

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Tight Squeeze: Staff Sgt. Jennifer Feldt, a nutrition and pest management specialist with the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 4, hugs her God daughter, Savannah Bruce, during a sendoff ceremony at the new Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 29.

Fourth Guard agribusiness team departs for Afghanistan

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

For Army Staff Sgt. Jennifer Feldt, the old saying is true: "The third time's the charm."

Feldt, a 13-year veteran of the Nebraska Army National Guard, tried twice before to be part of an overseas deployment, but was derailed for one reason or another.

She finally got her wish. And maybe the way things worked out was fate for a girl raised in a small Nebraska farming community.

Feldt is a member of the Nebraska National Guard's 12-person Agribusiness Development Team No. 4, which was wished well during a sendoff ceremony at the new Joint Force Headquarters building

See ADT on 5.

Nebraska National Guard focusing on retaining state's Soldiers, Airmen

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

Recruiting and retention has always been important to the Nebraska National Guard, but as the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard's overseas commitments change with the American military drawdown in Afghanistan, recruiting and retention are becoming even more important.

So much so that Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, has made recruiting and retention a top priority for the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard in 2013.

According to Lyons, recruiting and retaining skilled Soldiers and Airmen into the organization's ranks is vital to the long-term

health of the Nebraska National Guard.

"As we look at the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, we look at the next five to 10 years," said Lyons. "What we want to do is retain all the experience that's resident in our Soldiers and Airmen that has been built up over the 10-plus years of war. We (want to) hang on to that experience, skill and those abilities so that as new members join our formation in the Air and Army National Guard, they can draw on leaders and role models."

Lt. Col. Shane Martin, Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command com-

mander, said Nebraska's mission for 2013 includes gaining 407 enlisted Soldiers, 20 officers and six warrant officers, while retaining 575 current Soldiers.

See RETENTION on 10.

Retaining Nebraska's Fighting Force
First of a Multi-part Series

Obama says Afghan forces to take lead in security functions

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Afghan forces will take the lead for security throughout Afghanistan this spring rather than at mid-year, President Barack Obama announced at a White House news conference, Jan. 11.

Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai spoke following White House meetings.

The Afghan president emphasized that the number of American forces remaining in Afghanistan after the NATO mission concludes at the end of 2014 is not crucial.

"Numbers are not going to make a difference to the situation in Afghanistan," Karzai said. "It's the broader relationship that will make a difference to Afghanistan and beyond in the region. The specifics of numbers are issues that the military will decide and Afghanistan will have no particular concern when we are talking of numbers and how

they are deployed."

Afghan forces will be in the lead sooner than planned, Obama said. U.S. and NATO forces have been training Afghan police and soldiers, who have progressed to the point where they are able to take the lead, Obama said.

"We are able to meet those goals and accelerate them somewhat," he said. "What's going to happen this spring is that Afghans will be in the lead throughout the country."

U.S. forces will still be in the fight, the president said.

"It does mean, though, that Afghans will have taken the lead and our presence, the nature of our work, will be different," he said. "We will be in a training, assisting, advising role."

This will lead to a responsible end to the war in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the president said.

See AFGHANISTAN on 5.

Heroic actions in Afghanistan nets Airman second Outstanding Airman of Year award

Top Airman: Senior Airman Bryan Bach pauses during a High Altitude Weapons and Tactics course at Lake George, Colo., that required the participants to negotiate a number of obstacles over a 72-hour mission in conditions ranging from extreme heat to cold and snow.



Photo courtesy of Senior Airman Bryan Bach

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

Bryan Bach knew there would be days like this.

Traveling along a dusty Afghan road on April 23, 2012, in an armored Joint Explosive Ordnance Disposal Rapid Response Vehicle — more commonly referred to as a JERRV — the Nebraska Air National Guard senior airman was part of a three-person U.S. Air Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal team that had been at work for hours responding to calls to clear roads of improvised explosive devices.

Suddenly they received new orders: A U.S. Army convoy had come into contact with the enemy and one of their MAXX Pro Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protective (MRAP) vehicles had been

See BACH on 15.

2013 Outstanding Airman of the Year

Nebraska Guard members hail Pentagon decision to remove barriers to women in combat

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Staff Writer

The few remaining duty positions closed to women in the Nebraska National Guard may soon be open thanks to a Jan. 24 Defense Department announcement that it plans to remove gender-based barriers to service.

The announcement, which rescinds the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule for Women, was made by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin E. Dempsey.

"Today we are acting to expand the opportunities for women to serve in the United States armed

forces and to better align our policies with the experiences we have had over the past decade of war," Dempsey said.

"Ultimately, we're acting to strengthen the joint force."

According to senior defense officials, the services are reviewing about 184,000 positions now closed by specialty that will be open to women who meet the standards.

Gender-neutral occupational standards are specific requirements for anyone who wants to qualify for a specific job, an official explained. This is different from a physical fitness test, which is a general assessment of fitness that is normed for gender and age throughout the

See WOMEN on 12.

Inside

Ashland Warrior Leader Course tightens standards

See story and photos on 3.



Nebraska Air Guardsmen train at busy air base in Germany

See story and photos on 8-9.



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NEWS DIGEST

■Panetta says fiscal crises pose biggest immediate threat to Department of Defense

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — The “perfect storm of budget uncertainty” howling around his department is the biggest immediate threat facing the U.S. military, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta told reporters, Jan. 10.

Panetta and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stressed during a regular Pentagon press conference that unless Congress acts, the nation’s military readiness will be compromised.

The United States has a number of adversaries around the world, Panetta said, “but the most immediate threat to our ability to achieve our mission is fiscal uncertainty: not knowing what our budget will be; not knowing if our budget will be drastically cut; and not knowing whether the strategy that we put in place can survive.”

Panetta emphasized that DoD “is doing its part” by implementing over the next decade the \$487 billion spending reduction set by Congress. “We designed a strategy; we know what the elements of that strategy are; we built a budget based on that, and we achieved our savings by virtue of that strategy,” he said. But the additional half-trillion-dollar “meat-axe cuts” sequester would trigger still loom “less than 50 days away,” the secretary noted.

“While we appreciate... that both parties came together to delay sequester, the unfortunate thing is sequester itself, and the sequester threat, (was) not removed,” Panetta said. “And the prospect... is undermining our ability to responsibly manage this department.”

Two other fiscal crises are meanwhile converging on the nation’s forces, he added:

- Because Congress didn’t approve an appropriations act for fiscal 2013, DoD has been operating under a continuing resolution and will do so at least through March 27. The continuing resolution funds operations at fiscal 2012 levels, instead of the higher proposed fiscal 2013 levels Pentagon officials had anticipated.

- The debt-ceiling crisis, Panetta said, “could create even further turmoil that could impact on our budget and our economy.”

Looking at all three factors, the secretary said simply, “We have no idea what the hell is going to happen.” But DoD leaders do know that the worst-case scenario would mean “serious harm” to military readiness, he said.

Panetta noted defense strategy places the highest priority on operations and maintenance funding as the key to a ready force. He described the triple threat facing those funds:

- If Congress fails to pass an appropriations bill for fiscal 2013 and instead extends the continuing resolution through the fiscal year, “overall operating accounts would decrease by about 5 percent... about \$11 billion that would come out of (operations and maintenance funds).”

- If sequester occurs, “We would have to cut, in this fiscal year, another 9 percent, almost \$18 billion from... these operating accounts as well.”

- To protect funding for the war in Afghani-

stan from required cuts, “We would again have to cut another 5 percent, another \$11 billion, from readiness money available in the active-duty base budget, and more for the Army and the Marine Corps.”

The secretary said practical results of these cuts would be less training for units not imminently deploying to Afghanistan; less shipboard training for all but the highest priority missions; less pilot training and fewer flight hours; curtailed ship maintenance and disruption to research and weapons modernization programs.

■Sandy response reaffirms dual-status commanders’ value

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. (AFPS) — The response to Superstorm Sandy reaffirmed the value of a new command structure that Gen. Charles H. Jacoby Jr., the U.S. Northern Command commander, calls one of the most important initiatives to improve defense support of civilian authorities in more than a decade.

As Sandy was whirling its way toward the U.S. coastline in late October, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta responded to requests by several state governors in its anticipated path by appointing dual-status commanders in New Jersey, New Hampshire, New York, Maryland and Rhode Island. The appointments gave these National Guard officers the authority to command both federal and state National Guard forces if they would serve as joint task force commanders during a Sandy response.

The dual-status commander concept represents a dramatic shift from past practices that dictated two distinct chains of command for forces responding to domestic disasters. Federal troops who operated under “Title 10” authority reported to one commander, and National Guard members serving under “Title 32,” or state active duty authority, to another.

Hurricane Katrina underscored the problems of those parallel tracks when it pounded the Gulf Coast in 2005. As some 70,000 military poured into the region to assist, their efforts were hampered because no single joint task force commander was calling the shots. This caused duplicated efforts, delays, and in some cases, gaps in the support provided.

Jacoby has embraced the concept. “It harnesses DoD support in a unified way and connects it intimately to the needs and power of our communities,” he told participants at a domestic preparedness workshop last year.

The dual-status commander typically is a National Guard general officer who has authority over both Title 10 and Title 32/state active-duty troops. With a Title 10 deputy commander and staff members assigned to provide assistance, dual-status commanders report through both chains while supporting their respective state governors.

Superstorm Sandy provided the first unplanned, no-notice implementation of the dual-status construct.

In the days before the storm made landfall, Northcom deployed its designated Title 10 deputy commanders, each accompanied by two planners, to embed with the dual-status



Defense Department photo

Nominees: President Barack Obama announces his nominations of Chuck Hagel (second from left) as the next defense secretary and John Brennan (far right) as the next CIA director as Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta (far left) looks on at the White House, Jan. 7. Hagel, a former U.S. senator from Nebraska, earned two Purple Hearts as an infantry squad leader during the Vietnam War, and Brennan is the deputy national security advisor for homeland security and counterterrorism.

Former Nebraska senator confirmed, takes oath as 24th Secretary of Defense

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — New Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel promised Feb. 27 to always be frank with the men and women of the department and said he expects all to be direct in return.

New Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel addresses Pentagon employees and service members during an all-hands call during his first day at the Pentagon, Feb. 27.

Hagel earlier took the oath of office to serve as the 24th defense secretary.

Hagel spoke to the Pentagon workforce and a worldwide audience on the Pentagon Channel just after taking the oath as the nation’s 24th defense secretary.

“I’ll never ask anyone to do anything I wouldn’t do,” the secretary said. “I’ll never ask anybody to do more than I would do. That’s the story of your lives. I wouldn’t be worthy if that was not the case.”

Army Sgt. 1st Class John Werth, a native Nebraskan and combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, introduced the new secretary. He said Hagel already had held the most important job in the department: that of a combat infantryman. Hagel served in Vietnam as a young enlisted soldier and was wounded twice.

This is a defining time for the world, Hagel said.

“It’s a difficult time. It’s a time of tremendous challenge, but there are opportunities,” he added. “I think it’s important that we all stay focused, obviously, on our jobs,

on our responsibilities, which are immense, but not lose sight of the possibilities for a better world.”

Service members should not forget that America is a force for good in the world, he said.

“We’ve made mistakes. We’ll continue to make mistakes. But we are a force for good,” he said. “And we should always keep that out in front as much as any one thing that drives us every day.”

The military needs to deal with the budget realities, the geopolitical challenges, cyber issues and the threats of terrorism, Hagel noted.

“We’ve got ahead of us a lot of challenges,” he said. “They are going to define much of who we are — not this institution only, but our country, what kind of a world our children are going to inherit. That’s the bigger picture of the objective for all of us.”

Facing these challenges is difficult, the secretary said. “But it’s also pretty special,” he added.

“When you think about... how many generations have had an opportunity to be part of something great, as difficult as this is... we can really do something pretty special for our country.”

The secretary promised service members he will do everything he can “to ensure the safety, the well-being, the future of you and your families.”

“Now, I’ve got to go to work,” he said.

Officials say smaller Air Force will protect service’s quality, readiness

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — To roll with unprecedented strategic and fiscal challenges, the best path forward for the Air Force is to become smaller to protect a high-quality, ready force, top Air Force officials said, Jan. 11.

Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III briefed Pentagon reporters, addressing budget constraints, progress in the year just passed, and the development of future capabilities.

“Like the other services, the Air Force will work with our defense and national leadership to fine-tune our plans and programs as we confront both a dynamic security environment and the nation’s fiscal challenges,” Donley said.

“We’ll adjust and compromise as necessary,” he added, “but we will need broad consensus with the Congress on the way forward to avoid a hollow military. This must be our priority.”

The Air Force secretary said the service would continue to balance competing defense needs with the size of its force structure, readiness and modernization.

“To avoid the perils of a hollow Air Force,” the secretary said, “we believe the best path forward is to become smaller in order to protect a high-quality and ready force that will improve in capability over time.”

Welsh, who became Air Force chief of staff in 2012, said Donley’s tough budget decisions, reflected in the fiscal 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, translate into an active duty Air Force of about 329,000 Airmen, about the same size it was when the Air Force became a separate service in 1947.

In the past 10 years, the Air Force has retired about 1,900 airplanes and dropped about 30,000 active-duty billets, he said.

“None of those things is inherently bad, by the way,” the general added. “They are simply reflective

of today’s fiscal and strategic environment.”

For the Air Force, Welsh said, the future depends on “figuring out how to integrate data, how to better integrate information, how to move it quicker, how to connect platforms and sensors together.”

“That’s not as expensive as new weapons systems, ... and it benefits us in the way we do the job today,” he added. “So we have people all around the Air Force focused on that problem right now.”

Donley said the Air Force has been through many ups and downs over the years and the way through the challenges is to support the service’s active, Air National Guard, Reserve and civilian members and their families in their work.

“I am confident that by making prudent choices — difficult decisions among force structure, readiness and modernization — we can and will stay the world’s finest air force.”

commander in their designated state.

Col. Thomas Salo, one of the Northcom officials deployed, said he was impressed at how easily active-duty soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, N.Y., were able to meld with their Guard counterparts

when they deployed to New Jersey to provide fuel support for civilian first responders.

“They worked right alongside the National Guard guys in an integrated structure that started at the top and continued through the lower levels,” he said.

Prairie Soldier

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The **Prairie Soldier** is the newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, authorized and published by the State Public Affairs Office, Military Department of Nebraska, in accordance with AR 360-1 and AFI 35-101.

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

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

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

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

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Getting A Lift: Sgt. Myles Standish (left) and Sgt. Brandon Moldin work together to take battle buddy, Spc. Adam Lynnes, to medical aid after Lynnes was "injured" from an explosive device during the situational training exercise of the Warrior Leader Course at Camp Ashland, Neb., Jan. 22.



Photos by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Moving Forward: Spc. Adam Lynnes (left) and Sgt. Myles Standish, both active duty Soldiers, devise a plan to move their squad-sized element through the situational training exercise portion of the Warrior Leader Course at Camp Ashland, Neb., Jan. 22. WLC is undergoing multiple changes to reflect future needs of commanders following the announcement of the drawdown of American forces in Afghanistan in 2014.

Army Warrior Leader Course tightening graduation standards

■ Camp Ashland instructors say Soldiers must prepare themselves before arriving at school to meet new, changing requirements

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

As the American military's presence in Afghanistan transitions, the focus of Army leaders is also changing. One of those changes relates to the transition back to a concept called 'garrison leadership.'

That change is already being felt at Camp Ashland in the Warrior Leader Course that is taught there year-round.

Previously, Soldiers attending WLC could still graduate from the basic Army leadership course without passing the Army physical fitness test or the height and weight requirements. Not any longer.

"Currently the two biggest changes were the physical fitness test and height/weight are now graduation requirements," said Master Sgt. Bruce Nakai, operations noncommissioned officer in charge of 1-209th Regional Training Institute. "The Army physical fitness test is a basic Army standard that unfortunately not every Soldier can meet."

Officials at the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 209th RTI Noncommissioned Officer Academy are enforcing the new requirements and challenging their WLC students to be the very best they can be.

According to Nakai, WLC students are given two opportunities to pass the physical fitness test. WLC instructors administer a physical fitness test within the first three days of the course and then administer a retest no earlier than seven days prior to their initial test.

Instructors say they're already seeing a change in the level of preparedness that Soldiers are bringing with them to the course.

"When it first went into effect there was a high failure rate, but now it is tapering down,



You Are Here: Sgt. Brandon Moldin, with Grand Island's Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, plots out grid coordinates to locate a weapons stash during a training exercise of the Warrior Leader Course at Camp Ashland, Neb., Jan. 22.

said Master Sgt. Ryan Sullivan, branch chief 1-209th RTINCOA. "Prior to this no one really failed unless it was academically."

Soldiers need to be aware there are more changes coming into effect soon.

"We are going through some more changes," said Nakai, adding the modifications are expected to go into effect April 1. "A 36-hour continuous (Situational Training Exercise), bringing more classes back."

Nakai said one of the classes being brought back deals with the NCO evaluation report system, which isn't covered currently. "They are going to put a lot heavier emphasis on counseling and NCOERs," Nakai said.

"In doing so they are taking that out of the (Advanced Leadership Course) portion and putting that emphasis on the E-5s," added Nakai. "They are also bringing land navigation back."

The course is also extending from 17 days to 22 days.

"If the Army wants the fittest, strongest, smartest and most intelligence force it can get, this (Warrior Leadership Course) is a good gate they have to pass through," said Sullivan. "If they can pass the course now, they will do well going forward in their military career."

According to WLC instructors and students, they don't think Soldiers are coming to WLC fully prepared.



Through the Haze: Sgt. Nicholas Nelson, a Warrior Leadership Course student, clears an area as white smoke rises after a smoke grenade was used as screening during a training exercise of Warrior Leader Course at Camp Ashland, Neb., Jan. 22. WLC was from 15 to 17 days but will be extending to 22 days effective April 1.



Take Cover: Spc. Andrew Field, an active duty Warrior Leader Course student, finds good cover during the situational training exercise portion of the Warrior Leader Course at Camp Ashland, Neb., Jan. 22. Starting in April, the situational training exercise will be a continuous 36-hour exercise for WLC students.

"Some Soldiers are just not ready for WLC," said Sgt. Brandon Moldin, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter mechanic from Grand Island's Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion who recently graduated from the current WLC. "A little more work and I

think they will be ready."

"You have to be in shape and being out in the field during WLC was a great example," said Moldin. "You have to be able to run in a moment's notice... if you aren't in shape you, won't be able to last."

■Nebraska National Guard Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 Soldiers prepare to leave Afghanistan, confident they helped Afghan farmers and agricultural officials take major step toward self-sustainment

Growing a Legacy

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

They came from the largest city of Nebraska. They also came from some of the state's smallest towns and villages.

Most came from the Cornhusker State, although one calls Iowa home.

Despite differences in backgrounds, ranks and career aspirations, each volunteered for the mission because they wanted to help the people of a far-off, war-torn country rebuild their lives and livelihoods. They also wanted to gain knowledge of what it's like to perform a uniquely National Guard mission overseas.

Along the way, they accomplished many of their goals, yet wished they could've accomplished more.

They're the members of the Nebraska National Guard's Afghan Agribusiness Development Team No. 3, which has been serving in the Paktya Province of east-central Afghanistan for nearly a year. They will soon be coming home.

As the members of the 12-person team prepared to transition back to the United States, several members took time to respond to a series of questions given to them via email. Their responses tell a story about the unique and transitioning nature of the ADT's mission, their accomplishments and the impact they made in helping Afghan agricultural leaders and small farmers rebuild a way of life that was virtually destroyed during the decades of war that has overtaken Afghanistan.

Helping Afghan Women

Sgt. Beth Ramsey is a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter crew chief who has already completed three overseas tours with the Lincoln-based Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion. Still, Ramsey said the opportunity to deploy overseas on a different type of mission was something she just couldn't turn down.

"I thought it would be interesting to deploy as something other than a crew chief," said the Lincoln, Neb., native who served as the ADT's forestry specialist while also concentrating on local Afghan women's issues. "I also wanted to use my degree in Environmental Science for something other than a paperweight."

According to Ramsey, she spent the deployment focusing on environmental issues that often affect a nation's ability to fully redevelop itself. She also helped establish a link between local Afghan women and their Director of Women's Affairs, which she said is the first step toward establishing a stronger female presence in the Paktya province.

"I also trained many females in agricultural-based subjects, such as organic vegetable gardening, composting and healthy chick rearing, which the women have begun to implement in their households," said Ramsey. "Students were also instructed to train 10 other women on the subjects they learned about, thus expanding our impact to women we could normally never reach."

Ramsey said talking with the local Afghan women she met regularly was particularly eye-opening. "The friendships I made with them... It is easy to forget how good we have it in America until you hear the life stories of the rural poor in Afghanistan, especially women," she said. "They are truly exceptional women."

Ramsey said she also enjoyed helping the other ADT team members manage the team's 'barnyard,' home to two sheep, two goats, and 30-plus chickens, chicks and roosters.

There were some definite parts



Assessing Local Impact: Sgt. Alex Peyton, a Nebraska National Guard Afghan Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 agricultural specialist, conducts a market assessment in Jaji District, Paktya Province, Afghanistan, to assess agribusiness development within the district.

of the mission that Ramsey didn't enjoy, however.

"I wanted the programs to succeed more than my (Afghan government) counterparts, which was extremely frustrating," said Ramsey. "I also didn't enjoy being ignored and marginalized by the Afghan males. Anyone who knows me knows that didn't end well for the Afghan males."

She said she also wishes she could've done more to help impact the local women's programs.

"The new director of Women's Affairs had her own agenda and I feel I was not successful in getting her to understand that educating the females of Paktya was her top priority," said Ramsey. "I was also not successful in getting the Director of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAIL) to believe in training, hiring and educating the females of Paktya."

"Luckily, Kabul was on my side and the DAIL staff (is) in the process of hiring its first female."

Helping Afghans Transition

Like Ramsey, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Waylon Petsche volunteered for the mission out of both sense of responsibility and urge to utilize his University of Nebraska-Lincoln degree in agronomy to help Afghan farmers and agricultural officials rebuild their food production capabilities.

A native of Petersburg, Neb., who was serving as a maintenance technician in the Nebraska Army Guard's 1075th Transportation Company, Petsche said he also saw the deployment as a way to rebuild his agricultural resume for the future.

He said the team has had some major successes during its time in Afghanistan, counting the impact on women's programs, the mentorship of local Afghan DAIL officials in developing their own proposals and budgets, and the development of an extension program that the DAIL officials can use to assist local farmers as some of the ADT's biggest.

"The DAIL staff now has the tools to make this province progress and will be able to get funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock," Petsche said. "The DAIL staff also has the tools needed to get money from non-governmental organizations."

The Afghans aren't the only ones who have been impacted by the mission, either. Petsche said he, too, is leaving with some significant personal development.

"I've grown professionally as an officer during this deployment," he said.

Lasting Impact

The same could be said for 1st Lt.

James Small, a native of Fullerton, Neb., who had previously served as a platoon leader in the Nebraska Army Guard's 1075th Trans. Co.

Small is now the ADT's soil scientist and manager of the Commander's Emergency Response Program, more commonly referred to as CERP. According to Army officials, CERP enables local commanders in Afghanistan to respond to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief, and reconstruction projects with services that immediately assist the indigenous population that the local population or government can sustain.

Small said he volunteered for the deployment because "I felt like it was a unique mission with unique opportunities," he said. "It gives us a chance to help those who are unable to help themselves. It gives us a chance to improve the lives of Afghans who are ready for a positive change in their country."

Since arriving in Afghanistan, Small said the ADT has made an impact. For example, according to Small Nebraska's ADT No. 3 played a significant role in helping transition the program into one in which local farmers and DAIL officials have much more control.

"I helped mentor the agricultural extension agents in soil science practices," he said. "I also built a template for the provincial and district level officials to apply and receive funding for future projects."

This work, Small added, could be huge in helping Afghanistan recover capabilities lost during a war that has lasted for generations.

"I feel that (ADT No. 3) has had the biggest impact out of any previous ADT just due to the fact that we mentored the Afghans as we transition into an Afghan lead. This will help ensure that the agricultural improvements will be sustained after we are gone," said Small.

Small said another of his goals prior to deploying was to gain unique leadership skills that would enable him to be a better officer in the future.

He said getting to meet new people, learn about Afghan culture and how to help local Afghans deal with local agricultural issues has helped him do just that, as has the experience in working with people from the various American military services and nongovernmental agencies.

"This experience will help with any joint service mission in the future," he said. "It has also helped me understand the conditions and lives that people have in a third world country."

Wanting To Contribute

Like the other members of ADT No. 3, Sgt. 1st Class John J. Ruden



Photos courtesy of Agribusiness Development Team No. 3

Sealed With A Handshake: Sgt. Beth Ramsey, the Nebraska National Guard Afghan Agribusiness Development Team No. 3's forestry specialist, shakes the hand of a tree nursery manager after she completed a walkthrough quality assessment inspection of the nursery. Ramsey is one of several National Guard Soldiers involved in helping Afghan agricultural officials and local farmers redevelop their skills.

was attracted to the mission out of a sense of duty and interest in having an impact on the lives of Afghans. Having been raised on a small family farm, the mission seemed tailor made for him, he said.

"I felt like I was missing out on something," said Ruden, who had served as a Training Site Command range control sergeant. "When I heard about ADT No. 3 forming, I talked to my wife and signed right up."

"Being raised on a farm and knowing the ADT No. 3 mission, I felt like I could offer something."

Unlike his counterparts, Ruden is not a native Nebraskan. He hails from Remsen, Iowa, located approximately a half-hour northeast of Sioux City, Iowa.

That's where the difference end, though, as Ruden is now the team's food security specialist and supply sergeant. According to Ruden, he completely understood the role that the ADT could have in helping Afghanistan rebuild itself.

"Afghans rely on agriculture very heavily and they lost a lot of knowledge since the Soviets came through this country and destroyed not only the farmers, but also the land," he said. "It is vital that agriculture continue to improve over here because that is what makes their existence possible."

"Being a small part of that and making a difference in agriculture over here is the reason why I wanted to come over," Ruden added.

Since arriving in Afghanistan, Ruden said the Guard Soldiers have indeed made an impact. For example, the team helped mentor Afghan officials to use their own financial system versus the funds they receive through the CERP, while also helping the officials gain a more public face in front of the local Afghan farmers.

"The farmers need to know who to go to if they have problems and the (Afghan) officials need to realize they are the ones responsible to listen to the farmers' needs," he said.

"I have talked to many farmers and gave them the (points of contact) to those who could help them with their problems," Ruden said. "If I could, I would try and get that POC in front of the farmer. I would just sit back and they would discuss. It is all about transition over here and we pushed for that."

Despite being away from his wife, family and friends, Ruden said there have been many enjoyable parts of the deployment, such as meeting with local farmers and listening to their stories.

"They have some issues over here, but they also have a lot of success stories," he said. "This culture is very fascinating... and that makes it enjoyable."

"The other part that was enjoyable was hanging out with the interpreters and listening to them. We have had some long talks about family, culture, politics and just life in general. We both try to understand people."

Increasing Capabilities

Capt. Kevin Janousek is a native of Omaha. Prior to the deployment, he served as the commander of the Nebraska Army Guard's 1074th Trans. Co.

He is now ADT No. 3's operations officer where he has helped plan and synchronize missions throughout the province, enabling the team's agricultural specialists to focus on mentoring the Afghan counterparts.

According to Janousek, he volunteered for the mission for much the same reasons as his counterparts. "It was a chance to help the people of Afghanistan and provide them with the tools to improve agricultural viability."

"(More than) 80 percent of economic stability in the region is agriculturally based," he said, adding that he wanted to be part of a team who would help improve the Afghan's agricultural programs and practices.

"I think overall our biggest success as a team has been making a successful transition from the Afghan reliance on CERP monies to their own budgetary process at the national level," said Janousek. "Through months of budgetary proposals, project management and administrative process mentorship, the director of the Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and his staff have really come into their own and now represent the forefront of what right will look like over the next five to ten years."

Janousek also credited the work the team did in getting Afghan women's programs integrated into mainline society. Still, he adds, there are some things that he will regret when he returns to Nebraska: "Not being able to see firsthand the results of our mission."

Last Days

As the days tick down toward the end of ADT No. 3's time in Afghanistan, Ramsey said she and the other team members realize that their time in the war-torn country may have long-term effects on its ability to turn the corner.

"Being the last ADT for Paktya, our mission changed from one of training locals to one of transition and mentorship with our local (Afghan government) counterparts," she said. "I think we were successful in getting them to understand that the U.S. won't be here forever and they are going to have to pick up the ball and run with it."



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Funny Faces: Warrant Officer Steve Stienike, an agricultural specialist with the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 4, plays with his son Cooper, 4, during a sendoff ceremony at the new Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 29. ADT No. 4 departed for a yearlong mission that will ultimately take them to Afghanistan to help rebuild the Afghan agribusiness system.

ADT continued from page 1.

at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 29.

Feldt struggled to contain her excitement that her chance to deploy was finally here.

"It's just time to go," said Feldt. "I believe in the mission and I'm just excited to be part of it."

"I'm excited and I have a lot of fantastic support from my friends and family," she added. "I'm pumped."

Feldt said she not only wanted to deploy for the experience, she wanted to relieve the burden on her fellow service members.

"For me it was heartbreaking to never have deployed, seeing my friends come back that had been on their third or fourth tours and someone willing and able, such as myself, didn't do it," said Feldt. "I've just always felt like if I could do it, that's one less person who doesn't have to go on tour number three or tour number four."

Nebraska's fourth ADT is made up of 10 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers, one Nebraska Air National Guard Airman, and one U.S. Army Reservist. Ten of the team's members were present for the send-off ceremony and will meet up with the two other team members later.

Once in Afghanistan, the Soldiers and Airman, from units located across Nebraska, will become part of a U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team. There they

will assist local Afghan farmers and governmental officials in conducting agricultural development planning, assessments and support activities in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan.

The goal of the mission is to expand legal agriculture, agribusiness services, markets and agricultural education in order to reduce rural poverty. The team also hopes to increase employment opportunities in agricultural service industries and improve agricultural education.

The team's unique mission is well-suited for knowledge the Nebraskans bring.

"Our mission will be to reinforce the agribusiness efforts in the central Helmand Valley," said Lt. Col. Donald Kneiff Jr., ADT No. 4 commander. "Our Soldiers and Airman are up to the challenge. Their experience criss-crosses the state from northeast Nebraska corn farming, to southwest Nebraska well-drilling, northwest Nebraska ranching through South Dakota, all the way up to Idaho potato farming. From all this we've gained knowledge and experience to share with our friends in Afghanistan."

The team's unique mission of working with the people of Afghanistan is a big reason Feldt said she's so excited to deploy. There, she will put her background in nutrition, public health and community education to work.



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Packed House: Friends, family and fellow service members attend a sendoff ceremony for the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 4 at the new Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 29. ADT No. 4 is made up of 10 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers, one Nebraska Air National Guard Airman and one U.S. Army Reservist.



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Future Farmer: 1st Lt. Michael Kilgore, an agricultural specialist with Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team 4, holds his nephew during a sendoff ceremony for ADT No. 4 at the new Joint Force Headquarters building in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 29, before he leaves for a yearlong deployment to the Helmand Province of Afghanistan to help rebuild the Afghan agribusiness system.

"I get to combine my passion on the civilian side with military skills," said Feldt. "I love that the National Guard has this mission, the ADT, because we get to serve the community and serve someone else's community while representing our community."

"I really believe in this mission that the ADTs are doing," she added. "It's exciting. It's not something that you think of traditionally when you think of a military deployment or military relations with a foreign community, so that's what I'm excited about."

Leading up to the deployment, members of ADT No. 4 have put in a lot of work performing various combat readiness exercises, but more importantly, working to hone their agricultural acumen.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Teary Goodbye: Senior Master Sgt. Don Zwart, an agricultural specialist with the Nebraska National Guard's Agribusiness Development Team No. 4, hugs his daughter, Katie, following a sendoff ceremony at the new Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 29.

"The team spent the last year preparing for this mission training with the University of Nebraska Agriculture Extension in Lincoln, Nebraska City and Hastings," said Kneiff. "We travelled to Texas to study watershed management with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and to Fresno, Calif., to study orchard management and beekeeping."

And with the end of U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan rapidly approaching, missions dedicated to improving the infrastructure of a still-volatile nation are extremely important, he said.

"This year's the time to ensure

that we've set the conditions after more than 10 years of efforts in Afghanistan to give the Afghans the tools they need to continue to build their nation after the 2014 transition," said Kneiff.

Feldt said any type of positive influence she and the rest of the team can have will go a long way in leaving Afghanistan a better place than they found it.

"We're showing them that Soldiers don't just run around carrying guns kicking in doors," said Feldt. "I love that we're going to teach them something. Something that they can always have – and what they do with it is up to them."

Obama: Afghan objectives 'within reach'

WASHINGTON (AFPS)—The mission objective to prevent al-Qaida from using Afghanistan to launch attacks against the United States is within reach, President Barack Obama said in his weekly address to the nation, Jan. 13.

"This week, I welcomed (Afghanistan) President Hamid Karzai to the White House to discuss the way ahead in Afghanistan," Obama said in his address. "And today, I want to update you on how we will end this war, bring our troops home, and continue the work of rebuilding America."

The president thanked U.S. service members, noting the United States has "dealt devastat-

ing blows" to al-Qaida and ejected the Taliban from their strongholds in the past four years.

Obama said the 33,000 additional forces he ordered to Afghanistan served with honor, completed their mission, and returned home last fall as promised.

"This week, (President Karzai and I) agreed that this spring, Afghan forces will take the lead for security across the entire country and our troops will shift to a support role," Obama said. "In the coming months, I'll announce the next phase of our drawdown. By the end of next year, America's war in Afghanistan will be over."

Obama gave credit for the progress made in Afghanistan to the

"heroic sacrifices of our troops and diplomats, alongside forces from many other nations."

More than a half-million Americans—military and civilian—have served in Afghanistan, the president said, noting thousands have been wounded and more than 2,000 have given their lives. And, the drawdown in Afghanistan remains a challenge, he said.

"This remains a very difficult mission," Obama said. "The work ahead will not be easy. Our forces are still in harm's way. But make no mistake—our path is clear and we are moving forward." Now, the United States must "care for our troops and veterans who fought in our name," the president said.

AFGHANISTAN continued from page 1.

"This progress is only possible because of the incredible sacrifices of our troops and our diplomats, the forces of our many coalition partners, and the Afghan people, who've endured extraordinary hardship," he added.

Obama noted more than 2,000 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan since the war began in 2001, and tens of thousands have been wounded. "These are patriots that we honor today, tomorrow and forever," he said.

The president promised the number of U.S. service members in Afghanistan will continue to drop over the next year. Some 66,000 Americans are deployed to the nation now. "I've pledged we'll continue to bring our forces home at a steady pace," he said. "And in the coming

"This progress is only possible because of the incredible sacrifices of our troops and our diplomats, the forces of our many coalition partners, and the Afghan people."

— President Barack Obama

months, I'll announce the next phase of our drawdown, a responsible drawdown that protects the gains our troops have made."

Karzai and Obama discussed the still to be worked out bilateral security agreement between the two nations. Part of this is a status of forces agreement, which will protect American service members. Both said they think an agreement is possible this year.



Photos courtesy of Staff Sgt. Scottie Davis

Training In The Field: Texas Army National Guard Soldiers gather in a tent during a Warrior Leader Course field training exercise near Djibouti, Africa.



New Friends, Big Impact: Staff Sgt. Scottie Davis and Staff Sgt. Andrew Singaas talk with students they volunteered to help learn how to become better English speakers.

■ Two Camp Ashland instructors conduct Warrior Leader Course for deployed Texas Army Guard Soldiers Into Africa

By Sgt. Jason Drager
Staff Writer

In late August, two Warrior Leader Course small-group instructors from Camp Ashland, Neb., traveled to Djibouti, Africa, to train members of the Texas Army National Guard deployed there.

Staff Sgt. Andrew Singaas and Staff Sgt. Scottie Davis joined six other small-group instructors to teach WLC to new noncommissioned officers.

"It was a bizarre, but neat experience," said Singaas.

Given the circumstances and environment in which the pair trained the Texans, those words don't begin to describe the experience.

Normally, WLC is taught in the comfort of classrooms without real threats or danger and with the luxuries of air condition and computers.

Davis and Singaas were given the rare opportunity to teach WLC to deployed Soldiers, who could then take the training and apply it in the real world. The Texans were on a nine-month deployment providing security and presence control for Camp Lemonnier, the primary base of operations for U.S. Africa Command in the Horn of Africa.

"Helping deployed troops refine,

refocus and rebuild their leadership and tactic skills enabled us to see a true end result," said Singaas, "whereas stateside, WLC is used more as a stepping stone."

Davis and Singaas arrived in the area mere weeks prior to the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that resulted in the deaths of four Americans. With the attack also came rising tensions at other consulates and embassies across the Middle East and North Africa.

According to Singaas, the Soldiers were prepared for events, given the circumstances. Normally during field-training exercises, Soldiers wouldn't carry live ammo like they did during the training in Africa.

Even without rising tensions, the environment was not completely conducive to fulfill all aspects of WLC. Physical training was done at 4 a.m. because by sunrise the class was already susceptible to heat casualties. During the daylight hours the temperature soared to 120 degrees. Although the temperature was comparable to Iraq, high humidity made it far less bearable.

At night the temperature would dip into the upper 80s or lower 90s, said Singaas, adding that it felt as if it were freezing due to the extreme

heat during the days.

To help combat the heat, field-training exercises were only conducted at night and for only one night at a time. Also, uniforms were downgraded to load-bearing vests, t-shirts, and 'boonie' caps.

"The segments of the curriculum the Soldiers missed out on was made up for by the fact that as currently deployed Soldiers, they took a lot more of this to heart and were very much more involved in leadership and war-fighting modules," said Singaas.

As if Davis and Singaas didn't have enough to worry about, the added element of wildlife complicated things.

"During the in-briefing, we were told anything that can fly or crawl is poisonous," said Singaas.

While conducting night missions, the sounds of hyenas could be heard in the distance. But that only was a potential problem. Camel spiders and scorpions crawling on Soldiers' skin while on the ground posed much more immediate threats.

Live ammo was brought along on the first field training exercise – which took place before the Benghazi attack – to protect against wildlife, such as baboons, that might attack.

At times, camels surprised the group by setting off trip wires. Other times herders, trying to sell

goats to the Soldiers, would also set them off.

Despite the challenges, both Soldiers said it was an experience that was extremely rewarding.

"We went to fulfill our mission," said Singaas, "but made the most of our experience by helping the less fortunate."

"It was amazing being able to see that part of the world," said Davis. "To see the differences between there and the U.S. really makes you appreciate what you have."

During their free time in the evening, Davis and Singaas would travel to the Horn of Africa English School System, said Davis. There they engaged adult students in conversations to help them become better English speakers.

They also participated in a program known as Courtesy Patrol, driving into the city at night to pick up Americans who were in places that posed possible threats.

By the time they left on Sept. 27, Davis and Singaas had done such an outstanding job the Louisiana RTI and the Texas National Guard contacted the 209th commandment directly and thanked him for sending Davis and Singaas, saying their expertise and knowledge was irreplaceable.

"Overall, it was a rare opportunity that I am glad I got the chance to do and would do it again," said Singaas.

Commander says Africa Command working with many partners to make continental impact

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – There are many challenges across the African continent, but there are also seldom-talked-about opportunities and successes, U.S. Africa Command's leader said Jan 24.

Army Gen. Carter F. Ham addressed students, faculty and reporters about what he's seen during his command in Africa. The general spoke at the Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center at Howard University here, home to the nation's oldest Africa studies program.

"It's really easy in Africa to get focused on all of the negative things," he said.

"There are lots of problems," Ham said. "I think it's worthwhile, every now and then, to take a step back, and in addition to looking at the problem sets which is important to do to look at the good things, and look at the opportunities that present themselves."

Ham provided examples of successes throughout the continent that are not generally the focus of attention. "Africa is home to, depending on which survey you look at, six or seven of the fastest growing economies in the world... (This is) pretty extraordinary. But it gets lost in the noise sometimes."

The general said this tells him while Africa is "certainly home to lots of challenges," it is also the "home of great opportunity and progress and hope."

The general noted he has now been to 42 of the countries on the continent and "it's been exciting and exhilarating, and tiring at times, to be sure. It's a big place to move about."

"I found one that, to me, ideally captures what we, at U.S. Africom, are trying to do," he said. "It says, simply, 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.'"

Nebraska Air Guard first sergeant makes difference in Afghanistan

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Jodi Kouma wanted to deploy. A master sergeant with the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing, Kouma wanted to support the fight; she wanted to do her part.

So, Kouma put her name in the hat – repeatedly – with the goal of getting her chance to deploy overseas and work with Airmen, like herself, who were dedicated to the mission and determined to help out wherever they could.

"For the past three years, I've wanted to deploy," Kouma said recently. "I put my name in and nothing came down."

That didn't deter Kouma though. Recently, while attending the Air Force's First Sergeant Academy, she said she learned there was a great need for first sergeants in deployed locations and that many of those billets were going unfilled.

So, with the support of her commander, Col. Tami Thompsen, Kouma put her name in the hat again. This time, Kouma was selected to deploy to Afghanistan for a six-month tour.

So, for the past few months, Kouma – normally the first sergeant for the Nebraska Air Guard's 155th Medical Group and a fulltime human resources specialist with the Nebraska Guard's Joint Force Headquarters – has been serving as the first sergeant for the 451st Expeditionary Operations Group at an air base near Kandahar, Afghanistan.

There, she is responsible for providing mentoring and guidance for 650 Airmen spread across nine units and two detachments.

Kouma said she was surprised how big the job and responsibilities were.

"I had no idea the magnitude of the amount or type of work that I would be doing," Kouma said recently via email.

"Being a group first sergeant is vastly different than being a unit first sergeant. As the diamond wearer, I rely heavily on my additional duty first sergeants due to not being able to be at nine places at one time; In addition, time seems to run out."

According to Kouma, she is responsible to not only her group commander, but also to nine other squadron commanders.

She said learning her job has been much more difficult than she would've expected.

"I will honestly say that it has taken half my deployment to figure out my 'lane,'" she said, adding one of the biggest tricks was learning how she fit into the dynamics between the various lower-level squadrons, the group and its higher-level wing headquarters. "I had to learn who I work for versus providing support."

Still, she said, it's been a positive experience. "Those in command know when to ask for advice and get me involved," said Kouma, adding that her rapport with the additional duty first sergeants has also made a major impact on her work.

Kouma said a typical day finds her reviewing weekly and monthly decorations and providing feedback.

She is also responsible for pushing information and requests out to her squadron additional first sergeants while also advising, informing and coordinating with squadron commanders and superintendents about various subjects ranging from lodging and uniform standards to discipline, room



Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Jodi Kouma

Part Of The Leadership Team: Master Sgt. Jodi Kouma (second from right) poses for a photo with the other members of the 451st Expeditionary Operations Group leadership team at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. Kouma is currently serving there as a first sergeant.

inspections, criteria for decorations and incidents involving the installation military police.

She said she quickly came to understand why the National Guard Bureau functional manager that handles deployment assignments for Air National Guard first sergeants doesn't tell prospective candidates where their assignments might be when they vol-

unteer to deploy. "The logic is that it shouldn't matter where you go to serve as a first sergeant; bottom line, they want serious people to deploy for the right reason and that is taking care of Airmen," she said.

That's exactly the principle Kouma said she brought with her on the deployment.

"My leadership philosophy was to ensure that I do whatever is necessary for Airmen to be taken care of and ensure that my commander's objectives are being met," Kouma said. "It has now evolved (and) changed into much more."

According to Kouma, she now realizes that by taking care of Airmen while also mentoring and communicating with the other first sergeants and squadron commanders, while also looking for ways to improve processes and "make the foxhole better," she is essentially helping make sure her commander's mission is accomplished.

Kouma said she knows she's gaining a broader understanding of the role the Air Force plays during a contingency operation.

"(I'm gaining) a broader insight of Air

Force operations, different aspects of the unique challenges and obstacles of conducting 24-hour operations, the vast capabilities and technological advances we bring to the war fight, working and supporting coalition forces, and lastly, (I'm broadening) my leadership skills," said Kouma, who will mark her 19th year of military service in March. "Opportunities and situations can make or break a person; thankfully, I'm grateful for the leadership and support of my commander and superintendent here."

"First Sergeant Academy emphasizes the importance of the leadership triangle: commander-chief-first sergeant," Kouma added. "It's empowering when that leadership triangle forms."

Kouma said she also realizes that while there are some negative aspects to her job – like working with people who don't believe in the value of good customer service or are simply working to the barest of standards – there are also many positive aspects.

"I enjoy numerous aspects of my job," she said. "Traveling to different (forward operating bases) to see the Airmen on a variety of aircraft. Meeting or seeing the variety of countries represented here on (Kandahar Air Field)... Belgium, Australia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Singapore... the list goes on."

Another enjoyable aspect of the job, she added, was seeing the nine separate units come together to complete their mission objective. Kouma said probably the single most enjoyable part, however, is watching people's reactions when they learn that she is an Air Guardsman from Nebraska.

"The greatest joy is when I relay that I'm from the Nebraska Air National Guard. The response I get is, 'Oh really. I would have never known,'" said Kouma. "If anything, I represent the Total Force concept and, bottom line, it's not about status – Guard, Reserve, Active – at the end of the day, it's about my contribution to the mission."

Special operations Soldiers earn rare wings during Croatian exercise

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Having the opportunity to support an overseas training exercise is always a big event in a National Guard Soldier's career.

Several members of an Omaha-based special operations forward support company had the opportunity to one-up that event, recently, when they not only supported a multi-national military exercise in Croatia, they also had the extremely rare chance to earn Croatian and Romanian jump wings.

According to Staff Sgt. Gregory Horner, 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne), seven members of the unit travelled to a base on the western coast of Croatia near Zadar in late August for a nearly month-long exercise involving members of the U.S., Croatian, Polish and Romanian militaries.

"Our mission really was to support a validation exercise that the Special Forces do annually," said Horner, adding that while in Croatia the seven members of the 195th FSC provided basic life support functions for the base while also staffing the base Joint Visitors Bureau office with drivers that helped shuttle personnel between the exercise's various locations across the country.

Horner said this year's exercise,

which took place between Aug. 27 and Sept. 30, was the third time that members of the unit have supported a similar type of validation exercise. He said the experience gained during such exercises is invaluable for the Soldiers.

"I think it helps mainly with cross-training," he said. "With the support role we play in the special operations community, we have to be pretty versatile in what we are doing. So, where my job as a Guard Soldier is transportation platoon sergeant, I go over there and I'm the camp mayor. It gives us all a different point of view of the different types of support we can provide as special operations forces."

One of the Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers supporting the exercise was Staff Sgt. Noe Ramirez, who normally supervises the unit supply section. While in Croatia, however, he served as the camp's deputy mayor. He said it was an eye-opening experience.

"They told us that we were going to be the busiest people on the base... and for the most part, they were right," Ramirez said.

The benefit of that workload, he said, was the fact it enabled the Nebraska Soldiers to learn a number of different skills. "We got to cross-train and do a lot of different jobs."

"I think that probably one of the biggest things that a National Guard Soldier brings is their ci-

vilian skillsets. I think that's the reason why we do such a good job because we bring all these other skillsets to an operation that enable us to do more than just the things that the military has trained us to do," he said.

Spc. Pablo Solorio agreed. An ammunition specialist by training, Solorio was one of the Omaha Soldiers assigned to the JVB where he served as a driver, constantly shuttling people and equipment to the various exercise locations.

Success, he added, was being able to react quickly to sudden changes in the schedule in the same similar ways that he has to in civilian life.

"I'm a garden associate at Home Depot. I don't have a set schedule, because things are constantly changing, so I'm constantly transitioning from post to post, similar to what he had to do in Croatia," he said.

In fact, said Sgt. 1st Class David Stanek, who, while serving as the JVB noncommissioned officer-in-charge, had to deal with coordinating "the confusion," the ability to deal with sudden schedule changes was in itself a training opportunity.

"This really allowed us to show them what we can do," said Stanek, adding that keeping track of all the missions and locations of his Soldiers was a full-time job.

While the Soldiers assigned to the mission all agreed that the op-



Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Gregory Horner

Ready To Soar: (From left) Sgt. Matthew Salomons, Spc. Pablo Solorio, Staff Sgt. Wesley Newton and Spc. Britni Sullivan pose for a photo before participating in an airborne operation during their deployment to Croatia.

portunity to support an overseas training exercise was a memorable experience, for the four 195th FSC Guardsmen who earned Croatian and Romanian jump wings during the exercise, parachuting from a Romanian helicopter with a Romanian jumpmaster team on foreign soil is something they'll never forget.

"It was awesome," said Sgt. Matthew Salomons, a JVB driver. "It was the greatest thing in the world."

According to Horner, after an initial jump was cancelled, the Romanians offered some of their extra parachutes to the Americans. "It was kind of a luck of the draw thing," he said about the four Omaha Soldiers selected to participate in the jump.

Those selected were Solorio, Salomons, Spc. Britni Sullivan and Staff Sgt. Wes Newton.

According to Sullivan jumping with the Romanians and interacting with Soldiers from other nations was eye-opening.

"It really gave me an opportunity to gain some working knowledge of what it takes to work with soldiers from another nation," said Sullivan. "Sometimes I think we get tunnel vision from constantly doing the same thing. This really shook things up and helped me learn about what's really going on."

That's the kind of real-world knowledge and experience, Horner said, that will pay enormous dividends in the future for the unit.

"It was a great exercise and the work that the members of the 195th FSC did didn't go unnoticed," he said. "You really can't ask for much more than that."

Air Guardsmen support historic inauguration

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melson
Staff Writer

Eleven members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Force Support Squadron's Services Sustainment Flight made a debut appearance in Washington, D.C., joining more than 6,000 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen in support of the 57th Presidential Inauguration, Jan. 21.

The Nebraska Airmen joined Guardsmen from 32 states and territories, becoming part of a 224-year-old history of National Guard support for presidential inaugurations.

They were part of the second-largest contingent of Guard personnel to serve in the District of Columbia for an inaugural event.

The eleven-member team deployed with a Single Palletized Expeditionary Kitchen to provide food service support for other National Guard units involved with the inauguration.

"It was a really good feeling to be part of such an important and historic event in our nation's history," said Master Sgt. Jennifer Gubbels, a food services craftsman in the 155th Services Sustainment Flight.

Gubbels was part of an all volunteer services contingent from Nebraska that paired up with a similar team from the Puerto Rican Air National Guard to provide food service operations for security forces personnel from the Puerto Rican and Virgin Island Army National Guard.

The Nebraska and Puerto Rican services teams set up their SPEK at a downtown YMCA and slept on cots in a vacant exercise room on the seventh floor of the gym. The team cooked breakfast and dinner for 200 members of the Puerto Rico and Virgin Island Army National Guard security teams and handed out Meals Ready to Eat for lunch the day before and the day of the inauguration.

"I really enjoyed working in the joint environment," said Airman 1st Class Alonzo Blount, a 155th Services Sustainment Flight food service apprentice. "I didn't even know we had a (National Guard) unit in the Virgin Islands."

Although there was a slight language barrier, Blount said the two Air Guard units were able to seamlessly integrate into a proficient working force. The joint effort provided valuable training and new learning opportunities for both new and seasoned Airmen on the trip. Halfway through the first meal, the Nebraska team learned that about 50 percent of the Puerto Rico and Virgin Island Guard members did not eat pork.

"It was definitely a cultural experience," said Gubbels, adding the team came together to provide an alternative for those Guard members with dietary restrictions. "Both units



Photos courtesy of Master Sgt. Aaron Aulner

Historic Mission: Members of the 155th Force Support Squadron's Service Sustainment Flight gather for a group photograph at Sioux City's 185th Air Refueling Wing base before departing for a mission to Washington, D.C. Pictured are (back row from left) Tech Sgt. Rusty Zortman, Staff Sgt. Lucas Buike, Airman 1st Class Alonzo Blount. (Middle row from left) Tech. Sgt. Joshua Triplett, Senior Airman Brittany Bedor, Staff Sgt. Abby Ford, Master Sgt. Benjamin Venteicher. (Front row from left) Master Sgt. Jennifer Gubbels, Senior Airman Hannah Rohde, Airman Mattie Schake, Senior Airman Whitney Scholtes.

were very appreciative and that was a really good feeling," she said.

Upon arriving at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., the team learned that, in conjunction with the food service support, it would be deputized by the District of Columbia to perform a special police tasking as well. Each member was sworn in, given a badge and charged to assist in the safety and well-being of inaugural guests. In between serving meals the team also found time to visit the some famous historical sites including the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial.

On Inauguration Day, some members watched from a position near the Washington Monument as Barack Obama was sworn in as the 47th president of the United States.

"Being part of the inaugural team was an opportunity of a lifetime," said Blount. "Not many people can say that they did that."

Gubbels said she thought the team made a lasting impression on the both the Puerto Rican and Virgin Island Guard units. "The Nebraska Air National Guard has a very good reputation for its hard work ethic," she said. "I definitely think that we will be invited back to support future presidential inaugurations."

(Editor's Note: The District of Columbia National Guard Public Affairs Office contributed to this story.)

National Guard chief details sequestration's potential impacts

ARLINGTON, Va. (NGNEWS) – Sequestration and a yearlong continuing resolution would significantly hinder the National Guard's ability to protect and defend the homeland, the chief of the National Guard Bureau told the Senate Armed Services Committee Feb 12.

Sequestration is a mechanism built into budget law that will trigger deep, across-the-board spending cuts unless Congress comes up with an alternative by March 1. A continuing resolution is temporary funding that keeps the government running in lieu of a congressionally approved budget. The current continuing resolution runs through March 27.

"Sequestration will be devastating to the Department of Defense and the National Guard," Army Gen. Frank J. Grass said, joining other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior defense officials before the committee.

"Although National Guard warfighters will continue to receive support, the ability to provide ready forces and equipment to respond to disasters in support of our nation's governors and to meet our federal obligations will be negatively impacted," Grass said in a statement delivered to the committee. He further outlined four priority areas directly related to readiness: personnel, equipment maintenance, facility maintenance and training.

Under sequestration, Grass said:

- About 115,000 traditional Guard members would not get annual medical or dental exams. "Within one year, readiness will be degraded to pre-war levels," he said.

- The National Guard's civilian workforce would face a potential furlough. "Furloughs of these essential personnel will further reduce the readiness of our people, equipment, facilities and training," Grass said, because military technicians and civilian employees support maintenance and training.

- The Army would cancel or reduce depot-level equipment maintenance, including the reset of materiel returning from deployment. "National Guard units will return to their states with equipment in a low state of readiness, and it may not be available to the unit to support state authorities in response to tornados, floods or wildfires - or a complex catastrophe," the general said.

- The Air National Guard would be forced to "park" aircraft, degrading readiness.

- Military construction projects would be cut.

- Some facility security, firefighting, groundskeeping, custodial, snow removal and maintenance contracts might have to be cancelled, affecting jobs in communities and costing even more money in penalties for early termination.

- Equipment shortages would degrade training opportunities.

- Training cuts by the Army and the Air Force would affect both the Army and the Air Guard. "Under sequestration, most flying units (in the Air Guard) will be below acceptable readiness standards by the end of this fiscal year," Grass said.

"Without congressional action, these across-the-board cuts will impact the National Guard's ability to meet steady state demands and act as a strategic hedge for unforeseen world events."



Historic Vantage Point: Senior Airman Whitney Scholtes, a member of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Force Service Sustainment Flight, poses for a photo with a massive crowd of onlookers behind her prior to the swearing-in ceremony of Barack Obama as president of the United States.

Nebraskans in Deutschland

■Airmen use annual training in Germany to build up much-needed real-world skills

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Forty-three members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing traveled to Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, to work and train with their active duty counterparts during a Jan. 5-19 annual training.

Members from Base Training, the Force Support Squadron, the Communications Flight and deployment personnel joined members of the Logistics Readiness Squadron for the annual training. The primary mission for the training was to train many of the 155th ARW's air transportation specialists, also known as '2T2s.'

By traveling to Ramstein, the Airmen from the 155th ARW were presented with the opportunity to train in an air terminal that processed more than 200,000 passengers in 2012 and is the largest cargo processing aerial port in Europe. With that volume of personnel and cargo, the Nebraska Guardsmen got a chance to work with programs and equipment they simply don't have access to in Lincoln.

"A lot of the capabilities that they have here, we just don't have back at home station, especially when you look at the aerial port," said Maj. Carl Johnson, commander of the 155th Logistics Readiness

Squadron. "We don't do a lot of passenger travel...we just don't deal with that volume that they have going through here everyday. So, it gives them a lot of experience in ticketing and passenger check-in, passenger manifesting, doing security screenings and all that stuff that they would do in a normal aircraft passenger terminal."

As far as handling material and cargo, the opportunity for the Nebraska 2T2s to work with the large amount of 'through-put' at Ramstein is very beneficial, said Johnson. The ability to handle cargo is a skill the air transportation specialists are required to possess.

"This is the only place they can get that kind of experience and that kind of training," said Johnson.

The scope of operations of other career fields at Ramstein also gave members of the 155th ARW an opportunity to get hands-on experience with programs and equipment they aren't accustomed to seeing.

Senior Airman Cody Williamson, a general purpose mechanic with the 155th LRS, worked with active duty Ramstein mechanics to maintain their equipment, which is often different from what he deals with in Lincoln. And with a much larger operation, there's bound to be more work for the mechanics.

"The last time I got this much training was actually back in (technical) school," said Williamson. "Stuff on our base doesn't break



Dirty Job: Staff Sgt. Bobby Kozisek, a mechanic with the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, works on the pump of a de-icing truck, Jan. 11, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Kozisek was at Ramstein as part of an annual training, which saw 43 members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing training at the European base.

down that much and if it does break down, it's usually something really simple...but here, they've got some major stuff that's breaking down where it takes time and a couple days and more than just one person to fix something. So it's nice that you can break everything down and get to know the equipment and how it works more than just following a schematic."

Williamson said he was glad he got the chance to work with his active duty counterparts in the case he was deployed.

"If I didn't have this training I'd be kind of lost," said Williamson. "This training helped 100 percent. I know what to actually look forward to on active duty bases by getting my hands dirty with some of the equipment that I don't get to necessarily work on at our shop."

Airman 1st Class Devin Davila, a refueler in the Petroleum, Oils and Lubricants shop, also used his annual training – and first trip out of the United States – as an opportunity to learn procedures and equipment not used at home.

Davila joined two other POLAirmen in learning how to work with liquid oxygen used in aircraft to provide breathable air for pilots and



Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Cold Duty: Tech. Sgt. Paul Wood, a petroleum, oil and lubricants troop with the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, holds a test sample of liquid oxygen, Jan. 16, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Wood was part of a Jan. 5-19 annual training deployment where he got the chance to work with equipment and procedures not used at home in Lincoln, Neb.

crew members. Also called 'cryo,' short for cryogenics, liquid oxygen can be dangerous to work with and is another process the 155th ARW Airmen don't normally get an opportunity to practice.

"We don't have any cryo. We contract it out, so this is the only training I've ever had on it," said Davila. "The reason why we're even training for this is for (Operations Readiness Exercises) or if we do deploy to a base that does do this, so we can actually do it."

"The Air Force is very dynamic," he added. "Every base has something different and everything has something different to offer and you never know where you could get called to, so it's better to be well-rounded than in the dark."

Johnson said the training the Nebraska Airmen received will make them more confident in performing their jobs whether it's in Lincoln or any deployed location.

"Our goal was that they would receive training on aspects of their

job that they wouldn't receive home station," said Johnson.

"It enhances their career training and it will make them successful when they do deploy... so that we can integrate with the active duty seamlessly," he added.

As far as Davila is concerned, mission accomplished.

"I would say it definitely boosts my confidence," he said. "If I was deployed I would want to go with some background knowledge of what I was doing instead of having to drag everyone else down at the unit by having them take time out of the mission to train me."

Overall, Johnson said he was pleased with the work the Nebraska Guardsmen put in.

"I think everybody did receive excellent training across the board," he said. "I've heard nothing but positive comments from everyone that they learned something – that they got to experience something that they probably never would have at home."



Fogged Over: The gauges of a liquid oxygen tank freeze over as it is filled Jan. 16, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing used a Jan. 5-19 annual training in Germany to learn things they normally don't see at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Heavy Equipment: Senior Airman Tyler Kleinschmit, an air transportation specialist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Logistics Readiness Squadron, uses his spotters to back up a 60K Tunner Loader at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Jan. 10. Kleinschmit used the Jan. 5-19 annual training to Germany to prepare for a deployment to Afghanistan later this year.

Ramstein annual training prepares Nebraska Airmen for upcoming Afghanistan deployment

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

One common goal of annual training for members the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing is to improve the job skills of its Airmen, so when they deploy they're ready for whatever job they're assigned to do. For a small group of 155th ARW Airmen, a Jan. 5-19 annual training to Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, couldn't have come at a better time.

Just more than a handful of air transportation specialists, also known as '2T2s,' from the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron were part of the 43-person annual training to Ramstein. Those Airmen put the training to good use in preparation for a deployment to Afghanistan later this year.

By traveling to Ramstein, the air transportation specialists were given an opportunity to train at the largest cargo processing aerial port in Europe that also processed more than 200,000 passengers in 2012.

According to Master Sgt. Adam Dytrych, 155th LRS Air Transporta-

tion section chief, receiving training in a strategic aerial port like Ramstein is extremely important for preparations leading up to their deployment.

"We have a few members of our section who will be deploying shortly and they've already told me that seeing this (operation) and watching how all the sections interact – putting everything together – their confidence levels jump up huge," said Dytrych. "And then speaking of active duty here, integrating with them into exactly the environment we'll be in when we deploy, merging to be one team, you won't be able to tell the difference between us and active duty members."

The training the 2T2s received during the annual training is equally important because air transportation specialists must be able to work with every aspect of the movement of personnel and cargo.

"They get the chance to gain proficiency as well as gaining confidence," said Dytrych. "The workload goes up exponentially in a deployed location. So does the amount of stress... Being able to gain self-

confidence and proficiency in their job is very, very important. So, the timing of this annual tour is very, very important for us."

Dytrych said he did his best to rotate his Airmen throughout the many different moving parts of the Air Transportation career field, giving them a better chance to put all the pieces together.

"From day one of this trip I've had multiple people come up to me and say without seeing a strategic aerial port, such as Ramstein, that their confidence wasn't there," said Dytrych. "They're able to gain a lot of confidence just by seeing it and then jumping in and integrating with the active duty and civilians... everybody works as one team. After a few days you don't notice the difference between anybody. Everybody is doing the same job to accomplish the same mission."

By working within the different areas of the Air Transportation career field, the 2T2s are also able to step into any role where they might be needed.

"Some of the experience that

See DEPLOY on 9.

■ Nebraskans try hands at Europe's busiest aerial port

Busy German base helps Airmen develop abilities

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

To say the Air Force's air transportation specialist career field is broad would be a serious understatement.

Air transportation specialists, often called '2T2s,' perform every duty related to the movement of passengers or cargo. From checking passengers in, load planning and handling hazardous cargo to performing security scans and loading or unloading aircraft, the 2T2 is the aerial port guru.

With a career field so broad, extensive training is vital to developing deployment-ready Airmen.

Nineteen air transportation specialists from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing Logistics Readiness Squadron got a chance to increase their career field knowledge, Jan. 5-19, when they travelled to Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, for a two-week annual training.

There they worked alongside their active duty counterparts at an air terminal that processed more than 200,000 passengers in 2012 and is the largest cargo processing aerial port in Europe.

With that volume of personnel and cargo, the Nebraska Guardsmen got a chance to work with programs and equipment they simply don't have access to in Lincoln.

Senior Airman Vey Thach, an air transportation specialist with the 155th LRS, said he spent the first part of the annual training loading and unloading different aircraft including a C-5, C-17, MD-11 and 747s, even getting to load 'rolling stock' like Humvees and loaders. He then moved into the passenger terminal where he worked at passenger in check.

He said the chance to work in such a busy environment was a great learning experience and boosted his ability to do the job.

"It helps tremendously with my confidence," said Thach. "Prior to this I was confident, but at the same time I had questions...but now that I've been here and been able to ask questions and reaffirm the things I thought I knew, it just boosts my confidence tremendously."

"For me, overall, it's been exciting just to learn more," he added. "It makes me appreciate my career field more."

For Airman 1st Class Blake Reistroffer, another 155th LRS air transportation specialist, seeing how a large operation like Ramstein worked gave him a clearer picture of the scope of his career field.

"It's completely different," said Reistroffer. "We have a really small air transportation terminal in Lincoln - it's just a sliver of what they have here at Ramstein."

"You can actually see the different sections of our air transportation," he added. "Each section has its own building. At home, we're all in one room and do our separate duties, so it's definitely a lot different."



Special Cargo: Tech. Sgt. Joseph Frerichs (right), an air transportation specialist with the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, helps Staff Sgt. Dewayne Heidelberg, special handling supervisor for the 721st Aerial Port Squadron, unload cargo requiring special handling, Jan. 10, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Frerichs received training on processing cargo he would otherwise be unable to get in Lincoln, Neb.



Just Checking In: Senior Airman Kurt McGhee, an air transportation specialist with the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, helps a space available traveller at the Ramstein Air Base's air terminal, Jan. 17. McGhee and 18 other air transportation specialists from the 155th LRS travelled to the German base for a Jan. 5-19 annual training where they were able to train on many aspects of their career field.

Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon



60K In Action: Air transportation specialists with the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron use a 60K Tunnor Loader to load cargo onto a 747 cargo plane at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Jan. 17. Members of the 155th LRS were able to hone their career skills at Europe's busiest aerial port, which also served more than 200,000 passengers in 2012.



Give Me A Spot: Staff Sgt. Tara Petersen, an air transportation specialist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Logistics Readiness Squadron, uses her spotter to reverse a 60K Tunnor Loader at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, Jan. 10 during a two-week annual training in Germany.

Putting all the pieces together also boosted Reistroffer's confidence.

"I have a better idea of the bigger picture of it, so if I were to get deployed I definitely would feel a lot more comfortable," said Reistroffer.

Master Sgt. Adam Dytrych, 155th LRS Air Transportation section chief, rotated his personnel throughout the different jobs they may see in a deployed environment.

"Rotating them amongst the different sections within the air transportation career field allows them to see all aspects of the job and tie the pieces together," said Dytrych, adding it helped the Airmen gain broad knowledge on how the system actually works, taking a piece of cargo or a passenger entering the Air Mobility system to its final destination.

"It makes for a more well-rounded troop," he said. "If I don't allow them the opportunity to

rotate and see different sections, they could go perhaps their whole six-year enlistment without seeing or understanding what they do. There's only so much you can read in regulations before you need to see it to put the regulation and the experience together to make a proficient Airman."

Plain and simple, being able to work at a busy port, like Ramstein, allowed the Guardsmen unique training opportunities they have difficulty receiving at home.

"We study regulations and we go through exercises and stay ready on (Unit Training Assemblies), but if you don't go out and actually practice what you're doing then you'll never be fully proficient in your job," said Dytrych, who said training at Ramstein allows the Airmen the opportunity to learn on the job.

"The speed of operations speeds up a lot here because they have

many, many more missions going," he said. "Being able to get repetitions and gain proficiency and gain confidence in their career fields makes a big difference if they're tasked to do a mission home station or while deployed."

Philipp Poelker, a hazardous materials inspector and handler at Ramstein who is now a civilian employee with 24 years of active duty experience as a 2T2, said the Nebraska Guardsmen impressed him with their willingness to learn and take on work.

"They're unique because they're asking the most questions," said Poelker. "They're not just doing their web-based training, they want to go out to aircraft, they want to go on (Joint Inspections) and they want to learn everything. I thought that was a special characteristic for them because I haven't seen a unit ask that many questions."

Poelker said in the past, units have been concerned about imposing on him and his staff, but as long as the people visiting Ramstein are excited to work and learn, he's very excited to teach whatever he can.

"They're enthusiastic - it's their attitude," said Poelker. "They all came out there and wanted to get in and help and learn and assist instead of me just doing it by myself."

"The Nebraska guys I knew were great personalities right off the bat," he added.

Staff Sgt. Serena Brooks, the cargo processing supervisor for the 721st Aerial Port Squadron at Ramstein, was equally impressed with the Nebraska Air National Guardsmen she worked with.

"It's been really good," said Brooks. "They stand up a lot; they don't just sit back and watch us work. They'll come and take the initiative and come out with us. We don't have to ask, they just come."

According to Brooks, the Nebraska Guardsmen she worked with excelled and were especially helpful during a time the Ramstein shop was a little short staffed.

"We're a little bit short on some days where we need an extra driver or we needed extra people to help out with inventory," said Brooks. "So they were able to do it for us. Once they get signed off on their task they were good to do it for us - we didn't have to babysit them."

Brooks also said she was able to learn a bit more about the Air National Guard and has a new perspective on Guard units coming to work at an active duty base.

"It was just really good having them," said Brooks. "They did give me a new look at the Guard because I used to think they were the biggest pain...but these ones, it was nice having them."

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they're going to get here, they're going to use relatively soon," said Maj. Carl Johnson, 155th LRS commander. "When they get where they're going, that location might be short in certain areas and hopefully this kind of training will help them fit in, integrate and fill that need, whatever that job may be."

"I think this gives them the confidence wherever they're going to go, that they're going to be able to be productive right away," he added. "They'll hit the ground and it's pretty much just learning their surroundings...and they're going to get going on their business right away. And that's what we want to try to achieve in any of our career fields... that when we do deploy and we hit the ground, it's very minimal time to spin

up and be productive."

Training and working with active duty counterparts has been very beneficial for Staff Sgt. Christina Ebel, an air transportation specialist with the 155th LRS who will be part of the upcoming deployment.

"We've been integrating in with them and when there's work to be done, we go out and we do it with them," said Ebel. "If we don't know how to do it, they've been very patient with us. They'll show us everything and how they function here because it's a little different at every base."

Ebel added that working with active duty counterparts has been eye opening, especially based on the high amount of cargo that goes through Ramstein. It's just something she's not used to working with

in Lincoln, she said.

"It lets us see how the active duty world operates in real-world situations," said Ebel. "We're not always going to get that at our base."

"It makes me more confident because now I know more, I have more knowledge and especially talking to the active duty people who have deployed," she added, "some of them have been to that location and they can tell me how it is."

Dytrych understands the value of learning the job in a fast-paced, high-volume environment and said this annual training was the best way to prepare the deployers for what most likely awaits them.

"The workload's very heavy," said Dytrych. "You'll have to constantly adjust," he

added. "The manpower there, they're short staffed...we're going to be very, very busy. You're required to work long hours until the work is done and the work never stops."

With the annual training complete, the air transportation specialists from the 155th LRS have a greater picture of their overall career field making them more proficient at home or deployed.

"I think this is a huge force multiplier for us," said Johnson. "This is something that makes us better at home station when we have to do wing deployments and we do our exercises. It makes us more effective...the reason we have so many aerial port personnel, even though we're not a primary cargo mission, is because this is definitely a needed career field within the Air Force."

Retention sergeants say involved leaders key to keeping Soldiers, Airmen

By Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

With the Afghanistan War winding down, and the Iraq War over, the need for Soldiers and Airmen may seem, for some, to be diminishing; however, nothing could be farther from the truth.

The Nebraska National Guard is built upon the foundation of strong, hardworking individuals, and it will continue to succeed so long as it retains those who first came in search of a better way of life, say Nebraska National Guard retention sergeants.

"Retaining Soldiers starts with unit cohesion and esprit de corps," said Master Sgt. Brad Beiber, a recruiting and retention noncommissioned officer based out of Lincoln. "The Soldiers' first-line leader, their commander, their first sergeant and their unit career counselor should be looking at these young Soldiers and getting to know what they need from the Guard."

Beiber said enlistment options the Soldier received at the front of his or her career, although fitting at the time, may not be enough to keep them around permanently.

"(Soldiers) should explore all of their options before making a decision," he said. "Sometimes, Soldiers just need a break from the job they're doing and a change in (Military Oc-

cupational Specialty) could make the difference."

The Nebraska National Guard has provided many men and women with a large cash bonus or an opportunity to attend college. But it's not always about the up-front money a service member receives, said Sgt. 1st Class Austin Behnk, a retirement services NCO with the Guard. "You've got to find out what drives that person," he said. "The unit has to be proactive."

Behnk expressed the need for units to understand the people they are working with. It's not about showing up on a drill weekend and just asking the Soldier if he or she is going to reenlist. It's about taking some time away from drill to discuss options for the Soldier, which might include some nontraditional retention efforts.

The lure to exit military service after eight years is tempting. But with an additional tour of duty, the Soldier may start to consider things like money for retirement and health insurance for life—something everyone will one day need, say the NCOs.

Many Nebraska Guardsmen joined six to eight years ago. They are now at the pivotal point in their military career where they must choose to continue to serve or to move on.

Here's a reason to consider staying on with the Guard. According to



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Staying In: Spc. Andrew Buller, who plays the French horn with the 43rd Army Band, and Sgt. Jacob McCormack, an information technology specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 126th Chemical Battalion, both extend their service by reenlisting in the Nebraska Army National Guard, Feb. 20, at Pentterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb. Buller extended for six years while McCormack extended for two.

the National Guard website, "if you complete a standard part-time term in the Guard, at age (60) you could be eligible to begin receiving about \$1,653 every month—for a total payout of \$287,803. That's based on serving one weekend per month plus an additional 15 days per year,

for 20 years."

Currently, the Nebraska National Guard is offering a \$10,000 bonus for a six-year extension and a \$5,000 bonus for three year extension, said Sgt. Patrick Wyrick, 92nd Troop Command retention NCO.

Wyrick said he recognizes the

importance of making sure Soldiers understand their options.

"These Soldiers have to understand they're a valuable asset to us," he said. "We can find out what they want to do with their careers, and then get them in touch with the right people."

RE-ENLISTMENT BONUSES

You may be eligible for:

- **6 YEAR EXTENSION = \$10,000**
- **3 YEAR EXTENSION = \$5,000**
- **Both bonuses are lump sum payments, and contracts must be signed between 365 - 91 days to ETS.**

- CONUS or OCONUS
- Cannot be excess
- Must be E-7 or below
- Must be DMOSQ (Some policy exceptions)
- Under 13 years service
- Meet other requirements in policy
- Can only have one incentive at a time (Bonus, Kicker, SLRP)
- AGR and Technicians are not eligible to receive this incentive policy

For more information contact your Unit Readiness NCO or Unit Career Counselor.



Nebraska Army Guard officials use competition to amp up retention rates

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

The Nebraska Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Command is challenging Nebraska Army Guard companies and battalions to retain their highly trained and quality Soldiers. The winner of this challenge will receive hardware proving its success.

"We are going to start recognizing each unit each year with the highest extension rate," said Lt. Col. Shane Martin, commander of the Recruiting and Retention Command. "The traveling trophy will go around and each year they will get plaque that will stay with them forever."

On Feb. 8, the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion became the first Nebraska battalion-sized organization to win the award when Lt. Col. Craig Strong, 110th MMB commander, was presented The Adjutant General's Extension Trophy for the battalion with the highest extension rate for fiscal year 2012. The award was presented during the Strength Maintenance Workshop at the Joint Force Headquarters Building in Lincoln, Neb.

The 110th MMB won with an extension rate of 92 percent.

"They were all pretty close," said Maj. Daniel Kuhn, executive officer for Recruiting and Retention. "The other battalions were

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Martin said his focus is pretty simple: "My emphasis is retaining the (state's) highly trained and quality Soldiers to answer the call of our state and nation."

The Nebraska Air National Guard's fiscal year 2013 goals include 68 enlistments and 10 officer accessions while retaining current Airmen at the national average of 91 percent, according to Senior Master Sgt. Stuart Stofferahn, Nebraska Air National Guard recruiting and retention superintendent.

"If they want to stay with us," said Stofferahn, "and they have done a good job and they continue to want to raise up through the ranks, then we want to keep them."

"We want our retention rate to be as high as we can possibly get it," added Stofferahn. "That being said, we only have a certain amount of authorized positions available."

In examining the problem of recruiting new Soldiers and Airmen, while retaining those already in the organization, trends seem to be emerging. While recruiting continues to be strong, retention is becoming somewhat more difficult, based on the fact that many Soldiers and Airmen who enlisted into either the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard six years ago during the height of the war when enlistment bonuses

and opportunities to deploy were also at an all-time high, are now scheduled to make their decision as to whether or not they want to continue serving in the Nebraska National Guard.

That decision is often complicated by the fact that these same Soldiers and Airmen now have other commitments, such as newly started careers and families, pulling them in different directions.

It's something Nebraska Guard leaders understand fully.

"Family always comes first," said Lyons, adding that a person's career also takes priority. "And service in the Guard is important as well."

Stofferahn couldn't agree more. "We always want them to take into consideration how their job in the Air Guard is affecting their civilian job and their family," said Stofferahn. "It's got to be a good fit."

When those three important life pieces aren't in balance, it can make decisions harder.

"If it's a sense of uncertainty or a question mark in their mind about their involvement in the National Guard or the National

Guard's involvement in their lives, stick with us," said Lyons. "We are going to stay together while we work through some of the national-level issues we are facing, but when (troops) come to drill we need to make sure they feel like they are valued and their contribution is valued."

"We are asking them to stay with us... because we need them," added Lyons.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, Nebraska state command sergeant major, another concern deals with how these Guardsmen, who joined during an era of multiple deployments and numerous training opportunities, will deal with the changing military climate as the war in Afghanistan pares down.

"These (Guardsmen are the first) post-9/11 recruits that we have," said Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, adding Guardsmen who enlisted into the Nebraska National Guard since September 2001 now make up approximately 60 percent of the force. "They have been used to a certain operational tempo that we have had. That's all they know. They don't know the pre-9/11 Guard

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where it was one-weekend-a-month and two weeks in the summer."

Valenzuela and Lyons agree that accomplishing Nebraska's retention goals will take a combined effort involving commanders, first sergeants and other leaders to challenge and motivate their Soldiers and Airmen to continue serving.

"Retention of Soldiers and Airmen is a command team effort," said Lyons. "It's all about knowing their Soldiers and it goes beyond the two days every month we have them at drill. There has to be a relationship and connection with those Soldiers away from the National Guard."

"If commanders, first sergeants, squad leaders, section sergeants and battle buddies know each other both at drill and away from drill," added Lyons "and we are able to capture their imagination at (drill and have them feel like they leave their (inactive duty training) having being challenged, then we send them to annual training and they come back from annual training feeling like they have practiced their (military occupational specialty) or (Air Force specialty code) and they have accomplished a mission...they are going to stay with us."

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Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Proud Commander: Lt. Col. Craig Strong, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion commander, admires The Adjutant General's Extension plaque after it was awarded to the 110th MMB during the Strength Maintenance Workshop at the Joint Force Headquarters building in Lincoln, Neb., Feb. 8.

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in the high 80s."

According to Recruiting and Retention Command officials, they are trying to incorporate innovative ideas to help bring a little bit of a competitive edge to the work that units and battalions are doing to retain quality Soldiers within their organizations.

"We are always looking at ways we can try to create a competitive spirit in the organization," said Kuhn. "I think it will have a positive effect."

Both three-year and six-year extensions were counted for the overall extension rate of each battalion.

In addition, Recruiting and Retention Command is also conducting a company-level competition. According to Kuhn, the company with the highest retention rate, based upon information pulled from the Directives Personnel Readiness Overview database from Fiscal Year 2013 up until May 1, will be recognized with a unique reward.

"We are going to identify the company in each one of the (major subordinate commands) and we are going to provide them with a free movie," said Kuhn, adding that the units selected will then be able to utilize one of their drills for the event.

"They will be able to take Soldiers to the movies as kind of a morale-builder," he said. "Also, we would rent the whole theater so the Soldiers could bring their families and hopefully bring along another reference they would have that would be eligible to join the Guard."

According to Kuhn, the goal is to develop a sense of competition among the units that will hopefully create or enhance retention rates.

"I think the competitions will create that competitive spirit that will move us in a positive way."

RETENTION

continued from page 10.

According to Martin, one of the things he is attempting to tell those considering leaving the service is that there are many options available to them and that continued service can lead to some important results.

"The Nebraska Army National Guard provides many benefits, opportunities and support while being one of the few part-time jobs that provides retirement."

"By being a member of the military and Nebraska Army National Guard you are a member of a highly respected selective group," added Martin.

There are also some important near-term benefits, as well, said Valenzuela, such as opportunities to train overseas or be part of emerging homeland defense missions.

Probably the biggest issue, he added, is that in order for the Nebraska National Guard to aid its Soldiers and Airmen through the retention process, leaders need to make sure their troops know they are a valuable asset and, if they need anything, to talk to their chain of command.

"We need to ensure they are making the best decisions they can make," said Valenzuela. "Because truly they don't need us. We need them."



Role Playing: Spc. Christopher Heller (left), of the Kansas Army National Guard, conducts a mock interview session with Sgt. Aaron Menke, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 267th Ordnance Company (Direct Support Maintenance), who plays the part of a Soldier considering getting out of the Army National Guard during the Battalion Career Counselor Course, Jan. 23.

Nebraska Soldiers take up position on frontlines in Army Guard retention battle

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The frontlines of the Nebraska Army National Guard's battle to retain as many quality Soldiers as possible got a little stronger, Jan. 25, when 31 members of the organization graduated from the two-week Army National Guard Battalion Career Counselor Course at Camp Ashland, Neb.

The course, which was taught by a three-person team of instructors from the Army National Guard's Strength Maintenance Training Center at Camp Robinson, Ark., is designed to prepare newly assigned unit career counselors for their role in helping encourage fellow Soldiers to reenlist in the Nebraska Army National Guard.

"The goal was to teach these Soldiers how to educate their fellow unit members on options and alternatives to separation," said Doug Graves of the Guard's SMTC. "We want them to help take care of their Soldiers by giving them things to look for, such as morale and welfare issues, and how to encourage their Soldiers to not just be a good Soldier, but also a good citizen."

Subjects taught during the course included how to conduct retention and attrition management interviews, how to evaluate a unit's retention environment, how to assist Soldiers in career management, and how to conduct a unit retention environment briefing.

For Sgt. Mitchell Osantowski, an aviation operations sergeant with Grand Island's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation Battalion, learning how to conduct a briefing in front of a group of people was perhaps the most stressful – and hopefully useful – part of the course.

"I'm not good at speaking in front of large groups," said Osantowski, smiling somewhat sheepishly after successfully passing that portion of the course. "I just don't do it every day. It's something new to me that I need to overcome."

According to Osantowski, a Union Pacific Railroad foreman who recently returned with his Army Guard aviation unit from its yearlong deployment to Kosovo, he was recently selected to be his unit's career counselor. He said he believes he has a pretty good idea why he was selected.

"I think they asked me because I have a lot of friends within the unit. I'm very easy to get along with, so when I do counseling sessions with them, I might be able to persuade someone to stay in the Guard," he said, admitting that even with that possible foot in the door, the mission will still be challenging.

"I don't think anything is going to be easy," said Osantowski. "It's going to be challenging to get them to believe in staying with us and continuing to be part of our team."

For Sgt. Brenda Dutcher, a truck driver with Columbus' 1075th Transportation Company, those interviews may very well start at her home near Humboldt, Neb.,



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Learning A New Skill: Sgt. Mitchell Osantowski, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation, conducts a briefing on his unit's retention efforts during one of the final assignments of the two-week Army National Guard Battalion Career Counselor Course held at Camp Ashland, Neb. According to Osantowski, an aviation operations sergeant, conducting a briefing in front of his classmates was personally one of the toughest parts of the course.

where she and her husband own a dairy farm. All four of her children are in the National Guard: three in Nebraska and one in Kansas.

Dutcher said she is relishing the opportunity to help members of her unit better understand their options.

"I like challenges," she said. "I'm just a person who likes helping people. There's always something that you can do... and there's always something to learn."

Still, Dutcher said, she knows the mission will be anything but easy.

"I won't lie, I think it's a big role," Dutcher said. "It has a lot of responsibility because you're a counselor and you're going to have to deal with all sorts of issues, both personal and unit-based."

Both Osantowski and Dutcher said the things they learned during the two-week course should give them the initial skills to get started on the right foot.

"I learned a lot in this course. I learned a lot about myself and I think that I can take a lot back to my unit," said Dutcher.

"I gained a lot of insight on what Soldiers need as far as information they might be looking for in staying in the Guard," added Osantowski. "Some of the hardships that they may be experiencing might be overcome by staying in. They just need to have that information to make a more informed decision."

Along with the 31 Nebraska Guard Soldiers who attended the course were members of the Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico and Texas Army National Guard. During the graduation ceremony, the Soldiers were encouraged to take the skills they learned and apply them when they return to their units because the National Guard really is depending upon them to be successful.

"You're the team that is going to go out and help sustain our force strength," said

Lt. Col. Shane Martin, commander of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion. "Without you, we're not able to do that... you are the key to keeping (our) strength up, to keeping quality Soldiers in the National Guard."

"The hard part starts now," he added.

Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch agreed. According to Burch, who recently completed a stint as the senior noncommissioned officer in the entire Army National Guard and is now serving as a special project sergeant major in Lincoln, the Soldiers now have a big mission in front of them. "My challenge to you is to get to know your Soldiers," he told the assembled class during their graduation ceremony. "If we don't know our Soldiers, we don't know how we can help. And in doing that, you've got to get to know yourself a little better."

Burch said the key to each Soldier's success will be learning how to effectively communicate the variety of options that are open to Army National Guard Soldiers.

"You've got to educate them. You've got to let them know what's out there and what are the opportunities that they can seize to enhance their careers," said Burch.

It's a role that Soldiers like Nebraska's Staff Sgt. Jessica Myers is ready to tackle.

"I've learned a lot of good stuff," said Myers, a member of the Nebraska Army Guard's Medical Detachment who recently served as an Army Guard recruiter. She said that retaining Soldiers, especially those with between five and 15 years of experience, is important for the overall health of the National Guard. "We don't want Soldiers with 10, 15 years and all that experience to get out. We need to keep them here to train the new Soldiers coming in."

Officials to study more roles in Special Ops for women service members

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – With women already providing direct support in special operations, officials are studying how to open more positions that currently are open only to men, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command said Jan. 29.

Navy Adm. William H. McRaven touched on the future of women in special operations during remarks at the National Defense Industrial Association's 24th Annual Special Operations and Low-intensity Conflict Symposium.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced a week earlier that the 1994 policy that excluded women from serving in direct ground combat positions is rescinded.

"We have had women supporting direct special operations for quite some time," McRaven said. "So I am fully supportive of Secretary Panetta and the chairman's decision to do this — and frankly, so were all the service chiefs and combatant commanders."

Special operations forces include a number of women with specialized

language, cultural and special skills training, but McRaven acknowledged that Army Rangers, Navy SEALs and other "door-kicking" special operations units have never included women. Socom leaders have an opportunity over the next few years to assess how to open the command's ranks to women, McRaven said.

"I'm required to report back to the secretary, by the first quarter of (fiscal 2016), a plan on how to integrate them," he added.

The new guidance requires that standards be gender-neutral, the admiral noted.

"We never had gender standards... because we had no female population.... We had an all-male population that was going to become Rangers, or SEALs, or infantrymen," he said. "So that was the standard."

McRaven said he and his staff are looking forward to figuring out ways to integrate women into direct special operations roles.

"I guarantee you, there will be females out there that will come to (basic underwater demolition/SEAL) training or be Rangers... and will do a phenomenal job," he said.

Celebrating 376 years of service



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Another Year Wiser: Members of the Nebraska National Guard gathered at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb., to celebrate the 376th Birthday of the National Guard by cutting a cake during a ceremony Friday, Dec. 14. Keynote speakers for the ceremony, which was hosted by the Nebraska Air National Guard, was Nebraska Senator Bill Avery and Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska deputy adjutant general - Air. Cutting the ceremonial birthday cake were: (from left) Airman 1st Class Victor Habib, Avery, Chief Master Sgt. Matt Swetland, Bohac, Spc. Heidi Krueger and Master Sgt. Timothy Keesecker.

Army training commander promises fair standards for combat jobs

WASHINGTON (ARNEWS) — Fairness will be important as officials develop plans for opening more direct-combat jobs to women, the commander of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command said Jan. 24.

Gen. Robert W. Cone spoke with reporters after Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced the Defense Department has rescinded an exclusion dating to 1994 that barred women from being assigned to combat positions below brigade level.

"Soldiers — both men and women — want fair and meaningful standards" to be developed for accepting

women into previously restricted specialties, Cone said. "I think that fairness is very important in a values-based organization like our Army."

The memo Panetta and Dempsey signed rescinding the policy does not spell out which military occupational specialties will be open to women. Rather, it directs the services to provide their implementation strategies to the Defense Department by May.

Implementation will begin this year and be completed by the beginning of 2016, Panetta said at a news conference Jan. 23.

"This year we will begin to assign women to previously closed occupations using clear standards

of performance in all occupational specialties," Dempsey said at the news conference.

"The burden of proof used to be, 'Why should a woman serve in a particular specialty?'" the chairman added. "Now, it's, 'Why shouldn't a woman serve in a particular specialty?'"

As of September, 418 of the Army's 438 military occupational specialties were open to women of all ranks, according to an Oct. 31 Army report titled: "Women in the Army."

TRADOC already has been studying armies in other countries, such as Canada and Israel, where women successfully have been integrated into combat special-

ties. Army officials will consider knowledge, skills and attributes of Soldiers and get the best match in specialties now restricted, Cone said, such as infantry, armor, field artillery and engineers.

Physical requirements will be one of the important attributes, he added.

"Soldiers don't want to see (that) degraded," the general said.

Objective assessments and validation studies, many of which already are complete, will look at each requirement by specialty, Cone told reporters. Tasks include such things as how much infantry Soldiers must be able to lift, how much they have to carry and for what distance, Cone said.

Once the validations are done, scientists will then develop specialty-specific physical fitness tests that will, in turn, be validated with field studies, he added.

Besides physical ability, Cone said, Army officials will look at "traditional impediments" — the attitudes regarding the acceptance of women into previously male-only jobs.

"A lot of this is about leadership and the organizational climate," he added.

The Army will take "proactive measures to mitigate resistance to women going into these specialties," the general said.

"We want the right environment for women," he said.

WOMEN continued from page 1.

services.

If any of the services recommend that a specific position be closed to women, the secretary of defense must personally approve that recommendation, the official said.

Panetta directed the military departments to submit detailed implementation plans by May 15 and to move ahead to integrate women into previously closed positions.

The secretary directed the process to be complete by Jan. 1, 2016.

According to Nebraska leaders, the change is recognition of the reality that many Nebraska female Soldiers and Airmen have faced over the past decade. Women, although banned from serving in combat roles, have been heavily involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 12 years, serving as pilots, military police, intelligence officers and other roles attached to, if not formally part of, frontline units.

To date, countless female Soldiers and Airmen from Nebraska have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan where they have served with pride and distinction.

More than 40 Nebraska Army Guard female Soldiers have been awarded the Army's Combat Action Badge for involvement in combat operations with the enemy, while two have earned the Bronze Star with Valor device for heroism in combat. Five women Soldiers have received the Purple Heart.

Two female Soldiers from the Nebraska Army Guard, Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess and Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson, died in combat while serving in Iraq.

Women currently make up 21.6 percent of the Nebraska Air National Guard and 13.8 percent of the Nebraska Army Guard. Currently, all Nebraska Air Guard positions are open to both genders compared to 89.6 percent in the Nebraska Army Guard, where a number of positions, mostly located within

the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, were excluded by the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule.

Reaction to the recent decision has been similar at the command level of both Army and Air National Guard units in Nebraska.

"I wasn't surprised," said Col. Anita Curington, a 26-year veteran and current director of Nebraska National Guard joint operations. "Females have been in combat situations regardless of what their duty positions were."

Col. Wendy Johnson, commander of the 155th Mission Support Group and a 29-year veteran of the Nebraska Air Guard, said she remembers when security police positions were opened up to female Airmen shortly after she joined the Guard.

"Back then, that was a big deal," she said. "From an Airman's perspective in the Nebraska Air National Guard today, we have moved beyond that."

Secretary Panetta's announcement was met with cautious optimism from current and former female Soldiers and Airmen of the Nebraska National Guard. Johnson said she does suspect there may be a varying degree of reception for women who join units previously open to males only depending on the military branch and duty position, but expressed she had no overt concerns.

"There will be some woman who will experience some negativity," she said, "but that is just a function of the change."

Curington echoed Johnson's sentiments and said she recommends that females joining these units be mentally, physically and emotionally prepared to go into a situation where they could be the first females in a unit.

The possibility of initial hostility towards women in previously all-male units concerns Heather Wunderlich, a former staff sergeant, who served eight years in the Nebraska Army and received the Bronze Star with Valor as a

flight medic while deployed to Iraq in 2011.

"I have concerns about women being respected and treated as equals," she said. "I feel like, at first, those women who choose to pursue direct combat roles will be heavily discriminated against. There is still a huge stereotype that women are not as physically fit or mentally capable to fight in combat as men are. If a woman can pass the same testing and qualify in the same position as a man, she should be treated as his equal," she said.

Wunderlich said she never felt inferior for being a female Soldier during any of the 200-plus combat missions she flew in while deployed. Still, she said, she thinks the decision will affect women across the services in a very positive way.

"It's a step in right direction for equality," she said.

All three service women said they believe the policy will be implemented fairly and quickly so that female Soldiers and Airmen can receive the same recognition for their service as their male counterparts.

Secretary Panetta's new policy fundamentally changes 200 years of tradition and will likely meet some initial resistance across the force said Curington. It happened with desegregation in the armed forces, when women were allowed to serve and most recently with allowing the service of openly gay service members.

"It's an evolutionary process and there will always be resistance to new policy," she said, adding that as Soldiers and Airman of a professional fighting force, it is imperative that individuals maintain a change-centric outlook.

"Unfortunately, there are some individuals who may be set in their ways and decide to leave the military because of this change, but I don't know if those are the people we really want to keep in (the Guard) anyway."

Johnson said she believes there is a lot of support for this decision among Soldiers and Airmen throughout the Nebraska National Guard.

"I'm sure there are those people who will be resistant, but I don't think they are the majority," said Johnson.

Military leadership within the Nebraska National Guard welcomed Panetta's decision recognizing that qualified women will now have the same chance to distinguish themselves in combat as their brothers-in-arms.

"It certainly opens up more command and leadership positions that females can hold," said Curington.

Looking forward, she said this is especially true for young female Soldiers looking to be future enlisted leaders and commanders. It takes time for Soldiers and Airmen to develop the skills necessary for leadership and command positions. If they learn these skillsets early in their careers, it will be easier for them to climb through the ranks and gain the trust of their subordinates, Curington said.

On the Air Guard side, Johnson said she does not anticipate much of a change regarding females in leadership and command positions. Internally, the Nebraska Air Guard already has the tools in place that allow female Airmen to compete for command and leadership positions, she said.

"For a Midwestern state with generally conservative values, there are a lot of women in key positions within the Nebraska Air National Guard," she said. "This is not the case in many other states around the country."

The decision to rescind the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule for women puts the military more in line with the civilian sector, said Curington.

"Ultimately, it will make us a better organization because we will have more diversity within all the ranks."



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Conducting A Briefing: Maj. Dale Burrage, Nebraska National Guard Joint Operations Center officer-in-charge, conducts a briefing from the newly-built JOC, Jan. 12.

■ Getting to know the new Joint Force Headquarters

Nebraska Guard shows off new Joint Operations Center

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Writer

Members of the Nebraska National Guard's new Joint Operations Center hosted an open house in its new location in the new Joint Forces Headquarters building in Lincoln, Neb., Jan. 12.

Maj. Dale Burrage, operations officer and JOC officer-in-charge, hosted the open house in an effort help members of the JFHQ become better acquainted with the technological and communication capabilities of the new JOC.

Nothing is as important as getting information from those in crisis to those who can help, Burrage said.

"The new, state-of-the-art JOC is the information and communications hub for the Nebraska National Guard," he said. "The JOC is the

Guard's incident management control center that monitors situations statewide and around the United States."

"Wherever Nebraska National Guard personnel may be, the JOC is here to keep track of them," he said.

Burrage said the new JOC provides a much more technologically advanced communication environment than the old facility did, adding that careful thought was put into its design.

"It is physically bigger and has a much better layout," he said.

The JOC is manned by three fulltime Guard members and three traditional Guardsmen. It boasts a wealth of communication media including 28 computer workstations, five large TV screens, a podium for conducting in-house briefings and network communications for Army, Air and state personnel.

The center is also outfitted with



Keeping Informed: Members of the Nebraska National Guard Joint Operations Center staff work in the newly-built JOC, which is located in the Guard's new Joint Force Headquarters, while a bank of television monitors provide news and information, including updates about a winter storm approaching the Midwest, Jan. 12.



Updates: Col. Anita Curington (left), state joint operations officer, speaks with Maj. Eric Hunsbarger and other members of the Joint Operations Center staff, Oct. 12. The JOC has been designed to serve as the Guard's information and communications hub, monitoring situations across Nebraska and the United States.

video teleconference and Defense Connect Online. These capabilities allow JOC personnel to communicate in real-time with outside enti-

"Wherever Nebraska National Guard personnel may be, the JOC is here to keep track of them."

— Maj. Dale Burrage
Joint Operations Center
officer-in charge

ties from inside the control center.

"We can broadcast briefings so that the governor, (Nebraska Emergency Management Agency) or any interested party can tune in without having to be physically present," said Burrage.

"VTC allows us to work right up to the briefing time without having to worry about interruptions," he added.

Significant upgrades in mission communication equipment in the new location allows for more convenient interoperability with other agencies and emergency services

within the state as well as JOCs from other states, Burrage said.

In the past the Nebraska National Guard JOC has managed an array of situations from Hurricane Katrina, deployments, forest fires in Colorado, to flooding in Nebraska.

Although the JOC has not yet managed a major emergency response out of the its new center, it did recently help coordinate a team of 11 Air National Guard members who deployed with a single palletized expeditionary kitchen in support of the presidential inauguration.

Nebraska Guardsman at right place at right time... twice in one week

■ Helicopter pilot handles two life-threatening situations like a pro

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Growing up, Maj. Daniel Smith, commander of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, learned many things from his parents. As the son of a pastor, he was taught to always help those in need.

During a week in mid-September, Smith had the opportunity to put those lessons to work when he was seemingly at the right place at the right time...twice.

Smith and his wife were at the Tiger Rock Academy in Lincoln, Neb., watching their 7-year-old son participate in Taekwondo lessons. As they watched the session, Smith said his wife noticed a woman struggling to breathe. The woman soon slumped over, prompting Smith's wife to get his attention.

"I looked over and there was a lady slumped over in her chair," said Smith. "So I got up and walked over to her. I put my hand on her and right away when I touched her I told my wife to call 911."

Smith said he struggled to find the woman's pulse and, with the help of another man, laid her on the floor. He then directed others around him to move the young Taekwondo students into another room where they wouldn't see what was happening.

At that point, Smith and a Tiger Rock

employee who was a one-time emergency room nurse performed CPR until paramedics arrived and took over, finally transporting her to a hospital for more acute care.

Smith said he was unsure of what caused the woman's medical episode and at the time of this interview, the last he heard was that she was continuing her recovery in a local hospital.

As if that episode wasn't strange enough, Smith's week got a little more interesting a few days later.

Smith said he was driving home from work on the same route he takes everyday when he noticed something that seemed out of the ordinary. He noticed a very young girl walking down the sidewalk of the residential street.

"I did what I always do and start looking for a parent," said Smith. "I didn't see a parent, so I started slowing down and looked in my rearview mirror and noticed she wasn't wearing any shoes, so I turned around and went back, put the truck in park and talked to her through the window and said, 'Hey, where are your parents?' and she hid behind a tree."

Smith said he knew the small girl was scared and hoped she wouldn't run from him after he got out of his vehicle.

"I think it helped that I was in uniform because when she saw I was in uniform I don't think she was as scared," said Smith.

He again asked where her parents were and dialed 911 as she began to cry.

Neighbors came out to see if they could help as police arrived. She stopped crying and was eventually able to communicate where she lived.

Smith said as far as they could tell, the girl was being watched by her older brother and when he fell asleep, she decided to take a walk and ended up getting lost. By the time Smith saw her she had wandered more than

'I looked over and there was a lady slumped over in her chair...I put my hand on her and right away when I touched her I told my wife to call 911.'

— Maj. Daniel Smith
Commander Company C, 2-135
General Support Aviation Battalion



a mile away from her home.

Thankfully, the fact Smith was still in his uniform helped ease the young girl's fear of talking to a stranger.

"She was scared – don't talk to strangers and all that stuff – you think about how to communicate with a kid that's scared," he said. "I was already thinking about that, but the minute I jumped out and she saw me in uniform I could tell her attitude was changing, so the uniform helped out there."

Prior to becoming a Soldier, Smith said he encountered many instances where he was also in the right place at the right time to help others. Like the time he assisted a man who fell 30 feet while backpacking at Yosemite National Park and had to be airlifted out. Or the time he helped other lost children when he was a snowboard instructor in California.

Then came 9/11. At that point Smith was working as a flight instructor and charter pilot at TAC Air in Omaha, Neb., and couldn't stay away from something he'd always wanted to do.

"I figured we were going to war, so it was a good time to join because I always wanted to be in the military," said Smith.

He enlisted and eventually became an officer and aviator. Smith said he deployed twice to Iraq, once in 2007 and again in 2010. During his deployments Smith had the opportunity to use his helicopter to evacuate literally thousands of Iraqi citizens and U.S. service members.

Smith also deployed to the Hurricane Katrina relief effort where he hoisted stranded people off of rooftops. He also flew more recently in the state's response to multiple wildfires.

But by no means is Smith looking for accolades for what he sees as just doing the right thing. He said he's just happy to help our neighbors in need.

"It was just a weird week," said Smith. "I told my wife I'd probably never have one again."

"No thanks needed," he added. "I just hope it doesn't happen again."

Air refueling unit recognizes top three Airmen in December

By Senior Airman Mary Thach
Staff Writer

Three members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing were recognized as the organization's Outstanding Airmen of the Year when they were honored at an award ceremony during the organization's December drill in Lincoln, Neb.

Each of the Air Guardsmen would go on to be recognized as the state's top Airmen in their respective categories following the Nebraska Air National Guard's Outstanding Airman of the Year competition.

According to 155th ARW officials, the Airmen demonstrated selfless actions, going above and beyond expectation both on- and off-duty and telling the Air Force story through their actions. Their actions modeled the Air Force core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

Chief Master Sgt. Nancy Vondrasek, 155th ARW command chief master sergeant, said "the Outstanding Airman of the Year is to recognize our folks for things that they have done: activities and accomplishments, both personal and professional, that is generally above and beyond what your average Joe would accomplish."

The OAY award is an Air Force program in which Air National Guard, U.S. Air Force Reserve and active duty installations nominate their most worthy members. Once OAYs are selected at each base, they compete against other OAYs for national honors. The program recognizes Airmen for leadership and job performance, significant self-improvement and base or community involvement.

Vondrasek said it is a significant honor for a member to be selected



Bach



Viet



Tupper

as an OAY, adding that the award is important because hard work should not go unrecognized.

"We have people saving lives in the Area of Responsibility, we have people saving lives in their neighborhood, we have people averting suicides with their units who were deployed, we have people going out and being involved in community activities," said Vondrasek. "This is our story. This is the Guard's story that is lived out in these people's lives and to recognize them sends a great message to our communities."

"These are people who should be recognized. They are going to school, they are bettering themselves and they are becoming better leaders. These are the people that are going to become chiefs and senior leaders."

Senior Airman Bryan Bach, 155th Civil Engineer Squadron, was named Nebraska Air National Guard's Outstanding Airman of the Year. According to officials, Bach demonstrated himself as a truly selfless hero when he risked his life while deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (see story beginning on Page 1). He pulled a trapped, wounded Soldier from a burning vehicle that

had been hit by an improvised explosive device.

While deployed, Bach also conducted numerous combat missions and maintained costly Explosive Ordnance Disposal equipment.

Bach also maintained a 3.59 grade point average while attending the University of Nebraska-Kearney, and ran in several competitive long distance races, placing in the top 10, proving his excellent fitness. He is also fully engaged with his church volunteer group, assisting in moving a single mother and family, building shooting stands for the Fort Kearney Shooting Sport Association, and is an active supporter of Boy and Girl Scouts of America.

Tech. Sgt. Brandon Viet, 155th CES, was named Nebraska Air National Guard's Noncommissioned Officer of the Year. Viet deployed to Rygge Air Station, Norway, managing improvised explosive device site construction projects spanning 54 hours in five days, completing three-and-a-half expedient shelters.

Viet volunteered to deploy overseas when there was an AOR shortage, securing numerous base projects and service contracts, costly infrastructure upgrades and en-

sured no security breaches. Viet also counseled Airmen in the absence of leadership to properly align the Airmen with the Air Force core values.

According to nominating officials, Viet has consistently demonstrated his commitment to continuing his professional military education, completing 45 hours of continued education. He also co-taught a hands-on speech language pathology seminar, organized a cancer screening clinic, co-taught an annual head and neck cancer course, and assisted in neonatal, surgical and cardiovascular intensive care unit seminars.

Meanwhile, Viet volunteered 15 hours for holiday events, organized a squadron basketball league, volunteered to be the Civil Engineer drug testing program administrative manager to hold his peers accountable for their actions, and participated in numerous community events.

Master Sgt. Lisa Tupper, 155th CES, was named Nebraska Air National Guard's First Sergeant of the Year. Tupper also deployed to Rygge Air Station, Norway, as the first sergeant to support Operation Impeccable Glove 2012. During her assignment, she mentored 14 Royal

Norwegian Military engineer cadets and maintained accountability of 44 engineers.

Tupper also deployed to Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., to support Operation Silver Steed, at Silver Flag, keeping accountability of more than 180 active duty, Guard and Reserve Air Force engineers from 13 Air Force specialty codes. Tupper supported eight Airmen and their families during combat deployments, successfully intervened with a troubled Airman and counseled another Airman in a potentially dangerous situation to prevent a disaster.

Tupper also earned an Electrical and Mechanical Technology Associates degree, a Human Resources Associates degree from the Community College of the Air Force, and is making significant progress toward completing her senior noncommissioned officer academy educational requirements. She also earned a 98.2 percent on her recent fitness test.

Tupper was also credited with volunteering countless hours as a fourth grade catechist at Saint Stephen the Martyr Church, sponsoring many youth activity programs, and coaching boys' and girls' soccer and baseball teams.

Tupper is also involved in the Western Douglas County Chamber of Commerce and an active member of the Nebraska Hotel and Motel Association board.

According to Vondrasek, all three Airmen deserve the recognition they've received thus far.

"These are selfless acts," said Vondrasek. "They aren't doing it because they want to get an award, they are doing it because it's the right thing and they are helping their community. They are helping other members that they work with and that's what the military's about. It's the right thing to do to recognize your people."

Army Guard journalist named best in nation, *Prairie Soldier* newspaper claims fourth-straight Guard title

Nebraska National Guard
Public Affairs Office

The *Prairie Soldier* newspaper has topped the charts of the tabloid-sized newspapers in the Army National Guard for the fourth straight year and seventh out of eight.

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

According to the National Guard public affairs officials, the competition pitted the newspaper and Nebraska Army and Air Guard journalists against the best in the nation.

The *Prairie Soldier* beat the Plains Guardian of Kansas, which finished second, and the Illinois Guardian, which finished third. The *Prairie Soldier* will now compete in the U.S. Army's Keith L. Ware competition, where they will be competing against journalists from throughout the U.S. Army. This competition started at the end of February.

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

In the Army National Guard competition, Spc. (now Sgt.) Jason Drager, a print journalist with the Lincoln-based 111th Public Affairs Detachment, placed third in the News Article competition. Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen, a print journalist with Joint Force Headquarters, earned second in the Personality Feature Article competition.

Spc. (now Sgt.) Heidi Krueger, a



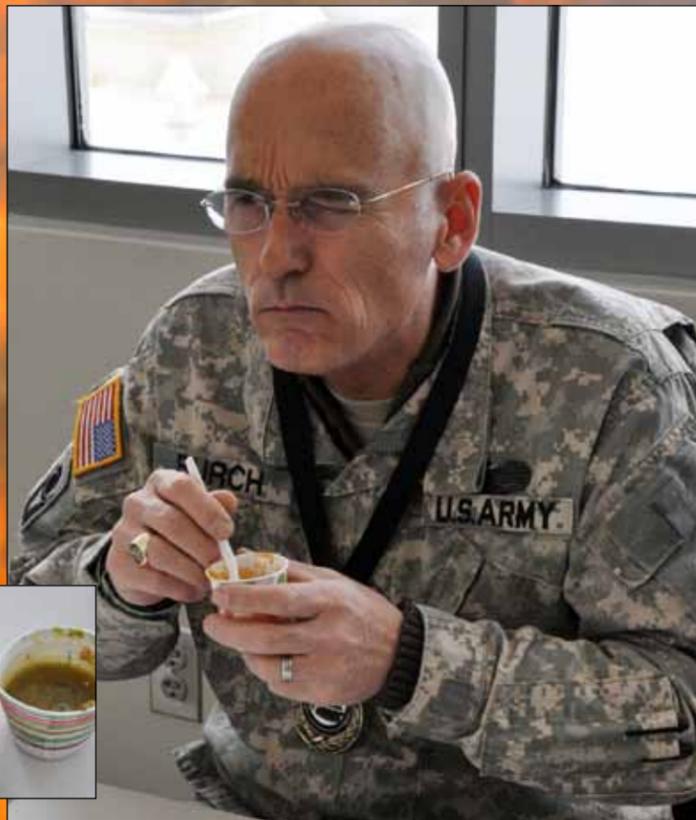
print journalist with the 111th PAD, took first place in Paul D. Savanuck Military Print Journalist of the Year competition for her work on a variety of news, features and sports articles. Krueger also took first in the Photojournalism competition for her Nebraska wildfire article and pictures.

Krueger's and Nissen's articles moved forward to the U.S. Army's Keith L. Ware competition, where they will be competing against journalists from throughout the U.S. Army.

In the Air National Guard competition, Senior Airman Mary Thach, a print journalist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing earned second place in the Sports Article competition and third place in the News Article competition.

Also earning awards was Maj. Kevin Hynes, Nebraska National Guard state public affairs officer and editor of the *Prairie Soldier*. Hynes earned second place in the Sports Photograph competition, second place in the Commentary competition and third place in the Feature Photograph competition.

2013 Chili Cookoff



Photos by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Expert Tester: Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch samples one of the many types of chili available during a chili cookoff for employees of the Operations and Training section of Joint Force Headquarters at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Feb. 1. Sgt. 1st Class Roger Ramos (pictured bottom right) took home first place honors in the People's Choice category.

Headquarters staff show off culinary creativity

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

"Nothing brings a group of Soldiers, Airmen and civilians together like a mouthful of delicious chili – and bragging rights for the entire year," said Maj. Steven Collins, anti-terrorism force protection officer for Joint Force Headquarters.

Collins recently served as coordinator of a chili cook-off, Feb. 1, at the new Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. The cook-off served as a team-building event for the operations and training sections to boost morale.

Nine entries were submitted with six of the best taste-testers from the Nebraska Military Department judging the chili based on aroma, color, consistency, taste and aftertaste.

Decorated aprons were given out to the top three in a People's Choice category and medals were given out to the top three scores from the taste-testers.



Outstanding Airmen of the Year

Nebraska Airmen selected to compete for national honors

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard selected the state's top four Outstanding Airman of the Year in December, nominating three members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing and one senior noncommissioned officer from the 170th Group's 170th Operations Support Squadron to compete in the national Outstanding Airmen of the Year competition.

According to Command Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, state command chief master sergeant, Senior Airman Bryan Bach was selected as the state's outstanding Airman for 2012, Tech. Sgt. Brandon Viet was named the state's outstanding noncommissioned officer and Master Sgt. Lisa Tupper was named the

Nebraska Air National Guard's first sergeant of the year.

All three are members of the Lincoln-based 155th ARW. (*Biographies are printed on Page 14.*)

Also taking state honors was Senior Master Sgt. Michael Hommen, an airborne system engineer with Offutt Air Force Base's 170th OSS, who was named the state's outstanding senior noncommissioned officer of the year.

Results of the national competition are expected to be released later this year, according to Forster.

According to 170th Group officials who nominated Hommen for the prestigious award, the Detroit, Mich., native has been an integral contributor to the unit's on-going mission. Hommen was credited with being a mentor to the organization's assigned Airmen, directing the first



Hommen

170th Group enlisted call as a superintendent, setting high expectations and 100 percent accountability. Nominators also credited Hommen with championing the organiza-

tion's educational efforts by helping facilitate both formal and informal education for deployed and home station-based Airmen.

Hommen also volunteered for a 90-day rotation to the Central Command Area of Responsibility where he recorded 328 flight hours over 30 combat missions in the unit's RC-135 aircraft that resulted in 298 hours of signals intelligence.

He was also credited with increasing the deployed unit's mission effectiveness in a number of different ways including helping troubleshoot operator work station repairs, providing preflight equipment security transitions and mentoring 24 active duty airborne system engineers that resulted in increased professionalism, crew resource management and Airmanship.

Hommen was also credited for

continuing both his civilian and military educational requirements while also volunteering to train as a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator victim advocate. Hommen currently is pursuing a degree in Counter Terrorism Studies from the American Military College where he holds a GPA of 3.8, while also finishing the requirements for several Community College of the Air Force associate's degrees. Hommen is also enrolled in the Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education course.

He is also an active volunteer, serving as the Bellevue East Trap Shooting coach, as a member of the base clean up crew, an active associate member of the 155th ARW's Chief's Councils and in providing continuous support to the families of deployed Airman.

BACH continued from page 1.

disabled by an improvised explosive device and was now involved with a complex enemy attack. They needed help recovering the vehicle.

Bach's team, like several others operating in the area, was ordered to converge onto the scene to lend assistance.

Approaching the area from east, Bach said his seven-vehicle convoy was approximately two kilometers from their destination when they joined up with another unit that had been struck by three IEDs, which had whittled that second convoy down to four operational vehicles...

Suddenly a bright explosion filled the windshield in front of Bach's MRAP as a command-controlled IED struck the vehicle immediately to his front, flipping the heavy armored truck onto its roof.

At that moment, Bach—a 21-year-old from Randolph, Neb., who joined the Nebraska Air National Guard after listening to his brother talk about the lifesaving role that EOD technicians had played on the mean streets of Iraq—knew that the day would be unlike any he could imagine.

It would also ultimately help him earn the Nebraska Air National Guard's Outstanding Airman of the Year award for second consecutive year.

From an early age, Bryan Bach knew what he wanted to do with his life.

Growing up in northeastern Nebraska, Bach listened as his older brother, who had served in Iraq early in the war as an active duty Army cavalry scout, talked about his experiences in the Middle East and the role EOD technicians played. EOD technicians not only kept Iraq's roads clear of increasingly deadly IEDs, they also saved the lives of injured American service members when those roadside bombs couldn't be found in time.

Mostly, Bach said, he remembers how his brother talked about his desire to serve in EOD.

"He wanted to do it, but never did," said Bach during a recent drill weekend at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

"He talked about them and how they not only made the road safe, but that they were the first-responders for people who were getting hit."

As Bach's 2009 Randolph High School graduation approached, he decided to join the Nebraska Air National Guard, enlisting in October 2008. He said he had only one military career path in mind: he wanted to be an explosive ordnance disposal technician.

Bach said his interests in technology and robots, combined with his desire to do something that required him to constantly "think outside of the box," simply made the EOD career field intriguing.

"It isn't the same thing everyday... Oh yeah, nothing is ever the same," said Bach.

As the thick smoke cleared after the explosion, Bach quickly realized the Soldiers in front of him were in trouble.

Fortunately, Bach and his two teammates had been training for days like this since their pre-deployment exercises at Tyndall Air Force Base in the Florida panhandle months earlier. There, among the tall pine trees and red Florida soil, the Airmen, who had just met, quickly learned to work together through a series of increasingly complicated exercises designed to make the EOD technicians think on their feet despite physical and mental exhaustion.

According to Bach, thinking under pressure was constantly reinforced from the time he began his seven-month EOD technical school at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., through a temporary training assignment in Germany and once again as he prepared for Afghanistan.

Bach said paying attention to the smallest detail is often the difference between life and tragedy, as the EOD's motto expresses: 'Initial Success or Total Failure.'

"You've got to be mentally ready when you're physically exhausted," he said.

That concept definitely would come into play today.

"We had done a million training problems to get there, so we were all comfortable and everybody had confidence in each other," said Bach about his teammates.

"If I needed help or had a question, I would ask. Otherwise, I would do my thing and they would do their thing... we just had a basic confidence in the team."

Part of that confidence also came from the fact that since mid-January, the Airmen had supported numerous EOD missions in Afghanistan. According to Bach, as the mission evolved, the Airmen constantly shifted between American and Polish bases set up in "R.C.-East," a huge swath of Afghanistan roughly the size of Virginia centered on Kabul that shares 450 miles of border with Pakistan.

"We were out all of the time," said Bach, adding that missions included such responsibilities as disabling IEDs, conducting post-blast investigations and destroying weapons caches.

According to Bach, following the blast on April 23, his team quickly, almost without word, shifted into action.

"Training makes instincts," said Bach. "The second it happened, before any of us had even talked, the metal detectors were out... and I grabbed the (combat lifesaver) bag."

Bach said his team leader quickly explained the plan: The leader and



Photo courtesy of Senior Airman Bryan Bach

Constant Training: Senior Airman Bryan Bach practices defusing a potential chemical munition during a training exercise at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., in August 2012. According to Bach, constant training is a key to success for explosive ordnance disposal technicians.

the other Airmen would sweep the road ahead of Bach for any other potential IEDs while he followed a step behind with the CLS bag, ready to provide medical attention to whomever they found.

"So they cleared me to the downed vehicle," Bach said.

Arriving at the still-smoldering MRAP, Bach said his team leader, Tech. Sgt. Aaron Weber from the Delaware Air National Guard, helped the vehicle driver while Bach peered inside of the truck to see if anyone else was hurt.

What he saw sent chills through him.

"I noticed the guy in the turret had the weight of the vehicle and the turret sitting on his femurs," said Bach, his voice slowly shifting to silence.

During the team's month-long pre-deployment training in Florida, Bach said the training rapidly progressed from simple exercises to complicated problems designed to test the team's ability to think and react on its feet. One thing remained constant, though.

"It sounds repetitive," said Bach months later, "but when we go on our pre-deployment, (combat lifesaving) is thrown in there every day. Everybody complains about it. It's not something that you want to do."

"In that one month, we probably did it hundreds of times," he added about the 20 field problems and two

days of classroom study that had been devoted to combat lifesaving. "It made me not think. It just made my instincts just go into their own."

Bach said the training proved its importance during the April incident.

"I definitely think it's worthwhile now," he said.

According to Bach, Weber, having assisted the MRAP driver to safety, quickly dispatched additional Soldiers forward from the trailing vehicles to help Bach treat the wounded man.

He said the third member of the EOD team, Staff Sgt. Aaron Lin, continued to sweep the area for additional hidden bombs.

Bach said as the extra Soldiers arrived, they tried to help the wounded man from outside the vehicle. Bach said he quickly realized that it wasn't going to be enough.

"There's only so much you can do," he said.

Quickly shedding his helmet and armored vest, Bach said he slithered into the MRAP and began putting tourniquets around the man's legs, which were bleeding profusely. He also kept talking calmly to the Soldier to keep him from going into further shock while placing gauze around

the man's eyes, which had also been injured in the blast.

"I didn't think much about it at the time," said Bach. "Something had to be done because he was bleeding by the second."

Still, the man was far from out of the woods. Because the bomb had struck the MRAP in a narrow section of road bordered by mud walls, the remaining convoy vehicles had to be pulled back in order to bring up the convoy's accompanying wrecker. Bach said that was going to take time... time the wounded Soldier didn't necessarily have.

"I just grabbed an (entrenching) tool from the truck and started digging so that we could get another tourniquet up higher around his leg," Bach said.

By the time the wrecker arrived, Bach said he and Weber discovered they now had an even bigger problem on their hands: fire.

"Something electrical in the truck had started on fire, up along the passenger door near the fuel tank, which was also starting to burn," said Bach.

Again, training came into play, particularly the lessons about remaining calm under pressure.

"I was already inside, so I grabbed the fire extinguisher and put it out from the inside while my team leader put it out from the outside."

Finally, as the vehicle was lifted up by the wrecker, the wounded Soldier was pulled from the stricken

MRAP and placed onto a stretcher. As Bach and others began to lift the stretcher and move him toward an awaiting medical helicopter, Bach said a senior noncommissioned officer from the Soldier's unit asked Bach if he could take his place and help carry the wounded comrade, who would lose both legs, but ultimately survive the battle.

After switching places with the Army first sergeant, Bach returned back to his team.

There was still a mission to do.

Was there ever.

According to information provided by Command Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, the Nebraska Air National Guard's senior noncommissioned officer, Bach and his team would be credited with conducting more than 60 combat operations in support of 23 named operations during his time in Afghanistan.

Additionally Bach helped assist in the destruction of more than 4,500 pounds of enemy explosives, the clearance of 450 miles of roads, while also helping train more than 100 U.S. Army Soldiers on IED trends and identification that ultimately helped save additional lives.

Bach returned back to Nebraska in July and is now fully involved in his courses at the University of Nebraska-Kearney where he's working on a degree in Information Technology. In fact, his current course load could be described as nearly twice the size of a similar student.

"My outlook's different now, but I'm back to normal and ready to go," he said, adding he returned to Nebraska with a newfound awareness of what's important to him.

"Trusting in your team and making sure to double- and triple-check things when you have down time," he said. "And that there's nothing worth more than life, no matter what you have... having people to share things with is more important than any tangible item."

Bach said he was also extremely pleased to learn that he had not only been nominated for the annual State Outstanding Airman of the Year Award for the second straight year, but had also been selected as the recipient.

He is now competing for national honors, an award a close EOD friend won last year.

"It really gives you a sense of pride to bring this type of recognition back to the EOD career field and to our shop," said Bach. "To be able to have the chance to be the second-straight EOD technician to win the national award... It would show the important job that people in EOD do on a daily basis."

Overall, Bach said, he's glad about the choices he's made, the deployments he's been on and the direction his career is headed.

"I would say it has changed me a lot," he said. "But overall, I think it has been a positive experience. It has made me a better person."



Photo by Spc. Riley Huskey

Diversity Lesson: Soldiers from the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, 92nd Troop Command, Company A, 1-376th Aviation Battalion, and 43rd Army Band enjoy a presentation featuring 25 distinguished African-Americans during their Feb. 10 lunch at the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

Nebraska Soldiers learn about diversity during drill luncheon

By Spc. Riley Huskey
Staff Writer

A slide show featuring 25 distinguished African-Americans was displayed as Army National Guard units enjoyed lunch, Feb. 10, to celebrate African-American History Month at Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

While the slides cycled through on the drill floor, troops enjoyed barbecued chicken, sweet potato casserole, fried okra, baked beans and peach cobbler. Refreshments included sweet tea and Kool-Aid.

"Because the full-time force gets to experience and honor diversity throughout the year, our command thought it would be good for the (traditional, part-time) Soldiers to experience it as well," said Staff Sgt. Bryan Campbell, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion supply sergeant.

The units participating were the 110th MMB; 92nd Troop Command; Company A, 1-376th Aviation Battalion; and the 43rd Army Band.

The African-American heritage-inspired menu was prepared by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Teresa Domeier, state food program manager, and executed by the 110th MMB cooks, who served 140 Soldiers. Copies of *Bridging the Gap*, a Nebraska Military Department publication on diversity, were available for the troops.

"The idea of promoting more diversity came to me from the strength management training conducted last year," said Lt. Col.

Craig Strong, 110th MMB commander. "We hear about diversity throughout the National Guard, but rarely do the traditional Soldiers get to experience it."

"This luncheon is just one small opportunity to expose these Soldiers to diversity, by using a federally-sponsored and recognized month to promote it," said Strong.

Through various after action reports on breakout sessions conducted at strength management training, in combination with guidance from Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, Nebraska National Guard Special Emphasis Program chairman, Strong assembled an action team to incorporate the promotion of diversity during the meal period.

He said he hopes to begin quarterly diversity luncheons by 2014.

"Diversity continues to be a key priority for the Nebraska National Guard as it impacts mission readiness," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, adjutant general, in the Nebraska Military Department's Diversity Strategic Plan. "The key to success is to maintain individual diversity within the framework of our military and state values and ethos."

The menu and presentation were met with Soldiers who were surprised by the information, saying they had never heard of some of the people featured in the slideshow.

"It's something different, clever," said Sgt. Mandy Crick, clarinetist for the 43rd Army Band. "Since I've been in uniform, I've never seen anything like this done before. I believe we all learned something new."

Changing ingrained habits often key to successfully accomplishing a person's New Year's resolutions

With every New Year most people make New Year's Resolutions.

The most common resolutions are to quit smoking, to lose weight, to eat healthier and to exercise more. At the beginning of January gyms are full and it seems almost every other commercial on television is about a new fitness craze or diet gimmick. By February most of us have given up on our goals.

There is no shortcut to good health or self improvement. In order to make changes in our everyday lives, we need to live deliberately and remain focused on the goals we set. We must remind ourselves to make deliberate steps each day that lead us toward our goals.

Likewise, we must make it a point to evaluate behaviors that are effective in moving us toward our goals and those that lead us away from them. We must be mindful of our surroundings, the impact our surroundings have on us and how to effectively interact with our surroundings to meet our goals.

If living a healthy lifestyle were easy and second nature our nation and health system would not be over taxed by obesity, diabetes and heart disease. It is no shock that the advertising and food industries have little concern about the circumference of your waistline. They care only about their bottom line, so we must become self-aware of the individual triggers and temptations that lead to unhealthy habits.

It seems that most unhealthy habits are coping skills gone awry. When difficult emotions of like anger, sadness and frustration come to the forefront, popping a chocolate bar, a slice of pizza, a beer or a cigarette is a quick fix and will help manage the difficulties of life in the short term. It may seem like everywhere you look there are advertisements and messages that support these quick fixes.

Think of the beautiful women you see eating potato chips and chocolate bars on television. I'm pretty sure they don't really eat those things.

There is a reason these ads work and the food lures us back

Healthy Coping

By Viola Raschke
Director of Psychological Health,
Nebraska National Guard

time and again. After we hear the same message over and over, we begin to believe we need that food item because, certainly if it makes the person on television happy, it will do the same for us.

In fact, it does. Nicotine, fats and sugar raise the level of brain chemicals that trigger feelings of happiness and relaxation. Each time a person reaches for that quick fix, we need more to get the same reaction the next time.

Believe it or not, we train our bodies to crave the foods that we give it most often. So, if we are frequently eating fatty and/or sugary foods, our bodies will crave fatty/sugary foods. If we begin to eat a cleaner healthy diet composed of lean protein, vegetables, fruits, low fat dairy, and complex carbohydrates, we may find the changes initially difficult. Our bodies may not be accustomed to new foods. One may experience stress, frustration and ultimately be tempted to give up.

However, if we are able to continue a habit of healthy eating for one month, our bodies will slowly be retrained to crave the healthy foods we have been feeding it.

We must also train our minds. We have to be mindful of what we put in our mouths and the messages we give to ourselves while we are eating. If we consistently complain and agonize about healthy food, then our bodies may struggle to make the switch. If we are mindful and give ourselves healthy messages, we are more likely to make the change to a healthier eating.

The first step is to be mindful when preparing, ordering and eating food. In our fast-paced world we often, mindlessly, grab what's in front of us and do not stop and think about our goals and the consequences of putting unhealthy foods in our bodies.

Here are some simple steps to mindful eating:

First: When sitting down for a meal (yes you must sit down preferably at a table) quiet your mind by taking at least three deep breathes.

Keep taking breathes until your heart rate slows and you begin to feel relaxed. Remind yourself about your goals for healthy eating/weight loss.

Second: Eat one forkful at a time. It doesn't matter what the food is, but make it something that will be nourishing to your body — let's say it's the first nibble from hot, fragrant, perfectly cooked ravioli.

Now comes the hard part. Put the fork down. This could be a lot more challenging than one might imagine, because the first bite was very good and another immediately beckons. The reflexive urge to plow through your meal hits you like Cookie Monster on a shortbread bender. Resist it. Leave the fork on the table. Chew slowly. Stop talking. Tune in to the texture of the pasta, the flavor of the cheese, the bright color of the sauce in the bowl, the aroma of the rising steam.

Continue eating this way throughout the meal and you should begin to experience your food in a new and exciting way. Eating this way should also slow down your eating. It takes nearly 20 minutes for the stomach to communicate to the brain that you are full. So, if we are able to slow down and tune into our bodies and the food we are eating, no matter what we are eating, we will likely eat less and enjoy the meal more.

Third: Try mindful eating for at least two weeks at every meal. Plan ahead by packing your own lunches and always keep healthy snacks close. Most gyms have nutrition experts available to help you develop a healthy diet.

There are also numerous helpful websites. One free option is Military One Source's Wellness Coaching. A wellness coach will be assigned who can speak with you as frequently as you chose by phone. The coach will help develop attainable goals and provide guidance along the path to wellness. Get started by logging into Military One Source: http://www.militaryonesource.mil/counseling?content_id=267032

Remember each of us can accomplish anything we put our mind to and it's always good to have help.

Editor's Note: Contact the author at (402) 314.4092

Defense Department, Veterans Affairs speeding up records integration effort

WASHINGTON (AFPS)- The secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs announced their departments will speed implementation of the Integrated Electronic Health Record program allowing service members and veterans better access and, more importantly, better medical care.

"This approach is affordable, achievable, and if we refocus our efforts we believe we can achieve the key goal of a seamless system for health records between VA and DoD on a greatly accelerated schedule," said Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta following a Feb. 15 meeting with Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki at VA headquarters.

The departments are able to step up the records program because of advances in information technology while working with existing platforms. The original goal was to have the system deployed by 2018. Now the expectation is by the end of next year.

The goal is to provide one set of electronic records from entry into the military through veteran status. The program is designed to allow service members or veterans to download information and present it to doctors or other health care providers without delays.

Previously, service members had to hand carry paper files from DoD facilities to Veterans Affairs.

Once complete, the record program will provide DoD and VA clinicians with the complete medical records of more than 18 million service members, veterans and their beneficiaries. "We've agreed to improve interoperability before the end of this year by standardizing health care data," Shinseki said. The two departments will also accelerate the exchange of real-time data by September.

The departments are upgrading the graphical user interface to display the new standardized VA and DoD healthcare date by the end of this year, Shinseki said.

"By this summer, DoD and VA will field and begin conducting a pilot program on the common interface for doctors at seven joint rehab centers across the country and we'll also expand its use at two other sites," Panetta said. "All of these facilities will be interoperable by the end of July 2013, so fast time track, but we think we can get it done."

These centers will be in San Antonio, Minneapolis, Palo Alto, Calif., Tampa, Fla., Richmond, Va., Anchorage, Alaska, and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

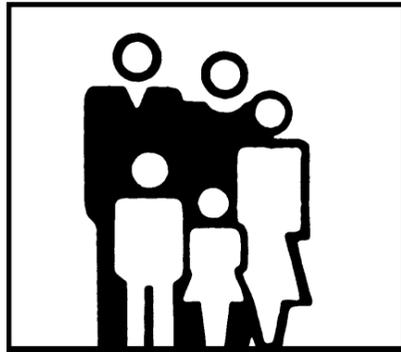
"Rather than building a single, integrated system from scratch, we will focus our immediate efforts on integrating VA and DOD health data as quickly as possible by upgrading our existing systems," Panetta said.

Honoring those who served before us



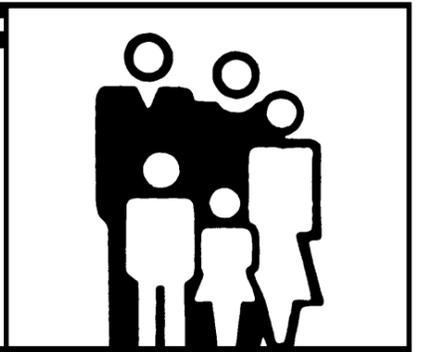
Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Bringing Some Holiday Cheer: Holiday wreaths lay next to the graves of veterans at Lincoln's Wyuka Cemetery, Dec. 15, as part of the Wreaths Across America program. Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska assistant adjutant general - Air, spoke to the audience and volunteers who placed 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.



Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



National Guard families can receive educational help through free online service

By Amy Briskin

Tutor.com

Balancing the demands of school and work can be challenging, especially for National Guard service members and their families.

Now, help is available any time, any day through Tutor.com, an online resource that provides free, personalized, 24/7 tutoring for U.S. Military Families.

This Department of Defense funded program is offered at no cost to all K-12 students in National Guard families, regardless of the service member's deployment or duty status.

Many adults in National Guard families can also use the program. Program eligibility details are available at www.tutor.com/military/eligibility.

Tutor.com allows students to work one-to-one with a live tutor online for homework assistance, studying, test preparation, proofreading, essay-writing and more.

Instant, on-demand expert support is available in all core K-12 subjects, including algebra, geometry, calculus, physics, earth science, history and AP level courses.

Students of all skill levels can benefit. Parents of younger or struggling students can log in and work alongside their children. Advanced students can get help with more challenging coursework.

Feedback collected from Tutor.com users shows that students who use Tutor.com

are more confident in their schoolwork, complete more homework assignments and are improving their grades.

Tutor.com for U.S. Military Families isn't only for children.

Many adult service members, their spouses and other adult dependents also have access to free help with college courses and career transition.

Career help includes resume and cover-letter writing, interview preparation and job-search tips. Supported college subjects include essay-writing, accounting, physics, calculus and more.

Tutor.com is staffed by more than 2,500 carefully screened, expert tutors who are available to work one-to-one with U.S. military families.

With an internet-enabled computer or handheld mobile device, students can connect to a tutor any time, any day—no appointment needed. A student and tutor work together in a secure online classroom that features an interactive whiteboard, file sharing and instant messaging.

Creating an account and getting a tutor is quick and easy.

For more information and to create an account, visit www.tutor.com/military.

Editor's Note: Tutor.com for U.S. Military Families is funded by the Department of Defense MWR Library Program, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, the Army General Library Program and the Navy General Library Program.



2013 Hiring Our Heroes Veterans Event – Lincoln, NE
Lancaster Event Center
Tuesday, April 2, 2013

Join us Tuesday, April 2nd, 2013 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, for a job fair for veteran job seekers, active duty military members, guard and reserve members, and military spouses, at the Lancaster Event Center, 4100 North 84th Street, Lincoln, NE 68507 This event will be a one-of-a-kind FREE hiring fair for both employers and job seekers.

EMPLOYERS Must register for FREE at HOH.Greatjob.net	JOB SEEKERS Register for FREE at HOH.Greatjob.net to guarantee admission. Walk-ins welcome but space not guaranteed.
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This U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation sponsored hiring event is being conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Nebraska Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), Nebraska Department of Labor, NE Chamber of Commerce and Industry, NBC News, and other local partners.

For registration questions, please contact us at hiringourheroes@uschamber.com or call 202-463-5807.



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monster | www.monster.com is the official online partner for Hiring Our Heroes | Find Hiring Our Heroes online: [f](https://www.facebook.com/hiringourheroes) [t](https://twitter.com/hiringourheroes) [in](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hiringourheroes)

MyPay can save retirees time, money during tax season

Greetings! Did you know you can stay caught up with retiree affairs on our website, www.neguard.org.

We post important announcements on Tri-Care, Medicare, Space-A, etc., for your use and information. If you know of someone who doesn't have internet access, print the information for them and let them stay up to date as well.

If you change addresses or email, please let us know so we can keep you up to date on all retiree information.

Looking for information?

If you have questions on any retiree subject and don't know where to go, you may call (402) 309-7105 and either Peggy or Bill will assist you in finding the right department.

Upcoming Kearney meeting

Wednesday, April 3, will see the Kearney-area retirees meeting at the Legion Club to receive updated information on Tri-Care, retirement information, etc. If you are in the area, the meeting starts at 7 p.m. There's always a lot of good information presented and it's always good to see old friends. Mark your calendar and come to the meeting

Retiree breakfasts

For those who like to rise early to meet fellow retirees and share stories, here's the breakfast site information for those in the immediate areas:

- Lincoln:**
 Army National Guard retirees: FIRST Monday of each month, 8 a.m., Virginia's Travelers Café, 3820 Cornhusker Highway, Lincoln;
 Air National Guard retirees: LAST Monday of each month, 8 a.m., Stauffer's Café, 2701 N. 48th St, Lincoln;
- North Platte:**
 SECOND Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., Village Inn, North Platte.

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

Update from 2nd Lt. Nick Curto, TRICARE representative

The following information is provided concerning co-pays for prescriptions: Beginning in February 2013 the TRICARE Pharmacy co-pays increased as follows:

Option	Generic (Tier 1)	Brand Name (Tier 2)	Non-formulary (Tier 3)
Military Pharmacy	\$0	\$0	Not Applicable
Home Delivery (90 day supply)	\$0	\$13(+\$4)	\$43(+\$18)
Network Pharmacy (30 day supply)	\$5	\$17(+\$5)	\$44(+\$19)

Note: This affects all TRICARE beneficiaries; active duty, TRICARE Reserve Select, and retirees.

If you know of any other location that holds a retiree gathering, please let us know so we can update the list.

From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Austin Behnk:

My phone number is (402) 309-8151 and email address is austin.j.behnk@mail.mil. Staff Sgt. Mandy Hatcher's phone number is (402) 309-8164 and mandy.r.hatcher@mail.mil. We are located in the new Joint Forces Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base. Our address is 2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, NE 68524.

This is also the location of the ID card station. If you have a change of address, please contact me or Staff Sgt. Hatcher to update our records to make sure you receive any information we mail out.

During tax season, myPay can save you time and money. For starters, 1099R tax statements are available at least a week before they arrive in the mail.

If you lose your statement or you need a copy for your tax preparer, you can get one in minutes on myPay any time of day or night from the comfort of your home.

If you don't have a myPay account you may have to mail a form to the Defense Finance

and Accounting Service or spend precious time waiting on hold for customer service. After that, getting a copy of your 1099R in the mail could take weeks.

To get your 1099R on myPay, just log in to the Main Menu, and click "Tax Statement 1099R." You can view, print or save it. In addition to printing tax statements, military retirees can use myPay to monitor their pay and survivor benefits, keep their contact and beneficiary information current, and control their allotments, direct deposit and tax withholdings.

If you've never used myPay, visit <https://mypay.dfas.mil> and click "Forgot or Need a Password" to have a temporary password mailed to you. When you receive your password, return to the myPay home page and click "Create an Account" to get started. If you have trouble creating your account, visit www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary for step-by-step instructions or call myPay at (888) 332-7411 (option 5).

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

- DEERS/ID** card stations within Nebraska.
 - G1** – 2433 N.W. 24th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524 – (402) 309-8167;
 - Spirit of 76 Armory**, 67th BFB – (402) 309-7058 or (402) 309-7260;
 - 92nd Troop Command Penteman 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 Street, Norfolk (402) 309-8908 or (402) 309-8900;
 - The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.
- Enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Major
Sean P. O'Neill

Captain
Rob R. Foxworthy
Adam R. Krčilek
Tyler R. Wilterding

Chief Warrant Officer 3
Daniel D. Kincheloe
Scott E. Wilke

Chief Warrant Officer 2
Michael P. Shottenkirk

Master Sergeant
Steven L. Barnes
Steven R. Gavre

Sergeant First Class
Rick G. Carter
Mark J. Goodrich
Andrew J. Hytrek
Scott E. Krul
Shawn C. Madden
Joshua S. Mcatee
Michael R. Minnehan
Noe Ramirez
Amanda K. Robinson
Jenna A. Schneider
Peter J. Smith
Josiah D. Unger
Mark A. Vanderheiden
Tonya S. Wagner

Staff Sergeant
David J. Austin
Tyler J. Beck
Chad M. Classen
Adam D. Dueland
Jason E. Duff
Lucas L. Geyer
Cody A. Graff
D. J. Johnson
Damian A. Kelly
Topacio A. Ortiz
Mitchell K. Osantowski
Michael D. Rieke
Corey J. Scheidemann
John M. Scholes
Mark P. Wattier
Adam R. White
Jake A. Winterburn
Craig D. Worley
Erin D. Youngblood

Sergeant
Daniel G. Anderson
Jordan M. Annen
Andrew J. Becerra
Gage A. Brummer

Laura E. Campbell
Benjamin J. Dally
Benjamin D. Danch
Adam J. Debock
Ashley N. Diehm
Ethan D. Dodd
Trenten B. Dohmen
Jason M. Drager
Kristen A. Dutcher
Nathaniel J. Emons
Benjamin D. Erickson
Joseph O. Evans
Bradley J. Flanagan
Christopher L. Franssen
Andrew W. Galloway
Jason J. Hansen
Nickolas R. Hansen
Matthew A. Harre
Bryce D. Hinrichs
Quelbin M. Izaguirre
Amy Jacobson
Alayna J. Kechely
Heidi J. Krueger
Amy S. Kuehn
Jonathan D. Lintz
Daniel Maciasvillegas
Marisa S. S. Martinez
Gregory A. Merrill
Ryan M. Mueller
Trevor L. Munster
Steven R. Neal
Bubba L. Page
Ryan A. Pella
Matthew J. Poehlman
Dion J. Quinn
Benjamin D. Reehl
Javier Saldana
Ryan S. Schacht
James F. Schreiner
Anthony J. Schuman
Jessie M. Seifert
Clayton K. Shaw
Taylor D. Siebrandt
Ashley D. Sons
Dustin E. Straight
Justin R. Teeters
Daniel J. Thompson
Jacqueline M. Timmerman
Benjamin G. Tretheway
Andrew J. Wacker
Daniel M. Welsch

Specialist
Tyler E. Bose
Aaron C. Brodahl
Jose A. Calderon
Jason C. Cole
Jonathan A. Cornish
Kyle K. Courts
Andrew C. Eshleman
Clinton D. Fauss
Vance M. Jones

Jacob A. Keever
Travis E. Kitkowski
Andres Lara
Linsey A. Lautenschlager
Karla E. Macias
Richard W. Martier II
Jay C. Olson
Benjamin R. Prater
Anthony S. Rodgers
Austin J. Stamp
Jace T. Williams
Stephanie M. Williams
John W. Wilson

Private First Class
Cassidy L. Barber
Santos J. Carrillo
Kyle K. Courts
Keegan G. Dorcey
Isidro Galarzafernandez
Luis F. Godinez Jr.

Cecelia M. Guptill
Nicole M. Havlovic
Tanner D. Henning
Yoni B. Izaguirre
Anthony C. Johnson
Lucas J. Kinsey
Tyler J. Miller
Melissa K. Rich
Samuel D. Sharnan
Thomas A. Slater
Jacobi D. Spencer
Troy D. Thielke
Trace N. Thompson
Ashley L. Walker
Jacob D. Zeiss

Air National Guard
Lieutenant Colonel
John F. O'Neill
Adam R. Worden

Major
Mikayla M. Carlson
Jennifer J. Leavitt
Michael H. Piening

Captain
Michael R. Mitchell

Senior Master Sergeant
William George
William Triplette

Master Sergeant
Daniel Westman

Technical Sergeant
Robert J. Kozisek
Constance Lewis
Adam Schaaf
Megan R. Sears
David Whitfield

Staff Sergeant
Edward Cope
Matthew Dunn
Jolie Farley-Wamberg
Wade A. Ulmer

Senior Airman
Andrew Cookston
Dmitri K. Davila
Kyle Duensing
Caleb Higgins
Andrew C. Hodgin
Joshua Koraleski
Chauncey Moore
Blake Reistoffer

Airman
John J. Brunk
Tyler Peterson
Brett Schutte
Salena Sermeno

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Col. Byron L. Diamond
Maj. Andrew S. Collins
Maj. Thomas W. Golden
Maj. Brian P. Kane
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Morgan J. Mathis
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Shawn L. Miller
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jeffrey M. Geiger
1st Sgt. Troy L. Armstrong
Master Sgt. Craig A. Bechtolt
Master Sgt. Jason C. Grams
Master Sgt. Thomas C. Pirrone Jr.
Master Sgt. Alfred J. Snoozy
Sgt. 1st Class William T. Buetter
Sgt. 1st Class Thomas W. Jones
Sgt. 1st Class Bradley J. Ranslem
Sgt. 1st Class Rodney T. Stuart
Sgt. 1st Class John E. Temus
Staff Sgt. Robert H. Hague
Staff Sgt. Brian C. Kennicutt
Staff Sgt. Jason M. Winchester
Staff Sgt. Erin D. Youngblood

Army Commendation Medal

Maj. Robert J. Mendez
Capt. Carlos A. Vannurder
1st Lt. Benjamin C. Harper
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Guy Canter Jr.
Master Sgt. Martin R. Misener
Master Sgt. Tomas C. Ortiz
Sgt. 1st Class Mark J. Goodrich
Sgt. 1st Class William D. Norris III
Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan C. Panipinto

Staff Sgt. Chad A. Couillard
Staff Sgt. Scottie L. Davis
Staff Sgt. Scyler W. Foss
Staff Sgt. Scott A. Kenec
Staff Sgt. Jason A. Mcatee
Staff Sgt. Steve A. Nelson
Staff Sgt. Andrew K. Singsaas
Staff Sgt. Katherine K. Smith
Staff Sgt. Randy L. Wallerich
Sgt. Derek A. Bell
Sgt. Heidi J. Krueger
Sgt. Joseph R. Pollock
Spc. Kyle E. Brethouwer

Army Achievement Medal

1st Lt. David M. Stoltenberg
2nd Lt. Tonya S. Burke
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Mark D. Roland
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Corey L. Baker
Sgt. 1st Class Dale T. Alexander Jr.
Sgt. 1st Class Joseph J. Dunlap
Sgt. 1st Class Richard S. Graves
Staff Sgt. Kelly S. Alexander
Staff Sgt. Matthew M. Boring
Sgt. Derek A. Bell
Sgt. Ashley N. Diehm
Sgt. Jesse M. Jarosz
Sgt. Kelsey R. Johnson
Sgt. Adrian Velez
Spc. Kyle E. Brethouwer
Spc. Joseph R. Pollock
Spc. Clay E. Robinson
Spc. Kristopher A. Vodicka
Spc. Michael S. Wiederspan

Pfc. Abdulaay S. Ndiaye

Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal

1st Lt. Oliver C. Berglund
Master Sgt. Gail L. Peterson

Combat Infantry Badge

Spc. Kristopher A. Vodicka

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal

Capt. Kevin A. Beavers
Sgt. 1st Class Jason M. Schiermeyer
Staff Sgt. Tyler J. Beck
Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hartmann
Sgt. Joshue J. Kushen
Spc. Dakota A. Kingham
Spc. Amanda L. Wells

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal

Maj. Bryan P. Bettey

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Capt. Russell L. Stewart
1st Sgt. Cynthia D. Vose
Staff Sgt. Kevin J. Burton
Spc. Leah N. Lacroix

Maj. Brett A. Scholting
Capt. Jocelyn J. Kuta
2nd Lt. Bradley L. Gonzales
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jennifer D. Fotinos
Master Sgt. Bruce A. Nakai
Master Sgt. Ryan E. Sullivan
Sgt. 1st Class Carl K. Dehling
Sgt. 1st Class David Godoy
Sgt. 1st Class Landen C. Koopman
Sgt. 1st Class Alan J. Wineinger
Staff Sgt. Jeremiah B. Houlden
Staff Sgt. Justin D. McCoy
Staff Sgt. Andrew M. Siemek
Staff Sgt. Patrick S. Sitter
Sgt. Travis M. Benda
Sgt. Corey C. Handley
Sgt. Tanner K. Tippen
Sgt. James R. Stapleton
Spc. Cesar L. Guerrero
Spc. Rahshaw A. Sides
Pfc. Josue F. Cleveland
Pfc. William P. Cozad

TAPS

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Leonard Krenk

Shorttakes

State Equal Employment manager honored

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

The Nebraska National Guard's State Equal Employment Manager was awarded the Department of Defense Outstanding Employee with a Disability award during the 32nd Annual DoD Disability Awards Ceremony at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., Dec. 4.

LaVonne Rosenthal was one of 17 DoD employees with disabilities and wounded, ill or injured service members who received Secretary of Defense awards for their outstanding contributions to national security. Rosenthal represented the National Guard Bureau.

"It's humbling because as I looked around the room and saw other individuals, their disabilities are more debilitating and more permanent than mine," said Rosenthal. "Breast cancer was diagnosed in September 2011 and I had surgery in October. Then I had chemotherapy starting in November and went through March 2012."

"My disability doesn't require me to use a wheel chair or any other special adaptations," said Rosenthal. "There are some side-effects, but I don't use a wheel chair and I don't use any other special adaptive devices, so I felt very humble to be in that room."

Rosenthal has 21 years of experience with the Nebraska National Guard. In 2004, she was appointed to her current position as the state equal employment manager where she advises Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, and other senior leaders on all matters dealing with equal employment opportunity and diversity within the Nebraska National Guard.

In addition to her duties as



Courtesy photo

National Award: LaVonne Rosenthal (middle), Nebraska state equal employment manager, is presented the Department of Defense Outstanding Employee with a Disability award by Frederick Vollrath, principal deputy assistant secretary of defence for readiness and force management, and Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, Nebraska assistant adjutant general - Army, during the 32nd annual DoD Disability Awards Ceremony at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., Dec. 4. Rosenthal represented National Guard Bureau.

SEEM, Rosenthal assists Nebraska National Guard leaders in the design and implementation of leadership development courses. She has also created a Special Emphasis Program working group, which is made up of representatives from various ethnic groups in the Nebraska National Guard, where they focus on educating others on the value of diversity and respect.

"The bottom line is America must employ the talents, skills and capabilities of incredibly bright and productive citizens - both in and out of uniform - who want to serve our country," said Stephen King, the DoD's director of the disability program. "People with disabilities often face unique challenges; we need that type of problem-solving ability and skills in the workplace."

Long-time Nebraska National Guard state public affairs officer, former *Prairie Soldier* editor dies

■ Lieutenant colonel's career as spokesperson for Nebraska National Guard spanned challenging post-Vietnam era through 1990s

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A long-time Nebraska National Guard state public affairs officer and former editor of the *Prairie Soldier* died Jan. 6 at his home in Crete, Neb.

Retired Lt. Col. Leonard Krenk was a long-time member of the Nebraska Army National Guard and Nebraska Military Department state employee.



Krenk

He was 75. Krenk joined the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1954 in Crete, Neb., at the age of 17. He served with the Nebraska National Guard as both a traditional Soldier and state employee for 45 years prior to his retirement as the state public affairs officer on Oct. 3, 1999.

He was born on Sept. 1, 1937, in Seward, Neb.

Krenk was a member of Crete's 1056th Transportation Company (Light Truck) that was ordered to active duty in October

1961 for the Berlin Crisis.

Following that mobilization, he joined the full-time force as the unit administrator for the Nebraska Army Guard's 43rd Army Band.

He later served as the Nebraska National Guard Headquarters manager, the State Marksmanship Program coordinator, commander of the 111th Public Affairs Detachment and later as the executive director of the Nebraska Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

In February 1973, Krenk was named by Maj. Gen. Francis L. Winner as the state public affairs officer, serving as the "voice" of the Nebraska National Guard for the next 26 years.

During this term, Krenk was instrumental in helping positively shape the public's perception of the Nebraska National Guard while becoming a national leader and subject matter expert in the development of Reserve Component Public Affairs training, policies and operations.

Krenk also served as the editor of the *Prairie Soldier* newspaper from 1973 until January 1977.

Krenk, who is survived by his wife, JoAnne, son and daughter-in-law Dave and Susan Krenk, daughter and son-in-law Teresa and Rick King, and five grandchildren, was buried with full military honors on Jan. 10 in Crete, Neb.

Street Talk

“What is your New Year’s resolution?”

Air National Guard’s new command chief master sergeant starts quickly

For Air National Guard Airmen, 2013 started with the announcement that Chief Master Sgt. James W. Hotaling had been installed as the Air National Guard’s new command chief master sergeant.

Another Voice

State Command Chief Master Sergeant

Mark Forster



near-term is for National Guard’s rate to be significantly lower than the national average for the same demographics. I think the most important step in this process is to remove the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

Having Chief Hotaling in position completes the leadership transfer at Headquarters, Air National Guard and ensures visibility for the enlisted force at all levels of leadership within the Air National Guard. Having met Chief Hotaling once in my capacity as the state command chief, I was quick to send a congratulatory email, offer my assistance as needed and wish him a less turbulent tenure than his predecessor (Chief Master Sgt Chris Muncy) endured.

is acting proactively to abate the potential harmful effects on people and unit readiness.

Without detailing any plans, the emphasis is on protecting such essential programs as funding for wartime operations, Wounded Warrior Programs and, to the extent possible, programs associated with the new defense strategy and family programs.

The very next email I received was data concerning suicide in the Air National Guard during 2012. This is an issue that concerns your leadership at all levels, regardless of service, regardless of unit. Chief Hotaling is soliciting comment regarding current programs and feedback on what we can do better.

From my perspective this issue breaks down like this:

- Our rate looks very much like the civilian rate for the same demographic groups;

- We (the National Guard) face some unique stressors (different from the active duty or civilian populace) due to our dual-role mission and the “Work, Work, Family” conflicts that mission creates;

- We (the Department of Defense) have more resources and training available to deal with the issue of suicide than civilians;

- There is a stigma associated with issues involving mental health that is perceived as greater for military members, which prevents service members from seeking help.

While I’m not an expert in this area, I see some room for improvement. First, although the long-term goal has to be zero, my goal for the

our mental health can be impacted by our physical environment, stress levels and disease. As an organization and as individuals we must be able to recognize problems in ourselves and others and ensure that proper attention is provided in a timely manner.

The Nebraska Army National Guard addressed this issue directly during their safety stand-down last fall and I hope to facilitate similar efforts on the Air National Guard side of the house.

Next on my list of things to communicate to Chief Hotaling are the nomination packages for our 2013 Airmen of the Year, First Sergeant of the Year and Air Force Sergeant’s Association Pitsenbarger Award nominee.

The Nebraska Air National Guard continues to do great things for our nation and state. These efforts do not go unnoticed or unrecognized.

In his email comments about a recent 155th Air Refueling Wing award, Col. Keith Schell made mention of your “hard work, dedication, and contributions,” and I think that sentiment bears repeating.

These awards reflect the outstanding efforts you put forth as you execute the dual-role mission of the National Guard and they only happen because you and your families are willing to make tremendous sacrifices to serve your nation and state.

The Citizen-Soldier/Citizen-Airman concept of operations is unique in the world to the National Guard and truly represents both America’s best value in defense and your dedication to excellence.

Chief Hotaling did not get his desk settled before the emails started to flow from him. He’s a busy guy.

First on the list was a request from Chief Hotaling to provide our enlisted force with “straightforward communication” to get you up to speed on the current fiscal situation and pending measures.

There are two issues here that impact our budget and operations. First, the Air Force is operating under a Continuing Resolution (through at least March 27) that creates uncertainty as leaders work through their budget forecasts not really knowing how much money they will ultimately receive to pay the bills. Next, the potential for sequestration resulting from the Budget Control Act could create significant fiscal shortfalls.

In theory, these separate issues compound the complexity of budget decisions because they represent two unknown values. In reality, these issues simplify matters by forcing Air Force and Air National Guard leaders to focus efforts on shifting spending away from non-essential to essential programs. The underlying theme of dealing with these issues

Leonard Krenk’s impact far outlasts long, distinguished career as public affairs officer

Recently, while continuing to unpack my office at the new Joint Force Headquarters building, I found a Prairie Soldier Newspaper from June 1993, about six months after I had become the ‘temporary’ editor.

My Turn

Editor, Prairie Soldier

Kevin J. Hynes



best possible effort of each of those men and women.

He was also a consummate jokester.

One particular story comes to mind. Leonard had developed a folder he loved to say that covered every possible question that could be asked. Of course, I took this as a challenge so I

would periodically pose a question to see if it would stump the folder, and, by definition, Leonard. Every time, I was defeated.

One day I thought I had the two of them licked. “Hey Leonard,” I called from my desk. “I’ll bet your folder doesn’t have the term for a group of crows?” “Well,” he said in his unique fashion, “let me check.”

After several minutes of listening to him page through his folder, I figured that I’d finally done it. Then, just as I had begun to smugly relish in my victory, I heard Leonard call, “Ah Hah!” Looking into his office, I saw him holding up a single piece of paper from which he read, “A group of crows is called.... a murder.”

I never challenged that folder, nor Leonard, again.

Leonard recently died at his home in Crete, Neb. His wife JoAnne was there at the time. I can truthfully say that I was pretty devastated by the news. Having served in the military for nearly 27 years, I’ve been blessed to work for a lot of good, well-meaning leaders who have each given me skills and taught me lessons that I will use for the rest of my life.

Leonard is at the top of that list. And I will be forever grateful for everything that he did for me, my wife and our family.

Scrawled across the top of the newspaper’s front page are the following words written in red cursive ink: “Kevin – Great job!! LK” with a dime-sized yellow smiley face sticker between the message and the initials of the sender.

Looking back at the newspaper, I can’t really say that it was an astounding piece of journalism. The reason I kept it was because of the person who signed it.

For the first 10 years of my service in the Nebraska National Guard Public Affairs Office, I worked for, in my humble opinion, the best public affairs officer to ever carry the title.

Retired Lt. Col. Leonard Krenk had already been the Nebraska National Guard’s state public affairs officer for 17 years by the time I met him in early 1990. I was fortunate enough to work with him in one shape or form for the next ten years. I still count those as some of the most educational and professionally enriching ten years that I’ve ever had in uniform.

To describe the skills Leonard brought to his craft every day is simply beyond my skills as a journalist. He knew and lived public affairs. In fact, he actually wrote many of those principles either during a stint at the Defense Information School where he helped develop



Staff Sgt. B.J. Carlson
41st Rear Operations Center
“Put last year behind me and have a successful and happy new year.”



Staff Sgt. Corina Ballesta
155th Force Support Squadron
“My goal is to finish two college courses by the end of the year, so I can get my bachelor’s degree.”



Staff Sgt. Erin Youngblood
Joint Force Headquarters
“No fast food!”



Airman 1st Class Joseph Naumann
155th Communications Flight
“Finish my Air Force Career Development Courses. I really need to do that.”



Tech. Sgt. Rashida Crittenden
155th Security Forces Squadron
“To graduate school. My anticipated graduation date is December 2013. I will be finishing nursing school.”



Sgt. Amber Gralheer
Joint Force Headquarters
“No pop.”

Taking Flight

155th Air Refueling Wing Airman uses unorthodox vehicle to catch air

By Senior Airman Mary Thach
Staff Writer

Waiting behind the starting gate, she clips her feet to the pedals, grips the handle bars, centers her balance, and clears her mind.

Heart beating wildly, she steadies her breathing and erases all doubtful thoughts from her mind, remembering the countless hours of practice she has devoted to prepare her for this race. She is ready.

The starting gun fires. Every muscle in her body jolts into action as her bike lunges out of the gate ahead of the other seven racers. Forty seconds of pure adrenaline, strategy, hills, turns and loops until it's all over. This is what Staff Sgt. Amber Bogle said she experiences when she competes in bicycle motocross races.

The 155th Air Refueling Wing boasts a female BMX rider ranked third nationally. A paralegal in the Judge Advocate General's office, Bogle's interest in racing BMX bikes began in 2008 after her husband took her to the outdoor track in Lincoln, Neb., to watch her step-son race.

Bogle said she has always been a competitive person and was looking for a hobby in which to compete. She laughed when her husband purchased a BMX bike for himself.

Motocross racing is an international competitive sport, popular since the 1970s, said Bogle. Depending on the geographical location, it can be a year-round sport. In Nebraska, the season typically starts in early April and ends once the snow comes, usually around mid-November.

Bogle said she wasn't too keen on the sport when initially introduced to it. Eight months pregnant at the time, the idea of sitting in the heat on backless bleachers watching people of all ages riding bikes did not sound like a good time.

"One day (my husband) finally got me to try going around the track once," said Bogle. "I was in jeans, a nice button up shirt and ballet flat dress shoes. It took me probably a minute and thirty seconds to ride around the track, but as soon as I finished I was like, 'I need to buy a bike, a cool shirt, cool pants, an awesome helmet...' and ever since then it has been non-stop."

Bogle said when she went around the track for the first time, the experience was frightening but fun and her adrenaline rush kept her going.



Courtesy photo

Catching Air: Staff Sgt. Amber Bogle, a paralegal in the 155th Air Refueling Wing Judge Advocate General's office, catches some air during a bicycle motocross race in Lincoln, Neb.

Her husband, Master Sgt. Robert Bogle, 155th ARW assistant fire chief, said Amber was introduced to BMX racing through his son. He said she was not fond of the amount of time it took away from the family or the financial burden, so he convinced her to give it a try. He recalled the first day she tried his own BMX bike at the track.

"She was in some crazy shoes that did not work very good," said Robert. "Luckily I don't think she crashed. It was sketchy, I know that. She's pretty good now."

She began competing in BMX races in 2010 with her first competition a national event held in Lincoln, Neb., only three weeks after she started training.

Bogle said she tries to race and train 10-15 hours per week. She wakes up early in the morning to practice sprints on her stationary bike or outside on one of her two BMX race bikes. In the evenings, she tries to get out to the local track at least three times per week to practice riding over hills, platforms, and rolling sections to better prepare

her for competitions and develop stamina.

Her husband said she devotes a lot of time and energy to the sport, sometimes spending four or five nights a week at the track.

"I'm proud that she does so good and it's good that she has something she works for. It's a good family activity."

On top of the time Bogle devotes to training on her bikes, she also performs strength training to develop her fast-twitch muscles, used for explosive power to exit the starting

gate in a race. She practices on a starting gate at home to perfect one of the most important parts of the race, exiting the gate ahead of the other racers. She described what it was like waiting in the starting gate.

"You are clipped into your pedals, so you are attached to your bike," said Bogle. "You have to balance and you have to stand. You are standing and the starting gate falls. You have to have the reaction time to go over the starting gate as it's falling so you can get ahead of your competition."

She not only competes, she manages the team she represents: Mullenex Auto Supply Performance (MAS Performance), which is a bike shop inside of an auto body shop. Bogle helped start this local Nebraska team, currently sponsoring seven riders. She was selected to manage the team not only because of her performance, but because her positive attitude helps her be an ambassador for the team.

Bogle admits, she gets nervous before she competes and tells herself, "Amber, you can do this. You practice so much, so hard. All you have to do is get out in front and you are unstoppable."

Bogle described her thought process when she is ahead in a race, versus when she is behind.

"If I am in the front, I'm like, 'Amber, the moment you stop peddling, someone's going to pass you.' So I get this abnormal feeling where I can just peddle for days," said Bogle. "I'm out in front, I have the adrenaline rush, because no one is going to catch me, just keep going."

"If I'm behind, 'Amber, what do you need to do,'" said Bogle. "I think of strategies. If you don't get out in front in the first straight it's hard because the tracks may seem long, but it's hard to get up and pass them. If you have to pass someone you don't have a lot of time to do it because most races last about 40 seconds."

Bogle devotes a lot of time to her hobby and is able to apply what she continues to learn to everyday life.

"When I want to quit because I don't want to get up in the morning, I have to remember the feeling that I feel when I lose a race, or win a race against someone who has been racing for 20 years," said Bogle. "You can make mistakes, but it's hard to recover from the mistakes you have made. You just have to remember the mistakes that you made and hopefully never again make those mistakes because you know the consequences."

"Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard."



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Brisk Pace: Chief Warrant Officer 5 John Regan, Nebraska command chief warrant officer, runs outside in the cold at the Nebraska National Guard air base, Feb. 25.

Consistency key to running winter blues away

By Spc. Riley Huskey
Staff Writer

As the temperatures in Nebraska drop across the state, safety and knowledge aid in battling the elements for cold weather physical fitness training.

"You don't need to stop training in the winter," said master fitness trainer and 92nd Troop Command senior supply sergeant, Master Sgt. John Snoozy.

"Everybody who has been deployed understands: if you've been consistently training, and the weather changes abruptly, your body will adapt to the change if you allow your mind to do the same."

For nearly 15 years, Snoozy has built programs for Soldiers in the National Guard to reach Army Physical Fitness Test standards and has seen a lot of success, he said.

He has also spent the last 31 years coaching high school track and cross country, which has given him volumes of knowledge and first-hand experience to effectively and safely train in cold weather conditions.

"First, it takes more planning to train outside," Snoozy said. "Watch the hourly weather on the days you train outside and

plan physical fitness during the predicted high temperatures for that day."

"Second, wind chill is a big deal. The first half of your exercise it is important to work against the wind and the second half, work with the wind. Third, you have to make sure you're hydrating and taking in extra electrolytes."

Snoozy added that popular sport or energy drinks should be reserved for after the workout as no hydration or electrolyte can top water, fruits and fruit juices. Artificial electrolytes found in sports drinks are fine for replacing what you lose, he said, but cautions their use before any intense cold-weather workout.

"Fourth, the winter months are perfect for cross-training," Snoozy said. "Plan your outdoor runs on the warmest days each week and cross-train on off-days with elliptical machines, biking and swimming."

Snoozy said he believes each cold weather workout should begin with five to 10 minutes of calisthenics or exercise bike warm-up. Following this he recommends stretching, as it aids in preventing joint injuries.

After stretching, he said begin with a 20-minute core workout inside and then

throws on the layers. He personally aims for three layers—a breathable, an insulator and a windbreaker layer.

"When you're ready to head outdoors, your body core may be warmed up and ready, but your extremities still need to be covered," Snoozy said. "While we lose the most body heat from our heads, we must not forget the fingers, toes, ears and nose."

At the conclusion of a cold-weather workout, Snoozy recommends holding each stretch twice as long as the initial stretch. He said to take caution in motion and stretch time, as each muscle has heated differently while outside.

"Training during the winter months is far more mental than it is physical," Snoozy said. "Consistency is key. If you have the self-discipline to maintain and be consistent with your training, it does get better."

"There of course is a safety issue too," he added. "When it snows or there is ice on the ground, don't be afraid to slow down. Forget about speed and focus on strengthening. You can always pick up speed later as long as you're safe now."