

# Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

## 20 years of booming business



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

**Moving In:** A crew from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing conducts in-flight refueling contacts with an Air Force B-52 Stratofortress in the skies over Kansas in June.

## Air Guard's enlisted refuelers celebrate 20th anniversary

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton  
Staff Writer

**S**omewhere over Topeka, Kan., an exchange of rhythmic patterns and purposefully calculated movement takes place between two aeronautical masterpieces.

In a sequence of carefully choreographed movements, the ballerina moves in behind her partner ever so close as the danseur extends his arm and connects with his partner. In perfect sync, the two then glide through the sky on a pre-planned track at speeds nearing 400 mph.

Choreographing this celestial courtship is 23-year-old Senior Airman Bradley Bouc,

an in-flight-refueling technician from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 173rd Air Refueling Squadron. The operation takes extreme focus to coax the two aging workhorses into perfect harmony at more than 20,000 feet above the earth where Bouc passes all-so-important aviation fuel from his KC-135R Stratotanker into a B-52 Stratofortress that seems to hover beneath his refueling pod.

Set to classical music, the air operation just might rival The Royal Ballet.

Lying on his stomach, the responsibility of aerial refueling aircraft is literally in Bouc's hands as he peers through a small window while expertly guiding the refueling boom into contact with the

See **BOOMERS** on 12.

**Boomers At 20**  
Special Report

## Nebraska National Guardsmen feel shutdown's impact

■ October drills postponed, more than 600 federal, state employees furloughed, many activities halted

By Maj. Kevin Hynes  
Editor

**T**he 16-day partial federal government shutdown that went into effect on Oct. 1 had some pretty significant impacts upon the Nebraska Military Department.

Approximately 560 federal technicians went on unpaid furloughs for the second time in less than a year. More than 70 state employees who are either fully or partially federally funded were also placed on unpaid furloughs. October drill weekend training assemblies for approximately 4,600 Army and Air Guardsmen across Nebraska were postponed, meaning crucial training wasn't conducted and drill checks – which many Soldiers and Airmen rely on – weren't earned.

Vital training supplies – including aviation and ground vehicle fuel – and replacement parts couldn't be purchased. Training exercises were either postponed or cancelled, as were official travel and important meetings.

And while the agreement reached by the US Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama on Oct. 16 may have ended the partial federal government shutdown and restored federal funds back to the Nebraska National Guard, the impacts of the budget crisis will probably last for quite some time.

"We are still developing the full understanding of the impact on the Nebraska

National Guard," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, about a week after the governmental shutdown ended. "The effects of the Budget Control Act furloughs combined with the partial government shut down have created feeling of uncertainty across the force."

"It remains to be seen what impacts that will have on retention of both full-time staff and traditional Soldiers and Airmen," he said.

The partial federal government shutdown, the first in nearly 20 years, affected hundreds of thousands of federal employees across the United States, including approximately 400,000 Defense Department civilian employees who were placed on furloughs. Included in this number were 560 'civilian' technicians from the Nebraska National Guard, the bulk of whom were dual-status technicians, meaning that while they receive benefits and pay according to federal civilian technician rates, they are required to wear uniforms to work and maintain training and membership requirements in Army or Air National Guard units.

Additionally, unlike the administrative furloughs that occurred earlier this summer, an additional 70 state employees who are either fully or partially funded by the Federal government through cooperative agreement programs were also sidelined

See **SHUTDOWN** on 6.

## Army National Guard's 9th command sergeant major retires in Nebraska

By Maj. Kevin Hynes  
Editor

**A** former Nebraska Army National Guard state command sergeant major who went on to become the 9th Army National Guard command sergeant major was honored in Lincoln, Neb., Sept. 27, as he completed a military career that spanned 37 years.

Richard Burch, who served as the Nebraska Army Guard's top enlisted Soldier from March 2007 until March 2010 when he was selected to serve as the top enlisted Soldier in the entire Army National Guard, was formally retired from the military during a ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters, where he had served in an advisory position for approximately a year.

The ceremony was attended by Burch's

See **BURCH** on 5.



Burch in 1976



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

**Retiring in Old Rank:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, laterally promotes Richard Burch (left) back to the rank of command sergeant major during Burch's retirement ceremony, Sept. 27, at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb. Burch, who served as the Army Guard's 9th command sergeant major, retired with more than 37 years of military service.

## Nebraska, Texas Guardsmen travel to Czech Republic for State Partnership Program

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon  
Assistant Editor

**T**he Nebraska Army and Air National Guard paired with the Texas National Guard to send several Airmen and Soldiers to the Czech Republic, Sept. 9-13, as part of the State Partnership Program.

Guardsmen with experience in explosive ordnance disposal, military intelligence, advanced trauma care and two different aircrews worked hand-in-hand with counterparts from the Czech armed forces to share their knowledge and increase interoperability between the partner nations.

The Nebraska and Texas - Czech Republic State Partner-

ship is one of 22 European partnerships that make-up the U.S. European Command State Partnership Program and is one of the National Guard's 65 worldwide partnerships. The Czech Republic partnership with Nebraska and Texas began its 20th year in 2013.

According to Lt. Col. John Williams, a bilateral affairs officer with the 155th ARW who is stationed in the Czech Republic who oversees the Nebraska and Texas partnership with the NATO ally, the goal of SPP is to support the EUCOM country campaign plan. The National Guard provides subject matter experts from Nebraska and Texas who are capable of assisting in a number of areas

See **CZECH** on 11.

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**Nebraska National Guard medics put to the test**

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**Nebraska Air Guard practices Crash, Fire and Rescue mission**

See story and photo on 8.



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# NEWS DIGEST

## ■ Defense Department must control rising personnel costs, Hagel tells enlisted leaders

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — The Defense Department has to get personnel costs under control, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told “NPR Morning Edition” host Steve Inskeep in an interview broadcast, Nov. 6.

The interview came at the conclusion of Hagel’s monthly lunch with junior noncommissioned officers in his Pentagon office, Nov. 4. The secretary uses these lunches, and the troop visits he conducts, to take the pulse of the more than 1 million enlisted members of the armed forces.

“You can’t build institutions, you can’t build national security for this country, unless you have the right people motivated in the right culture and they believe they are being treated fairly,” the secretary told Inskeep.

The secretary discussed the issue of sexual assaults in the military. He told the NCOs that the system was broken, and that the services are working to fix it. One NCO noted to the secretary that the recent case of an officer tasked with formulating service policy to combat sexual assault being accused of the crime does not help the push to eliminate sexual assaults in the military.

The NCOs also discussed the issue of women in combat with the secretary. Hagel said he does not want a lowering of standards or a quota system for putting women into combat jobs. Rather, he said, he wants equality of opportunity for all service members.

But the discussion with the NCOs, and later with Inskeep, came down to money and the defense budget. Former secretaries Robert M. Gates and Leon E. Panetta pointed out that the department cannot afford the uncontrolled growth in personnel accounts. The services already have plans to cut the number of personnel, and that sequestration-mandated spending cuts will speed this process if they continue.

“Health care costs are consuming a larger and larger percentage of our budget every year,” Hagel said. “Personnel costs right now, including retirement compensation (and) health care, are about 50 percent of our total budget.”

If this continues, the Defense Department cannot afford it, the secretary said.

“We made a number of recommendations over the past few years, ... but Congress has to be a partner in this,” he added. “If we don’t make some tough choices here along the way, ... then we’ll have a military that is heavily compensated, but probably a force that is not capable and not ready.”

## ■ Defense Department begins transfer of Kyrgyzstan air base

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — The Defense Department released the following statement Oct. 18 about the future of the Transit Center at Manas International Airport in Kyrgyzstan:

The Department of Defense (DoD) has begun the process of relocating from the Transit Center at Manas International Airport

(TCM) and plans to complete the transfer of areas and facilities to the Government of Kyrgyzstan by July 2014.

The current agreement between the U.S. and Kyrgyz governments on hosting the TCM expires in July 2014. The U.S. appreciates the support provided by the Kyrgyz people to U.S. forces and coalition efforts to counter the threat of terrorism and to achieve security and stability in Afghanistan and the region and respects the decision of the Government of Kyrgyzstan to end hosting the TCM after more than 12 years.

Working closely with Kyrgyzstan over the next nine months, the U.S. will manage the TCM relocation effort while continuing to support the International Security Assistance Force mission.

The U.S. intends to continue supporting Kyrgyzstan’s democratic and economic development, and we look forward to further developing our bilateral relationship in the years ahead.

## ■ Sexual assault victims now entitled to legal representation

WASHINGTON (NGNEWS) — Victims of sexual assault now have the option to have legal representation following the attack.

During criminal proceedings in a courtroom, the defendant has a lawyer. The prosecutor represents the state.

But the victims of sexual assault have historically not had the benefit of a state-provided advocate as they are interviewed, as they testify on the witness stand, and as they move through the other complexities of the criminal justice system.

This is no longer the case.

Beginning Nov. 1, Soldiers who report that they have been sexually assaulted can elect to have a Special Victims Counsel assigned to them. An SVC is an active-duty Army attorney, provided at no charge to the victim, who will represent the victim’s interest throughout the course of the legal proceedings that might follow the report of a sexual assault.

Col. Jay McKee, an Army lawyer with the Army’s Office of the Judge Advocate General, serves as the program manager for the Army’s Special Victims Counsel program.

“Once the crime happens, or alleged crime happens, and the victim is seen by a victim advocate, or at the hospital or by Victim Witness Liaison — however the victim is taken into the system — they are notified that they have a right to an SVC.”

It is a misconception, McKee said, that the prosecuting attorney in a criminal case represents the victim of a crime. The prosecutor represents the government’s interests or society’s. But McKee added that in almost all cases those governmental interests are the same as the victim’s: to see that justice is done.

“The prosecutor wants justice. He is serving the community, he is serving the military justice system for good order and discipline of the force,” McKee said. “And 99 percent of the time, that interest is aligned with the victim’s. They want the same thing.” But sometimes, McKee said, the victim might have concerns that require the assistance of an attorney.

For example, the defense attorneys might also want to bring into the trial a victim’s medical records or past sexual history. That might possibly damage a victim’s reputation or embarrass her.

“They can try to get that introduced on the record,” McKee said. “The defense is there to represent the defendant, the accused, they are going to put on the best case for the accused. Sometimes that is not in the best interest of the victim to undergo cross examination in a public trial about her past sexual history or to have her personal medical records be reviewed by parties to a courts-martial.”

The SVC can help the victim make sense of the ramifications of trial, and help her understand what will happen. McKee also said that while the SVC will not participate in the “adversarial portion” of a trial — in that there will not be a third table in the courtroom for the SVC and the victim — the SVC will be able to make motions on behalf of the victim, talk to the Special Victim Prosecutor, the trial council, trial defense attorney, and the staff judge advocate “in terms of what justice looks like for the victim.”

Right now, there are about 45 SVCs in the Army, across the United States, and in Europe. There will soon be an SVC in Afghanistan as well. The total number of SVCs the Army will ultimately need will be determined after a year of evaluating manpower needs for SVCs, McKee said.

Special Victims Counsel are nominated for service out of the existing pool of Army lawyers, and serve for no more than two years. They are chosen after an evaluation based on their military justice experience, maturity and judgment.

Those chosen for the program undergo three days of training, which includes classes on professional responsibility, military rules of evidence, the Army’s parole system, forensic medical exams, rules for practicing as an SVC, and classes from professionals who teach about how to treat and talk with a victim of a sexual assault.

## ■ Leaders advise commission not to merge Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard

WASHINGTON (NGNEWS) — Air Force Reserve leaders told members of the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force that merging the Air Force Reserve with the Air National Guard would create little value and cause numerous adverse impacts - detracting from the broader goal of improving the Air Force structure.

Appointed by the fiscal 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, the commissioners listened to testimony Oct. 24-25. They are looking at the Air Force’s structure to determine if and how it should be changed to meet future missions and funding challenges.

Their report and recommendations are due to the president by Feb. 1, 2014.

“I believe the nation benefits from the synergistic value of a three-component Air Force consisting of the Active Duty, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard,” said Lt. Gen. James F. Jackson, chief of Air Force Reserve and commander of Air Force Reserve Command, during his testimony on Oct. 24.

Members of the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force interviewed senior leaders - from past and present, active duty, Guard and reserve - to review proposals

to integrate the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard into one reserve component.

“I do not believe combining the AFR and ANG is beneficial or value-added to our nation,” Jackson told the commission. “A merger of the (two components) has been discussed many times during the 65 years of our history, yet has never materialized.”

The commissioners also met with the top enlisted leaders of each of the three components and asked about strengths, capabilities, improvements, shortfalls, resiliency, participation, recruiting, retention and morale.

“We have met our recruiting goal for the 13th consecutive year,” said Chief Master Sgt. Cameron B. Kirksey, AFRC command chief, during his testimony to the commission Oct. 25. “Our retention rate has averaged 88 percent for the past seven years. Morale continues to be high and our Airmen want to serve more than ever.”

“We are concerned with the current budget environment and the effects of sequestration,” he said. “From furloughs and paycheck losses, to the stress caused by financial uncertainty, the resiliency of the force is being tested, with the long-term impacts yet to be fully understood.”

Regular Air Force, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Airmen work together around the world as a team in air, space and cyberspace.

Today’s Total Force consists of about 327,600 active-duty Airmen in the Regular Air Force along with 105,400 Air National Guardsmen and 70,880 Air Force Reserve Airmen actively serving in the Selected Reserve as designated by the FY13 National Defense Authorization Act.

“We deliver our diverse portfolio of capability through air, space and cyberspace as a federal reserve, always in Title 10 status, whether at home or abroad,” Kirksey said.

“The Air Force Reserve always serves in Title 10 status as the federal member of the Air Reserve Component,” Jackson said.

Leveraging the cost effectiveness, capability and capacity of the reserve and Guard during this time of fiscal austerity is of keen interest to the commission.

Led by Dennis M. McCarthy, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant general and the previous assistant secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs at the Pentagon, the commission has visited and interviewed Airmen across the country.

## ■ Officials announce deadline for holiday mail delivery

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — Military Postal Service Agency officials recommend that parcel post packages for service members overseas be mailed by Nov. 12 for delivery by the holidays.

Officials at MPSA, an extension of the U.S. Postal Service, have published a chart at <http://hqdainet.army.mil/mpsa/xmas.htm> that shows deadlines for various mailing options, broken down by the APO/FPO/DPO numbers of various destinations.

USPS is offering a discount on its largest Priority Mail Flat Rate box at \$14.85. The price includes a \$2 per box discount for military mail being sent to APO/FPO/DPO destinations worldwide, officials said.

Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes are available free at local post offices, or can be ordered from USPS online. Postage, labels and customs forms also are available online.

## Hagel: States refusing to provide same-sex family benefits must comply

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel directed Gen. Frank Grass, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, to meet with the adjutants general of nine states to resolve the issue of those states denying ID cards to same-sex spouses at National Guard facilities.

In a speech at the 100th annual Anti-Defamation League in New York, Hagel said the adjutants general will be expected to comply with both lawful direction and Defense Department policy, in line with the practices of 45 other states and jurisdictions.

DoD last month began providing same-sex spouse benefits for military members and eligible civilian employees, following the Supreme Court’s June 26 ruling that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional.

“We did it because everyone who serves our country in uniform... should receive the full benefits they earned, fairly and in accordance with

the law,” the secretary said. “Everyone’s rights must be protected.”

A senior defense official speaking on background said that on Aug. 15, Pentagon officials issued a communication noting the system was updated and that ID cards to same-sex spouses were to be issued by all ID card processing stations starting Sept. 3.

The official noted that nine states — Indiana, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia — are denying equal access for same-sex spouses and are violating DOD and service-level policies for administering same-sex couple and family benefits.

“Secretary Hagel expects these nine states to resolve this issue,” the official said. “He is prepared to take further action should the states not come into compliance with DoD policy.”

In his remarks in New York, Hagel said the denial of ID cards at National Guard facilities unnec-

essarily forces couples to travel to federal facilities.

“Not only does this violate the states’ obligations under federal law, their actions have created hardship and inequality by forcing couples to travel long distances to federal military bases to obtain the ID cards they’re entitled to,” he said.

“This is wrong. It causes division among the ranks, and it furthers prejudice, which DoD has fought to extinguish.”

The secretary emphasized that members of the National Guard serve their states and the nation and deserve to be treated accordingly.

“Whether they are responding to natural disasters here at home in their states or fighting in Afghanistan, our National Guardsmen all wear the uniform of the United States of America,” he said.

They are serving this country. They — and their families — are entitled to all the benefits and respect accorded to all of our military men and women.”

## Prairie Soldier

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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](mailto: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.

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# Squad Medic Challenge 2013



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Patched Up:** Two health care specialists with the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) ensure a 'wounded' Soldier has information regarding her medical treatment during the 313th Squad Medic Challenge, Sept. 7, near Camp Ashland, Neb. Members of the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion role played as the 'wounded' Soldiers for the challenge.



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Working Together Under Stress:** Health care specialists with the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) work together to provide aid to a 'wounded' service member during the 313th Squad Medic Challenge, Sept. 7, near Camp Ashland, Neb. The challenge, in addition to Army warrior tasks, was designed test Soldiers on providing emergency medical treatment, primary care, health protection and evacuation from a point of injury or illness.

## 'Go' Time

### Squad Medic competition challenges Guard Soldiers' medical, military skills

By Sgt. Riley Huskey  
Staff Writer

As a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter touched down, squads from the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) rushed to carry "wounded" Soldiers on litters to the bird for medical evacuation.

From Sept. 6-8, the 313th Med. Co. completed six advanced skill-testing lanes as part of the unit's annual Squad Medic Challenge at Camp Ashland, Neb. They enlisted the assistance of the 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion for air assets and the 110th Medical Battalion for lane graders, "wounded" frendlies and opposition forces. The lanes included chemical, mounted and dismounted medevac, and air assets.

"This is a great test of our teamwork, leadership and medical skills," said Sgt. Lawrence Lind, a squad leader for the 313th Med. Co. "Having the challenge at Camp Ashland - in the terrain - gives it

an actual sense of realism."

The coordination, planning and training for this event is a year-long process, said 2nd Lt. Emmalena Kelly, a platoon leader for the 313th Med. Co. Kelly stressed the importance of annual training and how it prepares each Soldier and squad for the annual medic challenge.

"This is the capstone project every year - the one thing everyone trains for and looks forward to," Kelly said. "It's a nervous excitement for these Soldiers. When the challenge begins, it's 'Go' time and they are ready to execute."

The challenge is designed to provide the company's veterans and new Soldiers a chance to practice their skills in the field and improve upon teamwork among each squad. While some Soldiers have been in the company for years, others experienced the challenge for the first time.

"I felt like I was right back at (advanced individual training)," said Pfc. Steven Hope, a combat medic with the 313th Med. Co. "Being brand new to the company,



Photo by Sgt. Riley Huskey

**Tough Sledding:** A Soldier from the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) pulls a 'wounded' Soldier to medical treatment during the urban patrol lane of the 313th Squad Medic Challenge, Sept. 7, near Camp Ashland, Neb.

I had to quickly rely on the Soldiers in my squad to perform and finish the challenge tasks. It really was great training."

Lessons learned from previous years provided a more in-depth and stronger training experience for the company. This is a learning experience for the Soldiers and a chance for each of them to grow as a combat medic, said Lind.

"We made a few mistakes, but we're learning from them and that's what it's all about," Lind said. "The teamwork training in the field far outweighs the hip-pocket training on the drill floor. Actually getting



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**All Together Now:** Two Soldiers from the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) carry a 'wounded' Soldier to a ground ambulance as a part of the the 313th Squad Medic Challenge, Sept. 7, near Camp Ashland, Neb.



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Moving Out:** Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers carry a 'wounded' Soldier on a stretcher to a waiting air ambulance helicopter during the 313th Squad Medic Challenge, Sept. 7, near Camp Ashland, Neb. The squads worked together to provide medical care to three 'wounded' Soldiers as a part of the medical challenge.

out in the weeds and doing it hands on - seeing how we all work together as a team - builds on our strengths and weaknesses."

Kelly agreed that the Soldiers' reaction to the training makes the experience come full-circle.

"I think the Soldiers love it," Kelly said. "It's one thing to train on the skills, but it's another thing

to actually practically use them on live stations. In a time that there are fewer deployments, it gives people a reason to want to come to drill."

Battle-ready medics are what it's all about for Lind.

"In the end, this training makes us better for the Nebraska National Guard and allows us to excel in our mission overall," Lind said.

# Retention remains 2014 focus

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock  
Staff Photojournalist

Now that the 2013 fiscal year is done and over with, Maj. Vernon Chandler, the new commander of the Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention command, has plans to build off previous commander Lt. Col. Shane Martin's 2013 fiscal year retention strategy.

Martin headed the recruiting and retention battalion for roughly one year before Chandler took command in October. Chandler said his focus was pretty simple: "My emphasis was retaining the (state's) highly trained and quality Soldiers to answer the call of our state and nation."

"I am fortunate that my predecessor, Lt. Col. Shane Martin, left me with an organization with good systems and processes in place, a professional and well-trained team, and great relationships with our counterparts at National Guard Bureau, surrounding states and our in-state Reserve Officers' Training Corps program," said Chandler.

Looking back at fiscal year 2013, Nebraska's mission was to gain 407 enlisted Soldiers, 20 officers and six warrant officers, while retaining 575 current Soldiers.

"During the past year, the unit career counselors and the two active duty operational support retention non-commissioned officers took on a monumental task of retaining a strong qualified force," said Martin. "They were able to retain 493 Soldiers for over one year and were able to extend 96 for under one year to get them qualified for a longer term extension."

"This is a combined total of 589

extensions, which National Guard Bureau's goal was 575 Soldiers with greater than one year extensions," added Martin.

The Nebraska Army National Guard ended the fiscal year with 367 enlistments, 589 extensions, 36 officer accessions, and 9 warrant officer accessions.

"We learned that there is no one single reason Soldiers are not extending," said Martin. "The reasons range from retirement, family, career choices, military goals and a variety of general personal issues."

Nebraska's Recruiting and Retention Battalion knew they needed to make an even bigger difference during the next fiscal year. To help with the retention effort an advertisement was placed for two additional retention noncommissioned officers to be located near Kearney and Grand Island, Neb.

"These retention personnel will assist the unit commanders and unit career counselors with more face-to-face retention engagements to better inform Soldiers of the benefits of staying before considering leaving our ranks," said Martin. "We have learned the honest discussions with our Soldiers and individually reviewing options and benefits with them, helps them make a more informed decision, which tends to lead to more extensions."

According to Nebraska retention officials, the two additional retention NCOs will be a great addition to the team and will ensure Soldiers throughout the state will have all the information about the benefits of staying in the Nebraska National Guard.

"My vision for the Battalion is

a disciplined, values-based organization that conducts recruiting, retention and attrition management operations in pursuit of the quality and quantity of Soldiers," said Chandler. "And the appropriate skill sets required for the Nebraska Army National Guard to respond to any assigned mission."

With his vision in mind there is assigned mission numbers they hope to meet for fiscal year 2014.

"Our end strength goal for fiscal year 2014 is 3,629 Soldiers," said Chandler. "Our specific assigned missions are 430 enlistments, 34 officers, 13 warrant officers and retaining 394 Soldiers."

According to Chandler, he is confident that they can achieve the enlistment mission as well as meeting or exceeding the mission of 34 officers between both officers and warrant officers.

"However, our fiscal year 2014 warrant officer mission of 13 is more than double last year's mission and will prove to be a significant challenge," said Chandler. "We ask that units identify and encourage qualified Soldiers to meet with our officer strength managers to discuss the avenues available to them for becoming a warrant officer."

Nebraska retention officials feel reaching the end strength goal of 3,629 Soldiers will be difficult but attainable.

"There will certainly have to be a command emphasis at all levels to make strength a priority early in the fiscal year," said Chandler. "It will take a concerted effort from everyone to get us where we need to be on Sept. 30."

## Retaining Nebraska's Fighting Force

Last of a Multi-part Series



Photo by Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen

**Heavy Duty:** Capt. Elizabeth Micek, a finance officer with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, administers the reenlistment oath to Staff Sgt. Michael Gibson, II, an explosive ordnance disposal technician, Oct. 22, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in, Lincoln, Neb. Gibson made an explosive appearance by taking the oath while wearing an 85-pound EOD bomb suit.

# Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers have 'Breakfast with the Boss'

■ Hastings-area civic leaders try out Meals, Ready to Eat, learn about Nebraska National Guard's Greenleaf Training Site

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon  
Assistant Editor

Hastings-area business and civic leaders got a taste of Nebraska National Guard life during an Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve "Breakfast with the Boss" held at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., Sept. 25.

The day began with a morning meeting of the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce in the training site's dining facility. Following the meeting, chamber members were joined by additional Hastings-area employers and business and civic leaders for a breakfast of a military dietary staple - the Meals, Ready to Eat. During breakfast, the approximately 30 area leaders heard from Nebraska National Guard leaders about the importance of community support.

A tour of the training site followed breakfast with several of the business leaders, including the chamber president, capping off the activities by signing a 'Statement of Support,' an ESGR document signed by business leaders that aims to encourage employers to act as advocates for employee participation in the military.

The goal of the Breakfast with the Boss event was simple.

"It's an educational event to inform local employers about what ESGR is and what services the Nebraska Military Department has," said Peggy Brown, ESGR assistant support technician.

Brown said the ESGR staff works to make the employers and city leaders aware of services available for area Soldiers and services ESGR can offer to the area employers.



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Hot Stuff:** Lt. Col. Eric Teegerstrom, executive officer of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, shows Eldon Orthmann, Adams County supervisor, how to heat a Meals, Ready to Eat during an Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve "Breakfast with the Boss" at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., Sept. 25.

According to Tom Hastings, president of the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce, he had always been curious about what goes on at GTS and worked with ESGR to set up the morning.

He then decided to invite other community leaders out to join in the fun while learning more about the Nebraska National Guard.

"I think a lot of times people, especially people my age..., they just think of the Guard as people who used to be training on the weekends and doing meetings once a month," said Hastings. "They just didn't realize how much the Guard is a part of the system of the military...honestly, they're the people that make things happen now."



**Worthy Pledge:** Tom Hastings, president of the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce, signs an Employer Support for Guard and Reserve 'Statement of Support' during the "Breakfast with the Boss" at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., Sept. 25. The 'Statement of Support' program is the cornerstone of ESGR's effort to gain and maintain employer support. Also pictured are (from left): Col. Rick Dahlman, 92nd Troop Command commander; Bill Nelson, ESGR support technician; Peggy Brown, ESGR assistant support technician; Garth Scism, ESGR committee member; and Lt. Col. William Prusia, deputy personnel officer with Joint Force Headquarters.

Hastings was impressed with the facilities and the number of Soldiers who train at GTS each year. He said he was especially happy that it was located in the eastern part of the state.

"This training facility is very important to Hastings and the surrounding area because it does bring a lot of different people in," said Hastings.

"I don't think people realize everything that goes on with the Guard, regardless if it's here or any other place," he added.

During the group's breakfast, Col. Richard Dahlman, commander of the 92nd Troop Command, thanked those in attendance and stressed the importance of the community to the Nebraska National Guard.

"I just couldn't pass this opportunity to call you out and say thanks for your past support and also for your future support," said Dahlman.

"We think we're a good fit with the community," he added. "The community is about as near to us as family."



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

## New Medal of Honor plaque unveiled

Gov. Dave Heineman points out retired Lt. Col. Charles Hagemeister's name on a newly updated Nebraska Medal of Honor plaque at the Nebraska State Capitol, Nov. 11. Hagemeister, one of only two living Nebraska Medal of Honor recipients, is one of 72 names listed on the newly updated plaque.

**Look for story and more photos in the December edition of the *Prairie Soldier***



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

## Navrkal moves to 35th Infantry Division

Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, former Nebraska assistant adjutant general, Army, is presented the Nebraska National Guard Legion of Merit by Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, on Aug. 9 at the Nebraska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters. Navrkal was moving on to become the commander of the 35th Infantry Division, based at Fort Leavenworth, Mo.

## BURCH continued from page 1.

family, friends and approximately 100 Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen who served with Burch during his career.

According to Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general who served as the presiding official for the retirement ceremony, it seemed only right that Burch retire from the military in Nebraska.

"You left an indelible mark on the Nebraska National Guard," said Bohac prior to re-promoting Burch laterally to the rank of command sergeant major. "We in the Nebraska National Guard were honored when you were selected to be the ninth sergeant major of the Army National Guard. We're equally honored that you came back to Nebraska and that we get to take part in your retirement ceremony because you're part of our family."

According to Burch, he wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

"Even though I got to go to (Washington,) D.C, I was always a Nebraska Guardsman," said Burch. "You always come back to your roots. You're grounded in your roots. It's where you start. It's where you finish. And there are a lot of things and a lot of people that touch you in between."

Burch's military career began on Feb. 3, 1976, when he enlisted in Hastings' Company C, 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, as a teletypewriter repairman. At the time, Burch said, he was working as a civilian well-digger with the dream of one day becoming a locksmith.

"Over a beer and a coffee table, the first cook from Co. C, 2-134th, who was the recruiter at the time, talked me into being a teletypewriter repairman because that was as close as the Army's got to being a locksmith," said Burch. "I said, 'Okay, I'll give it a whirl.'"

"I'll have to admit at the time I didn't know why, but I will also admit that I'm glad I did," he said.

Burch served as a traditional Army Guard Soldier until July 1985 when he went to work full-time for the Nebraska Army National Guard. He would go on to serve as an infantry platoon sergeant, infantry company first sergeant, infantry battalion operations sergeant, acting infantry battalion command sergeant major, Human Resources senior sergeant, quartermaster battalion command sergeant major, the 67th Area Support Group command sergeant major and recruiting and retention command sergeant major.

According to Bohac, while serving in the Human Resources Office, Burch was credited with a number of major initiatives that were eventually adopted by the entire Army National Guard.

"One thing that I would note that many people wouldn't know about is his work in the enlisted

promotion system here in the state of Nebraska," Bohac said, adding that Burch's changes have now been adopted by the Department of the Army and National Guard Bureau. "That, in and of itself, I would tell you, is just one example of many examples that Sergeant Major Burch brought to the job each and every day."

That leadership, Bohac added, also contributed to the fact that Nebraska continues to be at the top of each personnel metric measured by National Guard Bureau. "Really, that was due to your leading in the personnel arena and running the show at (the Director of Personnel and Administration)."

In July 2005, Burch deployed to Afghanistan as a member of the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), 53rd Brigade Combat Team Training Assistance Group, serving as the Training and Doctrine Command sergeant major-mentor at the Kabul Military Training Center. Serving in Afghanistan until July 2006, Burch returned to Nebraska after having earned the Bronze Star and Combat Action Badge.

A short time after his return, Burch was selected to be the state command sergeant major by Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, then-Nebraska adjutant general. Burch's selection was well-received across the Nebraska Army National Guard, said the current state command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela.

"When he was selected as the next state command sergeant major, I was thrilled," Valenzuela said, adding that he recalled thinking: "We have a great person up there serving the Soldiers of the Nebraska National Guard."

"Obviously, that was well received by all of us in the NCO Corps," he added. "We all appreciated the job you did."

Burch remained as the state command sergeant major until March 2010 when he was selected to become the ninth U.S. Army National Guard command sergeant major. While serving in this capacity, Burch was responsive for representing and advising the director of the Army National Guard on matters pertaining to Army National Guard policies and actions that affected enlisted Army National Guard Soldiers from across the United States.

The position would literally take Burch to every single state in the country and to locations around the world.

"It was a great tour," said Burch. "I got to sense for the director of the Army National Guard... to find out if we're doing the right things in Washington, D.C., in making sure they're equipped, they are trained, and units are manned to meet the mission requirements."



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

**Returning To His Roots:** Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch, former Nebraska Army National Guard state command sergeant major who would go on to serve as the 9th Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard, addresses a crowd of approximately 100 during his Sept. 27 retirement ceremony at the Nebraska Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb.

"It was great." One of Burch's closest friends during the NGB tour was Chief Master Sgt. Denise Jelinski-Hall, who served as the National Guard Bureau's senior enlisted advisor. According to both Burch and Jelinski-Hall, the two native Midwesterners struck up an important partnership during their time at NGB.

"Sergeant Major Burch came in around the same time that I did," said Jelinski-Hall. "When he came on board, we just immediately became just good friends."

"There is no question that this man had my back and I had his. That's just how we operated," said Jelinski-Hall, who traveled to Lincoln to present Burch with a Minuteman award in honor of his service. Noting the readiness of the Minuteman to serve within a moment's notice, Jelinski-Hall said: "Sergeant Major Burch has done this for decades, not just at the state level but the national level as well. He has clearly made a difference in the lives of Soldiers, Airmen and family members."

Along with recognizing Burch, the sergeant major's family was also recognized during the ceremony. Burch's daughters, Jennifer Umama and Jody Knight, were each presented with Military Child Medals, while Burch's wife, Sandy, received the Military Spouse Medal.

Sandy Burch received special praise from both Bohac and Jelinski-Hall.



**Honoring The First Lady Of The Army Guard's Enlisted Corps:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac and Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch, present Sandy Burch with a certificate for her role in assisting her husband during his military career.

"Thank you, Sandy," said Bohac. "We all know that without you standing there next to him, Sergeant Major Burch would not have been able to accomplish all that he did."

"Sandy," said Jelinski-Hall, "You were the first lady of the Enlisted Corps of the Army National Guard."

Burch agreed that his wife deserves the bulk of the credit for helping him reach the levels that he did. "She's always been there. She pretty much raised the kids because my first full-time job was pretty hectic for those first few years... a lot of school, a lot of annual trainings... and a lot of exercises."

"You deserve a lot more awards

than just that ribbon for what you have put up with over the years while standing by my side," Burch told his wife. "I could always trust that things were in order when I got home."

According to Burch, he's proud to have been able to be part of the organization and contribute to the National Guard's important missions. He also knows that it's time for that part of his life to conclude.

"For every beginning, there's always an end... and this is the end of my career," he said, before adding a short time later: "I'll never forget the support that all of you have provided me and my family. I am forever in your debt."

# Partial Government Shutdown

## Special Feature

### Comptroller: Shutdown cost Defense Department \$600 million in lost productivity

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Furloughs of civilian employees as a result of the government shutdown cost the Defense Department at least \$600 million in productivity, the Pentagon's top financial officer said Oct. 17.

During a Pentagon news conference, DoD Comptroller Robert F. Hale said that in addition to the lost productivity, the shutdown generated a number of other costs that have yet to be calculated.

"We built up interest payments, because we were forced to pay vendors late," Hale said. "We had to cancel training classes, so we had to bring the people home on orders and then send them right back again."

The short-term deal signed by President Barack Obama late Oct. 16 doesn't put the department on firm budgetary ground, Hale said.

With no flexibility to move

funds between accounts and accounts frozen at 2012 levels, he said the department will have to be as fiscally watchful as it can.

"If that's a vague answer, it's because things are kind of vague," he said. "It's not a good way to run a railroad."

The temporary funding measure that allowed the government to reopen prevents DoD from starting new projects, Hale said. And one of the biggest problems, he added, is that it requires the department to buy the same ships it bought last year, because Congress appropriates by ship.

"It's a 'Groundhog Day' approach to budgeting," the comptroller said.

The budget uncertainty will have an impact on staffing levels and morale, he added.

If the budget stays at the level authorized under the Budget Con-

trol Act of 2011, he said, "we're going to have to get smaller." Hale added that the department will try to meet the staffing goals through attrition, but that either way, it will mean fewer civilian employees.

"I'm a lot more worried about the morale effects," Hale said. "We need some stability and we need to keep telling (employees) they're important, and then we need to show it through things like pay raises and no more furloughs, etc."

Without a change to the budget, there will also be military force reductions, Hale said.

"I think all of us are aware that it will be a somewhat different, smaller military if we have to go through with those cuts," he added.

"We will be as prepared as we can, within the limits of time that we have, to be ready for a wide range of contingencies, because we know that's what we face."

### President welcomes, thanks federal workers

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – President Barack Obama thanked federal employees for their service, sacrifices and dedication, Oct. 17.

In a White House speech to mark the end of a government shutdown that sidelined hundreds of thousands of federal workers, the president said their service matters.

"Thanks for your service," Obama said to federal workers. "Welcome back. What you do is important – it matters. You defend our country overseas. You deliver benefits to our troops who have earned them when they come home. You guard our borders. You protect

our civil rights. You help businesses grow and gain footholds in overseas markets. You protect the air we breathe and the water our children drink. And you push the boundaries of science and space. And you guide hundreds of thousands of people each day through the glories of this country."

Federal service is important, the president said. "Don't let anybody else tell you differently," he added.

Addressing the political differences that spawned the shutdown, the president called for cooperation going forward.

"Those of us who have the privi-

lege to serve this country have an obligation to do our job as best we can," he said. "We come from different parties, but we are Americans first. And that's why disagreement cannot mean dysfunction. It can't degenerate into hatred."

Federal workers serve America and Americans, Obama said.

"The American people's hopes and dreams are what matters, not ours," he added. "Our obligations are to them. Our regard for them compels us all, Democrats and Republicans, to cooperate and compromise and act in the best interests of our nation."

### SHUTDOWN continued from page 1.

In the days leading up to the shutdown, Congress, in one of its last official acts, passed the "Pay Our Military Act," which essentially guaranteed that active uniformed military members and certain civilian employees would be exempted from the shutdown.

That act was signed into law by President Barack Obama shortly before the shutdown occurred.

Following the Oct. 1 shutdown, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel warned lawmakers that the budget impasse's effects on U.S. military readiness and morale might be severe, even though active military members' pay was guaranteed through the shutdown.

"Here this great republic and democracy, the United States of America, shuts down its government. The Pentagon, even though we are exempted – our military – has no budget," said Hagel during an Oct. 1 news conference in Seoul, South Korea, where he was meeting with senior U.S. and South Korean military leaders. "We are still living under this dark cloud of uncertainty, not knowing what's going to happen."

Hagel added, the shutdown "puts us all in a difficult spot." A strong military is essential to the nation's security, he said, but civilian employees, not only in DoD, but across government, also play a vital role in that mission.

"To think what this is doing to the civilian employees and their families... they've taken furloughs already this year – administrative furloughs," said Hagel. "Now we have legal furloughs. This is going to impact the future of a lot of our employees."

Hagel said a number of senior DoD civilians had spoken to him in recent months about their future. "Their spouses are not happy; they have families – (they ask) how can we rely on a paycheck, how can we rely on a future... when this is the way we're going to be treated?"

"And I don't blame them," Hagel added. "That human dimension often gets lost in this great arena of debate in Washington – what we are doing to our people... who make the

government function."

Without quality employees, he said, "you will have a dysfunctional system; a dysfunctional government. This is serious."

For the bulk of the Defense Department's civilian employees, the furlough lasted until Oct. 7 when they were recalled back to work, based upon a weeklong study of the Pay Our Military Act conducted by DoD and Department of Justice lawyers. Those lawyers determined that POMA, as it was written and passed, applied to those employees whose responsibilities contribute to the morale, well-being, capabilities and readiness of service members.

That recall did not eliminate all of the furloughs, however. In Nebraska, three technicians in the Internal Review Office were unable to return to work until Oct. 17 following the signing by President Barack Obama of continuing resolution legislation that temporarily resolved the budget logjam. The legislation also included the provision to pay all furloughed employees for the period of the lapse in appropriations "as soon as practicable."

That continuing resolution passage also enabled the Nebraska National Guard to reinstate its cooperative agreements for the 70 state employees who were affected by the shutdown. It did not occur in time, however, to affect the decision by senior Nebraska National Guard leaders to postpone October drills for the majority of Nebraska Army and Air National Guard units.

According to Bohac, the decision, while painful, was necessary considering the uncertainty involved in attempting to conduct drill weekend training assemblies without knowing if there would be funding available for pay, food, fuel and supplies.

He added he's hopeful state leaders can limit the negative impacts as much as possible.

"We can probably mitigate the impacts of re-scheduling training if it is limited to one month only," he said. "However, there are cases where you simply can't avoid the loss

### Decision to postpone October drills affects around 4,600 Nebraska Guard Soldiers, Airmen

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska National Guard postponed its October drill weekend assemblies for Soldiers and Airmen in units located across Nebraska due to the partial federal government shutdown.

The decision, which was made on Oct. 11 by Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, after consulting with his senior staff and commanders, affected approximately 4,600 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

"This was obviously a very difficult decision that I did not take lightly because of the obvious impacts that it will have on our Soldiers and Airmen, who depend upon their drill weekend checks, and our Nebraska National Guard units' readiness," said Bohac. "Unfortunately the Pay Our Military Act, which was passed by the Congress and signed into law by the President shortly before the lapse in funding, does not allow for the National Guard to conduct our normally schedule training assemblies. Additionally, the lapse of funding means that we do not have the money we need to purchase such things as fuel, food, and training supplies."

"Based upon those two major

factors, we decided that we have no choice but to postpone the October training assemblies until another date," Bohac said.

According to National Guard officials, unit commanders will now be responsible for rescheduling the postponed drill weekends for later in the year.

Unit drill weekends are used to accomplish a variety of unit and individual-level training required to maintain the Guard's ability to be ready and reliable when called upon to respond to state or national emergencies.

The postponement also affected the Oct. 19 Nebraska National Guard retiree briefing that was scheduled to be held in Kearney. That briefing has been cancelled, according to Guard officials, who said that they hope to reschedule a similar briefing for next spring.

Bohac offered this assessment of the decision: "The postponement of training activities and the retiree briefing in Kearney are unfortunate consequences of the lapse in appropriations that led to the partial government shutdown. Although the decision was difficult, I felt it necessary to inject as much predictability as possible for our Soldiers and Airmen and our retiree community."

"They deserve at least that much during this time of uncertainty in our nation."



Photo by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Many Questions:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, speaks to Nebraska Military Department state employees impacted by the partial federal government shutdown, Oct. 11, at the Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. During the meeting, Bohac, state human resources personnel and Nebraska Department of Labor representatives discussed issues impacting state employees following the partial federal government shutdown and addressed questions from the affected state employees.

of training impact if it occurs out of sequence in the year-long training plan."

"Our commanders and (noncommissioned officers) will have to be careful re-allocating training resources across 11 months in order to mitigate the effects," Bohac added.

Bohac said he's hopeful the Guard won't face a similar situation in January when the current CR is scheduled to expire. However, even if it doesn't, Bohac said the Nebraska National Guard – like the rest of the Defense Department – will likely see significant challenges as the second year of the Budget Control Act – more commonly referred to as the sequester – goes into effect.

"Anytime you face a 10-14 percent reduction in training funds, you have to be concerned," Bohac said. "Remember, all the reductions are in the Operations and Maintenance

accounts since the personnel accounts have been exempted from the Budget Control Act. So, all the risk is in the account we use to buy things with and use to support training events."

"Our training is going to be degraded over time, nothing we can't deal with, but there will be impacts," he said.

Still, one thing won't change, Bohac said. The Nebraska National Guard will continue to be ready to answer whatever call comes its ways.

"Bottom line: we will be as ready as we can be with the resources provided and we will always be there when asked by the governor to help protect and defend the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Nebraska."

**(Editor's Note: The American Force Press Service contributed to this article)**

# Partial Government Shutdown

## Special Feature

### Leaders worry partial shutdown may cause lingering effects on recruiting, retaining full-time force

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

After seeing a significant percentage of its full-time work force furloughed for the second time in less than a half year, leaders across the Defense Department – to include the Nebraska National Guard – are wondering what types of negative impacts will be felt. In particular, leaders are concerned that its civilian employees may begin to look elsewhere for more stable employment opportunities and that finding their replacements might become equally difficult.

At the shutdown's height, more than 400,000 Defense Department civilian employees – including 560 Nebraska National Guard federal technicians as well as approximately 70 fully or partially federally funded state employees – were furloughed because of the lapse of appropriations for the new fiscal year. The Pay Our Military Act, which was passed by the U.S. Congress

and signed into law by President Barack Obama prior to the Oct. 1 partial government shutdown, allowed the Defense Department to bring most of the affected back to work on Oct. 7, with the rest – around 5,000 nationally – returning to work on Oct. 17.

According to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, the impact of the shutdown was felt throughout the Department of Defense. "I know that its impact will continue to be felt by all of our people," said Hagel during an Oct. 17 news conference at the Pentagon. "All of them, in different ways, had their lives affected and disrupted during this period of tremendous uncertainty."

"I want all of our civilian personnel to know that the work they do is critically important to this department and this country," Hagel said. "It matters to this department and it matters for the country. The military simply cannot succeed without our civilian employees, and the president and I appreciate their professionalism and their patience throughout this very trying period."

Hagel said the recent furloughs and the current and predicted uncertainty caused by the Budget Control Act, have made employee morale and even more important issue.

"I don't think anyone questions that the uncertainty that shutting down the government and closing down people's jobs has brought a great amount of not only disruption to our government, to our country, but to their lives, to the civilian personnel whose lives have been disrupted by this particular shutdown," he said.

"People have to have some confidence that they have a job they can rely on," Hagel added. "I know there are no guarantees in life, but we can't continue to do this to our people – having them live under this cloud of uncertainty."

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, said he shares those concerns. He added that he's particularly worried that the two recent furloughs may increase the competition the Nebraska National Guard is facing in recruiting



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

**Empty Desks:** Although the recent government shutdown has come and gone, officials do wonder what the lingering effects this summer and autumn's furloughs will have upon recruiting and retaining the organization's full time staffs.

and retaining qualified and highly-skilled full-time employees, whom the organization depends upon to ensure that the organization's traditional, part-time Airmen and Soldiers are able to accomplish their training objective during weekend training assemblies and annual training exercises.

Those same full-time employees are becoming in high demand as other local federal agencies, especially those that are fee-serviced-based, have ex-

panded their hiring rate, said Bohac. "Fee-based agencies do not experience as great an impact, since their budgets are not as dependent upon federal appropriations," said Bohac. "That means less turmoil in their work force, or said another way, those federal employees do not have to worry about the impacts of the Budget Control Act."

**(Editor's Note:** The American Force Press Service contributed to this article.)

### Adjutant general uses town hall meetings to talk to full-time force

By Maj. Kevin Hynes,  
1st Lt. Alex Salmon,  
Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Prairie Soldier staff

**“W**e've got a great team. We will get through this. We will survive this.”

That was one of the key messages Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, brought to four town hall meetings held in Lincoln, Neb., Oct. 7-8, to update members of the Nebraska Military Department on the latest information about the partial federal government shutdown. He also welcomed back the majority of the 560 federal civilian and dual-status technicians who were recalled to work after spending nearly a week on unpaid furlough.

"Welcome back to our technicians," said Bohac during the first town hall meeting held at the Joint Force headquarters building. "We're glad to have you back in the building again. I can tell you that (my wife) Kris and I had you in our thoughts...we're very glad to have you back."

"That's the good news," Bohac said. "The bad news is we still have a few people on furlough on the technician side... please keep these folks in your thoughts. The other reality we have is, because we have no new funds that have come in to fund our cooperative agreements, we still have (around 70) state employees who support our Soldiers and Airmen in the Nebraska Military Department on unpaid furlough as well."

The affected state employees, who are either fully or partially federally funded, work in such areas as the state facilities management office, civil engineering and at the base fire department in Lincoln. Those employees, including three federal technicians who worked in the Guard's state auditing office, did not return to work until approximately a week later.

"Please keep those folks that are still furloughed in your thoughts as we move forward," Bohac added during the Oct. 8 meeting at the 155th Air Refueling Wing's operations group theater. "Because for those folks, money is going to get tighter and it's not going to get better."

According to Bohac, the shutdown also impacted the Nebraska National Guard's ability to spend money from its operations and maintenance accounts. While that won't affect the Guard's ability to conduct annual training, it did negatively impact its ability to pay for such things as fuel, office and training supplies and replacement parts.



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Welcome Back:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, speaks to a crowd of Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen affected by the partial government shutdown on Oct. 7 during a town hall meeting held at the Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. Several town hall meetings took place to answer Nebraska Military Department employees' questions about the effects of the partial government shutdown.

"We're not anywhere near business as usual," Bohac said. "I think you all know that, because the reality is, we have no operations and maintenance funds."

"There is no approval or authority to buy anything," he added at the Air Guard meeting. "We're just going to have to operate that way for the foreseeable future. That's a challenge for us because as time continues on, we're going to see a degradation of readiness across the force – Army and Air."

"What we will not have, though, is inability to respond to state emergencies," Bohac said. "I've assured the governor several times that this Nebraska National Guard stands ready to respond if needed in this state. That is unchanged. We proved that by having a limited response to the tornado in Wayne, (Neb.)... those activities will continue."

Additionally, while the Pay Our Military Act – which was passed by the Congress and signed into law by President Obama prior to the Oct. 1 shutdown – was eventually interpreted by the Departments of Defense and

Justice to allow affected military and civilian technicians to return to duty and for the Guard to conduct annual training exercise, it did not allow the Guard to conduct weekend unit training assemblies. That forced the Nebraska Guard to eventually postpone the drill weekend training assemblies for the vast majority of its units across the state.

At the time, Bohac said he fully expects the state's Soldiers and Airmen to receive their training weekends.

"We fully expect to be able to have 48 UTAs in the course of (Fiscal Year) 14. The question is when," he said. Bohac added that one of his concerns is the impact that the postponements would have on the state's younger enlisted Airmen and Soldiers who depend upon their drill checks to help them get through the month. In the Nebraska Air National Guard, traditional part-time Air Guardsmen make up more than 70 percent of the organization while in the Army Guard, they make up more than 80 percent.

"They're why we're here," Bohac said.

"They're why we serve in this day-to-day effort... to take care of them."

"I look to you as the full-time force to help lead our traditional force through this... and we will get through it," Bohac said. He then asked the enlisted leaders in each of the audiences to reach out and contact their traditional Soldiers and Airmen and talk with them about their concerns point them toward resources that are available.

"There are resources out there for folks," Bohac said.

Bohac closed each of the meetings expressing his appreciation for the sacrifices the entire Nebraska Military Department workforce is making during the lapse in federal funding and the attitude people were taking with them as they confronted the myriad of issues arising from the partial shutdown.

"We're in it together. We're going to lead through it together. We're going to solve it the best we can with the resources we're given," said Bohac. "So, let's be smart about it as we go forward."

# Soldier becomes first female Army Pathfinder in Nebraska

By Sgt. Jason Drager  
Staff Writer

Being an Army pathfinder is an accomplishment that anyone who is qualified should boast about. Being a female pathfinder in the state of Nebraska, however, is a distinguished honor that only one can take pride in.

Spc. Carmen Ruiz, a motor transport operator with the 195th Forward Support Company, became the first-ever female pathfinder in the Nebraska Army National Guard when she graduated from Pathfinder School in November 2012.

It's a tremendous honor and something Ruiz said she was definitely proud of.

"I actually found out while at school that there had never been a female pathfinder in the state," said Ruiz. "I didn't think it would have been such a big deal."

"Every Soldier should know they can accomplish anything they want to," said Sgt. 1st Class Edward Whitehill, readiness noncommissioned officer for the 195th FSC, "but it's a great example that gender doesn't matter in the military. It's all about personal attributes and skills."

The U.S. Army Pathfinder School, which is three weeks in length, is located at Fort Benning, Ga. Army Pathfinders specialize in navigating through foreign terrain, establishing safe landing zones and relaying coordinates back to command.

Ruiz's class began with 66 stu-



Photo by Sgt. Jason Drager

**Final Preps:** Then-Spc. Carmen Ruiz, a motor transport operator with the 195th Forward Support Company, stands while a Soldier ensures her gear is secured during the unit's February drill at Husker Drop Zone, near Mead, Neb. Ruiz became the first-ever female pathfinder for the Nebraska Army National Guard.

dents, two of whom were female. By the time of graduation, only 32 students remained, including both females.

"I don't think I could have ever gone to a school my unit sent me to and come home empty-handed," said Ruiz. "I would be too disappointed in myself and I wouldn't

want my unit to be disappointed in me."

"The reason we gave her the opportunity is because we're confident in her abilities," said Whitehill. "She's always motivated, intelligent and very articulate. She's always wanting to challenge herself."

Ruiz had hounded her leadership for months prior to going to Fort Benning. "The fact that it's one of the hardest schools in the military was one of the motivating factors to attend," said Ruiz. "I'm always trying to push myself above and beyond."

Ruiz said she was only given six days notice that she was leaving for the school. "One day they asked me how serious I was about going and I said, 'extremely serious and I will pass,'" said Ruiz. "They told me to pack my bags."

In addition to being a pathfinder, Ruiz is also airborne-qualified and a member of the Nebraska Honor Guard.

"It makes me more useful to my unit and it's really important to me to make them and my leadership look great," said Ruiz. "I know the more I can do and more useful I can be, the better off my unit is."

According to Whitehill, the unit wants other Soldiers to realize there are some high-speed schools available for those who serve in the 195th FSC.

He added it's a great recruiting tool to have Ruiz as an example.

Ruiz said she doesn't plan to slow down, either. She added she wants to attend Jumpmaster School once



Photos by Sgt. Riley Huskey

**Free Fallin':** Soldiers from the 195th Forward Support Company drift toward the ground during a morning airborne exercise at Husker Drop Zone near Mead, Neb., Sept. 7.

she is promoted to sergeant, would like to deploy and hopes to stay in the Army for 20-plus years.

"I'm going to be in the Army until I'm too old and they kick me out," said Ruiz. "I just really love the lifestyle."

Ruiz sees herself as someone

younger female Soldiers can look to as a role model or mentor.

"I don't even know how to tell you how much it means to me," said Ruiz. "What makes me so proud is not that I'm the first female, but my unit had the first female. So, I'm proud for my unit."



Photo by Senior Airman Mary Thach

**Hot Mess:** Members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's Crash, Fire and Rescue team work to extinguish a "crashed" aircraft on an unused portion of flight line at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Sept. 4-6. The live burn was an extension of the University of Missouri's travel-training aircraft, which is a propane-filled aircraft simulator.

## Nebraska Air Guard Crash, Fire, Rescue teams practice lifesaving skills

By Senior Airman Mary Thach  
Staff Writer

Approximately 40 firefighters from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing conducted a three-day crash, fire and rescue exercise using a travel-training aircraft at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., Sept. 4-6, 2013.

An extension of the University of Missouri set up a propane-filled simulated aircraft on an unused portion of the flight line and set the plane ablaze with a dummy trapped inside.

Nebraska Air National Guard Assistant Fire Chief Mark Wid said all of the firefighters in the department train monthly, as required by the Air Force and the Fed-

eral Aviation Administration, but only have the opportunity to work with live fire and a simulator on an annual basis.

"Crash, fire and rescue personnel are required to do an annual burn," said Wid. "On occasion, we will go someplace to do a mock-up that is already set up at bases around the United States. However, this is from the University of Missouri. It is a unit that can be transported, so they were hired to come here to fulfill our requirement."

Wid said training with a live fire is a great opportunity for full-time state and Guard firefighters to brush up on skills learned during school and ensure they're prepared if an incident ever occurs.

"It gives everybody a chance to refresh all of the training they have had," said Wid. "The guys who go through technical school through the Air Force, of course they get it there. But,

on the civilian side, they have to go to a college or some place that can provide that training. The FAA, as well as the Air Force, requires each firefighter to do an annual burn so they can keep their training current."

"Also, it gives the crash firefighter an opportunity to be in a hot environment," said Wid. "Over the course of a crash firefighter's career, they may get one major burn in 30 years, so the opportunity to get in here and stay fresh will prepare us in the event that it does happen."

The crash, fire and rescue team trained on egress by approaching the aircraft, rescuing injured and trapped victims, and dousing the fire. Wid said the whole process can be very challenging.

"They make an approach and set up the trucks on the aircraft, depending on the position of the aircraft, the wind, the terrain,

other exposure," said Wid. "Our first priority is rescue – to get any people off the airplane. Then we go for the attack to contain, confine, and extinguish the fire."

Wid said it was a big deal to have the University of Missouri travel to Nebraska to provide a means for the firefighters to train with real elements instead of simulating a fire. He said training opportunities are limited when it comes to live fire on base.

"We can simulate by using the KC-135. We do egresses on that," said Wid. "It gives the guys an opportunity to learn more about our aircraft we have on our home base, that's the one we specialize in. However, there are a lot of different aircraft that come in and out of that airport, so we have to be on our game to be able to handle everything."



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**High Adventure:** A Czech Republic Air Force JAS 39 Gripen flies behind a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker during an air refueling training exercise over Slovakia, Sept. 10. Nebraska Airmen from the 155th Air Refueling Wing were in the Czech Republic as part of the State Partnership Program between the Nebraska National Guard and the Czech armed forces, which aims to share military knowledge between the two organizations.

## 155th Air Refueling Wing shares refueling knowledge with Czech Republic Air Force

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon  
Assistant Editor

With more than 20 years of aerial refueling under their collective belts, saying members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing are experienced, would be an understatement. An aircrew from the Nebraska-based Air National Guard unit recently had the opportunity to pass on some of that knowledge when they visited the Czech Republic, Sept. 9-13, as part of the State Partnership Program.

The State Partnership Program aims to increase military interoperability with key allies like the Czech Republic.

Along with sharing aerial refueling knowledge with the Czech armed forces, the KC-135R Stratotanker and its crew were able to participate in exercises with the Czech Republic's neighbor, Slovakia, in addition to conducting real-world missions.

During one of the training missions, the Nebraska aircrew took off from Pardubice, Czech Republic, to perform a mock refueling of a Czech Air Force JAS-39 "Gripen." They then flew over the Tatra Mountain Range in Slovakia where they played the role of an unidentified aircraft in airspace shared by the Czech Republic and Slovakia and were intercepted by Slovakian MiG-29 "Fulcrums" from the Slovakian Air Force.

The goal for the mission was



**Friendly Escort:** A Slovakian Air Force MiG 29 Fulcrum "intercepts" a KC-135R 'Stratotanker' from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing over Slovakia, Sept. 10, during an exercise. The Nebraska KC-135R played the role of an unknown aircraft in Slovakian airspace, giving the Slovakian pilots a unique opportunity to hone their skills by flying against a real-world aircraft.

simple.

"The biggest thing we wanted to accomplish was to get the Czech Republic Air Force some actual flight time against a tanker," said Capt. Edward Conner, an instructor pilot with the 155th ARW. "Much of their time is spent in the simulator and they probably get a 10th of what us Air Force pilots get back in the United States, so it's good to see them up in the air."

But the training goes far beyond just the pilots and aircrews.

"The mission of the KC-135 was to extend air refueling capability to the Czech Republic, but by doing so we also need to consider the Czech Republic's neighbor, Slovakia, where a lot of the air refueling takes place,"

said Lt. Col. John Williams, a bilateral affairs officer from the 155th ARW who is stationed in the Czech Republic. "The goal for this mission was to validate the air space that the aircraft were flying in and train Slovak controllers. And what was great about it was that we... helped train the Czech air traffic controllers last year and this year."

"Those same controllers are training the Slovaks, their partners," he added.

According to Connor, working with the Czech and Slovak controllers went well. And to add some realism, the Nebraska aircrew tried to put the Slovakian MiGs to the test.

"We asked the controller if we were able to maneuver at our own



**Room With a View:** Chief Master Sgt. Russell Sladky, a boom operator with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, waits for a JAS 39 Gripen from the Czech Republic Air Force to approach his KC-135R Stratotanker before performing a mock aerial refueling in the skies above Slovakia, Sept., 10, during a State Partnership Program mission to the Czech Republic.

speed and direction to challenge the MiG 29s – so basically go nose-to-nose with them – and see how they handled the situation and we didn't get away," said Conner with a laugh.

"I think it's difficult for the Slovaks to get the opportunity to go head-to-head against a real aircraft in their airspace and simulate a real-world situation where we had the freedom to move where we wanted, do what we wanted to, and at the altitude we wanted to," he added. "And they responded flawlessly."

Conner said working with Czech and Slovakian counterparts was a great experience and he was able to learn as much as he was able to teach.

"They're very inquisitive as far as what we do, how we do it," said Conner.

"I think it's an exciting opportunity for us to come out here and represent the Nebraska Air National Guard and do the State Partnership Program with the Czech Republic Air Force," said Conner. "We're here to increase our interoperability and teach the Czech Republic pilots how to properly and safely air refuel."

And with an ever-evolving military landscape, having NATO allies like the Czech Republic can only strengthen the global partnership and bolster NATO's peacekeeping efforts.

"In this day-and-age I think it's good to have allies that you train with...before a real-world event happens," said Conner. "Today we were able to train with the Czech Republic Air Force. We learn from them, they learn from us."

## Explosive Knowledge

Nebraska Air National Guard explosive ordnance disposal experts exchange information with Czech Republic Soldiers

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon  
Assistant Editor

For more than a decade, the United States and its allies have been engaged in warfare against enemies with ever-changing tactics. Gone are the conflicts of the past with clearly-defined battle lines and enemies. Many of today's wars are fought against a faceless enemy hiding within society. And all too often their weapon of choice

is a cowardly improvised explosive device used to kill indiscriminately. For that reason, explosive ordnance disposal experts have become vital in detecting and destroying devices designed to kill and maim.

Recently, EOD knowledge was shared between members of the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing and the Czech Republic as part of the State Partnership Program. Both the Nebraska and Texas National Guard partner with the Czech

Republic.

The partnership, which began in 1993, is one of 22 European partnerships that make up the U.S. European Command State Partnership Program and one of 65 worldwide partnerships that make up the National Guard State Partnership Program.

Two EOD specialists from the 155th ARW joined four others from the Nebraska National

See EOD on 10.



Photo by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Common Cause:** Tech. Sgt. Dustin Frey, an explosive ordnance disposal specialist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing's EOD team works with Czech Republic Army Warrant Officer 2nd Class Jan Bradac, first sergeant for the 15th Engineer Brigade EOD company, on a Talon bomb disposal robot at a Czech Army base in Bechyne, Czech Republic, Sept. 9.

## Texas Army National Guard medical Soldiers train again with Czech counterparts

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon  
Assistant Editor

In late 2011, an improvised explosive device exploded in the Logar Province of Afghanistan, severely wounding an American Soldier. His life was ultimately saved by another Soldier who was well trained in advanced combat trauma.

But the Soldier who helped save the American's life wore a completely different uniform and hailed from half a world away. For his actions, Staff Sgt. Michal Novotny of the Czech Republic Army received the U.S. Armed Forces Bronze Star for bravery. Novotny had recently attended a series of U.S. military professional health-care courses that focused on combat life saving and combat medicine.

Without that training, the day's could've ended much differently.

The Texas Army National Guard aimed to expand that combat medical knowledge when four Texas Medical Command Soldiers traveled to the Czech Republic, Sept. 9-13, as part of the State Partnership Program. Both the Nebraska and Texas National Guards partner with the Czech Republic. The partnership, which began in 1993, is one of 22 European partnerships that make up the U.S. European Command State Partnership Program and one of 65 worldwide partnerships that form the National Guard State Partnership Program.

According to Lt. Col. John Williams, a bilateral affairs officer with the Nebraska Air National Guard who is stationed in the Czech Republic and oversees the Nebraska and Texas partnership, the goal of SPP is to support the EUCOM country campaign plan. The National Guard provides subject matter ex-



**Patchwork:** Czech Republic Soldiers worked with Soldiers from the Texas National Guard Medical Command Sept. 9-13, during a State Partnership Program visit. During the week the Czech medics learned techniques from the Texas Soldiers on how to create their own combat lifesaver classes.

perts from Nebraska and Texas, who are capable of assisting in a number of areas that the Czech Republic is interested in. The desired end state is increased partner capacity and interoperability with a key ally.

"Battlefield medical care is something the Czechs have been interested in for several years and dating back three years ago our Texas Soldiers visited the Czech Republic to help establish Combat Lifesaver Courses," said Williams.

Williams added that through the partnership program with the Czech armed forces, many Czech Soldiers have attended advanced medical courses in the U.S. So, the decision was made to try to establish



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Watchful Eye:** Sgt. Antonio Haro (center), a medic with the Texas National Guard's Medical Command, observes as Czech Republic Soldiers tend to a "wounded" Soldier during an advanced trauma care field exercise near Vyskov, Czech Republic, Sept. 11. The Texas Soldiers were in the Czech Republic as part of the State Partnership Program and worked to exchange medical treatment information with their Czech counterparts.

that training capability within the Czech Republic.

"We brought Texas Soldiers to the Czech Republic to teach tactical combat casualty care to the CLS instructors so that they can then develop their own Czech program for deploying Soldiers," said Williams.

The four Texas National Guard Soldiers used their first few days in the city of Vyskov, Czech Republic, in the classroom, eventually taking that knowledge into a field exercise.

"We did our classroom training the first two days and we are implementing the tactics of what we were talking about here in the field and putting it into actual practical exercises," said Sgt. 1st Class James Balandran, the operations noncommissioned officer of the Texas Medical Command.

During the field exercise, the Czech Soldiers performed rotations of foot and mounted patrols where they had to locate, treat and evacuate wounded Soldiers. The Czech Soldiers also had to deal with terrain, small arms fire and improvised explosive devices all while evacuating their patients.

"They're going through care under fire," said Balandran, who explained it as the initial lifesaving steps after encountering an injured Soldier.

"Tactical field care is the next phase and that's where they get more invasive with their care – bandaging, splinting. And then the last phase they go into is called now tac-evac...and that is when they check the final interventions that they've done and call in medevac to

transport them to a hospital."

Balandran, who returned from an Afghanistan deployment earlier this year, said he worked with Czech Soldiers while deployed. He added this was his second trip to the Czech Republic under SPP to share his medical knowledge, which is important because treatments are always evolving.

"Medical treatment is changing all the time," said Balandran. "From 2009 to now it has changed from night and day."

Balandran said the Czech troops had improved leaps and bounds in their medical training, so on this visit he wanted to focus on keeping up with medical advances.

"We are trying to get all the medical care on the same standard, so

See MEDICS on 11.

## EOD continued from page 9.

Guard and six from the Texas National Guard during a weeklong mission to the Czech Republic Sept. 9-13.

Throughout the week, the Nebraska EOD specialists worked with Czech Soldiers from the 15th Engineer Brigade in Bechyne, Czech Republic, to learn more about the Czechs' newly acquired EOD equipment including robots, bomb suits, and metal detectors.

"The Czechs received over \$3 million in (United States Code) title 1202 funding to procure EOD equipment," said Lt. Col. John Williams, a bilateral affairs officer from the 155th ARW who is stationed in the Czech Republic.

"We identified a need last year that they were operating at their (EOD) school without the equipment that they use in (the International Security Assistance Force). That equipment was procured on their behalf by the United States government, which in itself was a tremendous value for us, but then we were able to extend that value by using our State Partnership Program with the Nebraska Air National Guard and the 155th Air Refueling Wing EOD team," Williams added.

After introductions were complete, the EOD specialists from both countries got to work.

"Our main goal is help train them on some new equipment they're receiving as well as build a relationship so we can further build on training we can do in the future – to see exactly what their capabilities are, where they're lacking and we can fill in and we can go from there," said Tech. Sgt. Dustin Frey, a 155th ARW EOD specialist.

Some of the USC title 1202 money from the U.S. was used to purchase eight Talon bomb disposal robots to be used for training the Czech Soldiers. Many of whom have deployed to places like Afghanistan and Iraq multiple times where they've used the robots, but this was the first time they've had robots available to train with at their EOD school.

"The Talon robot is our number one choice for deployed robots right now," said Frey. "We have a couple tools as well...but the Talon is our most robust option. It's great for breaking ground, it has the power to actually pull stuff



**Safe Disposal:** A Talon bomb disposal robot is remotely operated at a Czech Army base in Bechyne, Czech Republic, Sept. 9, during a State Partnership Program visit to the Czech Republic where Airmen from the 155th Air Refueling Wing exchanged EOD knowledge with their Czech counterparts.

from the ground and it's the most rugged in our equipment arsenal."

Finally having robots at their home training station means a lot for the preparedness of the Czech EOD specialists.

"Having that robot here on stations means they can sharpen their skills so when they do their next deployment, which for them is very often, they're going to be much more proficient operators...which keeps people safe," said Frey.

The Czech Soldiers were excited to have the Nebraska Airmen on site because of their knowledge of the robots.

"I would say that we were interested into robot today because all of the stuff coming to the Czech Army has to be tested," said Warrant Officer 3rd Class Karel Vaclavik, a Czech EOD Soldier. "So we did small tests if this material is appropriate."

"I know it sounds weird a little bit, but we have to test it if it's appropriate for the specific job – for the EOD job," Vaclavik added.

In addition to training with the new robots, the EOD specialists worked with bomb suits and metal detectors.

The Nebraska Airmen were also able to learn more about different explosive devices used around the world thanks to an amazing



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Knowledge Exchange:** Tech. Sgt. Dustin Frey (left), an explosive ordnance disposal specialist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing's EOD team works with a Czech Republic Army Warrant Officer 2nd Class Jan Bradac, the first sergeant for the Czech 15th Engineer Brigade EOD company, to remotely control a Talon bomb disposal robot at a Czech Army base in Bechyne, Czech Republic, Sept. 9, as Master Sgt. Stacey Michaelson, another Nebraska EOD specialist with the 155th ARW, watches.

collection of devices immaculately displayed in three rooms within the Czech EOD school.

But the most important byproduct of actually interacting with counterparts from half a world away is simply sharing knowledge and experience.

"We're really impressed with their experience level," said Frey. "These guys have had a high deployment tempo as well as an amazing training area."

"Any relationships you can build are important and more people in your field – that's more experience you can draw to and get their side of the story and their experiences," he added. "So making this relationship is great, especially somebody that's so far away."

The Czech Soldiers said the partnership with Nebraska has been great.

"I have to say that we really appreciate

American cooperation," said Vaclavik.

"I don't know the best way how to share information than with U.S. guys, because you are the most experienced guys I've ever met," he added.

Vaclavik also said working face-to-face is the best way to share information.

"All of the operators, or EOD specialists, all of those guys have deployed in Afghanistan or Kosovo, but we don't have possibility to upgrade the knowledge – just in cooperation with U.S. Army or U.S. military during the courses and during these meetings," said Vaclavik.

"I know those guys are experienced," he added. "They've been deployed already so the best goal is that we share our deployments and this (is) the best way how to learn new things or share experience."



**Foreign Relations:** Lt. Col. John Williams, a bilateral affairs officer with the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing who is stationed in the Czech Republic and oversees the Nebraska and Texas partnership, speaks with a Czech Soldier in Bechyne, Czech Republic, Sept. 12. Nebraska Guardsmen were in the Czech Republic as part of the State Partnership Program between the Nebraska National Guard and the Czech armed forces, which aims to share military knowledge between the two organizations.

## CZECH continued from page 1.

in which the Czech Republic is interested. The desired end state is increased partner capacity and interoperability with a key ally. "This is particularly useful given the coalition environments the U.S. operates in," said Williams. "The enduring relationship that we've built with the Czechs can't be emphasized enough. It's a mission in which the National Guard is uniquely capable."

Throughout the week many events were planned to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience between the two countries' service members.

According to Williams, an EOD exchange between members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing and the Czech 15th Engineer Brigade was designed to help the Czechs learn more about newly acquired EOD equipment including robots, bomb suits and metal detectors.

"The equipment was purchased through a U.S. program. (It) is really beneficial when we can use SPP to supplement the contract training the Czechs received earlier this year with our own subject matter experts," said Williams. "Our people can really fill in the gaps."

Two EOD specialists from the 155th ARW worked with Czech Soldiers in Bechyne, Czech Republic.

"We've tried to get to know them, and more importantly, introduce ourselves and pass on our experience level, so they can judge that compared to theirs, which is very high," said Tech. Sgt. Dustin Frey, a 155th ARW EOD specialist.

"Our main goal is help train them on some new equipment they're receiving as well as build a relationship so we can further build on training we can do in the future – to see exactly what their capabilities are, where they're lacking... we can fill in and we can go

from there," he added.

Also during the week in the Czech Republic, Williams arranged an exchange between the Nebraska National Guard's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and the Czech 53rd Electronic Warfare and Surveillance Brigade to assist in developing a Czech exercise. Earlier this summer, the Czechs visited Nebraska to see first-hand how it's done. Next year, the Czechs will put on the exercise with U.S. assistance.

According to Lt. Col. Jeffery Kilgore, operations officer for the 67th BfSB, the Nebraskans used their time in Opava, Czech Republic, to plan and prepare for the upcoming exercise.

"The plan calls for much more coordination and synchronization between the 67th and the 53rd, as well as the Czech Embassy liaison officer (Williams) and both the Nebraska and Texas SPP directors in the year leading up to the exercise," said Kilgore. "In the end, the 67th BfSB planners want to provide a well-planned, coordinated and sourced training plan, which is effective, yet challenging for the Czech Army."

Off the ground, the airspace above the Czech Republic and neighboring Slovakia was busy as a Nebraska Air Guard aircrew was sent to further the Czech's knowledge of aerial refueling with a KC-135R.

During one training mission, the Nebraska aircrew took off from Pardubice, Czech Republic, to perform a mock aerial refueling of a Czech Air Force JAS-39 "Gripen." They then flew over the Tatra Mountain Range in Slovakia where they played the role of an unidentified aircraft in airspace shared by the Czech Republic and Slovakia and were intercepted by Slovakian MiG-29 "Fulcrums" from



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Partners:** (Standing from left) Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, Nebraska state command sergeant major, Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, Master Sgt. Stacey Michaelson, an explosive ordnance disposal specialist with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, and Tech. Sgt. Dustin Frey (front center), also an EOD specialist with the 155th ARW, work with Czech Republic Army Warrant Officer 2nd Class Jan Bradac, (front left) the first sergeant for the 15th Engineer Brigade EOD Company, and another Czech Soldier at Czech Army base in Bechyne, Czech Republic, Sept. 12.

the Slovakian Air Force.

The goal for the mission was simple. "The biggest thing we wanted to accomplish was to get the Czech Republic Air Force some actual flight time against a tanker," said Capt. Edward Conner, an instructor pilot with the 155th ARW. "Much of their time is spent in the simulator and they probably get a 10th of what us Air Force pilots get back in the United States, so it's good to see them up in the air."

The Texas aircrew tackled an entirely different mission.

"The Czech Air Force is seeking to expand their close air support capability, so they were joined this week by two instructor pilots from the Texas Air National Guard F-16 schoolhouse," said Williams. "This is what we call a Traveling Contact Team. The U.S. pilots will assess possibilities and share valuable information to help the Czechs reach their goals."

Finally, said Williams, a train-the-trainer event for Czech Combat Life Saver instructors was arranged and designed to expand their ability to teach Tactical Combat Casualty Care, which emphasizes care under fire. Last year a Czech Soldier was decorated for saving the life of a U.S. Soldier who stepped on an improvised explosive device.

"The Czech Soldier received much of his training in U.S. courses, so this event really shows the tangible benefits of our partnership," said Williams.

Four Texas National Guard Soldiers used their first few days in the city of Vyskov, Czech Republic, in the classroom, eventually taking

that knowledge into a field exercise.

"We did our classroom training the first two days and we are implementing the tactics of what we were talking about here in the field and putting it into actual practical exercises," said Sgt. 1st Class James Balandran, the operations noncommissioned officer of the Texas Medical Command.

During the field exercise, the Czech Soldiers performed rotations of foot patrols and mounted patrols where they had to locate, treat and evacuate wounded Soldiers. The Czech Soldiers had to deal with terrain, small arms fire and improvised explosive devices all while evacuating their patients.

Balandran, who returned from an Afghanistan deployment earlier this year, said he worked with Czech Soldiers while deployed. He added this was his second trip to the Czech Republic under SPP to share his medical knowledge, which is important because medical technology is always evolving.

"Medical treatment is changing all the time," said Balandran. "From 2009 to now it has changed from night and day."

Balandran said the Czech troops had improved leaps and bounds in their medical training, so on this visit he wanted to focus on keeping up with medical advances.

"We are trying to get all the medical care on the same standard, so when we are treating other NATO Soldiers they would know what we're doing and vice versa," he added.

Williams said the military partnership with the Czech Republic is beneficial for both countries.

"I think too often we look at this partnership as a one-way street when it comes to sharing information, but I've seen many instances where we learn as much as we share," said Williams. "The Czechs are NATO interoperable in many areas and often resource constrained when compared to their U.S. counterparts. This often contributes to different approaches to the same problems. For our Soldiers, it is important to see alternative solutions."

Williams said there are several reasons it's important for Nebraska and Texas to partner with the Czech Republic, but perhaps the most tangible piece comes from sharing the deployment burden.

"The Czechs have fought alongside the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001," said Williams. "They are professional, competent partners capable of operating independently in a range of missions." And having a partner like the Czech Republic is a great fit for the folks of Nebraska and Texas.

"It has been terribly rewarding working with the Czechs," added Williams. "We share many of the same values. The Czechs are hard-working, industrious people. Their work ethic is very similar to the one found in the Midwest. They are grateful for our cooperation, and that goes a long way to making things work smoothly."

"We continue to find ourselves in international operations, so the more exposure we have to our coalition partners and NATO standards before we conduct operations together, the better."



Photo by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**Helping Hands:** Sgt. 1st Class James Balandran, operations noncommissioned officer for the Texas National Guard's Medical Command, instructs Czech Republic Soldiers as they tend to a "wounded" Soldier during an advanced trauma care field exercise near Vyskov, Czech Republic, Sept. 11. The Texas Soldiers were there as part of the State Partnership Program and worked to exchange medical treatment information with their Czech counterparts.

## MEDICS continued from page 10.

when we are treating other NATO Soldiers they would know what we're doing and vice versa," he added.

Balandran said working with Czech counterparts has been a great experience.

"They're very approachable and appreciative of what we're doing," said Balandran.

"They're so interested in our ways of medical care and making sure that they ask all the questions," he added. "Everything has been going really well."

The Czech Soldiers couldn't agree more.

"It's always a great opportunity to operate with our counterparts and (exchange) the information we received during our military deployments in Afghanistan or Iraq," said Warrant Officer 1st Class Jaroslav Duchon, a combat paramedic and Czech CLS instructor.

Duchon said the Czech armed forces often lack medical training material, which forces them to become very resourceful. The Texas Soldiers were able to provide some medical supplies to further strengthen the partnership. But by no means was the learning

one-way.

"We have problems with the material, the supply – the medical supply, but I think we have very clever medics and paramedics and doctors, so we can share the (information) we have and you can offer us the materials," said Duchon. "With your materials and our experiences, or your experiences...we can improve ourselves."

Balandran said he was impressed how much the Czech medics recalled from his last visit three years ago. He said that dedication means a lot to him.

"They're top-notch – especially this crew here," said Balandran. "They are medics... so they have kept up with the trends and changes... it's been very easy for us this time to go ahead and show them the changes."

"I've been a medic for 22 years and I'm very passionate about my job," he added. "And someone being passionate about their job in teaching others really shows a lot of passion towards what they want to know and it's a good feeling."



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

**Aerial Mentorship:** Senior Airman Bradley Bouc (center), a boom operator with the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, finishes filling out the required aerial refueling paperwork on the flight deck of a Nebraska 155th Air Refueling Wing KC-135R Stratotanker during a training flight in June while Master Sgt. Michael Minnick (left) and Master Sgt. Mat Ellison (right), both instructor boom operators with more than 37 years of combined in-flight refueling experience, provide him with some advice.

## BOOMERS continued from page 1.

awaiting B-52.

Bouc, Nebraska's newest boomer, recently graduated from in-flight refueling school in May and was conducting his mandatory 90 hours of training to get fully qualified and mission ready. During this particular flight, Bouc was flanked by Master Sgt. Michael Minnick, an evaluator boom operator from the 173 ARS with more than 5,000 flight hours who is also member of the first cadre of boom operators in the Nebraska Air Guard.

Under Minnick's watchful eye, Bouc made 12 successful training contacts with the B-52 before handing the controls over to the more experienced boom operator.

"Repetition is what I need right now as a new boom to get proficient," Bouc said as he observed Minnick make perfect contact with the receiver aircraft a few more times.

"For me, this training is a part of life," said Minnick, adding that it's his responsibility to ensure that the organization's newest boom operators receive the mentoring they need. "I won't be around forever. It's really neat to take these young kids and go out and get them trained and get them experienced. I can't do it forever and I know that he can replace me."

Twenty years of in-flight refueling experience separates the booms, but age and experience doesn't hinder their ability to interact with fluidity somewhat emulating the aging KC-135's ability to perform its mission with even the newest generation aircraft in the Air Force inventory.

Minnick has seen a lot of boom operators come and go throughout his 20 years as a boom operator. He said he's particularly happy with the most recent boom hires.

"I see a lot of myself in them," said Minnick. "I love their enthusiasm. They are eager and they have a thirst for the knowledge of the flying career field. I was the same when I started 20 years ago, and that's fun to see."

### The Originals

In May 1992 the Nebraska Military Department issued a news release announcing the end of the Nebraska Air Guard's reconnaissance mission with the RF-4C Phantom II. That news release also marked the end of the organization's nearly 46 years of flying fighter-type aircraft.

The unit's new mission called for 10 KC-135R refueling aircraft, each requiring a four-person crew consisting of a pilot, copilot, navigator and refueling-boom operator, to



Courtesy Photo

**Peacekeepers** An armed A-10 Thunderbolt II moves into position to receive fuel from a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135 Stratotanker during an Operation Deny Flight mission in 1994.

replace the unit's 18 RF-4s.

Air refueling is a mission with a future, said Lt. Col. Joe Johnson, public affairs officer for the Nebraska National Guard at the time. "As long as the United States has military aircraft subject to movement across the globe, the nation will need people and units like ours to get those aircraft where they need to go."

The Guard's vision for the tanker mission still resonates true today after 20 years, said Col. Bob Stevenson, the vice wing commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing.

"I can tell you that there were a lot of guys that were initially unhappy, but when they actually started doing the mission—more impact that it has tremendous impact—more impact than the RF-4 ever had on national policy,"

"It goes to interesting places and it's an essential and relevant part of our airpower doctrine," he added.

The 1992 change was not without its drawbacks, however.

The greatest impact was felt in the 155th Operations Group, which had to undergo a massive retraining of its aircrew. The mission change also required new skills, meaning Guard members who wanted to stay had to be retrained into new positions.

One of those new positions was a little more high-profile than the rest—the in-flight refueling technician. It was an enlisted flying position; a position the Nebraska Air Guard had not had before.



Courtesy Photo

**The First-Timers:** Members from the initial cadre of boom operators from the Nebraska Air National Guard pose in front of a KC-135R Stratotanker drogue in 1994. Boom operators assigned to the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron are still passing gas to American and foreign aircraft after two decades on the job.

### Boom Operators Job Description

Whether it's refueling B-52 bombers during a training mission over Kansas, refueling those same aircraft while flying nonstop from Missouri to Guam, or passing fuel to fighters on patrol over a combat zone, making sure that American and allied planes have enough fuel to safely do their missions is the job of an in-flight refueling specialist, or "boom operator."

Operating an extendable hydraulic arm from a pod in the back of a KC-135R, boom operators need calm nerves and a cool confidence to connect with a receiver aircraft and transfer thousands of pounds of fuel into it. It's a high-stress job that's crucial to the 155th ARW's ability to help project American force throughout the globe.

"As a wing, we have a lot of missions and they all go out and support the enterprise, but here, when we are working at home plate, everyone is working to get those planes in the air. That's really what it's about," said Stevenson.

Boom operators are the only enlisted aviators in the Nebraska Air Guard. They make up a small, elite group of enlisted Guard members – 20 in all. Put into perspective, at any given time there are roughly 1,200 boom operators in the United States mili-

tary – active duty has roughly six to seven hundred boom operators; the remaining half are employed by Guard and Reserve units.

Being part of that elite group requires a huge commitment and a tremendous sacrifice of time spent away from family and employers, said Chief Master Sgt. Russell Sladky, in-flight refueling manager and chief boom for the 173rd ARS.

Most traditional booms fly three or four days a month on local training flights. Depending on the Airman's civilian job, deployment range from about 30-60 days a year, although various trips can range from two days to 60 days, said Sladky.

The job is not always as glamorous as the flight suit makes it look, said Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, Nebraska state command chief master sergeant and former boom operator. "I think boom operators figured it out very quick. There is the dirty sweaty part of the job that requires tying down cargo or loading passengers bags on days when the inside of the aircraft is well over 100 degrees and you sweat through your flight suit several times," Forster said. "The cool factor of that part of the mission wears off pretty quick."

"I never really thought of it as increasing

See BOOMERS on 13.

## 2001 terrorist attacks signaled major changes for Nebraska Air Guard Stratotanker crews

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton  
Staff Writer

Well over a decade has passed since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Most service members remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when they found out the United States had been attacked on its own soil by Islamic extremists.

Many Nebraska Guardsmen worked long hours in the days following the attack to provide ground support in response to heightened security levels at government facilities and airports.

There are few, however, who witnessed the chaos and confusion that followed the attacks from the air, like Nebraska Air National Guard tanker crews did.

Those men and woman were witness to something never seen before in American aviation history: a complete shutdown of the national airspace system and combat support missions over their back yards, refueling fully armed fighters jets whose mission was to protect the skies over U.S. cities and other strategic locations.

"It was really strange," said Chief Master Sgt. Russell Sladky, the chief boom operator with the Nebraska Air National Guard's 173rd Air Refueling Squadron. "I remember that day very well. We were watching news reports on the first plane and saw the second plane hit the second tower.

"Immediately after that," he said the unit received a phone call asking how many tankers they could support. Within minutes, the 173rd ARS put one tanker and crew on alert. Sladky volunteered to be the boom operator on that crew and went into crew-rest at a nearby hotel.

Air traffic had been shut down over the U.S., but nobody knew if there were rogue aircraft out there with other targets.

By the end of that fateful day, the alert aircrew, including Sladky, had been alerted and found themselves flying a pattern over the Chicago area dragging two fully armed fighter aircraft with them.

"It was a very strange flying that evening," Sladky said. "The thing that felt the strangest was how quiet everything was. It was eerily quiet and very somber. Normally there is a lot of radio traffic, but on that night the radios were silent except for communication with the fighters we were refueling.

Master Sgt. Michael Minnick, boom operator evaluator in the 173rd ARS, remembers exactly where he was when the first plane hit the tower. "I was in this building on the west side of the operations building," he said. He paused as if recalling that moment before he continued.

"We kept the news on and spent the night in the (Operations) building on alert."

"I rode my bike to work that day and had just walked in the door of the (Operations) building after the first tower got hit," said Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, the Nebraska state command chief master sergeant and former boom operator.

"It was hard to believe that the first one could possibly be an accident and when the second plane hit, I remember saying 'We better start calling people, I think we are at war.' Within a couple minutes we did find out that we were at war and

by noon were in 'go-fight mode,'" he said.

"The sky that day was a little bit like a ghost town," said Forster. "The amount of quietness in the air seemed pretty eerie. I remember thinking that we are refueling fighter jets whose pilots could potentially be given the OK to shoot down an American airline and how much responsibility that would be."

Chief Master Sgt. Leighton Michaelson, a boom operator at that time, was on a fishing trip in Valentine, Neb., with fellow boom operator, Master Sgt. Mark Stocking. "We were out on a boat and did not believe what happened because the TV reception was so bad. We called in immediately and they confirmed our worst fear."

Michaelson said they did not get recalled immediately, but they stayed in constant contact with the Nebraska Air Guard command for the remainder of their trip.

After 9/11 things changed dramatically for the Nebraska Air National Guard. The reality of war was brought up close and personal for 173rd ARS aviators as they began flying missions in support of Operation Noble Eagle. They flew Combat Air Patrol missions over the U.S. refueling fully armed fighter jets protecting the skies over U.S.

"In the early and mid 1990s we'd fly over a foreign country and that's where you expected the war to be," said Michaelson. "You didn't expect to be flying over Denver or St. Louis or D.C. refueling fighters that had the live weapons on them."

"The schedules were very difficult because they were 24/7, and we had to spend nights at the base," said Michaelson. "The Nebraska Air National Guard did not have permanent alert facilities, so they improvised using camping trailers."

"That's what turned me off from camping," he said. "You'd be out here in the middle of winter on a sub-zero night and the propane bottles would run out. It wasn't set up right."

The Nebraska Air Guard did finally set up doublewide trailers to use as alert facilities, which were more accommodating, he said.

"I specifically remember one time I had to be on alert," said Michaelson. "I was at the Base Exchange getting something to eat and we got alerted for a no-fly situation. We were airborne within minutes. The engines were actually cranking as I jogged across the ramp with my headset. On that occasion, we flew to Colorado and met the Buckley fighters over Denver."

As it turned out, the pilot of a small aircraft didn't get the memo about the no-fly zones and got a real big surprise as the Buckley fighters escorted him out of the area, he said.

One civil air patrol flight that Minnick specifically remembers was during the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah. "We were performing a necessary mission, but I remember thinking how strange it was to have to provide air support over the Olympics in the United States," he said.

Shortly after the terrorist attacks, the Nebraska Air Guard was activated and took the Global War Against Terrorism overseas to Afghanistan and then to Iraq.

For the next 12 years Nebraska Air Guard aircrew would be deployed and re-deployed as the tanker mission expanded across the Middle East.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

**Hands On Training:** Senior Airman Bradley Bouc, a 173rd Air Refueling Squadron boom operator, controls the boom of a KC-135R Stratotanker under the watchful eyes of seasoned refueling veteran, Master Sgt. Michael Minnick, as Bouc practices making refueling contacts in the skies over Topeka, Kan.

measure the work ethic, intelligence and initiative of potential hires.

The amount of responsibility bestowed on boom operators justifies the hiring process, said Stevenson. "We need someone who has proven what their work ethic is, their intelligence and an ability to make the mission happen. A B-2 bomber costs \$2 billion, the paint job alone costs \$150 million," he said. "If you scratch it, it's expensive. That's a lot of responsibility for a 23 or 22-year-old. When you swing that boom into the nozzle of a B-1 bomber, its right in front of where the pilot is sitting. You've got to be good, you've got to know what you're doing and you've got to be confident, even if you're bouncing through turbulence."

So far, the process has proven successful for the Nebraska Air Guard, said Forster. In 20 years, the 155th ARW has averaged 8.5 years per boom operator—almost double what the active Air Force gets out of its boom operators.

The job of a boom operator is not for everyone, said Tech. Sgt. Cassie Sabatka, an in-flight refueling technician with the 173rd ARS.

"Boom operators must have rigid flexibility, both mentally and in civilian jobs," said Sabatka, one of two female booms currently in the Nebraska Air Guard.

Ironically, two was the number of females first hired 20 years ago. "It is a diversity challenge because no mission is the same and you're not always flying with the same crew," said Sabatka. "I see that really diminishing now. I think the newness of female aircrew is wearing off and a lot of the new generation is not really seeing that as a nuance."

For those who love to travel and be with people, becoming a boom operator might be a good fit. However, those who decide to pursue this career must also realize that receiving and giving constructive criticism is part of the job.

"Boom operators must have pretty thick skins," said Minnick. "You can't let constructive criticism affect you because you still have a \$2 billion aircraft out there waiting for you to refuel it."

There are also benefits that come with "hardest traditional job in the Guard," said Forster.

One of those benefits is the ability to travel... "a lot," said Minnick, who grew up bailing hay and detasseling corn in rural Nebraska. In 20 years as a boom operator Minnick's crawled through the Great Pyramids of Egypt, been to London and Tokyo, cruised down the Nile on a riverboat, flown missions out of Southeast and Southwest Asia, and tromped through a rainforest in South America.

"Never would I have ever dreamed I would see and experience these things," he said.

There is also a level of professionalism between aircrew that is not typically seen in other career fields, said Minnick. "When we step on that airplane, we know that we are all equal. (That) creates a heightened level of camaraderie between both enlisted and commissioned aircrew," said Minnick.

"Accidents do happen," he said. "We all put our lives on the line together during our mission in the air. That really brings us together, both in the air and on the ground."

That bond and camaraderie is what brought current and former boom operators of the 173rd ARS together in July for a reunion celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Nebraska Air Guard boom operator. Forty of the 51 total Nebraska Air Guard boom operators attended.

The reunion also marked important benchmarks for two of the original boom operators—the final flight for Senior Master Sgt. Mark Fusco and the promotion of Leighton Michaelson to chief master sergeant.

The 20th anniversary of the boom operator is significant moment for the 155th ARW, Stevenson said.

"Essentially this is an air refueling wing and that's the mission. We have 20 boom operators. They are the mission. Everybody else supports getting them to the point of transferring that gas to that receiver. That's what makes it important to recognize 20 years."

### First Combat Mission

The 155th ARW was certified "fully combat ready" after successfully passing their first post-conversion inspection and Operational Readiness Inspection conducted by Air Mobility Command in 1996.

It would be just three years before the unit flew a combat mission.

During that transition time, Nebraska boom operators "hired themselves out" to active duty units, supporting tanker missions for Operations Northern and Southern watch from bases in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, as well as Operation Deny Flight from bases throughout Europe.

In April 1999, the 155th ARW flew its first-ever combat mission, during Operation Allied Force, the NATO bombing campaign of Serbia and Kosovo.

In less than three days the 155th ARW, which was the first Air Guard unit asked to support the campaign, successfully deployed two tankers and more than 80 personnel to Frankfurt, Germany. Shortly thereafter, the young tanker unit was tasked as lead unit for all American tanker operations being conducted from the Frankfurt International Airport.

Sladky said the mission meant flying in five-ship formations, or "nickel packages," with each of the five tankers dragging an F-117 Nighthawk on each wing to and from Kosovo.

"It was fairly tough flying contingency missions out of an international airport," said Sladky recalling long waits for takeoff and landings.

The task of lead tanker unit may have come as a surprise to a lot of people, but not to members of the 155th ARW. The command structure at the time wanted to prove its worth as a mobility aircraft and a deployable asset, said Forster.

"I remember thinking we are really deliberately going after some of these missions to (demonstrate) something to the Air Force and the Air National Guard," he said. "In the '80s and early '90s, we were kind of the Plan B on the shelf. Command was excited to see what the new airplane could do and the tanker really blew the dust off that old mentality."

"The motto back then was to be the 'tanker unit of choice,' and we were," said recently retired Master Sgt. Mary Baker, a member of the original boom operator cadre and first female aviator for the 173rd ARS. "It is a direct tribute to the great work ethic and high standards that our unit has—especially the Maintenance Group. Our tankers always looked better and flew better than anyone else's."

The 155th ARW's performance in OAF set a precedent for future refueling missions. "Even now, we are the lead on so many things," said Michaelson. "I think it's because we've always (lived) the motto that we want to be the tanker unit of choice."

### September 11; A role change

September 11, 2001, would change the lives of many. For the 155th ARW, the planes that went down that day had a major impact on the role Guard tankers would play in active-duty missions, both at home and abroad. That day's events presented the country and its

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the prestige of the enlisted on base. I think initially our first goal was to increase the credibility of the enlisted flyers on base and say as section, top to bottom, we are doing the mission the way it should be done and are giving the pilots the best product they can get by giving good pre-flights and being the most proficient in the back as we could be," he said.

Stevenson said Nebraska boom operators are very proud of their job and know that it is a unique privilege to be an enlisted aircrew member.

"I hope that they are not haughty and don't hold it over anyone else's head," he said. "Every Air Force career field is important and everybody is needed to generate the jets and make it happen. In all honesty, pilots just drive the boom operator to work and make sure he gets there on time... that's all they

do. It's the boom's job to get the gas into the receiver and that's what the mission is."

"It's an air refueling wing, not a KC-135 flying wing," Stevenson added. "Those guys (boom operators), whether they are acting as loadmasters and hauling cargo or people or passing gas through the boom, are the tip of the mission for this unit."

The selection process for Nebraska Air Guard boom operators is also unique. From the very beginning, the hiring board has almost exclusively come from within the Nebraska Air Guard.

"The first hiring were from within because of the change of career missions, said Forster. "Very early on, leadership decided because of the cost to put a boom through training, the Guard can't afford a lot of failures."

Forster said that process also gives board members a chance to talk to supervisors and



**Noble Boomer:** (Right) Master Sgt. Mike Minnick, a boomer with the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing, prepares to refuel an F-16 Fighting Falcon jet fighter over Salt Lake City, Utah, during an Operation Noble Eagle flight that supported the Winter Olympics in February 2002. (Above) **Vigilance:** An armed F-16 Fighting Falcon from Hill Air Force Base, Utah, receives fuel during an Operation Noble Eagle flight over the Winter Olympics in February 2002.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

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political and military leadership with a new set of pressing security challenges that would change, if not expand, national defense priorities and affect decisions on programs and spending.

Perhaps the first and most visible priority was Homeland Defense.

From the early hours after the 9/11 attacks through April 12, 2002, Operation Noble Eagle evolved from an improvised temporary expedient response and to a permanent defense requirement and major force commitment involving thousands of Airmen from the Air National Guard. The Nebraska Air Guard went from being a reserve unit to playing an integral part in the American military.

The 173rd ARS flew its first combat missions in support of the Global War on Terrorism within hours of the attacks.

By noon of Sept. 11, 2001, boom operators were passing gas to combat-configured fighter aircraft that were fully prepared to shoot down any rogue civilian airliner if given the word. It was the first time that the Nebraska Air Guard flew combat support missions over continental United States.

Since then, Nebraska boom operators have flown thousands of sorties under Operation Noble Eagle, passing gas to fighter aircraft conducting combat air patrols over random urban areas, nuclear power plants, weapons storage facilities and laboratories; sorties in response to possible air threats in the United States; and air cover support for special security events such as the Winter Olympics in Utah.

The 9/11 attacks also signaled a transformation within the entire Air National Guard, as it transitioned from a strategic reserve force to a fully integrated operational force that participates side-by-side as full partners with the active duty Air Force. This evolving role of the Guard led to and increased involve-



Courtesy Photo

**Dangerous Neighborhood:** An abandoned Serbian, Croatian or Bosnian listening post lies on an island off the coast of the former Yugoslav Republic as a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker passes by during a mission over the Adriatic Sea in May 1995.

ment in overseas operations including Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Nebraska Air Guard crews and support staff were mobilized for duty in October 2001 when they were ordered to Moron, Spain, to begin supporting the air bridge over the Atlantic Ocean as the United States and allies began preparing for Operation Enduring Freedom and the initial bombing campaign of Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. The increased operational tempo and deployments only gave Nebraska boom operators more chances to shine.

"They answer the call whenever they are called," said Stevenson recalling being deployed to Moron Air Base, Spain, with Minnick in October 2001.

"There were days that he worked

18 hours per day," said Stevenson. "I got worried that he would get burnt out, but there was stuff that needed done and Mike was that guy who would stay and stay and stay. It's that kind of work that people remember about our boom operators. They aren't going to remember your name, but they are going to remember that you're a Guard guy and they're going to remember the 'N' on your nametag."

**Moving to the 3-Person Crew**  
The biggest modern challenge for the 155th ARW may have been 9/11, but the biggest change for the boom operator came as the war in Iraq was in its infancy.

The U.S. Air Force, now supporting both OEF and OIF, needed tanker aircraft to refuel U.S. and Coalition aircraft around the world. These missions required KC-135s to have unrestricted access to domestic and international commercial and military airspace. Additionally, new civil airspace Communication, Navigation, Surveillance and Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) requirements threatened to restrict the KC-135's access to certain airspace while limiting its ability to fulfill its mission.

Without an upgrade to the KC-135R's avionics system, the USAF would face challenges in supporting missions around the globe.

The KC-135R Global Air Traffic Management (GATM) program took an aging aircraft, with an abundance of legacy equipment, and incorporated the latest CNS/ATM technology. Keeping with tradition, the Nebraska Air Guard became the first Air Guard unit and among the first Air Force units to transition to the system.

This upgrade not only brought



Courtesy Photo

**Mission Ready:** (From left) Nebraska Air Guard boomers Mark Heithoff, Mel Kauk and Russ Sladky stand next to the front of a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker after completing an aerial refueling mission.

## Special Bond

### Former bomber pilot expresses admiration for Nebraska's boomers

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton  
Staff Writer

**W**ith fuel levels waning, the pilot makes a call to a prepositioned air-refueling tanker about 15 minutes ahead of him—his gas-hungry bird is thirsty.

Lt. Col. Jeff Billingsley, nuclear enterprise branch chief at the National Guard Bureau at Joint Base Andrews, Md., and former director of operations and pilot for the 110th Bomb Squadron of the Missouri Air National Guard, has a deep sense of appreciation for job that enlisted aerial refueling specialists do on a daily basis.

Even though his B-2 Spirit has been labeled one of the most survivable aircraft in the world, it still relies on the talent and skills of in-flight refueling technicians to stay airborne on its missions.

He recently recalled what it's like to be the recipient of those enlisted aviators' hardwork.

After giving the pilots his call sign, altitude, timing information and identifier code, he uses GPS to close in on the tanker. At two miles out the procedure becomes less technical and both Billingsley and copilot pilot look out their windows until they spot the tanker.

The next radio call is a radio check from the boom operator as they approach the pre-contact position. "When we are cleared from pre-contact into contact, we rely mainly on visual cues and the pilot director lights," said Billingsley. "The boom operator flashes the fore-aft light as we get close to the proper position. That's our message to slow our closure and allow him to make contact."

The B-2 closes in behind and below the tanker until there is about 30 feet between the two aircraft and holds steady. It's one of the most dangerous aircraft operations there is, and a moment of truth for the boom operator. He must focus all his attention on making contact with the receiver port on the aircraft about the size of a paperback book.

"The boom itself is a lot of metal, and it looks big enough and strong enough to come through our windshield if the boom operator makes a mistake," Billingsley said. "They typically fly it from out in front, directly toward us and then raise it enough to clear the cockpit and make contact with the receptacle behind us. There is a definite 'clunk' as it latches into the

receptacle. When the boom locks, it completes an electrical circuit between the two planes and we do an interphone check with the boom operator."

"It's always a relief to hear the boom operator talk on interphone and see our fuel gauge start to increase as the pumps are turned on," he added.

Billingsley's longest flight, from Guam to Whiteman AFB, Mo., lasted 28 hours and required four in-flight refuelings.

"The lower you are on gas, the more relieved you are to first hear

the tanker on the radio, then see it and finally to hear the boom operator on the interphone," said Billingsley. "There have been times over the ocean when I was within five minutes of turning around if we were unable to connect with the tanker. In each case, though, the tanker has showed up on time, in the right place, to allow our crucial mission to continue. We are always appreciative of the efforts tank-

ers and their boom operators make to flex with us and help us get bombs to the target, on time."

During a recent deployment, Billingsley got the chance to ride along on a KC-135 and watched from the boom operator's perspective as he refueled six F-22s.

"I was incredibly impressed by the finesse and ease with which he flew the boom into the receptacle," he said. "The receivers looked shiny and new on top, and after flying the boom myself I was certainly glad I wasn't responsible for trying to connect with them. We absolutely trust the boom operators and once we put the B-2 into the envelope, a lot of the success of the refueling, and therefore the mission, depends on their skills and expertise."

Throughout the nine years he flew the B-2, Billingsley said he had the pleasure of doing business with Nebraska Air Guard tankers many times, including his second-to-last mission.

He said he shares a special bond with the Nebraska unit because his good friend, Nebraska Air Guard pilot Lt. Col. Jeff Link, was his roommate at Delta Air Lines training and was onboard the tanker during his last Nebraska Air Guard refuel. According to Billingsley, the two pilots were able to catch up over the interphone as the boom operator refueled his B-2.

Billingsley extended his personal thanks and appreciation to the Nebraska Air Guard boom operators for the many years of quality service they provided him and his fellow B-2 pilots.

"They were always professional, confident and experienced."



U.S. Air Force Photo

**Thankful:** Lt. Col. Jeff Billingsley after receiving the 131st Bomb Wing 2012 Pilot of the Year award.

the aircraft into compliance with new requirements, it also improved mission effectiveness, providing increased situational awareness to both the aircrew and air traffic control while also increasing overall avionics reliability.

The added technology reduced the tanker's aircrew by one, elimi-

nating the need for the navigator position on the aircraft. Although this reduced crew size, it increased the roles and responsibility of the boom operator.

"Once the pilots get into the plane after their walk around, the boom pretty much owns the plane from the

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# Gordon Anderson: A legacy who set bar high for future generation of Air Guard boom operators

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton  
Staff Writer

Master Sgt. Gordon A. Anderson, a boom operator in the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, was awarded, by a vote of his peers, the inaugural Nebraska Air National Guard Outstanding Boom Operator of the Year in 2001 for his selfless service, spirit of teamwork, dedication to duty and sense of mission accomplishment.

An outstanding boom operator exudes a "Service Before Self" attitude which is reflected in their desire to always put the needs of others first. They are gracious, courteous, generous, compassionate, and bring their uplifting spirit to all of those around them.

"As one of the original boom operators hired by the Nebraska Air National Guard, Anderson set the standard high for the

rest of the booms," said Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, Nebraska state command chief master sergeant. "He went above and beyond to make people flying on the jet comfortable; making sure they had everything they needed to be comfortable."

Anderson began his military career in the Army in 1974 and enlisted in the Nebraska Air Guard as an RF-4C Phantom crew chief in 1984.

Having always loved flying, Anderson applied for, and was selected from more than 150 applicants to be among the first to fly as a boom operator on the KC-135R Stratotanker. He quickly became the envy of his peers, who struggled to match Anderson as he tirelessly supported the new tanker mission.

His friends and colleagues said he had a true calling for aviation and his love of flight showed. They said he was a professional in every respect and a friend to all he met.

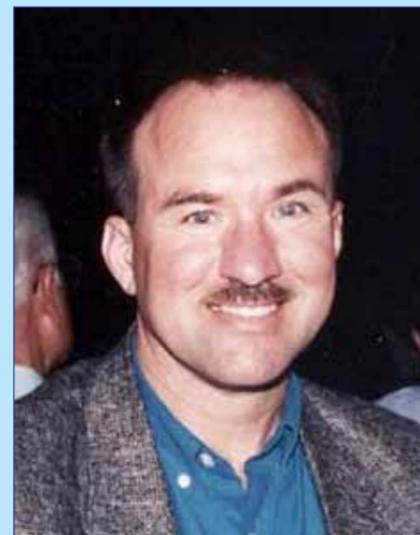
Anderson lost a three-year fight to cancer

on May 21, 2001. To memorialize his spirit, pride, teamwork, and devotion to duty, his colleagues from the 173rd ARS decided to rededicate the Outstanding Boom Operator of the Year Award in his name. The award criteria, and all that Anderson represented, has evolved into an annual award in his honor. It was expanded to recognize the Outstanding Boom Operator of the Year, as well as an outstanding Rated Officer, and an Operations Support person.

"His perseverance working days at the base while going through cancer treatment really inspired other people around him," said Forster. "He made people want to be a little more selfless, even before that was adopted as part of the core values in the Guard."

The award is unique because it is awarded based on a tally of one's peers and not to those who can write the best rewards package, he said.

Those who knew Anderson said his high



Master Sgt. Gordon Anderson

ideals and accomplishments are qualities every member of the 155th Air Refueling Wing should strive to attain and his attributes and ideals are the perfect basis for selecting award winners.

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front seats back," said Stevenson.

When carrying more than 10 passengers, at least one flight-crew member must be with them at all times according to Air Force regulations, he said. The Guard decided early on that it would not give up its third set of eyes in the cockpit, enrolling an extra boom operator on flights with more than 10 passengers.

"The active duty was willing to accept that risk (of only two in the cockpit) and we weren't," said Stevenson.

Additionally, the war on two fronts required more troop movement. Because of this, Nebraska aircrews frequently found themselves transporting troops in and out of the areas of operation in addition to its tanker mission. The four-crew requirement on "passenger hauls" significantly increased the operations tempo for Nebraska boom operators, requiring more of them to be gone more often, said Michaelson.

"Before the GATM upgrade we were boom operators and flight attendants, but that's all we did," said Minnick. After the change he said boom operators became more integrated into the whole concept of flying the airplane. "We're now a third set of eyes for the pilots. I feel like the boom operator is more involved in the entire refueling mission, not just one element of it."

"The boom became part of the cockpit crew and added quite a few additional responsibilities," said Michaelson. "Pilots need that third person in the cockpit to check circuit breakers and, in case of an emergency, fight fire. We learned to read approach plates and radio in takeoff times and codes. Before the change we were only on the radio while refueling."

There were also added checklist procedures that included command and response from the pilots.

"It took a little time to get used to the new normal," said Forster, "but the smaller crew size kept us better engaged with the crew."

Forster's appreciation for the smaller crew reflects the feelings of the later generation boom operators. "It's an odd crew," said Sabatka. "Most crews are not as clearly mixed as tanker crews—between officer and enlisted aviators."

As boom operators on the KC-135, Sabatka said they back up the pilots and help them maintain situational awareness. "In turn, they are reviewing our jobs; based off of what they hear, they are insuring we are right there with the receiver, she said. "It's kind of a special concept."

The 155th ARW completed its transition to the GATM system in late 2004 and deployed to Incirlik Air Base Turkey from October to December 2004 in support of OIF.

While in Turkey, Nebraska boom operators refueled cargo and combat aircraft directly involved in Iraq.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Nebraska boom operators have served in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, serving at locations around the globe including bases in Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar, Kuwait, Spain, France, Germany and several others. In the past 10 years, the 20 Nebraska boom operators have flown more than 14,500 sorties, including over 1,300 combat sorties and 2,000 combat support sorties totaling more than 52,900 flight-hours.

### Future of Boom Operators

Will the Nebraska Air Guard tanker mission and the demand for its boom operators decrease as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down? Not likely, said Stevenson. There are enough potential enemies in Southwest Asia to maintain a footprint there, he said.

As long as the U.S. has airplanes and personnel in that region, there will be a refueling mission.

According to Stevenson, U.S. foreign policy is shifting toward North Korea, China and the Pacific Rim. Air refueling becomes all the more important in that region because it's not possible to operate between California and the Philippines without fuel stops or fuel tankers, he said.

The Nebraska Air Guard's air refueling mission is central to the success of the Air Force mission, said Stevenson. That's why maintaining the unit's capability, maintaining its boom operator force, its experience levels and its training here in the middle of the United States is so important.

"There is a reason we're located in the middle of the United States. It's because we can go over the United States in either direction and can make it to Europe or make it to Hawaii, even Guam. If we were located on either coast, we could only go one way," he said. "We can haul cargo and we can haul passengers, but what we are really good at, is what the booms do."

### Mission Carries On

Nebraska's KC-135R Stratotanker has witnessed several changes over the past 20 years. It took on more responsibility after 9/11 and kept pace with the Air Force's needs as the ever-expanding War on Terrorism required air power around the globe.

Through it all, the 155th ARW's main mission of supplying fuel to receiver aircraft has not changed.

The aging KC-135 tanker started out its mission with the Nebraska Air Guard by dragging outdated RF-4s to the bone yard. Since then, it has watched several generations



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

**Reunion:** Nebraska Air National Guard boom operators, past and present, celebrate two decades of in-flight refueling with the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, June 22. Forty of the total 51 boom operators attended the reunion at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

**Splash:** After spending 20 years as a boom operator in the Nebraska Air National Guard, Senior Master Sgt. Mark Fusco gets a well-deserved dousing from his son, Gavin, and a fellow boom operator, Master Sgt. Mike Hamernik. Fusco began his career as a boom operator in 1993, one of the original cadre of boom operators hired by the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron.

of aircraft retire and witnessed the exhilarating thrill of passing gas to the newest generation of USAF aircraft. Often, it has the honor of passing gas to one of the original aircraft it was designed to refuel more than 50 years ago.

Three boom operators from the original cadre hired by the Nebraska Air Guard remain in the 173rd ARS. Twenty years ago, Master Sgt. Mike Minnick, Senior Master Sgt. Mark Stocking and Chief Master

Sgt. Russell Sladky were selected to take on a new venture—refueling U.S. and Allied aircraft as enlisted flyers on the KC-135 Stratotanker.

Much like the aircraft they fly on, "The Originals" have witnessed many changes since they first became boom operators. They took on more responsibilities in the cockpit after the GATM upgrade and witnessed an increase in operational tempo as the Air National Guard took on a more active role in the

Air Force mission.

Over the past 20 years the three originals watched their colleagues retire or move on to different military careers, while also watching new generations of boom operators come and go.

In step with the mission-hardened aircraft they fly in, the seasoned originals continue to seamlessly pass a wealth of knowledge to the newest generation of NEANG boom operators.

Through three generations of aircraft and three generations of boom operator, the KC-135 tanker continues on. Some estimate KC-135Rs will remain around for another 40 years, although only time will tell what missions may be bestowed on the aging beauty.

One thing is for certain, though: as long as it continues its tanker mission, it will require a boom operator to direct its performance in the sky.

"I think there is another generation left in the KC-135," said Stevenson. We (155th ARW) are pursuing, and the Air Force has a program called the Block 45, which is a service-life extension that will take the airplane out to 2040. That would make our planes 70-years-old, he said.

"So is there a future for the 135? Yes, there's not a long future, but there is a future."

That's a good feeling for the old booms and a comforting reassurance of job stability for the new generation of boom operators in the Nebraska Air National Guard.

# Golden Bars

## Nebraska Officer Candidate School graduates 13 from Nebraska, one from South Dakota

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock  
Staff Photojournalist

**T**welve Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers and one South Dakota Army National Guardsman were commissioned as second lieutenants during the Officer Candidate School graduation ceremony, Sept. 14, at Camp Ashland, Neb.

In addition, one Soldier was commissioned as a second lieutenant from the 2013 accelerated officer candidate class.

The ceremony was held in conjunction with the 209th Regional Training Institute Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

The traditional Officer Candidate School program is 17 months of leadership training, which included two weeks of annual training followed by one weekend of training per month. It concluded with an additional two weeks of annual training.

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

"It was challenging, but rewarding," said new 2nd Lt. Luann Brown, who attended the traditional OCS course. "Everybody worked together and we had great teamwork. We made sure everyone was able to strive to get through everything."

During the two-week, phase one portion of the traditional OCS in Kansas, the Nebraska OCS candidates earned the company streamers as "Best Academics," "Best Land Navigation," and "Overall Best Company." The candidates knew after achieving those awards that their instructors would push them more and only accept even better results.

"It was an intense program," said new 2nd Lt. Travis Rupp. "You will enjoy it in the end. Everything worth achieving is not easy, but it feels good to be here graduating."

Earning the award for academic excellence was Joseph Grundman. The leadership academic award was given to Thomas Ballard. Jessie Park earned the physical fitness award and the distinguished graduate award.

According to the newly pinned second lieutenants, they are ready to start their new careers as commissioned officers.

"I look forward to having that command time," said Rupp, "along



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Making It Official:** Officer Candidate Class 56 takes their oaths from Brig. Gen. Scott Gronewold, the assistant adjutant general of the joint staff for the Nebraska National Guard, during the Officer Candidate School graduation ceremony, Sept. 14, at Camp Ashland, Neb.



**Gold Bars:** Newly-commissioned 2nd Lt. Luann Brown receives her new gold bars from family members during the Officer Candidate School's graduation ceremony at Camp Ashland, Neb., Sept. 14. During the ceremony 14 new officers were "pinned" with their new rank.

with being in the Aviation Corps."

The candidates also expressed their gratitude to their families, whom they said made significant sacrifices while the Soldiers were away from home missing important family events.

"Thank you to all the families out there," said new 2nd Lt. Kevin Rose. "Especially to all of our spouses; we couldn't do it without you."

### Nebraska OCS Class 56

Thomas Ballard  
Scott Bergmann  
Luann Brown  
Tyson Gould  
Joseph Grundman  
Dennis Hatfield  
Jessica Pan  
Kevin Rose  
Travis Rupp  
Bradley Steinman  
Vincent Struble  
Marc Ueda

### South Dakota OCS Class 56

Jessie Park

### 2013 Accelerated OCS

Matthew Burke



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Hall Of Fame Career:** Retired Command Sgt. Maj. John Payer is inducted into the Nebraska Army National Guard's 209th Regional Training Institute Hall of Fame, Sept. 14, by Col. Kevin Lyons at Camp Ashland's Memorial Hall.

## Camp Ashland institute inducts new member into Hall of Fame

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock  
Staff Photojournalist

**T**he Nebraska Army National Guard's 209th Regional Training Institute Hall of Fame added another name to its impressive honor roll, Sept. 14, when a retired command sergeant major was inducted into the prestigious institute.

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. John Payer was honored during the Officer Candidate School graduation ceremony held at Camp Ashland's Memorial Hall.

The RTI Hall of Fame was established to honor former staff members and/or graduates of the officer candidate program who distinguished themselves in military or civilian pursuits. The individuals are selected based on their contributions to the overall development of the 209th RTI or the Nebraska National Guard Military Academy.

"Over the course of his career, Command Sgt. Maj. Payer served in all three organizations stationed at Camp Ashland," said Maj. Charles D. McWilliams, master of ceremony. "He exemplifies the concept of be, know and do and he always carries himself with the upmost professionalism as an instructor, trainer and mentor."

Payer began his military career when he enlisted in the South Dakota Army National Guard in 1981. His initial assignment was with the 854th Quartermaster Company of the South Dakota Army National

Guard as a water purification specialist before transferring to the Nebraska National Guard into Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-134th Infantry, in 1986 as a motor transport operator.

Payer began his initial Active Guard Reserve tour at Camp Ashland as a Primary Leadership Development Course instructor in 1987. He transferred to the Nebraska Military Academy in 1993 where he served as operations noncommissioned officer until 1995. From 1995-2006 he was the operations sergeant major/school manager in the Nebraska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters.

From 2006-08 he served as the commandant for 1st Battalion, 209th Regiment. In 2008 he deployed to Afghanistan as the command sergeant major of the Afghan Regional Security Integration Command-East. When he returned home he served as the commandant again until 2011.

Payer ended his service as the operations sergeant major for the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade when he retired in 2012.

"I'm very honored to be given this award," said Payer. "I just didn't expect it. It's one of those things you know you put in some time, but you don't know if you put in a contribution or not."

Payer said Camp Ashland holds a special meaning for him.

"Coming back, Camp Ashland is like a second home to me," said Payer. "It's nice to see the people and see where I put in all my hard work."

## Watch for changes in retiree health coverage, rescheduled retiree briefing

**G**reetings from your Nebraska Military Retiree Council! There have been numerous changes in retiree health coverage and I encourage you to contact your Tri-Care representative or go to [www.UHCmilitarywest.com](http://www.UHCmilitarywest.com) to get updates on your coverage.

Unfortunately, the scheduled retiree briefing in Kearney was postponed due to the partial government shutdown and uncertainty in funding. It will be rescheduled for spring 2014.

During the last NMRC Executive Council meeting, we met with Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, state command sergeant major. They asked how they could be more involved with the retiree community. They both said retirees are part of the National Guard family and are a valuable part of the system. To that end, they asked us to put together a list of those items you, as a retiree, want to know about.

Please send all suggestions or ideas to me at [William.h.nelson48](mailto:William.h.nelson48).

### Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

[ctr@mail.mil](mailto:ctr@mail.mil), or call (402) 309-7105. This is your council and we encourage you to be an active and involved member. Elections are pending for the vice-president, treasurer, and three at-large members. Cast your ballots and make a difference.

We've also purchased NMRC pins to be worn by NMRC members. These will be handed out over the next few months to all current members.

Thank you for your dedicated service to the National Guard and this great country.

As always, for those who like to rise early to meet fellow retirees and share stories, here's the breakfast site information for those in the immediate areas:

Army National Guard retirees:

**FIRST** Monday of each month, 8:00 a.m., Virginia's Travelers Café, 3820 Cornhusker Highway, Lincoln.

Air National Guard retirees: **LAST** Monday of each month, 8:00 a.m., Stauffer's Café, 5600 S. 48th St, Lincoln.

North Platte area retirees: **SECOND** Saturday of each month, 8:00 a.m., Airport Inn, North Platte.

■ **From Sgt. 1st Class Bonnie Frazier:**

Hello! My phone number is (402) 309-8162 and email address is [bonnie.d.frazier@mail.mil](mailto:bonnie.d.frazier@mail.mil). Staff Sgt. Mandy Hatcher's phone number is (402) 309-8164 and [mandy.r.hatcher@mail.mil](mailto:mandy.r.hatcher@mail.mil). We are located in the Joint Force Head-

### DEERS/ID Card Stations

- ♦ G1 - 2433 N.W. 24th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524: (402) 309-8167/8168/8169;
- ♦ East Campus Readiness Center, 2000 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503: (402) 309-8014.
- ♦ Penterman Armory at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln (402) 309-1724/1719;
- ♦ Air Guard (Lincoln Air Base) Bldg 600 Room E209: (402) 309-1542;
- ♦ Offutt Air Force Base: (402) 294-5019;

- ♦ Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney: (402) 309-7758/7752;
- ♦ Norfolk Armory 817 S 1st St Norfolk: (402) 309-8908/8900;
- ♦ 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), 220 County Road A, Bldg. 508, Ashland, NE 68003, (402) 309-7809/7628;
- ♦ The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.

Remember, you need two forms of ID when you arrive for your appointment.

quarters Building at the Nebraska National Guard air base, 2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, NE 68524.

Your Tri-Care manager is Staff Sgt. Travis Garrett. His number is (402) 309-1541. Contact him for all your Tri-Care related questions.

Just a reminder: Retirees, you can get your "Retirement ID Card" as early as 14 days prior to your

60th birthday. Retirees can apply for retired pay as early as 12 months before their 60th birthday, but it usually kicks in three months after their 60th birthday with back pay on the first check and the next check will be your normal retirement check.

Enjoy your well-deserved retirement!



# Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



## Parenting website aims to assist in communications

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — Service members who deploy or are otherwise separated from their families due to mission needs now have an online resource allowing them to hone their parenting skills as they reconnect with their children.

Pam Murphy, the Defense Department's lead psychologist for the website, said the launch of <http://www.militaryparenting.org> offers unprecedented, comprehensive and free computer-based training from a service member's perspective on parenting and building strong relationships with their children.

A clinical psychologist with more than 20 years of experience in community and private practice, Murphy said the Integrated Mental Health Strategy Program is a collaborative initiative between the Veterans Affairs Department and DoD.

"We initially did an environmental scan of everything within the DoD as well as commercially available, and one of the areas that seemed to be at a deficit was a comprehensive parenting program that looks at the basics," Murphy said.

She noted while a plethora of parenting information exists online, it was difficult to identify a free, private "military-centric" program. "This is one of the first of its kind," Murphy said.

The interactive site, she said, develops and reinforces parenting skills to help families reconnect through in-depth technology solutions that appeal to younger parents.

"Many of the parents in the service member population are gener-

ally younger," she said. "Prominent age groups of their children are typically 5 or below."

Murphy added the site goes beyond the job and hits home in terms of affecting family relationships, building resilience and helping service members to be happy with their lives within the military.

She also noted service members' personalized accounts interwoven into the site make the situations and solutions relatable.

"We included videos of real service personnel... to talk about their real-life experiences with parenting, reintegrating and making those everyday decisions," Murphy said.

The website consolidates and simplifies information previously accessible across multiple resources, said Air Force Senior Airman Matthew Siegele, a protocol specialist, and his wife, Air Force Staff Sgt. Sabrina Siegele, noncommissioned officer in charge of knowledge operations, both of whom work at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

"We've been through so many parenting classes, counseling and therapy, and a lot of the resources and advice is mirrored on this site," Sabrina said.

"This website is excellent — it's a one-stop shop instead of jumping around to multiple appointments."

During family separations, Murphy said, applications such as Skype and Facetime can help in keeping families connected, but the military parenting website provides ideas for technology-based activities that can help in reuniting parents and children after a deployment.

## Official stresses value of saving for emergencies

WASHINGTON (AFPS) - Tucking away money in savings accounts for emergencies is as critical to service members' financial readiness as establishing retirement accounts, the director of the Defense Department's office of family policy and children and youth said Oct. 15.

DoD officials encourage troops and their families to have emergency savings funds for unforeseen contingencies, such as when a car needs mechanical work, a washing machine breaks down, or when out-of-pocket money is needed during a household move, Barbara Thompson said in an interview with American Forces Press Service and the Pentagon Channel.

"You want to make sure you have at least \$500 in emergency funds so you don't have to look for financial assistance or a long-term loan to cover your daily expenses," Thompson advised service members and their families.

Troops and families also are encouraged to have six months' worth of salary earnings put away in case something disastrous happens, such as if a spouse loses his or her job, Thompson said.

"If anything catastrophic happens, you want to have enough

savings to pay your mortgage and your big bills, because those are your life investments and you don't want to see any of them in jeopardy," she advised.

"The more costs you have, the more savings should be in your plan," Thompson added. The plan, she added, should account for ongoing expenses such as monthly car payments and for occasional extra costs, such as putting a deposit down on an apartment during a move.

Just as important to a savings plan, Thompson said, is living within one's means. And, an important question that should spring to mind when making purchases, she said, is: Do I need it, or do I just want it?

"If the answer is you only want it, (you should consider) putting that money into a savings account," Thompson said.

By examining spending habits, living within a budget and saving for emergencies and unforeseen circumstances, service members gain another benefit: becoming financially resilient and prepared when they get out of the military and enter the civilian workplace, where they can be bombarded with spending lures such as attractive credit card offers, Thompson said.



**Haunting The Armory:** A group of military kids check out the treats and prizes at a table during the Haunted Armory party held Oct. 25 at the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

## Hundreds attend haunted armories

By Maj. Kevin Hynes  
Editor

Hundreds of spooks, goblins, princesses and super heroes descended upon four Nebraska National Guard readiness centers as the Guard hosted their annual "Haunted Armory" parties in Omaha, Kearney, Grand Island and Lincoln.

According to Kelli Czarnick, a contractor who serves as the Nebraska National Guard's lead Child and Youth Program coordinator, the parties are designed to provide a safe, fun and free evening for military children and their families to celebrate Halloween.

Czarnick said that a total of 358 military kids and 273 adults attended the four separate parties. She added that this year's celebrations were probably even more important than past ones, considering that many of the kids and their parents were dealing with the lingering effects of the recent partial federal government shutdown.

"This year, in particular, we were excited to be able to provide families with an event at no costs, given the furloughs and government shutdown that affected so many of our military members and (Department of Defense) civilian employees," she said. "Children and parents also had the opportunity to interact with people from organizations who support the military and to receive information that may be beneficial to them such as activities or resources they can utilize."

According to Czarnick, community support was strong at each of the events, including PMI Nebraska, which donated pumpkins for the Grand Island event, and the Alpha Delta Kappa-Epsilon sorority, which donated education supplies for all of the kids who attended the Grand Island event.

Czarnick said the most popular event varied by location, ranging



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

**Minion On The Loose:** Bill Buettner and his daughter, Eve, pose for a photograph after the costume contest, Oct. 25, at the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

from trick-or-treating, to interactive games, photo booths and balloon art. Kids also had the opportunity to compete in costume contests, which proved to be extremely competitive, she said.

Additionally, the Elks Club donated a check to the Headquarters Operation Fund, earmarked for other youth events. Czarnick said those funds will be used to pay for such future events as next year's Operation Hidden Egg in April and the Haunted Armories in October.

"We were happy with the way the Haunted Armories turned out this year," she said, "particularly because of the outside factors what could have affected our attendance, such as the government shutdown. This limited our reach to many of our service members and their families."

"We were very excited about all of the organizations who were willing to participate," Czarnick added. "We definitely could not provide these opportunities for our service members and their families without their help."



**Taking It All In:** Nolan Pehrson, 2, takes in the festivities at the Penterman Armory in Lincoln, Oct. 25. The son of Jared and Laurie Pehrson of Wahoo, Neb., Nolan came to the Haunted Armory party dressed as a pirate.

## Giving Thanks

During the month of November and on into December, we have many opportunities to pause and give thanks.

### The Adjutant General

Major General

Daryl Bohac



We begin with Veterans Day in which we take time to reflect on the sacrifices made by veterans in service to their nation and in defense of the constitution of the United States. It is doubly meaningful for veterans of the National Guard, since they also sacrificed in service to their state and in defense of the state constitution.

Our veterans' service makes it possible for the citizens of our great nation and in our state to be engaged. They can be engaged because our veterans protected the rights enshrined in the constitution of the United States such as the freedom of religion, free speech, a free press, the right to petition the government and the right to vote.

Perhaps most importantly, their service preserves the right for the minority voice to be heard so that the majority rule may be informed by all. That takes an engaged citizenry and for that I give thanks to our veterans.

I also give thanks to those who take action when they see someone in need. I recently was going through the chow line at Greenleaf Training Site and a young Private First Class was serving breakfast sandwiches like it was the most important job in the world.

Turns out it was. He and his wife were without a home, living in their car and looking for work.

I knew none of this when his NCO approached me and asked if I would present him an Adjutant's General Coin for Excellence for his work ethic and attitude during annual training.

I didn't have a coin with me, but Brig. Gen. Scott Gronewold did.

So, his NCO called him over and General Gronewold presented him the coin and complimented him on his energy and positive attitude.

Now for the rest of the story... the NCO, upon discovering his Soldier's living situation, moved in with his significant other so that the Pfc and his spouse could move in to his apartment. He then worked with the Soldier and his spouse and helped them find employment. When I hear about this kind of leadership and our own taking care of our own, I give thanks and know that the future of our Nebraska National Guard is in very good hands.

Finally I give thanks for everything that our TEAM accomplishes for the citizens of our great nation and our state. The full spectrum of what we do is probably never fully realized by the public, which is all the more reason why we must be engaged with our communities; letting them know who we are and what we do.

For the Soldiers and Airmen, for the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, and for the employees of the Nebraska Military Department, I give thanks for what you do and how you do it. Your service to protect and defend the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Nebraska and providing combat ready forces to combatant commanders when called upon is a gift of sacrifice for all we serve.

## Changing last name difficult

Who would have ever thought changing your last name would be such a hard decision?

Not me. I always imagined finding the man of my dreams, getting married and taking his last name. Sounds simple, right? I thought so, too, until I joined the military.

After joining the Nebraska Army National Guard in 2009 my whole prospective on the importance of my last name changed.

Your last name instantly becomes your identifier. I was not Heidi Krueger anymore, but just Krueger. Rank then replaced my first name.

Starting off as Private Krueger, or as I saw it as a public affairs specialist, Pvt. Krueger. Then soon I became Pfc. Krueger and then Spc. Krueger. But, as I learned, with those ranks you are really just identified by your last name.

As my career progressed I realized Krueger was much more than the name on my uniform, in my email address and on all my documents.

When someone said my name, Krueger, everyone knew I was either a journalist, photographer or worked in the public affairs office. If someone said, 'Go talk to Krueger,' they knew exactly who I was.

You have no idea how great that makes me feel. I know that all my hard work and dedication to my job has made an impact and/or impression on Soldiers throughout Nebraska.

I can happily say, I made a name of myself. I joined the National Guard for a change in my life and it is definitely one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Then came the day I met Mason McClintock. I still recall the first time meeting him and telling

### Another Voice

Sergeant

Heidi McClintock



had to make. Keeping Krueger would make everything in my military career easy just add Mason as my husband, hyphenating it would make life a little more confusing in my eyes and taking his last name would change a lot.

The first thing I could think of was, 'I'm sure people would wonder who McClintock is without seeing me in person.'

I wanted opinions, so I went to my friends, family, coworkers, Mason of course, and even Google. I got all of the different options for my last name from everyone. Each person made valid points, which just made it 10 times harder.

Then I went to Google. I found articles, polls and information about changing last names. I'm pretty sure Google just made my decision even harder than I thought after reading an article talking about how writers usually only don't change their name once their career was started.

On Oct. 19, I made my dream of wearing a wedding dress down the aisle come true when I married Mason McClintock.

Ultimately I knew I had to choose.

As you can see by my byline McClintock won. I choose to go with McClintock due to my traditional family backgrounds, for Mason's sake and the start of a new journey.

With the start of a new journey, I start a new chapter in my book.

I am the same person with a new last name doing what I love, covering the National Guard and telling its story. It's really my honor to preserve the stories of men and women risking their lives to preserve and protect the freedom of the United States of America.

And with that, Sgt. Heidi McClintock is now reporting for duty.

## Every Airman counts

By Gen. Larry O. Spencer

Air Force vice chief of staff

*(Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt of an editorial General Spencer wrote for the Air Force News Service on Oct. 31.)*

WASHINGTON (AFNS)—When I was a young Airman, during the heat of an intense intramural flag football game, a fellow Airman, who was frustrated that he could not stop me from advancing the ball, yelled the "N" word out loud. I was shocked and confused... I was an American Airman and I didn't expect that kind of verbal attack from a fellow Airman...

The Air Force stood for something and I liked it. Those words meant I could always trust and depend on my fellow Airmen. But at that moment, on that field, those values had been violated and I felt let down...

Then something remarkable happened. Several Airmen, on both sides of the ball, spoke up — forcefully. They chastised the offender and made it clear they did not approve of his outbursts or attitude.

The referee, who was an NCO, also stepped forward and not only ejected him from the game, but directed him to report to his first sergeant the following day. The next day, not only did my teammates (on both teams) go out of their way to apologize for this single Airman's behavior, but the Airman who committed the act also personally apologized.

As an officer, some of the best experiences in my life have been the opportunities I've had to command. I especially enjoyed my squadron command because it was in the midst of Operation Desert Shield/Storm and my entire unit was singularly focused...

One busy night on the flightline, a young Airman approached me and said she was being harassed by several male Airmen. She went on to say

that this wasn't the first time the harassment had occurred and typically she would just "grin and bear it." However, since we were literally preparing for war, she did not want to be distracted and just wanted the behavior to stop. Although she was not assigned to my squadron, we quickly and decisively dealt with those involved.

Several months later I ran into the female Airman at the gym. I reminded her about her words, "grin and bear it," and asked why she put up with that behavior without speaking out. She explained that she so badly wanted to be part of the squadron that she remained silent as not to "make waves."

Her story bothered me a lot. For a young Airman to feel like she had to "go along to get along" by accepting behavior that was repulsive was unacceptable to me...

As vice chief of staff, I cringe when I read reports of sexual assaults in our Air Force... Airmen who act in this manner are not representative of the Air Force I serve and I won't tolerate it. Neither should you. I know the vast majority of our Airmen don't act that way—they understand the importance of fostering a culture of dignity and respect and they live it every day. To those Airmen, I say thank you for living up to Air Force core values and I ask you to join me in re-doubling our efforts to NOT TOLERATE those who don't live-up to those standards. ...

For those who cannot or will not live up to Air Force standards, I offer a simple phrase: "shape up or ship out..."

You and I now have a sacred responsibility to not only keep us the best, but to make the AF even greater. That's a big responsibility, but it starts by treating everyone with dignity and respect and remembering that every Airman counts.

## Veterans Day 2013 truly memorable

Considering everything that's occurred this past year — sequestration, furloughs, government shutdowns, drill postponements — it's sometimes hard to concentrate on all of the good things that serving in the Nebraska National

Guard, or any branch of the military for that matter, bring with it.

That's why this year's Veterans Day was like a breath of fresh air.

In a lot of ways, attending a number of activities, including the dedication of a new Medal of Honor plaque at the State Capitol in Lincoln, Neb., really did allow me to refocus on some important things that really do still matter. Important things like service to communities, state and nation, being part of a military family, and being dedicated to something far bigger than any one of us alone.

Let me explain a little further. Every year for probably the past decade, a number of businesses across the United States put on a variety of Veterans Day activities. Some — well, actually many — of these events involve free breakfasts or dinners for veterans.

For whatever reason, I've never participated in any of these events. That is until this year when I attended both a breakfast and a dinner put on by two local Lincoln businesses.

Quite honestly, I wasn't sure what to expect when I went in, however, what I experienced during those two meals was something I'm not sure that I will soon forget.

First off, the meals were very good and the staffs of both restaurants really went out of their way to make each and every veteran feel special. However, this was far more than just a meal, though.

As I sat at my table, I decided

### My Turn

Editor, Prairie Soldier

Kevin J. Hynes



to come over to a group of elementary students and speak with them. Hagemeister almost seemed to be waiting for that invitation as he quickly waded into the group of students, said a few words and then answered their questions.

One student finally asked a question that Hagemeister seemed to be waiting for: "Can I touch your medal?" Quickly popping the medal from his neck, Hagemeister held it out for the students to touch and admire. As the students did, Hagemeister told them that he had not had the medal polished since it was first placed around his neck by President Lyndon Johnson nearly 45 years earlier. It had been touched by countless students since, although he had had the ribbon replaced a few times.

Watching this exchange, I couldn't help but wonder who among these students was Hagemeister providing the encouragement and inspiration they need to do something truly great with their life. I also wondered about all of those other students who had touched that medal over the years. How many of them had gone on to do something extraordinary with their lives.

I realized that what this unassuming retired Soldier was doing was continuing to give of himself. He was continuing to serve and the impact that he was having on all those he was coming into contact with could not be measured, only appreciated.

And that's when I realized that being a veteran in the United States is pretty special. It's something that I don't think I truly appreciated until this past year's commemoration.

Hopefully it's something that I won't ever forget.

to just look around and take in all that was happening around me. The crowds were mixed, ranging from elderly World War II and Korean veterans down to those from the Vietnam-era and far more recent. Some dressed up in jackets and patriotic ties. Others wore faded t-shirts and jeans.

Nearly every one of them, though, wore a hat, a pin, or shirt designating their military affiliation. And every one of them were engaged in story-telling, most of which seemed to deal with military experiences.

Sitting there, I started thinking: Just imagine how many stories there are here. Just imagine all of the experiences, all of the hardships, all of the joy that were represented in these rooms.

Later that day, I had the opportunity to cover the unveiling of a new Medal of Honor plaque at the State Capitol. In attendance was retired Lt. Col. Charles Hagemeister, one of Nebraska's only two living Medal of Honor recipients. The ceremony, as expected, was truly something else, as the state paused to remember the 72 people with Nebraska ties whose names have been placed on the plaque, which will eventually be installed on the 14th floor of the Capitol.

However, it was after the ceremony that I saw something truly remarkable. As the crowd began to filter out of the Capitol's rotunda, Hagemeister, who earned his medal while serving as an enlisted medic during the Vietnam War, was asked

## PROMOTIONS

### Army National Guard

**Captain**  
Joshua P. McClure

### Chief Warrant Officer 3

Russell L. Eddy  
David M. Flores  
Jeffrey J. Kuklis  
Eric L. Riley  
Jeffrey P. Switzer

### Sergeant First Class

Melissa A. Benton  
Christine E. Braun  
Daniel J. Fellman  
Jeremy W. Hartwell  
Scott A. Kennec  
Katherine K. Smith  
Jeremy S. Tiede  
Andrew J. Yates

### Staff Sergeant

James M. Engel  
Derek S. Fryer  
Tanner K. Hippen  
James E. Iske  
Zack R. Marshall  
Stuart J. Mason  
Brooke M. Peters  
Angel R. Rodriguez  
Dennis A. Sedlacek  
Yvonne M. Wadas  
Laura N. Zietz

### Sergeant

Spencer K. Bartlett  
Coltin V. Bebenese  
Kayla M. Bledso  
Nissa L. Brown  
Erica A. Cardenas  
Christy R. Collins  
Kirsten M. Confer  
Jared T. Cornell  
Jared M. Cyr  
Austin J. Edeal  
Libby L. Henschke  
Craig D. Hoppes

Riley S. Huskey  
Joel G. Jones  
Dakota A. Kingham  
Amber L. Kloss  
Lawrence M. Lind  
Katie T. Lopez  
Darcey D. Mendez  
Alan J. Muneio  
Paul D. Myers  
Westley P. Negley  
Erica C. Olivares  
Tyler D. Petty  
Nancy L. Rayaparra  
Randy M. Robertson  
Kendall R. Sage  
Bobby Sanchez  
Johnathan E. Weinmaster  
Jason B. Wilcox

### Specialist

Tara S. Burnett  
Christopher J. Cameron  
Alex Y. Connor  
Taylor K. Duffy  
William J. Erickson  
Luis F. Godinez Jr.  
Tanner D. Henning  
Jonathan C. Houser  
Dien T. Le  
Trevor J. Plautz  
Carter A. Quinn  
Joshua S. Schmidt  
Rakia A. Singleton  
Christopher J. Smith  
Christopher W. Suttles  
Shawn M. Weibert  
Joshua A. Wiese

### Private First Class

Austin A. Bonner  
Corey E. Doorlag  
David W. Fuhs  
Cody R. Hamling  
Mark L. Jacobs  
Miranda J. Lynch  
Austin D. Niemann  
Steven Z. Parker

Andrew P. Percic  
Shalyn K. Prochnow  
Blake E. A. Reppert  
Charles J. Royce

### Air National Guard

**Lieutenant Colonel**  
Robert M. Schafer

### Major

Lloyd R. Blessington Jr.

Robert J. Mangels

### First Lieutenant

Aaron F. Karpisek  
Alex R. Salmon

### Senior Master Sergeant

James M. Restau

### Master Sergeant

David C. Parker

Jill C. Schurman

### Technical Sergeant

Matthew J. Conboy  
Cynthia J. Jackson  
Eric L. Pyatt  
Brian R. Trollope

### Staff Sergeant

Jacob Bowder  
Lane D. Kelly

Caitlin A. Price  
Jared T. Stubbendeck  
**Senior Airman**  
Trevor E. Meiler

**Airman First Class**  
Daniel W. Burbach Jr.  
John J. Brunk

### Airman

Nicholas J. Jackson

## AWARDS

### Army National Guard

**Bronze Star Medal**  
Spc. Brody C. Staman

### Purple Heart

Spc. Brody C. Staman

### Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Curtis L. Abendroth  
Lt. Col. Brent D. Flachsbart  
Lt. Col. Shane M. Martin  
Lt. Col. Erick J. Teegerstrom  
Maj. Dale L. Burrage  
Maj. Edwin W. Davis  
Maj. Daniel L. Smith  
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Teresa A. Domeier  
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jeffrey J. Kuklis  
Chief Warrant Officer 4 David W. Wiese  
Sgt. Maj. Shawn M. Griffith  
Master Sgt. Troy A. Redl  
Master Sgt. Pamela R. Whisenhunt  
Master Sgt. Edward G. Whitehill  
Sgt. 1st Class Adam J. Kosch  
Sgt. 1st Class Mary M. Moss  
Sgt. 1st Class Jason M. Schiermeyer  
Sgt. 1st Class Kevin D. Smith  
Sgt. 1st Class Lance A. Zobel  
Staff Sgt. Patrick S. Sitter

Sgt. James M. Nordman

### Army Commendation Medal

Cpt. John L. Bechenbauer  
Cpt. Aaron J. Fisk  
Cpt. Dennis R. Frey Jr.  
Master Sgt. Jeffrey L. Rowell  
Staff Sgt. Megan G. Dannelly  
Staff Sgt. Jerod W. Ideus  
Staff Sgt. Topacio A. Ortiz  
Sgt. Wade K. Bradley  
Spc. Dion W. Hixson

### Army Achievement Medal

Staff Sgt. Timothy J. Brewer  
Staff Sgt. Stephen P. Dorcey  
Staff Sgt. John M. Ferguson  
Staff Sgt. William J. Jones  
Sgt. Jaimy D. Albrecht  
Sgt. Daniel G. Anderson  
Sgt. Spencer K. Bartlett  
Sgt. Caleb M. Brown  
Sgt. Jacob N. Campbell  
Sgt. Mario A. Chavez  
Sgt. Shane D. Harsh  
Sgt. Cody L. Howell  
Sgt. Shiloh M. Littrel  
Sgt. Justin Metcalf

Sgt. Elizabeth I. Nielsen  
Sgt. Nicholas A. F. Sasada  
Sgt. James F. Schreiner  
Sgt. Arron T. Smith  
Spc. Brentton A. Jackson  
Spc. Anthony J. Keever  
Spc. John M. Rogers  
Spc. Arron M. Sands  
Spc. Brody C. Staman  
Spc. Kaio J. Uhing  
Spc. Andrew J. Uhlenkamp  
Pfc. Dracy L. Bender  
Pfc. John R. Gahan  
Pfc. Casey S. Harris  
Pfc. Troy D. Thielke  
Pvt. Julia I. Anderson

### Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Nickolas J. Effle  
Staff Sgt. Robert J. Ternus  
Spc. Brody C. Staman

### Nebraska National Guard

**Commendation Medal**  
2nd Lt. Thomas K. Ballard  
2nd Lt. Joseph R. Grundman  
Sgt. 1st Class William M. McClure  
Sgt. 1st Class Jason P. Sharp  
Staff Sgt. James T. Estes

Staff Sgt. Karl E. Girard  
Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Kozak  
Staff Sgt. Koan L. Nissen

### Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal

Sgt. Caroline E. Gies  
Sgt. Peter K. Lass  
Sgt. James S. Morphew  
Sgt. Randy M. Robertson  
Sgt. Nicholas A. Vancura  
Spc. Alexis S. Dossantos  
Spc. Elisabeth R. H. Eisenmann  
Spc. Ashley N. Lindemann  
Spc. Michael R. Neil  
Spc. James R. Palmer  
Spc. Ryan M. Polich  
Spc. Victoria L. Smith  
Pfc. Brian J. Sydik

## RETIREMENTS

### Army National Guard

Sgt. 1st Class Richard A. Cole Jr.  
Sgt. 1st Class Richard A. Hagedorn  
Sgt. 1st Class Daniel C. Nichols  
Staff Sgt. Gregory L. Henderson  
Staff Sgt. Jeremy L. Klein  
Staff Sgt. Charles B. Roberts

## Shorttakes

# Recruiting, Retention welcomes new commander

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

The Nebraska National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion welcomed a new commander during a change of command ceremony held at the "Spirit of 1776" armory in Lincoln, Neb., Oct. 11.

In front of friends, family and Soldiers of the battalion, Lt. Col. Shane Martin relinquished command to Maj. Vernon Chandler.

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, officiated over the ceremony and reflected on the Martin's success during his command. Recruiting and Retention achieved 110 percent of the enlisted mission, 180 percent of officer mission and 150 percent of warrant officer mission.

"At a time when strength mattered more than ever," said Bohac, "in order to deliver the mission day-in and day-out, not only for our roles as combatant commanders, but also to the citizens of the state, (we had) to ensure we had the Soldiers we needed to meet the mission."

"So, job well done," he added. "You've served admirably in this position."

Martin reflected on his time as commander and compared it to a nature walk after being told to enjoy the "green mile" upon its selection as commander. "With a team of 30 strong recruiters acting as the gardeners on this nature hike, we were able to nurture young warriors with a strong officer management team and a dedicated staff," said Martin.

Martin said he enjoyed watching the success of the Recruit Sustainment Program and watching 85 percent of those young warriors ship off to basic training. The journey, however, was not without its bumps in the road, he added.

"We got past it," said Martin. "We improved our techniques and our processes because of it."

"Even though it wasn't an easy nature walk, it was an awesome opportunity and I really appreciate the leadership's faith in me for this phenomenal opportunity to join this green mile," he added.



Photo by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

**New Commander:** Maj. Vernon Chandler (right) accepts the guidon of the Recruiting and Retention Battalion signifying his taking command of the unit during an Oct. 11 ceremony at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb. Chandler took command of the unit from outgoing commander Lt. Col. Shane Martin.

An Arapahoe, Neb., native, Martin received his associate of Arts from McCook Community College in 1991, his bachelor of Science in Finance and Real Estate from the University of Nebraska-Kearney in 1993, and his master of Business Administration from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2000. He enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1988 as a petroleum supply specialist. Following his commissioning in 1993 he served in a number of leadership and command roles. He deployed to Iraq in 2009 with the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade.

Martin and his wife, Ann, have two children, Ashley and Ayden.

After Chandler assumed command, Bohac welcomed the major and his family to command, thanked them for their support in the past, and said he was confident in his ability to take over.

"Your experience across the force... will help you lead this organization to new standards and new

achievements," said Bohac. "You have some big shoes to fill, I would say, in following Lieutenant Colonel Martin, but I am highly confident you will lead the mission forth and you will maintain the strength and increase it over time."

Chandler thanked his family for their support and thanked leadership for the opportunity.

"I consider it an honor and a privilege to be selected for command of this battalion, but more so to be selected to lead these Soldiers," said Chandler. "I appreciate your confidence in my ability to accomplish such a challenging mission. I have been extremely fortunate to have had a supportive family, but also to have had the support of great officers and (noncommissioned officer) mentors throughout my career."

"(Lieutenant) Colonel Martin, your hard work over the past year is evident," he added. "Thank-you for leaving behind a proud and strong organization. To the Soldiers of the battalion, thank-you for being so

welcoming during the past week. I look forward to working with you over the next two years."

Chandler received his bachelor of Science in Business Administration/Marketing Management from Florida Southern College in Lakeland, Fla., in 1997. Upon graduation he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and served in the active Army until he transitioned into the Nebraska National Guard in 2006. Chandler has served in multiple leadership and command roles, most recently as the executive/administrative officer for the 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance). He deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1998 and Afghanistan in 2008. Chandler completed the in-residence Command and General Staff Officer's course at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., in 2010, earning a Masters in Military Arts and Science.

Chandler and his wife, Lisa, have a daughter, Katie, and reside in Lincoln.

# Kosovo service medal shifting, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal now being awarded

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – The Defense Department has announced the transition of the Kosovo Campaign Medal to the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, effective Jan. 1, 2014.

In a Sept. 19 memorandum, Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Jessica L. Wright stated that the KCM recognized the significant contributions of U.S. military personnel in support of Operation Joint Guardian since 1999 as part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force.

"The contributions of U.S. military personnel have been integral to ending open hostilities and to reducing ethnic tensions, allowing for the dramatic reduction of force levels over the past decade," Wright noted.

As smaller contingencies of U.S. forces continue to support Operation Joint Guardian and NATO headquarters in Sarajevo, the AFEM will accordingly recognize that support of operations in the Balkans, the memo states.

The AFEM area of eligibility mirrors that of the KCM, Wright explained, with the addition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Hungary. The eligible area also encompasses Serbian land and airspace including Vojvodina, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, and U.S. Naval vessels operating in the Adriatic Sea.

The Department of Defense Manual 1348.33, Volume 2, "Manual of Military Decorations and Awards" contains specific eligibility criteria.

# Proven Warriors

## Military Police test skills during annual challenge

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Staff Photojournalist

**“I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade.”**

Nebraska Army National Guardsmen participating in the Sept. 7-8 Military Police Challenge at the Mead Training Site truly lived up to the words of the U.S. Army's Warrior Ethos when they competed in a two-day competition designed to test their abilities as Soldiers and as military policemen.

Members of the 402nd Military Police Battalion and one team from the 192nd Military Police 'Law and Order' Detachment endured 10 fierce challenges during a 48-hour period, testing the Soldiers mentally and physically. Operating in teams ranging from three to seven Soldiers, the competition was designed to bring Guardsmen from different sections and platoons together in a competitive event.

“We are mixing everyone up and building good camaraderie throughout the whole unit,” said Sgt. Brian Sloan, unit supply specialist with the 402nd M.P. Bn. “This is an individual effort for a team score.”

After a recent deployment and change of command, the 402nd hadn't conducted a challenge like this in a couple of years. That's why unit leaders wanted to get the Soldiers out and mixing together in a training event that introduced a heavy dosage of competition into the mix.

“As a staff, we are trying to get back to getting the Soldiers in a competitive environment,” said Lt. Col. Randall Ames, 402nd M.P. Bn. commander.

“When we put together this challenge, we wanted to focus on activities that would push the Soldiers not only to compete against one another, but identify Soldiers possibly to go forward from the battalion for (the state Best Warrior Competition) as well as those Soldiers that are willing to make that effort and possibly go to a school if opportunity was available,” added Ames. “So with that in mind, we are doing a lot of physical things.”

Were they ever.

Over two days, the Military Police Challenge tested the compet-



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Bombs Away:** A Soldier with the 402nd Military Police Battalion throws a practice grenade during the Military Police Challenge at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb., Sept. 8. The grenade portion of the challenge involved throwing practice grenades into different objects to improvise as doors and windows.

ing Soldiers both physically and mentally in ways they probably didn't expect.

### Day 1

Soldiers started the challenge with the Army Physical Fitness Test in the morning followed by land navigation in the afternoon at Mead Training Site. In addition, Soldiers were tested on general military knowledge including non-commissioned officer information, history, current events and more.

### Day 2

After putting plenty of miles in during the APFT and land navigation, Soldiers endured a 4-mile ruck march. Following the ruck march, the Guardsmen then completed a round robin of six different events including assembling three different weapon systems, a grenade throw, Humvee push, preventive maintenance checks and services, Mission Oriented Protective Posture levels and radio operations.

According to the Soldiers, the competition was definitely not for the faint of heart.

“Land navigation was challenging,” said Sloan. “A lot of people have never run this course before.”

The teams were given four points and two hours to accomplish the land navigation course.

But according to most of the Soldiers, the ruck march was probably the most challenging.

“It was a good distance and there was some high motivation,” said Sloan.

The ruck march proved to be

the most difficult challenge of the competition. That challenge became even greater when one Soldier started experiencing chest pains that required him to be rushed to the hospital.

“Unfortunately I'm a bit concerned that the enthusiasm sometimes doesn't equate to their physical ability,” Ames said after sending the Soldier to the hospital.

Still, Ames said, he was pleased by how quickly other Soldiers responded to the situation, adding that he and his staff used the situation to help their Soldiers better excel while also understanding their limitations.

Ames said the battalion hopes to incorporate even more sections in future M.P. Challenges.

When the dust settled after this year's competition, the 192nd M.P. Det. team consisting of teammates Staff Sgt. Stephen Dorsey, Sgt. Jacob Campbell, Sgt. Mario Chavez, Sgt. Nicholas Sasada, Pfc. Casey Harris, Pfc. Troy Thielke and Pvt. Julia Anderson had placed first.

Ames said comments he received showed that the time invested in the competition was well spent.

“(The Soldiers) were worn, tired, sore... but they were happy they had the chance to do it,” said Ames. “I'm very proud of Soldiers making that effort, even some of the Soldiers that knew they couldn't physically do some of the activities. They still wanted to participate as team members because of the activities they could help with.”



**Bring It Home:** Spc. Chuck Stierwalt, an internment/resettlement specialist with the 402nd Military Police Battalion, finishes the 4-mile ruck march portion of the military Police Challenge at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb., Sept. 8. The ruck march was one of 10 events in the challenge.

## Nebraska Military Department honors generous fans



**Honored:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, presents Dan Whitney (aka “Larry the Cable Guy”) with a plaque in recognition of Dan and Cara Whitney's continuing support of the men and women of the Nebraska National Guard. Bohac presented the Whitneys with the Nebraska National Guard Legion of Merit for continuing to contribute skybox seats to Nebraska football games to Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, the majority of whom had just returned home from lengthy deployments to such locations as Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. Since 2006, more than 300 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen have attended the games, courtesy of the Whitneys.



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

**Big Thanks For Big Supporters:** Members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard flank Dan Whitney (aka “Larry the Cable Guy”) following a Sept. 7 ceremony honoring Whitney and his wife, Cara, for the work they've done providing support to Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen. Since 2006, more than 300 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen – the majority of whom had just returned home from deployments to such places as Iraq, Afghanistan or the Balkans – have had the opportunity to attend a University of Nebraska football game, sitting in skybox seats donated by the Whitneys.