university's annual Veterans Day Game.

Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

It's an honor to meet them."

Also honored during the game were members of a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker crew, which conducted the pre-game flyover salute during the playing of The National Anthem. After landing back at the base in Lincoln, the crew was introduced to a roaring crowd during the fourth quarter.

That roar grew visibly as the crew members showed off the Nebraska Cornhusker t-shirts they wore under their flight suits during the flight - again, another tradition among military flight crews conducting flyovers during Nebraska football games.

Probably the biggest roar, however, was reserved for members of the Nebraska National Guard's Afghan Agribusiness Development Team No. 2, which gave a special message to the Memorial Stadium crowd from Afghanistan and several extra special guests.

That message was delivered by



Exciting Play: Sgt. Stuart Mason, 1167th Brigade Support Company, Spc. Kelley Sabata, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, and other Nebraska National Guardsmen and U.S. Reservists cheer as the Nebraska Cornhuskers intercept a Northwestern University pass midway through the third quarter.

Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Burton to his wife Kitty and kids, Joe and Anna, and niece Ashley McMurchie, who stood at the center of Memorial Stadium during the video message.

After Burton talked to his family, the camera panned to the rest of the ADT No. 2, who chanted "Go Big Red" to the delight of the capacity crowd.

Nebraska hosts regional shooting competition

By Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood
National Guard Marksmanship Training Center

A team of Louisiana Army National Guard Soldiers proved that they will be a force to be reckoned with at the 2012 U.S. All-Army Small Arms Championships at Fort Benning, Ga., when they competed at the 2011 Marksmanship Advisory Council Region V Marksmanship Sustainment Training Exercise, Aug. 19-21, at Greenleaf Training Site in Hastings, Neb.

Not only did Staff Sgts. Joseph Noe, Nathan Lacombe, Steven Moore and 1st Sgt. Tommy McGee team up to win the Combined Arms Team Championship, they also won two more events and placed third in another.

The top two teams of the Combined Arms Team Championship qualified for the All Army dependent on funding. Finishing in second was the Iowa National Guard team.

A Kansas team of Lt. Col. David Seybold, Capt. Gleb Gluhosky, Maj. Allen L. Moore and Tech Sgt. David A. Salinas won the Combat Arms 3 Gun Match and the Iowa team of Sgt. 1st Class Patrick M. Rose, Tech. Sgt. John J. Waechter, Maj. James Grimaldi and Sgt. 1st Class Treg D. Marcellus won the 10 Meter POW Match.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Clinton Wood

On Target: An Air National Guardsman fires his pistol at a target during the 2011 Marksmanship Advisory Council V Marksmanship Sustainment Training Exercise Aug. 19-21 at the Greenleaf Training Site in Hastings, Neb.

Moore noted that his team, which has been together since 2009, is in the same unit, but the togetherness doesn't stop there. "We do a lot of practice as a group and there is a lot of camaraderie between all of us," said Moore. "We are real close friends on the outside and talk every day or every other day."

There were 108 Airmen and Soldiers competing in the exercise where the Guardsmen from seven other states, Nebraska, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, fired a variety of weapons from varying distances and positions.

The final two events of the ex-

ercise on Aug. 21 were probably the best example of how the competition is not an ordinary rifle qualification course. In the Combat Arms 3 Gun Match, the competitors fired their M-16A2 rifles or M-4 Carbines, M-9 pistols and 12-gauge pump shotguns at a variety of targets at short and long distances.

They had to run to each station and then a last-dash sprint to the finish line several meters away.

But this was nothing compared to the Falling Plate Match where teams sprinted 100 yards before assuming a prone position with their rifles and knocking down metal plate targets as fast as possible.

Seybold said his team put together a strategy in the three-gun match. "What route we were going to take and what order we wanted to engage the targets," he said. "We strategized a little bit before we got up there."

He added that his team was in the lead after the first round of the falling plate match, but was beat out by a split-second in the second and final round.

Moore said the three-gun match was the most challenging because it tested his team's fitness levels plus several targets were at unknown distances. "I mean it had a lot of different factors in it," he said. "That was a big eye opener for some of us."

NEBRASKA NATIONAL GUARD

30th Annual

BOWLING

Tournament

JANUARY 4 & 5

HASTINGS, NE

Pastimes Lanes
1000 hrs

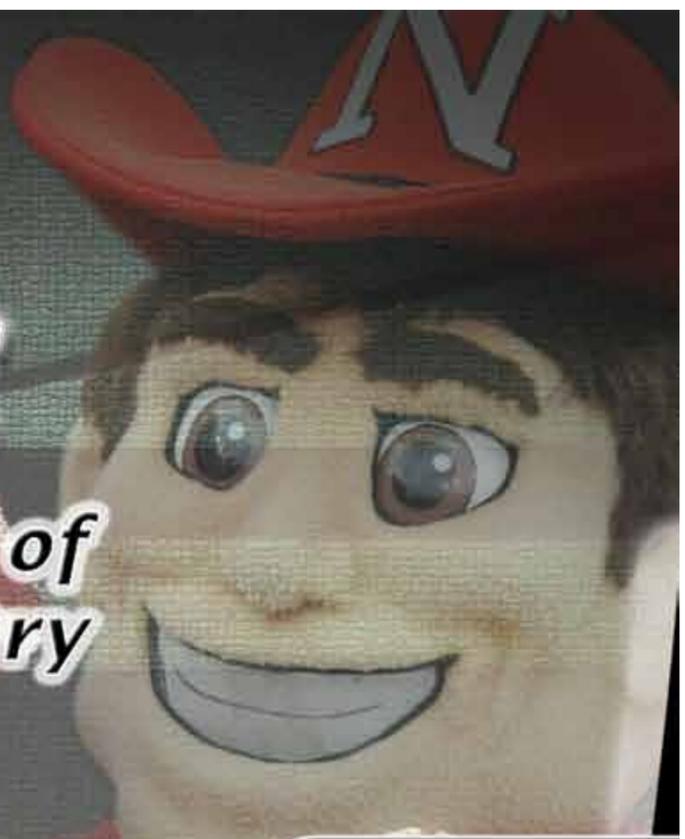
For entry forms, rules, and bowling information, see the Base Wide email attachments or contact:

MIKE VAVERKA

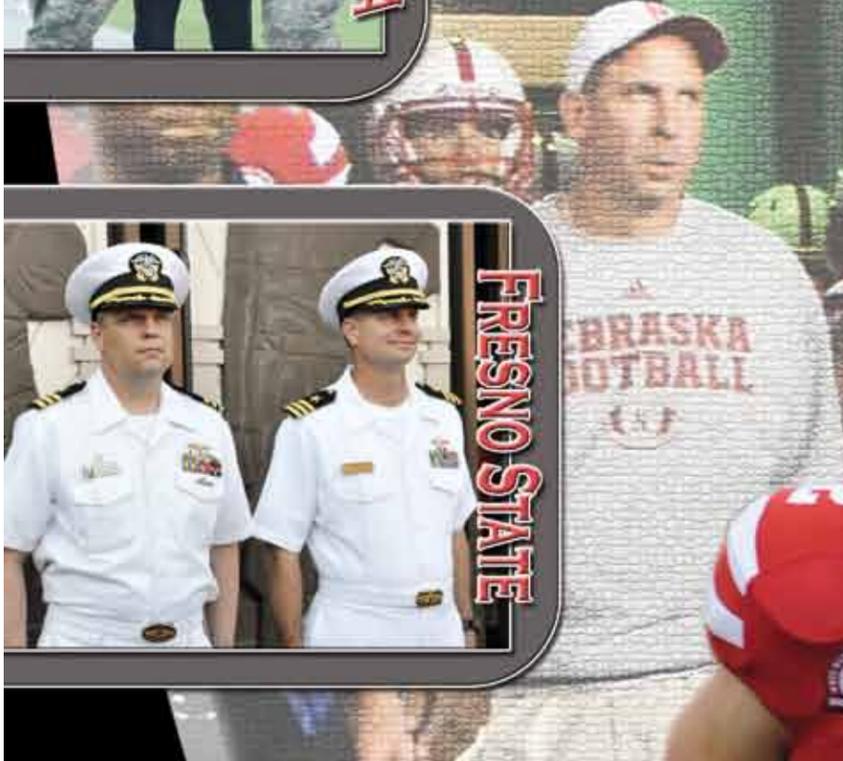
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