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Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Army Guard director 'returns home' for first Nebraska tour

■Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy makes first official visit to Nebraska Army National Guard

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

There aren't many occasions where one can call a visit by an Army lieutenant general to the Nebraska National Guard a homecoming; but then again, there aren't many occasions when a former Nebraska adjutant general returns to the state of his roots for his first official visit as the new director of the Army National Guard.

Kadavy

So, it shouldn't come as much surprise that one of Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy's words used to describe his visit to the staff of the Nebraska Army National Guard referred to it as a "coming home."

"You have no idea how good it is to be home again," said Kadavy as he sat down for a briefing at the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb., April 22. "In fact, you have no idea how good it is be surrounded by so many familiar and friendly faces."

For Kadavy, who served as the Nebraska adjutant general from 2006 until early 2008, the April 22-23 visit to the Nebraska Army National Guard was designed to accomplish a number of important tasks to help him better accomplish his new job as the director of the Army National Guard in Washington, D.C.

"It's always good to come home. It reminds you of where you came from. And it's always good to not only see familiar faces – Nebraska has some great Soldiers, so I always enjoy coming home to talk to them – but it's good to get to know what's going on," said Kadavy, who is responsible for guiding the formulation, development and implementation of policies affecting the Army National Guard's 350,000 Soldiers in the nation's 54 states, territories and the District of Columbia.

The trip to Nebraska marked Kadavy's first official visit to the Cornhusker state since becoming the director in March 2015. Kadavy isn't a stranger to Nebraska, though. Far from it. In fact, Kadavy said that many of his core leader-

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On Angels' Wings

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Tight Formation Flying: Members of the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels demonstration team fly in formation during a May 8 performance at the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house in Lincoln. Despite being grounded by smoky air on May 7, the Navy team was able to headline the May 8 show, which attracted a massive crowd of onlookers.

GUARDIANS OF FREEDOM AIRSHOW
A SALUTE TO LINCOLN

Nebraska welcomes U.S. Navy's Blue Angels, other aerial acts to Lincoln during Guardians of Freedom event

See stories and photos on 8-11.

Deploying Army Guard aviators, families wished good luck in June

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard's most deployed unit hit the trail again, June 3, when approximately 35 Soldiers assigned to a Lincoln-based helicopter ambulance company were wished good luck before starting a deployment that will once again take them halfway around the world and into a combat zone.

The Soldiers are members of the Nebraska Army Guard's Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, which is being mobilized for Operation Inherent Resolve. It marks the first time the unit – which has deployed numerous times over the past 20 years under various unit designations – has mobilized since a second tour in Iraq from 2010-11, although half of the unit did deploy to Kuwait last year.

According to Maj. Thomas Traylor, unit commander, the Soldiers of the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter medical evacuation company are ready to once again tackle their overseas mission.

"We've been training for a long time," said Traylor, about an hour before the start of a send-off ceremony for the Soldiers and their families at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Lincoln where numerous military and governmental leaders would gather

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Daddy's Sergeant: Staff Sgt. Matthew Hawke's 15-month-old daughter, Brooklyn, plays with his hat before the start of the June 3 send-off ceremony for the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion.

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Nebraska Soldier climbs mountaintop, earns first best warrior title for state

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The last few steps may have been the most difficult… and the easiest.

His boots pounding over the wooden deck of a rounded, historic bridge near an even more historic battlefield, Sgt. Calvin Koziol, a scout sniper from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, said his mind began to wander as he completed the final steps of a brutal 14-mile rucksack march.

Koziol

Koziol, who was competing as Nebraska's first-ever participant in the National Guard's national Best Warrior Competition, held June 20-23 at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, said his mind was suddenly struck with "flashback" images of the entire journey, which had started back in Nebraska this spring, that was finally coming to an end.

"You get a good flashback to the whole experience," Koziol said several days later. "You're finally finishing, so you have to give it your all, (but) it's just such a special feeling to be able to complete something like that… I don't know, it just makes it all worth it to do something that special."

What Koziol had just done was become the first Nebraska Soldier to complete the final event of the national-level competition, which ended at the historic North Bridge at Concord, Massachusetts, where local militiamen had stood up to the British Army regulars and the first "shot that was heard around the world," was fired in 1775.

Koziol had just won Nebraska's first national Best Warrior title.

According to Koziol, a 2013 graduate of Boone Central High School in Albion, Nebraska, who

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Soldier Competes at Army's 2016 Best Ranger Competition

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Nebraska Truck Drivers Log Major Miles During Annual Training

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NEWS DIGEST

■Pentagon: Budget uncertainty threatening overall readiness

WASHINGTON (DoD News) – Budget uncertainty threatens readiness and training, underscoring the need for reliable funding for defense operations, the Pentagon's press secretary told reporters May 26.

There have been warnings for some time indicating that readiness and training would suffer amid sequestration spending cuts and in the budget uncertainty of the last few years, Peter Cook said.

"Ultimately, there's a price to be paid for budget gridlock, particularly with the Department of Defense," he added.

The Defense Department's $582.7 billion budget request for fiscal year 2017 takes the needs of the services into account, Cook said, and it includes significant and aggressive investment in dealing with readiness issues. Defense Secretary Ash Carter has been vocal about the need for continued budget certainty and investments in modernization, force structure and readiness, Cook pointed out.

The budget plan seeks to address readiness and training concerns in the "most effective and efficient way possible," Cook said.

Moving forward will take time, using the resources the department has available, he added.

"We'd all like more money to try to address this right away overnight, but that's not the reality of the budget situation we're in," he told reporters.

Carter heard directly from the services about their needs, Cook said, and the proposed budget puts forth a plan to allow the national security mission of the country to be carried out.

"This has to be an investment over time, which is why budget certainty and planning going forward — not just this fiscal year, but going forward — is also so important to the secretary of defense," the spokesman said.

■U.S. Southern Command commander says illicit networks posing greatest security challenge to regional stability

WASHINGTON (DoD News) – In Latin America and the Caribbean the biggest security challenge confronting the United States comes from illicit networks used by criminals and terrorists, U.S. Southern Command commander Navy Adm. Kurt W. Tidd said June 1 during a media roundtable at the Pentagon.

Southcom is responsible for Defense Department security cooperation in the 45 nations and territories of Central and South America and the Caribbean Sea, an area of 16 million square miles. During any given week there are up to 7,000 service members in the region, Tidd said.

The admiral called it a region where the United States has significant opportunities, friends and longstanding relationships with countries that see the United States as the security partner of choice.

The Southcom area of responsibility has been characterized by the absence of ongoing armed conflict between nations for some time," he noted, "but it's not a region that is without challenges... (and) the biggest security challenge when you look at Latin America and the Caribbean… is the illicit networks."

Sometimes the networks are used by criminals, and sometimes by terrorists, but more often the lines blur between them, Tidd said.

To go after the networks, he added, the U.S. military plays a useful role by working with all its partners – partner nations, U.S. interagency partners, and those in the diplomatic, intelligence and law enforcement communities – and using experience developed over the past 15 years to detect, illuminate and disrupt the networks.

"The disruption piece is almost always going to be by partner-nation law enforcement organizations, or by partner-nation military organizations, so that drives a lot of our activities where we work closely to build their capacity to deal with these networks," Tidd said.

"The last disruption piece is our own U.S. federal law enforcement agencies that are active down in the region working on our country teams," he added, noting that "pretty much everything that we do, we do in support of our country teams, of our ambassadors."

The State Department is probably Southcom's closest partner, Tidd said, and one of his two deputy commanders is a senior State Department official.

Law enforcement and intelligence communities have determined that most of the terrorist networks engage in some kind of criminal activity to raise money, the admiral said.

As one example, there is longstanding concern in the region about organizations like Hezbollah – a Shiite Islamist militant group based in Lebanon – "raising money in one region and funneling it to nefarious activities in other regions, and that certainly continues," Tidd said.

The networks support illicit activities that include smuggling drugs, wildlife, bulk cash, weapons and people, along with illegal logging and mining.

"Our friends in Colombia have said more money is raised in illegal gold mining than is raised in illegal drug smuggling out of Colombia," Tidd said, "...the way they do this leads to enormous ecological damage, where they destroy river systems and leave them a ruin."

Two Army Guard Soldiers injured during truck convoy accident in North Carolina

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Two Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the 734th Transportation Battalion were injured on April 27 when the vehicle they were driving overturned during a convoy mission in North Carolina.

The two Soldiers are members of the 1074th and 1195th Transportation Companies. According to reports, the Soldiers were driving an M915/M872 tractor trailer carrying training ammunition from the Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point, North Carolina, as part of a 734th Transportation convoy when their vehicle overturned on an Interstate 140 exit near Wilmington, North Carolina.

The two Soldiers were injured in the accident and evacuated to a local hospital. Neither Soldier's name or medical condition is being released.

No other civilian vehicles were involved in the accident.

The accident is currently under investigation.

■Wyoming Army Guard Soldier first female noncommissioned officer graduate from U.S. Army infantry qualifying course

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (NGNEWS) – Thirty-five newly trained Infantry Soldiers graduated May 26, among them the first female noncommissioned officer to graduate a U.S. Army Infantry qualifying course.

Sgt. Shelby Atkins is the first female graduate from an Infantry military occupational specialty school in the U.S. Army, military officials said. Atkins is assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry, as a team leader.

Wyoming's Infantry Soldiers completed the Infantry qualification and transition course at Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center. The graduates will serve in the Wyoming Army National Guard's first Infantry unit in more than 100 years and will be the first Soldiers to fill qualified jobs there.

The Infantry unit, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry, is assigned to Evanston and Afton, Wyoming, and replaces the 1041st Multi-role Bridge Company, which, as was announced last year, will be deactivated in July.

■Army now allowing Soldiers to wear headphones in gym

WASHINGTON (ARNEWS) – Soldiers jogging or lifting in the gym may now be allowed to listen to music through small headphones or ear buds, according to Army Directive 2016-20, released May 6.

Acting Secretary of the Army Patrick J. Murphy signed a memo that authorizes Soldiers to listen to music on a variety of devices and ear pieces while doing personal physical training inside gyms, though the memo does give final word on the new policy to installation or unit commanders.

"Effective immediately, unless the unit or installation commander prohibits otherwise, Soldiers may use headphones, including wireless or non-wireless devices and earpieces, in uniform only while performing individual physical training in indoor gyms or fitness centers," Murphy wrote in the memo.

The headphones cannot be more than 1.5 inches in diameter and the memo states violators may be subject to administrative or disciplinary action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

To push music through "conservative and discrete" earpieces, Soldiers are also permitted to "wear electronic devices, such as music players or cell phones" on their waistband, in accordance with AR 670-1. That regulation says the color of the carrying case for such a device must be black.

The directive also permits Soldiers to wear a "solid black armband" to hold their electronic device, but only while in the gym or fitness center.

When Soldiers leave the gym or fitness center, however, the arm bands, the music devices and the headphones must be put away. Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey said the new policy is something Soldiers have told him they wanted for a while.

"This change came about because Soldiers stood up at one of my town halls and asked about it," Dailey said.

"If we can make changes that improve morale and they don't adversely affect discipline, I'm all for it."

The memo applies to Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers. It's expected that the new rules regarding the wear of music devices and headphones in installation gyms will be incorporated into the existing uniform policy, AR 670-1, by the Army's G-1.

Photo by Capt. Doug Carlson

Shooting with the Governor

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, along with Nebraska adjutant general Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, visited Fort Riley, Kan., June 9 to observe the Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry during their annual training at the Douthit Gunnery Complex. Ricketts toured the complex, which culminated in the opportunity to shoot an M-2 .50 caliber machine-gun with members of the Nebraska Army National Guard.

Along with the story on Page 15, look for additional stories about this year's Nebraska National Guard annual training season in the August edition of the Prairie Soldier newspaper.

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 heidi.j.mcclintock.mil@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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Reaching For Gold

Photos by Sgt. Jason Drager

Heading Toward His Goal: Staff Sgt. Luke Katz, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, negotiates along an inverted rope with the goal of touching the Ranger tab during the April 15-17 Best Ranger Competition at Fort Benning, Ga.

Hanging On: Staff Sgt. Luke Katz prepares to hit the water while descending along the Slide For Life, a 75-foot-high obstacle that was part of the Combat Water Survival Assessment during the second day of the Best Ranger Competition.

Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier finishes close in bid to become Army's top Ranger

By Sgt. Jason Drager
Staff Photojournalist

The 33rd Annual David E. Grange Jr. Best Ranger Competition was held April 15 - 17 at Fort Benning, Georgia. Fifty-two Solider teams from around the country competed to determine the best Rangers in the entire United States Armed Forces.

The grueling competition, which stretched three days and two nights, incorporated a series of events and tasks designed to test a Ranger's physical and mental toughness. Of the 100 competitors, eight were National Guardsmen. Of the original eight guardsmen, two were from the state of Nebraska.

Staff Sgt Luke Katz, an infantryman, and Staff Sgt. Nathan Neuvirth, a team leader with Company C (Long Range Surveillance) 1-134th Cavalry, were the first two Nebraska Guardsmen in its history to be invited to compete at Best Ranger, according to Katz. Unfortunately, due to a training injury weeks before the competition, Neuvirth was unable to compete.

Katz, however, with his partner Sgt. 1st Class Jon Knea of the California National Guard, finished 17th out of the field of 50 teams in the competition.

Katz's journey to an impressive showing and finish wasn't an easy one. To even be selected for the Best Ranger Competition, a hopeful Ranger must first tryout. The state of Nebraska wanted to send two representatives to Fort Benning in hopes of at least one being selected, Katz said.

"We were pretty much handpicked to represent Nebraska because the state knew we could go and at least meet the standards and be competitive," Katz said.

In preparation for the four-day November tryout, Katz and Neuvirth spent three weeks training and honing their Ranger skills. This included rapelling, weapons tasks, land navigation and other events they thought might be tested.

Once the tryouts were complete, retired Sgt. Maj. John Burns, the coach for all the National Guard competitors, selected eight Rangers from a pool of dozens to represent the Guard in the competition.

"We found out the last day of the tryouts who was selected for the actual competition," Katz said. "When I found out I had been selected I felt ecstatic. I was overwhelmed. It was a very exciting moment for me in my life."

Not only did Katz get selected for the competition but Neuvirth did as well. It was the first time the Nebraska National Guard had a Ranger selected.

Now with the honor of being selected to compete in Best Ranger in hand, the National Guard representatives needed to train. Competitors reported to Fort Benning on Jan. 19 to begin their three-month-long training.

At Fort Benning, Burns made it clear to the National Guard competitors they would be representing the Guard as a whole and not individual states.

"All we want is a National Guard win," Burns said. It was a feat that had never been accomplished.

Burns created a rigorous three-month training schedule designed to build up their skills and physicality.

"I thought I was strong when I first arrived but after getting thrown to the wolves, the training schedule actually beat me up," Katz said.

"Ruck marching was definitely my weak point. I had to get picked up on the first one because I didn't think I was going to make it. It definitely made me question whether or not I could really do this."

"I just kept telling myself, 'I'm here to compete in Best Ranger; it's a fight'," Katz added. "That was motivation enough to keep me on the right path to get past the pain and struggles.

"I didn't want to let the other Rangers down, I didn't want to let Nate down and I especially didn't want to let Mr. Burns down."

Daily training was Monday through Friday and lasted anywhere from eight to 11 hours.

On weekends, the competitors did not have structured training and were given time to recover and relax. However, Katz and other competitors chose to participate in other local events in the area, such as the Green Beret Challenge and five-kilometer races to help build team cohesion.

Katz and Neuvirth were less than a month away from the competition when Neuvirth sustained an injury. Neuvirth was rapelling down a tower when he accidentally fell 30 feet and landed on a mat below.

Neuvirth broke several vertebrates and was unable to compete. He did, however, stay at Fort Benning during the competition to support Katz.

Katz and Neuvirth had been paired together as one of the four Guard teams competing. With Neuvirth's injury, Katz was paired with Knea. Katz and Knea spent the last few weeks of training getting to know each other's strengths and weaknesses.

After three months' worth of hard work, strenuous training and adversity, the competition had finally arrived for Katz.

"Past competitors told me I'd be nervous," Katz said. "It was 100 percent accurate. I got up to the starting line and I was just shaking."

The first day of the competition started at 6 a.m. with an unknown distance run. The competition only got tougher as the days passed. Events included weapons firing, night orienting, the Darby Queen obstacle course, an urban obstacle course, a swim across famous Victory Pond, a combat water survival obstacle course, a helocast and an 18-mile ruck march while carrying a 60-pound ruck.

After the first day of competition, the field of 50 teams was cut to 24. With no guarantee Katz would make the cut, he knew his team had to push to their limits through day one. The moment Katz learned he was moving on to the next day was bittersweet.

"I was very excited, but then I realized I had two more days of this," Katz said. "It was a sense of relief knowing I made the cut and all I had to do was finish, but I also felt jealous of those going home to eat chow."

In all, Katz and the other Rangers competed for 60 continuous hours and covered more than 50 miles of Fort Benning terrain. There was no scheduled sleep and each competitor had five Meals, Ready to Eat, to ration over the three days.

In the crowd of onlookers at the competition, was a small group of Katz's biggest supporters. The group included Katz's father, Lyle Katz, and close friend Staff Sgt. Josh Meyers of the Nebraska Army National Guard.

"Luke is one of those Soldiers that if there is a school or a mission or a task you need done, you send that guy," Meyers said. "There is nothing he can't accomplish and exceed the standards at."

After the last event was complete, Katz was just grateful to be around at the end. "Just finishing the Best Ranger Competition was a goal of mine," Katz said.

After finishing 17th in his very first Best Ranger Competition, Katz said he now has the experience and motivation to prepare for next year's competition.

"I've learned you don't need a lot of muscle to win the Best Ranger Competition," Katz said. "As I lost weight during the three months, my times, tasks and skills improved. Over the next year I'm going to run a lot more, I'm going to ruck a lot more and build up my lower body."

"I will definitely be back next year."

Through The Muck: Staff Sgt. Luke Katz and his partner, Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Knea, low crawl under barbed wire through bone-chilling muddy water during the Malvesti Obstable Course. The course ended with a set of pull-up bars.

Teamwork Is Key: Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Knea and Staff Sgt. Luke Katz use verbal commands to synchronize their efforts as they maneuver a 225-pound tire over a 100-foot course.

Up And Over: Staff Sgt. Luke Katz uses his upper-body strength to climb a slippery wall obstacle of the Spartan Race Challenge during the second day of the Best Ranger Competition at Fort Benning, Ga.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Lunch With His Old Unit: Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy, Army National Guard director, smiles as he talks with members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry during a lunch at the Mead Atlas Readiness Center, April 22. The 1-134th Cavalry draws its lineage back to the 1-167th Cavalry, which Kadavy commanded during its deployment in the early 2000s to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Hearing Them Out: Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy, Army National Guard director, listens as a Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier asks him a question during a townhall meeting at the Grand Island Readiness Center on April 22. Kadavy used his April 22-23 visit to Nebraska as a sounding board.

KADAVY continued from page 1.

ship beliefs were formed while wearing the uniform of a Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier.

A native of Omaha, Kadavy's military career started as an enlisted Soldier in the Nebraska Army National Guard. He received his commission in 1987 after graduating from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps program and then went on to serve as a platoon leader in the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-167th Cavalry – the precursor to the Guard's current 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance, Surveillance and Target Acquisition).

Kadavy served in a variety of leadership positions within the cavalry squadron, including commander of Troop B, before taking Active Guard Reserve assignments at Fifth Army, Army Forces Command and the Army National Guard staff at National Guard Bureau. He then returned to Nebraska in 2001 to command the Guard's 1-167th Cavalry during its 2002-03 deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina for Operation Joint Forge.

Following several out-of-state assignments, Kadavy returned to Nebraska once again in November 2007 when he succeeded Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Roger Lempke as adjutant general for Nebraska. He served there until August 2009 when he was named the deputy director of the Army National Guard.

> *"You can't replace your opportunities to be a leader and commander and Nebraska gave me those opportunities. Some of my greatest lessons came from having served in Nebraska."*
>
> ***— Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy***

Those experiences helped shape Kadavy into the officer he is today, he said.

"You can't replace your opportunities to be a leader and commander and Nebraska gave me those opportunities," he said. "Some of my greatest lessons came from having served in Nebraska.

"I learned about humble leadership. I learned that the strength of the Army and the Army Guard is not the senior leaders, its junior leaders and the young Soldiers. And you have to know how what we're doing affects them."

Memories: Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy takes a moment during his tour of the Mead Atlas Readiness Center to read the plaque displayed with the colors of the 1-167th Cavalry. Kadavy served with the squadron multiple times during his military career.

"I learned all of these lessons from a lot of really good leaders… and we've been blessed in Nebraska by a tremendous amount of great leaders," he added.

For example, Kadavy said, a couple of the things he hoped to learn from his trip to Nebraska was the state of military construction and the transformation of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade into a new maneuver enhancement brigade.

"What I really want to see is what's going on, on the ground," Kadavy said. "I firmly believe that Nebraska is one of the better states, especially in understanding how to do military construction. It's also one of the states that is going through a large transformation. I was just curious how the team here saw it and what they thought of it.

"Not to my surprise, because we have great Soldiers here in Nebraska, but the way they've embraced change and are making it a good thing isn't a surprise to me at all."

During the course of Kadavy's two-day trip, he visited the Guard's joint force headquarters and then toured the new facilities and readiness centers at the Mead Training Site and Grand Island, which were just visions of distant future during Kadavy's tenure as adjutant general. Kadavy also had the opportunity to address Nebraska Soldiers during a town hall event at the Grand Island Readiness Center before conducting a briefing for Nebraska National Guard officers at Camp Ashland's Memorial Hall.

Kadavy also had the opportunity to visit the Guard's new museum in Seward before meeting with members of the Guard's 67th BfSB and new cyber team in Lincoln.

Kadavy said that seeing the new facilities was particularly heartening.

"You know, when I left, it was just a big field," Kadavy said about the Mead Training Site. "Now there's two armories and the training area. It's just a tremendous thing for Nebraska. It brings it back full circle from vision to actually seeing it implemented.

"My successors – Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons and Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac – they've taken (the vision) and grown it. I just feel humbled for the small part that I played in it."

Along with getting the opportunity to see the new facilities – many of which were on the drawing tables back in 2007-09 – and seeing mementos from his cavalry's squadron's mission to Bosnia in 2002-03, Kadavy said he also wanted to give the Soldiers he met more information about where the National Guard is heading in the future.

"It's about letting them know where we're going because we're asking our Soldiers to do a lot of things," he said. "We're moving some of the priorities around to really improve readiness in the Army National Guard and sometimes, especially among the lower levels, people begin to wonder, 'Why are you doing this?' So, I really wanted to inform this team and see what kind of feedback they have to see if they truly understand what we're trying to accomplish as far as readiness goes."

In particular, Kadavy said, he wants Soldiers to know how great the Army National Guard really is today.

"The Army National Guard of today is the best trained, best led, best organized that it's ever been," Kadavy said. "After 15 years of war, what we've accomplished proves that."

"For example, (the National Guard) just won the Best Ranger contest this year. I think that's just indicative that we are the combat reserve of the Army," he added.

And that means that the Guard must continue to seek ways to better preserve and improve its readiness while also constantly refining itself to meet the changing needs of the nation.

"We need to continue to redefine and refine the heart of a warrior. Now is not the time to take a knee. Now is the time to reinforce our commitments to readiness and to being there when our country needs us."

Kadavy said that the visit "home" was definitely memorable.

"It all brought back memories. The pictures. The paintings. The guidon. A couple of the artifacts from Bosnia," said Kadavy about visiting the headquarters of the 1-134th Cavalry, which displays many of the artifacts from the squadron's peacekeeping deployment to Eastern Europe. "It brings back memories from when you were a younger Soldier who was focused on tactical things instead of strategic issues."

Time For A Photo: Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy takes time out during his tour of the Grand Island Readiness Center to pose for a photograph with Staff Sgt. Dustin Schlote, a Nebraska Army National Guard recruiter. Kadavy used his first official visit back to Nebraska, after assuming the post of Army National Guard director, to learn more about changes going on in the Nebraska Army National Guard while also explaining ideas he has about the direction he wants to take the Army National Guard to the Nebraska Soldiers he met.

National Champs!

Nebraska National Guard unit tops field in cooking competition

By Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Editor

Food service specialists and field sanitation team members of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, gained serious bragging rights after winning the national Philip A. Connelly award in the National Guard field kitchen category.

This marks the second time that a Nebraska Army National Guard unit has won the competition's national award.

The unit won the award after previously taking top honors at the state and regional cooking competitions.

Members of the 110th joined U.S. Army Reserve and active Army Soldiers and civilians from across the globe in Chicago, Illinois, May 20, where they were recognized as the Army's best food-service professionals during the 2016 Philip A. Connelly Awards Program. This year's event marked the 48th anniversary of the annual cooking competition.

The Soldiers of the 110th were definitely delighted with their accomplishment.

"I feel proud," said 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner, commander, HHD, 110th MMB. "I am proud of the Soldiers who dedicated a lot of time and hard work throughout the last year."

Award-Winning Smiles: Members of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, pose for a group photo during the 47th annual Philip A. Connelly Competition awards ceremony in Chicago, Ill., May 20.

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

According to Nebraska National Guard officials, the unit put a lot of time and effort into making it this far. They came together as a cohesive team and accomplished all their missions.

"The Soldiers stayed confident through the entire process," Kirchner said. "They went into every competition expecting to win. During the national competition, we had some unexpected events that really challenged the Soldiers, so when they found out we had won, they were excited to hear they were national champions."

"These Soldiers did their all and it paid off," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Tollie Yoder, food service warrant officer for the Nebraska Army National Guard. "I couldn't be more proud of them."

Kirchner said he couldn't agree more.

"I'll first say thank you," Kirchner said he told his Soldiers. "Thank you for accepting the challenge and working together to accomplish something that a year ago seemed unattainable."

Kirchner added, "There's a lesson to be learned that when you believe and trust in your leadership, rely on and can be relied on, the greater mission can be accomplished."

Photos by Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Hot Chicken: A thermometer checks the temperature of chicken to make sure it is where it needs to be before serving lunch during the national level of the 47th Annual Philip A. Connelly Competition, March 20, at Greenlief Training Site, near Hastings, Neb.

Nebraska Soldiers put all their cards on table during cooking competition's final evaluation

By Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Editor

After winning the regional level of the 47th annual Phillip A. Connelly Competition Army National Guard field kitchen category, the Soldiers of Nebraska's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, knew they had to step up their game for the finals of the Department of the Army competition.

Those finals took place on March 20 when a team of U. S. Army evaluators graded the Lincoln-based unit at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb. There, the Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were required to prepare a full meal under time constraints while also ensuring proper food temperatures and cooking techniques, while following standard operation procedures.

The meal included savory baked chicken, spicy brown rice pilaf, herbed broccoli, spring salad, tomato soup, pineapple upside down cake, assorted drinks and assorted fresh fruit.

Between the regional and national level competitions, the Soldiers said they constantly refined the meal, teamwork techniques and how to set up of their forward operating base, all with the goal of maximizing their points. The Soldiers said they also spent a lot of time reviewing regulations and improving their location site to make it as realistic as possible.

"It's been a lot of work to get here," said 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner, detachment commander. "A lot of preparation and a lot of planning was involved."

Ready To Serve: Spc. Jason Cole, a food service specialist with the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, moves cooked chicken from a pan to the serving container during the national level of the 47th Annual Philip A. Connelly Competition, March 20, at Greenlief Training Site, near Hastings, Neb.

Competing in the nationals may have required hard work and significant dedication, but Soldiers said it was worth every effort. "It feels good to compete at the national level," said Pvt. Md Hossain, a food service specialist with HHD, 110th MMB. "But it is a lot of hard work."

"It feels good to be out here knowing we are one of the top four teams," Kirchner added. "That has motivated the unit and the Soldiers a lot. They know we are out here for a reason not to just train, but to compete for the National Connelly Title."

Along with the pride in knowing they were competing for the national title, the Soldiers said they enjoyed working together to accomplish the goal of feeding their unit.

"The best part of the day was working together," Hossain said. "Nothing can be done without teamwork."

No matter the results, the unit members say they know they are coming out of the competition better than they entered it.

"Win or lose, I thank all the Soldiers for their hard work and motivation," Kirchner said.

Freshly Prepared Rice: Pvt. Md Hossain scoops rice out of the pan while preparing the lunch menu during the national level of the 47th Annual Philip A. Connelly Competition, March 20, at Greenlief Training Site, near Hastings, Neb. Hossain's unit ultimately won the national cooking championship.

Award-Winning Meal: Members of the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, serve fellow Soldiers chow during the national level of the 47th Annual Philip A. Connelly Competition, March 20, at Greenlief Training Site, near Hastings, Neb.

Loving Embrace: Capt. Luke Holland, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 195th Forward Support Company (Airborne) (Special Operations) hugs his daughter Eden tight during the welcome home ceremony for members of the unit's Army Special Operations Forces Support Operation Team.

Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Woman asked big question as Omaha Soldiers return home

By Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Editor

Ten Soldiers from the 195th Forward Support Company (Airborne) (Special Operations) were welcomed home by friends and families after a six-month deployment, May 11, in Omaha.

For Ellise Nichols, however, the welcome home at the North Omaha Readiness Center wasn't just an opportunity to finally see her boyfriend of one year… it was an opportunity for her boyfriend, with some help from her family, to give her an even bigger surprise.

Nichols' boyfriend, 1st Lt. Nathan McGrudder, had been planning for this particular surprise for the majority of his deployment to the Middle East. So, just moments after he got off the bus, McGrudder dropped to one knee and asked Nichols to be his wife while friends and family members gathered around, many taking photos and videos of the moment.

"I've been waiting six months to do it, so I'm glad I finally got to do it," McGrudder said, a short time later.

Without hesitation, Nichols responded with: "Yes."

Warm Patriotic Welcome: Sgt. 1st Class Bradley Schwarz enjoys a tender moment with his flag-wielding daughter during the May 11 welcome home ceremony for members of the 195th Forward Support Company (Airborne) (Special Operations) Army Special Operations Forces Support Operation Team.

According to Nichols she had no idea that McGrudder was planning to propose to her. She did wonder, though, why her best friend flew in from another state for the welcome home. Nichols just thought her friend was there to support her during what would probably be an emotional time seeing her boyfriend for the first time after being separated for months.

"I had no idea at all this would happen," Nichols said. "I'm in shock."

Nichols' parents were in on the scheme, however, helping McGrudder plan the whole proposal so that their daughter would have no idea when the time came.

Will You...? 1st Lt. Nathan McGrudder, 195th Forward Support Company (Airborne) (Special Operations), proposes to his girlfriend, Ellise Nichols, shortly after arriving back in Omaha following a deployment to the Middle East.

According to Nichols' parents they were very happy by the way he went about asking for their permission and planning this special event for their daughter.

The couple plans to get married next summer.

First, though, it's about getting to know each other once again, now that the deployment has passed.

"We are looking forward to spending time with each other now," McGrudder said. "We both took some time off work to spend some quality time with each other."

That time is definitely well-deserved, too. While deployed, the 195th FSC Soldiers were responsible for coordinating, monitoring and synchronizing logistics for special operations units. For some of the Soldiers, it was their first deployment.

For all, it was simply good to finally be home.

155th Air Refueling Wing leads Air Force into new era of flight technology

By Tech Sgt. Mary Thach
and Senior Airman Marshall Maurer
Staff Photojournalists

In June 1957 John Glenn was preparing for the first supersonic transcontinental flight, a new house could be had for $12,200 dollars and the first of many KC-135 Stratotankers, complete with a steam gauge cockpit, was delivered to now-defunct Castle Air Force Base in Atwater, California.

Castle AFB closed for good in 1995—20 years later. Now, the original steam gauges on those Stratotankers are nearing their end as well.

For decades, KC-135 Stratotankers featured an outdated instrument panel, mechanical gauges and analog dials, in what pilots dubbed a "steam gauge cockpit." That technology, considered cutting edge when the plane was introduced, became obsolete as other parts of the aircraft evolved over time.

When those gauges broke, it became more difficult to locate and employ factories capable of refurbishing them. But this problem, like the round gauge itself, is becoming a thing of the past, with the introduction of Block 45. It all started with a napkin and colored pencils.

The 155th Air Refueling Wing is the first Air National Guard unit and second in the Air Force to be selected for the Block 45 modification, a series of improvements that will be applied to three planes by the end of 2015, and by 2022, the wing's entire fleet.

Where gauges and dials once cluttered the pilot interface, a smooth glass display panel now simplifies the interaction between pilot and machine. As a result, it's easier for pilots to focus only on the most pertinent information. For instance, instead of manually selecting the plane's altitude changes and vertical and horizontal movement, the pilot can accomplish such tasks via a single display screen.

The selection of the 155th ARW to be the Air Guard standard bearer is a sign not only of the unit's storied past, but also of its promise for the future, said Lt. Col. Jeff Mathemeier, Wing Plans chief. In 2003, when Block 45's predecessor, Block 40, was introduced, the unit's maintenance personnel earned high marks during the certification phase for quickly and efficiently implementing the upgraded equipment.

Those high marks are attainable once again.

"We have a chance to set the standard for the entire Air Force," said Mathemeier. "McConnell Air Force Base (which received the first Block 45 variants) will be transitioning to a different aircraft in the near future, so we will invariably be the lead unit, the leader in knowledge, moving forward."

It's a position the 155th finds familiar.

Col. Bob Stevenson, 155th ARW commander and an integral member of the Block 40 launch, has remained instrumental in Block 45's early stages, according to Col. Donald Neff, 155th Operations Group commander. Stevenson, along with 155th maintainers, crew chiefs, and pilots, has provided steady and consistent vision and expertise for both Block projects, since Block 40's start in 2001 and continuing through Block 45's inception in 2010.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Showing Off The Block 45: Col. Donald Neff, 155th Operations Group commander, explains how the Block 45 upgrade to his unit's tankers have increased the KC-135R's capabilities to Gen. Frank Grass, National Guard Bureau chief, during Grass' April 3 visit to the Nebraska National Guard air base. The 155th Air Refueling Wing is the first Air Guard unit to receive the upgrade.

Speaking to the advantage that guard members provide the program, Stevenson said, "The Air National Guard provides continuity…active duty members come in and spend one year on the cockpit working group and then they leave, where as we have a consistent representation. They have all gotten involved and stayed involved for years at a time, but no one has been as involved as…the members from our unit."

That involvement helped ensure the Block 45 suite will remain an integral part of the Stratotanker cockpit for the rest of the plane's lifetime, until 2040, by current estimates.

Stevenson recognizes that such innovation is not without cost. Fortunately, those costs will be offset in the years to come by eliminating the expensive repairs required by the steam gauges and analog dials.

Speaking of the gauges, Neff said, "Air Mobility Command came up with the idea to swap out all those gauges for a flat glass panel—like a TV screen, basically—which is what all modern airliners and even fighters use now."

But the model was far from finished, said Neff. During a meeting with contractors from Rockwell Collins in 2010, civilian and 155th pilots, not satisfied with the program's initial direction, diagrammed their vision for the engine instruments with napkins and colored pencils. It worked, and several years later, their ideas have become tangible.

Neff compared the clunky user input of the previous Block system to a 1980's-era MS-DOS computer.

In comparison, "(Block 45) is not quite IBM's Watson," Neff said, alluding to the super-computer of Jeopardy fame. "But it's maybe (on par with) a Mac, where you program the flight director, the autopilot uses the flight director, but how the pilot team interacts with each other is where the changes will occur."

The Block 45 package is useless, however, without qualified flight crew members proficient in its use. For that reason, McConnell AFB hosted the first four 155th ARW pilots to become Block 45-certified this past spring. Those pilots are back now, and readying for peer-to-peer training that will bring other crew members up to speed and up to snuff.

Neff admitted that the user interface of the Stratotanker's Block 45 might not be as seamless as a brand-new Boeing 737 or 767, however, the functionality is equal. That's notable for a platform that predates its successors by a half century.

While the Block 45 replaces traditional gauges with digital displays, it raises the question—what happens if it breaks? In that case, Neff said, the pilots remain ready and able to step in and manually operate the aircraft safely—an aircraft that remains protected by layers of secondary and tertiary backup measures.

"(For instance), when something catches fire, the panel needs to turn red," said Neff, speaking to the development that began with ensuring the panel's most basic needs were met.

At that point, the pilot would take necessary action.

Block 45 is also plenty advanced for the Stratotanker to comfortably meet the flight standards set forth by the International Civil Aviation Organization, said Neff, which allows the plane to continue operating in and through international airspace. Neff said such compliance is a necessity for the global mission of the Stratotanker.

Considering the continued retrofitting of the wing's flagship, Stevenson foresees further evolution of the aircraft on the horizon. Stevenson, like Neff, hopes the conversation will eventually turn to auto-throttle, a setting that would allow a pilot to control the plane's engines via a desired flight characteristic, rather than manually applying power and fuel flow.

That change, Stevenson said, would slash fuel costs, raise cockpit safety, and make for safer skies in general as our flight paths grow more crowded. For now, though, pilots and maintainers of the 155th will stay at the forefront of one of the most significant changes to the Stratotanker cockpit since it first arrived at Castle AFB nearly sixty years ago.

Nebraska chaplain offers prayer at U.S. House of Representatives

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes and Tech Sgt. Jason Melton
State Public Affairs Officer and Staff Photojournalist

A Nebraska Army National Guard chaplain made a unique appearance at the U.S. House of Representatives in April, calling on the U.S. legislators to put aside their differences while they go about their work of representing Americans.

"Pour into this chamber today a spirit of civility, a freshness of renewal and a bountiful grace of new ideas," said Chaplain (Capt.) Steve Thomlison during the April 13 opening prayer at the U.S. House of Representatives. Thomlison, who serves as the chaplain for the Nebraska Army National Guard's 92nd Troop Command, was invited to deliver the opening prayer by U.S. Rep. Adrian Smith of Nebraska, a long-time friend of Thomlison.

Thomlison, a 29-year veteran of the Nebraska Army National Guard who once served as the chief of staff for former U.S. Rep. Jon Christensen, said that to the best of his knowledge, he is the first Nebraska National Guard chaplain to be invited to be the guest chaplain for the U.S. House and to open the day with prayer.

"In part, Congressman Smith invited me to come to Washington because of my work as both a military chaplain and also as a state and federal law enforcement chaplain," said Thomlison, who also serves as a chaplain with the Nebraska State Patrol and the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Thomlison is also the pastor of St. Stephen's Catholic Church in Exeter, Nebraska.

"(Congressman Smith) mentioned each of these in the speech that he gave on the floor of the House after the prayer and also during his comments at the Nebraska breakfast," Thomlison said. "Congressman Smith is a big supporter of the National Guard and this was a small way that he could raise the visibility of the Nebraska National Guard with our national leaders and also to show his gratitude and appreciation for everyone's military service."

Photo courtesy of C-SPAN

Congressional Prayer: Chaplain (Capt.) Steve Thomlison opens the April 13 session of the U.S. House of Representatives with a prayer. Thomlison was invited to deliver the prayer by Nebraska's U.S. Representative Adrian Smith.

Also in attendance was Lt. Gen. Timothy Kadavy, current director of the Army National Guard and former Nebraska adjutant general. Kadavy had served as the commander of the Nebraska Guard's 1-167th Cavalry, during its deployment to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 2000s, at which time Thomlison served as a member of the squadron.

Thomlison said that his goal was not to specifically pray for the elected representatives, but for their constituents as well.

"It was a prayer not just for members of Congress, but for all Americans," he said. "As a chaplain, we frequently pray for our nation and our national leaders, so it was a great experience to actually be with our national leaders in our National Capitol while praying for them.

"To have fellow National Guard Soldiers present was a real honor… the military is a team approach to service, so it meant a lot to have everyone there, especially my former Cavalry commander who is now the director of the Army National Guard."

Thomlison added, "Speaker (of the House Paul) Ryan was very gracious to make time to visit beforehand and then to also pose for pictures with me and also with Congressman Smith and Lieutenant General Kadavy. The Speaker was very interested that we were all from Nebraska and the Lieutenant General Kadavy and I had deployed together."

While delivering the prayer was a distinct honor, Thomlison said that it paled while reflecting upon the last time that he was in the chamber: Sept. 24, 2015, when he was a guest of U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse for the Pope Francis historic address to the Joint Session of Congress.

"To get to stand at the exact same lectern that Pope Francis stood at was amazing," he said.

GSAB continued from page 1.

to wish the unit well.

"It's a long process, but it's well worth it," Traylor said. "I feel that everyone is certainly well-prepared and ready to do the mission."

The unit, which traces back to the 24th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) that mobilized in 1990 to support Operation Desert Shield/Storm and has deployed numerous times over the past 25 years, will now be responsible for conducting aerial evacuation support in the U.S. Central Area of responsibility.

Traylor said the unit is blessed by the amount of Soldiers who have significant mobilization experiences under their belts.

"For some, of course, it's their first deployment," said Traylor. "For the remainder, it's their second, third, fourth, even fifth deployment.

"It feels pretty good having that kind of experience because the guys who have never deployed before can learn a lot from those who deployed multiple times. It's great having that kind of experience across the unit."

Sgt. Dylan Hegenrader and his wife Shannon are great examples of that point. This marks the first time that they've been through a deployment.

"I've been busy all day, so I really haven't had a chance to breathe it all in," said Hergenrader, the unit's aviation life support equipment sergeant a few minutes before the send-off ceremony. "It really hasn't hit me yet that I'm going. I'm just excited about it, that's all. I'm just ready to go."

Shannon Hergenrader echoed those sentiments. "I'm just ready for it to get going so that they can get back," she said. "I've just been trying to be supportive and happy… it's been kind of rough, though."

Both husband and wife admitted they truly don't know what to expect. Having never gone through a deployment before, they really have no frame of reference to compare it to.

And that's where the Soldiers who have that experience, who have memories of what to expect, are stepping in.

"A few of the guys have told me what to expect at (the training site), and they've also told us what it was like when they deployed to Iraq, so we have some of that information, but still, we're going to a different location, so I'm not sure exactly how this will work," Dylan said.

"I've talked to a couple of women and they just kind of said to be as supportive as I can and just try to be as happy as I can, even if you're not, because it makes it a lot easier on them and a lot easier on you," said Shannon, adding that she's already made plans to meet monthly with other unit spouses to have coffee, talk and to share information.

Getting the unit's less experienced Soldiers and their families ready for the deployment has actually been a pretty significant mission for Co. G's more experienced Soldiers and families for some time, said Staff Sgt. Matthew Hawke, the leading crew chief standardization instructor who is also a veteran of the unit's 2010-11 deployment to Iraq.

"This one," Hawke said, "we're a lot more experienced. Last time was my first time ever (deploying), so now I'm in a leadership role."

And that means helping mentor the newer Soldiers on what to expect, how to train for the mission and how to prepare themselves and their families for the months-long separation, said Hawke, who is leaving behind his wife, Nicole, and six children.

"We're older and our kids are older now," Hawke said. "Last time I left my wife was pregnant and I saw my daughter for the first time when she was six-months-old."

Now, he said, they both know what to expect. "My wife is really good. She's been really supportive," Hawke said. "(Our kids) will keep her busy. She's ready. She's prepared. She's been through it before."

So much so, he added, that his wife is now helping other spouses prepare for the separation.

"We were at a wedding reception and my wife, she actually gave out her phone number to some of the newer ones," Hawke said, adding that family leadership extends down from the highest level of the company. "Our family readiness group back here is excellent. We had quite a few get-togethers over the course of the year to get everyone information."

Knowing their families are supported back home is extremely important, Hawke said.

"It's everything," he said. "It's good to know that if my wife back here needs anything – from some major issue to simply getting the grass mowed – I know my buddies back here will take care of it."

Vows of support to the Soldiers and the families were a common theme throughout the ceremony where hundreds of families, friends and co-workers crowded together to wish the departing Soldiers good luck.

"Actions speak louder than words," said Lt. Gov. Mike Foley, one of several state and governmental leaders that spoke during the half-hour long ceremony. "And by your actions, our deployers and their families are saying to us that their commitment to this country's values, freedoms, liberties and opportunities that this country offers means so much to them that they will sacrifice for all of us."

"Thank you to the families," he added a few moments later. "You shoulder such an enormous amount of the burden of military service. You pick up all of the extra responsibilities at home… we thank you so much."

Holding Tight: A Nebraska Army National Guard family maintain their physical contact during the June 3 send-off ceremony for members of the Guard's Company G, 2-104 General Support Aviation Battalion. The Nebraska Army National Guard aerial medical evacuation company was mobilizing for a mission that will ultimately take them to the Middle East.

Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Addressing The Crowd: Maj. Thomas Traylor, commander of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company G, 104th General Support Aviation Battalion, speaks to the crowd of Soldiers, families and governmental leaders during his unit's June 3 send-off ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1.

"We live in a dangerous world and every single one of you know that…." said U.S. Senator Deb Fischer. "You know what to expect. You know the dangers you will face… you folks know your job. You know how to do your job. And, you do it well."

"You have been trained. You have the commitment. You have the professionalism. You represent the best of Nebraska and you represent the best of our country," Fischer said, while adding her thanks to the families as well, adding that the entire state is ready to support them if the need arises.

Fischer was joined by U.S. Senator Ben Sasse, U.S. Representative Jeff Fortenberry and U.S. Representative Adrian Smith, all of who spoke of their gratitude to the Soldiers and families. An aide to U.S. Representative Brad Ashford also spoke at the ceremony.

According to Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, the Soldiers are ready and trained for their mission, adding he knows they're ready to accomplish great things during their deployment. He encouraged them to also remember their heritage as well.

"You need to remember who you are… Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard," Bohac said. "And, you need to remember where you come from. If you remember those two things and trust in your training and trust in what you know what you can do… I have no doubt that the Soldiers of Golf Company will be highly successful in their mission.

"And remember that we are here for you…. and not only just for you, but for your families and the communities you come from, so that you can remain focused on doing your job and coming home safe. We will take care of your families. We will take care of your communities… and we will be here to welcome you home."

Traylor said that level of support will undoubtedly assist the Soldiers as they meet the challenges that await.

"Deployments are not something new to us," he said. "We have deployed to Bosnia, Egypt, Kosovo, Iraq twice and have just returned from Kuwait. For some of the service members here today, this will be their first deployment. Some, it's their second, third, fourth or even fifth. We have multiple deployments because we are passionate about ensuring the freedoms we all hold near and dear."

"The training we have received has undoubtedly prepared us to deploy, accomplish the mission and return safe," Traylor added in concluding his comments. "We are aware of what is being asked of us and who we represent: the state of Nebraska and the United States of America, the best country in the world."

The unit's mission is expected to last approximately one year.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

Smoke Ring: A formation of smoke-spewing U.S. Navy Blue Angels F/A Hornet II fighters fly in a delicate ring-like formation, May 8, during the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house.

From smoke, they arose

Guardians of Freedom marries military aviation's past with present

By Senior Airman Marshall Maurer
Staff Photojournalist

The first day of the May 7-8 2016 Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house, with 120,000 people in attendance, was cut disappointingly short when winds from the north, smoky from Canadian wildfires, dropped local air quality to dangerously low levels.

That disappointment, like the hazy sky, didn't last long.

The next morning, more than 100,000 people, propellers, pilots and planes, with a cool breeze and clear skies now enveloping them, came back to the show grounds undeterred, ready to make up for lost time.

The show was headlined by successful performances by the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels, the U.S. Air Force Academy's Wings of Blue parachute team, World War II-era fighter planes, the stealthy F-22 Raptor and a heritage flight between that F-22 and a P-38 Lightning.

Together, the planes and people, many decades between the oldest and youngest members in attendance, were unified by a desire to honor the men and women of the United States military. The show paid homage not only to past and present flyers, but to veterans of every branch of the U.S. Military, including some of whom died for their country.

Lincoln native Jana Bartels, with husband Randy and daughter Jenna, was one of many thousand moms in attendance who chose to spend their Mother's Day surrounded by loved ones and jet engines.

"It's my first show, I'm really looking forward to the F-22 Raptor, the Blue Angels and to getting a closer look at the C-130 (Fat Albert)," Bartels said as Maj. Dan Dickinson, the F-22 pilot wearing a fitted black flight suit, warmed up his plane's engine 200 feet away.

Moments later, Dickinson, at the controls of the futuristic stealth fighter, deftly made all 20 tons of steel perform like a cross between a whirligig and a yo-yo, at one point using the Raptor's thrust vectoring and advanced flight controls to seemingly stop in midair one second, spinning and blasting off to another whim the next.

The F-22 was soon joined by one of its forebears in flying, a P-38 Lightning, for the long-awaited Heritage Flight. Never mind that the Raptor could fly laps around the Lightning. On this day, the pair preceded in unison, separated by half a century, a hundred feet and nothing else—united as proud stalwarts of a U.S. military legacy.

As the Heritage Flight flew over the crowd one last time, the Raptor peeled right, toward the future, and toward the legacy that it continues to build. The P-38, meanwhile, peeled off to the left, to its indelible place in air warfare history.

P-38s, similar to the one flown alongside the F-22, were part of the Allies' efforts in Europe during World War II, which culminated in Victory in Europe Day exactly 71 years earlier. In a break from the weekend's festivities, service members, veterans and civilians paid solemn tribute to the Nebraskans who gave their lives during the war, including those from the 134th Infantry Regiment, 110th Medical Battalion, and 110th Quartermaster Company.

Despite being geographically far removed from the events that led to V-E Day, Nebraska was not immune to the bloodshed therein.

During its 10 months in Europe, the Cornhusker State's 134th Infantry Regiment sustained 10,216 casualties, including 6,412 battlefield casualties. The 110th Medical Battalion, which supported the division during its march into

See AIRSHOW on 9.

Blue Angel pilot dies in accident

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

A Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron F/A-18C Hornet flown by Capt. Jeff Kuss, 32, of Durango, Colorado, crashed during an air show practice at the Smyrna, Tennessee, Airport, June 2, killing the aviator.

Kuss flew Blue Angel No. 6 and served as the opposing solo pilot. This was Kuss' second year on the team and his first year as a demonstration pilot.

The demonstration team recently performed at the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house in Lincoln in May showcasing the combination of the aircraft's capabilities and superior airmanship.

"The Nebraska National Guard and the aviation community grieve the loss of one of our own," said Lt. Col. Kipper Hesse, commander of the 155th Maintenance Group and 2016 Guardians of Freedom director. "Being an aviator is an inherently dangerous profession and all aviators accept that risk in service to their nation. Even so, it still pains us whenever there is an untimely loss. The Nebraska National Guard family extends heartfelt condolences to Captain Kuss' family, friends, fellow Marines and his Blue Angels teammates."

The demonstration team has begun an operational pause to give investigation officials time to gather facts and ensure the continued safe operations of the squadron.

Kuss' official biography can be found at http://www.blueangels.navy.mil/team/officers.aspx.

Photo by Lt. Col. Keven Hynes

Taking A Look: Crowds of aviation enthusiasts wait their turn to tour a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter on May 8 during the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house in Lincoln. The event attracted crowds in excess of 100,000 for each day of the show.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

Birds Of A Feather: A U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor and a P-38 Lightning fly in formation during the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house Heritage Flight that offered the crowd a chance to see a modern aircraft flying with a World War II-era airplane.

Paying Homage

Nebraska National Guard opens second day of Guardians of Freedom event by saluting past, current service members

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Photojournalist

Nebraska National Guard officials marked the 71st anniversary of Victory in Europe and the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Nebraska Air National Guard, May 8, before the start of the second day of the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house.

Under the rising Nebraska sun with the Navy's infamous F-18 Blue Angels as a backdrop, Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, remarked on the two anniversaries that served to open the Lincoln event.

"On days like this, as we prepare to watch these highly trained aviators perform their amazing acts," Bohac said, "it's important for us to remember, as a community, that days like today wouldn't be possible if it hadn't been for the dedicated service of America military men and women – Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines – who came together, time and time again, to fight against the forces of tyranny that had endangered freedom around the world."

As a joint forces honor guard consisting of two Army and Army Air Corp WWII reenactors and two Nebraska Army and Air National Guard members posted colors, Bohac, flanked by the Nebraska National Guard's senior enlisted leaders – Chief Master Mark Forster and Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker – paid tribute to the service members and veterans of the Nebraska National Guard, past and present, who fought to keep the United States free.

Remembering the Fallen: Current and former military service members salute during the playing of Taps at the May 8 Victory in Europe ceremony in Lincoln.

"Today, we remember all of the Soldiers of the Nebraska National Guard who gave their lives to help free the people of Europe," Bohac said as a bell was struck in tribute to the 134th Infantry Regiment and the Nebraska Soldiers who fell while liberating St. Lo, France.

Again the bell tolled as Bohac recognized the formation of the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1946 and paid tribute to the 14 Airmen who gave their lives during training accidents while preparing to defend their state and nation.

Two more times the bell tolled as Bohac recognized the Soldiers and Airmen who have served since 1946, including those who are currently are serving overseas in support of our nation's interest. He also paid tribute to the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers who have given their lives since Sept. 11, 2011, while serving in our nation's call during the War on Terrorism.

"We will never forget," he said.

After a moment of silence, the narrator directed audiences' attention to the sky as the U.S. Air Force Academy Wings of Blue cadets jumped carrying the colors. As the flag unfurled, Tech Sgt. Lindsay Bustamante sang the National Anthem concluding the ceremony and kicking off the start of the second day of the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house.

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

Honors: Members of a Nebraska Army and Air National Guard color guard are joined with World War II reenactors in rendering honors to the United States during the singing of the National Anthem as a Wings of Blue parachutist presents the colors during the opening of the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house, May 8.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Wow! U.S. Navy Blue Angels crew chiefs move to their aircraft as a billowing wall of flames ignites behind them during the May 8 Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house in Lincoln.

AIRSHOW continued from page 8.

Germany, sustained more than 100 casualties as well.

The 110th Quartermaster Company, likewise, played a key role in keeping the division outfitted and supplied.

"On days like this, as we watch highly trained aviators perform their amazing acts, it's important for us as a community to remember that days like today simply wouldn't be possible if it weren't for the dedicated service of America's military men and women," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general.

The eventual Allied victory at the Battle of St. Lo, France, during the ramp-up to Operation Cobra, was fought in part by Nebraska's sons, husbands, brothers and fathers, said Lt. Col. Kipper Hesse, Guardians of Freedom air show and open house director. According to Hesse, the airshow's purpose was in large part to commemorate the fallen Nebraska Guardsmen from that conflict and others like it.

Later on, a simulated dogfight and strafing run between WWII-era P-51 Mustangs and Japanese 'Zero' fighters commemorated the dogfights of the Pacific, sending walls of flame and plumes of smoke billowing along the runway.

Earlier in the day, the engineless sailplane, manned by German stunt pilot Manfred Radius, looped in arcing ribbons above the crowd before gliding to a safe landing. For once, the cheers of the crowd could be heard over the plane, which in this case, with no engine, remained silent.

The prime time performers of the show, the Blue Angels, saved arguably the best for last.

After an introduction flight by the Blue Angels' C-130 Fat Albert, they set out to do just that.

At 3:36 p.m. on Sunday, the highly-skilled sextet of pilots wowed the crowd not as daredevils escaping scrapes with death, but as technicians exacting surgical precision, completing highly-refined, real-life combat maneuvers in rapid succession.

In perfect formations, the dazzling navy blue planes with goldenrod lettering approached the viewing area in tightknit clusters, then diverged and re-converged at nearly the speed of sound.

Photo by Lt. Col. Keven Hynes

Keeping Their Eyes On the Action: A pair of Guardians of Freedom patrons shade their eyes as they attempt to follow the aerial action, May 8.

With diamond rolls, dirty loops and opposing passes of all sorts, the Blue Angel pilots continued a legacy of past and present military aviators seven decades in the making.

Fifty-two minutes later, as the Blue Angels pilots taxied back to face the dispersing crowd, laughing as they packed up their chairs, Jana Bartels, the Lincoln native excitedly awaiting the headliners of the show, spoke up. "It was excellent, the F-22, the Blue Angels, everything. It was truly an incredible show," she said.

That incredible show would have remained a pipe dream without the dedication and hard work of the nearly 1,000 Airmen from the 155th Air Refueling Wing who, together with Soldiers from the Nebraska National Guard and partners from the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and Lincoln Airport Authority, helped make it a success.

For them, the airshow began 18 months earlier, during a series of meetings between local military leadership, Lincoln-area business owners and the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce.

"It's very humbling," Hesse said of his privilege to lead the preparations of the air show and open house. "(This airshow and open house) serves to highlight the men and women of the Nebraska National Guard – our equipment, our capabilities – as well as the city of Lincoln, and the Airport Authority, as well as what we do for the city and the region."

Hesse was also enthusiastic about the potential for future Guard members, among the children and minors in attendance, to be inspired by the images and the message of the day.

"First, it's great to have something bigger than (you) to be a part of—and that's what being in the military is," Hesse said. "And second is… There's nothing that can stop you from serving if you set your mind to it."

Former Nebraska Army Guard retired Brig. Gen. Dale Williamson, 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized) commander, was one of the higher-ranking veterans in attendance. He said the entire weekend was awe-inspiring.

"It means so much," Williamsons said of the importance of the day's message. "It means a great (deal), to come and see everyone (in today's military) doing a super job."

Viewfinders: Photos capture airshow's excitement

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

Double Vision: A pair of U.S. Navy Blue Angels get up close during their May 8 performance in Lincoln.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Break Away: The U.S. Navy's Blue Angels perform a breakaway technique during their May 8 performance at the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house.

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

Thumbs-Up: Nebraska Men's Basketball Coach Tim Miles gives the thumbs-up as he prepares to take a once-in-a-lifetime flight with the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels, May 3, at the Nebraska National Guard air base, part of the unit's preparations for the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house activities.

Nebraska's Coach Tim Miles, others get workout of lifetime during Blue Angels flights

By Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach
Staff Photojournalist

Cloud surfing, barrel rolls and inverted flight were just a few tricks U.S. Navy Blue Angels pilot Lt. Tyler Davies had up his sleeve for Tim Miles, University of Nebraska men's basketball head coach, at the Nebraska National Guard air base, in Lincoln, May 3.

Miles, along with Tim Gillotti, Lincoln Southwest High School's principal, and Shelby Fenster, 10/11 News anchor, were selected to ride in the passenger seat of Blue Angels jet No. 7, an F/A-18 Hornet.

The ride kicked off the final week of preparations ahead of the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house, May 7-8.

Miles endured the pull of 7.1 "Gs," a level of gravity force equivalent to more than seven times his body weight, while flying up to 600 mph.

Few have experienced the thrill and intensity of riding in a fighter aircraft without wearing a G suit, which is designed to counteract the physiological effects of gravity on an aviator.

The Blue Angels are the only demonstration team in the U.S. Armed Forces to fly without wearing a G-suit.

Miles said he and his daughter sat and watched YouTube videos together before his flight. He added that he was expecting to pass out or lose consciousness.

"I am excited," Miles said. "I am nervous of course, but more than anything I think this is also an opportunity for me to get to know the Air National Guard.

"I have found out just in a few short days things that happen right here in Lincoln (and the impact the Nebraska Air National Guard makes) worldwide. I have learned so much about what these guys do and how hard they work for our country and for our local community. Whether it be globally, the war on terror, assisting our troops… I was most impressed."

Prior to taking off, Miles, Gillotti and Fenster, were provided a "crash course" on how to fly without a G suit, by Airman Joshua Wilbourne, Blue Angels jet number seven crew chief. The three riders learned the "HOOK" maneuver, a power breathing and intra-abdominal pressure technique meant to force blood from the lower extremities into the brain to prevent G-LOC or G-force induced loss of consciousness.

Miles and the other riders were instructed to take a three quarter breath of air while beginning to exhale and forcefully speak the word "hook," holding the "k" to sound like "hook-ahh."

When holding the "k" sound, the throat closes and forces the abdominal muscles to tighten, keeping air and blood in the upper body for 3-5 seconds.

Riders then slightly release the abdominal muscles, relax the throat and forcefully finish the "ah" of the word "hook."

Once this is completed, faintly inhale and begin the process again until the maneuver is complete.

In addition to learning how to breathe correctly, Miles was taught what muscles to flex and when.

The hook maneuver actually begins with curling one's toes to flex the calf muscles as tightly as possible, squeezing the knees in to flex the quadriceps and hamstrings, and flex the glute muscles to drain all the blood from the lower body and keep the blood in the brain.

Wilbourne said the amount of energy it takes to flex and breathe at the appropriate times during a 45-minute flight is equivalent to two hours of intense cardiovascular exercise.

Following his flight, Miles climbed out of the aircraft dripping with sweat and kissed the ground.

Despite being physically exhausted, Miles grinned from ear to ear.

"It was awesome," Miles said. "It's such a physical demand. The abilities of a pilot, the force, the power and acceleration of the machine. It can maneuver and do things that you just can't imagine. And whether you are flying upside down or spinning, there's nothing like it. I am glad I am on the ground though."

Miles said he was impressed with the pilot's physical stamina as he performed multiple flights that day.

"I cannot imagine the strength, conditioning and will power these guys have," Miles said. "The maneuverability and the turns, the force that your body feels, the speed you go is amazing.

"To see my pilot, Tyler, who is an ultimate pro, to see his ability to handle this, I see why pilots have a great deal of confidence. I think these guys would be great role models for any sports team."

Final Jitters: Shelby Fenster, a news anchor with KOLN-KGIN in Lincoln, smiles as she listens to her last-minute instructions before a flight with the U.S. Navy Blue Angels.

Flight Training: (From right) Shelby Fenster, Tim Gillotti and Nebraska Coach Tim Miles receive some preliminary training as they prepare for their flights with the U.S. Navy Blue Angels, May 3.

Aerial Salutes

Air Force jump team handles danger with precision training

By Senior Airman Marshall Maurer
Staff Photojournalist

On a cool but warming May morning, 100,000 spectators await the next performer at the 2016 Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house.

Five 20-somethings—Robert Farley, McKall Turk, Heather Parcasio, Gabrielle Briggs, and Cameron Kistler—huddle with close friends over a smartphone's glowing screen. They study the backlit contents for a moment and nod to each other. Satisfied, they break off into high-fives, handshakes, smiles and laughter; two of them play a quick round of thumb war, two more stretch their legs.

Is it an inside joke? Snapchat? Facebook?

Turns out, it's none of the above.

These 20-somethings are actually highly trained members of the U.S. Air Force Wings of Blue parachute team hailing from the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. And, roughly 50 times a year, for more than 2 million cheering spectators, the team jumps out of a moving aircraft during air shows, sporting events and other public venues.

Today, the team will jump from a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter from Grand Island, Nebraska.

The screen they were looking at doesn't show texts or posts—instead it's got up-to-the-minute wind patterns, according to Parcasio—important for, say, parachutists preparing for a low show jump. That information is even more important when the strong winds that blast the parachutists approach unsafe speeds.

Robert Farley, cadet 2nd class, is one of the jumpers. He grew up in New Jersey, perfected his skills on the basketball court as a youth and enlisted in the Air Force when he was 19.

"As part of the low show, my job is to form a canopy stack with the rest of my teammates and to deploy my streamer before I land in front of the crowd," Farley said.

Behind a pair of black Oakley's and his helmet visor, Farley envisions his next move. "To be honest, I am 100 percent focused on the jump, visualizing what exactly my maneuver is supposed to look like during the freefall, and what my landing pattern is going to be as I get closer to the ground."

Upon crossing over the orange safety-fence and stepping onto the flight line, the team takes its place in the bowel of the Chinook, splayed out across the interior nylon mesh seats.

The flight crew from Grand Island runs its pre-flight checklist. The Chinook whirs and thumps like a 12-ton beating heart. The hydraulic innards pump life into the rotors. The whole bird vibrates.

Then all 12 tons lift off, with 16 souls on board.

Opening the Show: A member of the U.S. Air Force Wings of Blue parachute demonstration team opens the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house, May 7.

As the Chinook climbs to its appropriate altitude and position over the Lincoln crowd, Tech Sgt. Marcia Regula, jump master, takes position at the rear of the helicopter, holds up three fingers and touches her index finger to her thumb: three minutes remain.

The jump team shuffles to the back of the helicopter in a single line.

Third in line is Heather Parcasio, cadet 2nd class. She grew up in California and enlisted after high school. When she's not attending classes at the academy or jumping out of planes, she's a medal-winning amateur boxer.

Today is her first air show jump. To get to this point, she's already jumped over 350 times. With those experiences comes caution. Today, her mind is centered on the high winds.

One by one, as the three minutes evaporate, the jumpers step out of the rear loading ramp of the helicopter as if it were a sturdy dock on a lazy river.

One by one, with fingers bent and offering peace signs, "rock on" signals, or simple fingertip-to-eyebrow salutes, the team falls away from safety, toward the concrete strip below.

In 15 seconds the team reaches terminal velocity on ice cold bursts of wind, with a rural Nebraska landscape coming quickly into focus beneath them. Seconds later, they deploy their canopies.

And it's at this point that a sense of calm washes over Jacob Martin, cadet 2nd class.

"Since such a large portion of our time is spent preparing for each dive, and we are constantly training…it is easy to simply live in the moment," Martin said. "Stepping out into the blue skies and enjoying the rush is what I remember the most from all my jumps."

It's a process with life-or-death implications. And it's a process that the young men and women of this group have accomplished together more than 350 times.

Moments later, each Airman executes perfect landings in front of the gathered crowd.

Photos by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

High Flying Salute: Cadet 1st Class Cameron Kistler, a member of the U.S. Air Force Wings of Blue parachute team, salutes as he steps off the back of a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter during his May 7 performance at the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house in Lincoln.

After the jump, the team huddles up, packs their parachutes with the assistance of crowd members and departs as one. They stop for fans and camera phones along the way.

For Parcasio, the feeling never gets old, nor one she's taking for granted.

"We were right at our limits, and of course I was nervous, but all I wanted to do was jump," Parcasio said. "Every time is almost like the first (time) when I think about how I have been beyond blessed with such a crazy opportunity."

Together, the Wings of Blue and the crew from Grand Island are a testament to the power of crew coordination and crew resource management—and what's possible when a group of individuals from all walks of life work together to achieve one goal.

"You get to experience pure joy and adrenaline and truly live in the moment," said Cameron Kistler, cadet 1st class. "All I can think is that I am blessed to have the opportunity and want to put on a good show for the audience."

Viewfinders: Guardians of Freedom's lasting images

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Birds Of A Feather: A Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker escorts the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels to Lincoln on May 4.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Heads Up: A crowd of people point their cameras and eyes to the Lincoln skies during the May 8 edition of the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house.

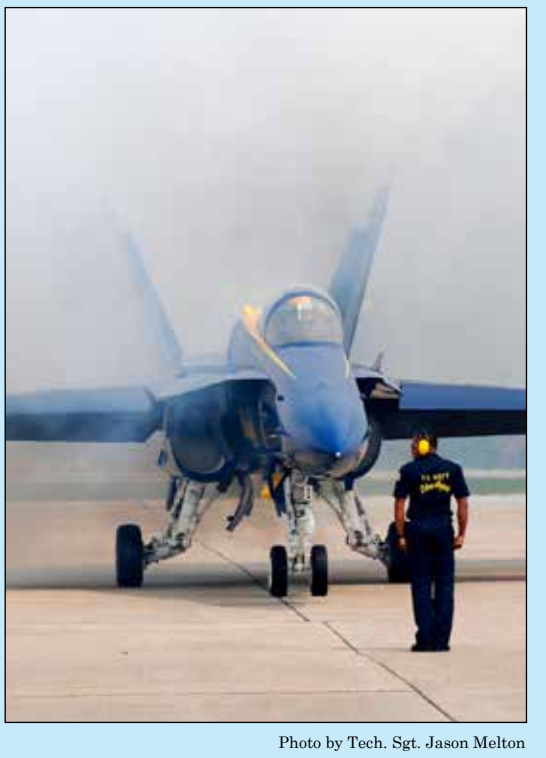


Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Smoky Start: A U.S. Navy Blue Angels crew chief stands at attention as his F/A-18 Hornet starts its engine before the start of a May 8 performance.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Can He Do It? Noted Lincoln pilot Harry Barr attempts to land his airplane on the "world's smallest runway," during an aerial performance on May 7 at the Guardians of Freedom airshow and open house. Barr had to negotiate significant winds to successfully land his airplane on the moving truck.

Unique Mission: Soldiers of Nebraska Army National Guard's 1057th Transportation Company prepare for a 1,200 mile journey from North Carolina to Oklahoma during their annual training in April. The Soldiers were part of a unique Operation Patriot Bandoleer that saw them providing a much-needed transportation support to the U.S. Army Materials Command.

Ready To Move Out: Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers make final preparations at Military Operation Terminal Sunny Point, N.C., as they gear up for a 45-vehicle convoy for a trip to McAlester Army Ammunition Plant in Oklahoma.

Nebraska truck drivers assist in million-mile convoy

By Lisa Simunaci
Army Material Command

SOUTHPORT, N.C. - As Nebraska Army National Guard troops prepared for a 1,200-mile journey in long-haul trucks, their convoy commander sensed their enthusiasm - and matched it.

"I'm a die-hard road tripper," said Sgt. 1st Class Adam Borer of the 1057th Transportation Company after cautioning Soldiers that speed and overconfidence would pose the biggest safety risks during their upcoming excursion.

"They're very excited," Borer said as the Nebraska Soldiers made last-minute preparations on the 45-vehicle line up that would travel from the North Carolina coast to eastern Oklahoma. "They're doing a real-world mission and doing what they are trained to do. They know they are making a difference."

Over the course of Operation Patriot Bandoleer in April, National Guard Soldiers from five states traveled more than one million miles to haul munitions and equipment.

Army Material Command's Army Sustainment Command ships items from Army Prepositioned Stocks located around the world to Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point in North Carolina. From there, they are delivered to sites as far away as Utah. Once the items reach their destination, they will be stored or destroyed in accordance with Army guidelines.

Now in its second year, Operation Patriot Bandoleer not only provides real-world training opportunities for Reserve Component Soldiers, it also supports the Army's Total Force Policy, said Maj. Gen. Elizabeth Austin, the Army Materiel Command's assistant deputy commanding general - Army National Guard.

U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Eben Boothby

Final Inspections: Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers conduct a final inspection of their trucks at Military Operation Terminal Sunny Point, N.C., before the start of a 45-vehicle convoy trip to McAlester Army Ammunition Plant in Oklahoma.

"Army National Guard and the Army Reserve are enhancing readiness at the Army Materiel Command," Austin said. With 10 major subordinate commands, a variety of missions lend themselves to Reserve Component training.

A newly established Reserve Component Mission Support Office at AMC is charged with identifying and expanding these types of opportunities. "We're working to prioritize and coordinate with the National Guard and Army Reserve to facilitate mutually beneficial operations," Austin said.

Besides supporting the command, real-world training enriches the experience for citizen Soldiers.

"We're paying Soldiers two weeks a year to drive trucks - why not put something on the back of them?" said Lt. Col. Christopher Weskamp, commander of the Nebraska National Guard's 734th Transportation Battalion.

Planning on a different cycle than the active Army and taking civilian jobs and college student schedules into account often makes it difficult to find real-world missions, Weskamp noted. Units like the 734th, with Citizen Soldiers who double as dairy farmers, restaurant owners, carpenters, transportation inspectors and more, must be flexible enough to meet the mission's time constraints.

Once committed though, these units take full advantage of the training opportunities provided. Rather than traversing the Nebraska plains, Operation Patriot Bandoleer allowed truck drivers to test their mettle across multiple states and mountainous terrain. For full-timers or those on extended orders, the mission has a deeper impact.

"This has been our whole world for the past six to eight months," said Capt. Tim Buskirk of the 734th Transportation Battalion who was on temporary active duty orders to help coordinate the mission.

After an initial get together with participating units, communication throughout the planning and execution phase fell into line, Buskirk said.

"It's all about communication, and everybody was really excited about this mission," he said. "That made coordination easy."

From team missions around the world, to opportunities for individual Soldiers in its headquarters, AMC continues to incorporate the Reserve Component into its fold.

"We could not do what we do on the active side without the Total Force Concept," said AMC Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Edward Daly. "We're on a great glide path and we've got to continue this irreversible momentum for the future."

Hansen named National Guard contracting's 'best of the best'

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Please forgive Randy Hansen if he's smiling just a little more these days.

After all, it's not every day that a person receives a national honor in front of both their co-workers and peers from across the nation who literally represent "the best of the best" in the National Guard contracting community.

"I am totally humbled," said Randy Hansen, a Nebraska National Guard contracting officer shortly after receiving the first-ever 'Leadership in Contracting' award during the National Guard Bureau Principal Advisor Responsible for Contracting (PARC) workshop in Norman, Oklahoma, March 7.

"I just can't believe that I would get this award," Hansen said. "I am with a group of heavy-weights…To know these people and to have me come up and get this award… it's just unbelievable."

According to Col. David Rasmussen, supervisory contracting specialist for Nebraska, Hansen's response was exactly what he expected. Rasmussen was the one who initially nominated Hansen for the new award based upon his years of work in ensuring that Nebraska National Guard contracts are created and then implemented appropriately according to federal rules and regulations.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Nation's Best: Randy Hansen receives the national Leadership in Contracting trophy during the National Guard Bureau Principal Responsible for Contracting workshop in Norman, Okla., March 7.

"We have a lot of really good contracting specialists within the office, but as I was reading through the nomination packet, this one just stood out for Randy," Rasmussen said. "He's always there… he always steps up to whatever you need. He never complains and he is a true mentor to some of our younger contracting specialists.

"It was easy to write (the nomination) because he does such outstanding work."

That may have been easy. Keeping the news from Hansen, however, was a totally different matter. Rasmussen said that he was informed that Hansen had won the award approximately 10 days before the ceremony. He said that it was a struggle not letting him know.

"It was tough, but if you know Randy, you want to get him as good as you can," Rasmussen said, smiling. "He's a kidder, himself. So, it was good that we were able to keep it a big surprise."

Hansen said he had no idea that he was going to be recognized during the event, although he did have a small inkling that something was up. Hansen said that had to do with the fact that Rasmussen kept asking him if he'd packed a sports jacket for the trip.

"I thought it was for the office because we have such a great office staff. We have some really great leaders," Hansen said. "So I thought something was going to happen for the office.

"I couldn't believe it when my name flashed on the screen. I am still in shock. I can't believe this."

Hansen said that the award really represents the quality of work that he and this co-workers do each and every day.

"It says a lot about our office," he said. "We have some great professionals. We have some people who are really knowledgeable. They've been there for years and they really know the business.

"And we have some new people coming up who are really the cream of the crop. Contracting is a tough field, but we really do a good job."

Rasmussen agreed, saying the fact that the Nebraska National Guard contracting office was a finalist for two other contracting awards speaks volumes.

"There are outstanding professionals in the office," Rasmussen said. "Everyone wants to do the right thing. It's not rocket science, but is very complex. You have to keep up with things all of the time.

"And I think we do a great job of doing that."

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 1.

has served in the Nebraska Army National Guard since enlisting three-and-a-half-years ago, winning the national Best Warrior title was something that even in his "wildest of dreams" he couldn't have conceived of. "It really hasn't sunk in yet," said Koziol, the son of John and Rhonda Koziol of Albion who is currently majoring in Exercise Science at the University of Nebraska at Kearny. "It really hasn't sunk in yet. No, I never imagined this."

The Best Warrior Competition is a multi-step program designed to select the one enlisted Soldier and noncommissioned officer who can best demonstrate their Soldiers skills in a multi-day event that features both mental and physical challenges. In order to qualify for the national competition, Koziol first had to win similar contests at the state and regional levels, held in April and May, respectively.

The Massachusetts competition brought together seven enlisted Soldiers and seven NCOs representing Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The Soldiers were literally the best of the best of the entire Army National Guard, said Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, Nebraska Army National Guard state command sergeant major, who officiated over the state competition and then accompanied Koziol to both the regional and national matches.

"When you get to that level of competition….they're all good. They come from all parts of the country and they're all studs," Baker said.

According to Koziol, he and his unit sponsor, Sgt. Kurt Ruh, flew out to the Massachusetts National Guard installation near Cape Cod roughly a week before the start of the competition. While there, Koziol focused on keeping his physical fitness sharp while also trying to best understand the challenges that would be presented during the competition.

"Just to get a feel of the surrounding and to get a feel of what was going to be expected of us and what we needed to do," Koziol said about the preparation. "I just kind of prepared mentally, I guess."

That mental preparation definitely paid off. On the very first morning of the competition, when the participating Soldiers expected to take a physical fitness test, Mother Nature forced a change in the schedule. Instead, the Guardsman had to complete a written essay, written test and then appear before a senior enlisted leader board where they were expected to answer a wide array of questions.

"So, right away it was a rocky start," said Koziol. "Everyone was preparing for the P.T. test and you have to switch your mindset and get ready for the mental part."

Final Push: Sgt. Calvin Koziol, an infantryman with the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, pushes it out to the finish line of a five-mile run as part of the 2016 Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition at Joint Base Cape Cod, Mass., June 21.

Then, the Soldiers moved out to conduct their physical fitness test, which, Koziol said, actually combined two events into one. After completing the two-mile run portion of the graded physical fitness test, the Soldiers continued on another three miles, which allowed them to receive scores for their five-mile race as well.

The day concluded with an evening "stress shoot" exercise where the competitors had to collect intelligence on a mock enemy compound.

"It wasn't something that I've had a lot of experience training on," Koziol said, "but I enjoyed it a lot. I took a lot of good graining away from it."

Photos by Sgt. 1st Class jon Soucy

How Many More? Sgt. Calvin Koziol, an infantryman with the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, pushes out one more repetition as the final seconds tick off during the pushup event of the Army Physical Fitness Test portion of the 2016 Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

He also took a first-day lead in the Enlisted Soldier Category.

"I figured after the P.T. test and the five-mile run I would be sitting pretty good," he said. "But I didn't know if I would be at the top. So, it was a little surprising.

"It's an unbelievable feeling. You know the quality of the guys you're competing with, so you know what you've been through and you know what they've been through. Just to be there is an accomplishment in itself, so when you're at the top… I had to step back and take it all in because that's not just given to you. You've got to earn that."

According to Baker, he was particularly impressed with the level of teamwork that Koziol and his mentor/coach Ruh had developed during their months of preparations and competitions. "They melded as a team," Baker said. "I give a lot of credit to Sgt. Ruh for being a great sponsor, for helping him along and keeping him motivated."

Koziol agreed. "He was super important. He kept me mentally prepared. He was always training. He was always refreshing me, making sure I was at the right place at the right time."

"It was just nice to have somebody there to motivate you and to make sure you were doing what needed to be done," Koziol added.

That definitely had an impact, Baker said.

"I think (Koziol) had the mentality to do well," Baker said. "He wasn't cocky going into it. He was focused. I enjoyed watching him as he was preparing for events. You could tell that he was focused on that event… he wasn't getting out in front, he was focusing on the task at hand… he was concerned only about that moment."

"I think that helps," Baker added. "Instead of getting too far into the future and thinking about the next event or about the event he just did… he just kept his focus on the present. I think that he was very well prepared."

The second day of competition included such additional mental and physical challenges as a short ruck march followed by shooting an M-9 pistol for score, an obstacle course, day land navigation tests and a series of "warrior tasks" that required Koziol and his fellow competitors to successfully conduct a mounted reconnaissance for "improvised explosive devices" while demonstrating proper radio procedures and the ability to conduct battlefield medical care and evacuation on a "wounded" comrade.

The event concluded with a night land navigation course.

Baker said that through the state and regional levels of the competition, Koziol had some difficulties with land navigation. Those difficulties arose again during the land navigation course at nationals.

"He really spent a lot of time working to improve the areas that he was weak on, to include land navigation," Baker said. "Even though he had some troubles during the day land navigation course, he turned around and won the night land navigation event. That was probably one of the main reasons he won."

The next and final day of the competition, the Soldiers were flown to the historic Concord and Lexington Battlefield where they completed the arduous 14-mile ruck march. Koziol, as he had on the previous day's events, went in with the overall lead.

"I kind of knew where I was sitting," said Koziol. "I knew who I had to beat and what I had to do to have the best chance."

Although tough, Koziol said the final ruck march was helped by the fact that it followed the historic trail of militiamen who had responded to Paul Revere's famed call for action. "It helped keep your mind occupied," he said.

Finally, the last steps were in sight. The bridge, where the Revolutionary War began, simply had to be crossed.

"I didn't get first in the ruck march," he said. "I knew I had to finish strong."

And then, it was over. But was it enough?

Koziol said he couldn't bring himself to go look at the board where they results were kept. Instead, he sent Ruh over to get the final verdict.

"I guess I was pretty nervous," he said.

"He came back and said, 'You did it,'" Koziol added. "I gave him a handshake and we just kind of looked at each other and said, 'We did it.'"

Koziol was a national champion.

"It really didn't sink in. It was just an amazing feeling."

Following a ceremony, Koziol returned home to Nebraska. His phone still continues to bring him words of congratulations from his unit mates, leaders and other people.

Koziol said the praise was nice. Still, he said he also feels that perhaps he isn't the only one who could've achieved the historic championship. "We've got some good guys in the unit," he said. "I'm probably not even the best Soldier in the unit. I'm pretty confident that a lot of other Soldiers could've done the same thing."

Baker agrees, saying that Koziol is serving as a pathfinder, giving Nebraska's other Soldiers the confidence that they, too, have what it takes to win at the highest levels.

"We've always had some pretty good competitors in the state," Baker said. "We've gone to the regional level, but we just haven't been able to get over the hump. We've been knocking at the door. We know we have it in us now.

"It's not just unit-specific, either. The entire state can see this. I'm just sure that from now going forward there's going to be some incredible competition at our state-level Best Warrior."

Photos courtesy of the Nebraska Emergency Mangement Agency

Getting Into Rugged Places: A Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter practices dropping water into a western Nebraska canyon using its bright orange Bambi bucket during the annual TERREX held April 23-24 at Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford, Neb. This year's exercise focused on communication capabilities of state and local resources following a simulated wildfire set by a terrorist group.

Preparing for any emergency

Wildfire exercise brings multiple state agencies, local responders together

By Jodie Fawl
NEMA Public Information Officer

State and local agencies tested interoperable communications during the annual state exercise, April 23-24 at Ft. Robinson State Park near Crawford.

Dubbed TERREX16, this year's full-scale exercise focused on communication capabilities of state and local resources during wildfires set by a terrorist group.

Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), in coordination with the Nebraska State Patrol and the Office of the Chief Information Officer, planned and coordinated the annual statewide exercise. Sean Runge, NEMA exercise training officer, served as exercise director.

Air-to-air, air-to-ground and all types of ground communication, with multiple agency involvement, was tested.

"We designed this exercise so that all of those responsible for communication during a wildfire incident would have a chance to test their equipment in a simulated wildfire response," Runge said. "This allowed all involved to practice a coordinated communication response before an actual event."

Objectives of the exercise were to:

- Test interoperable communications amongst responding agencies
- Ensure agency specific equipment can integrate into the interoperable communications plan or develop a work around to ensure interoperable communications
- Ensure air to air and air to ground communications among all air assets
- Ensure the ability to communicate with Great Plains Communication Center
- Provide opportunities for the completion of Incident Management Team task book work;
- Deliver the RT130 annual wildland firefighter refresher course
- Tag and track all resources involved in TERREX16
- Operate in the safest and most efficient manner possible

Each agency that participated also had specific objectives they worked in conjunction with the overarching objectives.

This is the state's 14th annual TERREX which is a wide-scale emergency response exercise. Past events have simulated a terrorist attack on state infrastructure, an infectious disease outbreak among livestock, a flu-like epidemic, an active shooter attack on a college campus, a pipeline explosion and last year's exercise which involved a crude oil transportation spill exercise.

Agencies involved include: NEMA, Nebraska National Guard, Office of the Chief Information Office, Nebraska State Patrol, Nebraska Forest Service, Nebraska State Fire Marshal, the United State Forest Service, Nebraska Department of Roads, Region 23 Emergency Management and Great Plains Dispatch Center. The following volunteer fire departments also participated: Chadron, Crawford, Hemingford, Harrison and Alliance.

Morning Session: Bryan Tuma, the assistant director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, addresses a group of civilian and Nebraska National Guard firefighters and emergency support personnel during the annual TERREX at Fort Robinson State Park.

Off They Go: A row of firefirghters march up a hill at Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford, Neb., during TERREX16. This year's exercise focused on communication capabilities of state and local resources during wildfires set by a terrorist group.

Guard teams with third graders to protect Camp Ashland's eagles

By Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Editor

Third graders from Ashland-Greenwood Elementary School learned all about bald eagles with the help of Operation Bald Eagle Project and the Nebraska Army National Guard.

Operation Bald Eagle is a project that was started by the Nebraska Army National Guard last year to help raise awareness about the importance of bald eagles and their habitats.

The third graders were visited in their classroom by members of the Nebraska Guard's Environment Office earlier in the year.

The Guard staff members then taught the students about Operation Bald Eagle as well as different facts and information regarding the bald eagles that nest at Camp Ashland, a training site for the Nebraska Army National Guard located approximately two miles east of their community.

"This project is done as a part of the public outreach/community involvement program area that is incorporated into each of the Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans – a requirement for all training sites by National Guard Bureau," said Amy Dirks, Natural Resources manager for the Nebraska Army National Guard.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock

There It Is: Ashland-Greenwood third grade students point at a bald eagle's nest while Amy Dirks (far right) helps a student locate the nest through a scope during a May 17 visit to Camp Ashland. The students were participating in the Nebraska Army National Guard's Operation Bald Eagle program at Camp Ashland.

"This activity gives us an opportunity to get the community of Ashland involved in just one of the ways the military mission is supported at Camp Ashland.

"Protecting the environment is an important aspect to sustaining our military lands to benefit the surrounding ecosystem as well as support continued training use. We're able to share that message with Operation Bald Eagle."

After learning about the bald eagles, the students had the opportunity to participate in an essay writing contest, during with the students wrote about how bald eagles are important to them personally while also adding some fun and interesting facts about the famed bird.

"It's always a delight working with the Ashland-Greenwood School third grade classes," Dirks said.

"The students respond to this event with such enthusiasm for the essay-writing activity and the Camp Ashland visit."

According to the third grade teachers at Ashland-Greenwood, it is a wonderful learning experience for the students.

"The students were really interested in this project," said Jan Gutirrez, a third grade teacher at Ashland-Greenwood Public School.

"They even did research on their own to find out more information on bald eagles."

Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Feet Wet: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, jump into Milford Lake near Fort Riley, Kan., shortly after an active Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter dropped their Zodiac raft into the choppy water during a HELOCAST exercise, June 11. The annual training exercise was designed to give the Guard Soldiers the opportunity to practice conducting water insertion operations.

Boat Engine Maintenance: Sgt. Chase Lind, a team leader with Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, tries to fix a maintenance problem on one of his unit's Zodiac raft engines, June 10, at his unit's base camp on Fort Riley, Kan.

Waterborne Troopers

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Nebraska Long Range Surveillance Soldiers turn in parachutes for rubberized rafts during unique annual training exercise at Fort Riley

Members of Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, are used to taking slightly different modes of travel when they conduct their mission.

However, even the most seasoned of the Airborne Soldiers were smiling pretty broadly after the unit successfully conducted a unique HELOCAST mission at Milford Lake near Fort Riley, Kansas, June 11. The mission required the Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to launch two rubber Zodiac rafts from the back of a Fort Riley CH-47 Chinook helicopter and then take the jump themselves into the chilly water below.

According to 1st Sgt. Andrew Yates, the exercise was designed to test the unit's ability to conduct its long range surveillance mission through water insertion.

"This is one of our primary means of insertion," said Yates, the unit's top enlisted Soldier. "We have a dedicated detachment (of Soldiers) for water operations, so this is really about training to our (Mission Essential Task List) tasks of insertion."

Sgt. 1st Class Josh Meyers, an assistant operations noncommissioned officer attached to unit as its jump master, said the exercise was a culmination of months of preparation that included water survival training at YMCA pools in Beatrice and Hastings and then practicing with the Zodiac rafts at a small lake near Beatrice.

"We've been training with the water a lot, making sure that guys are comfortable in it and identifying our weaker swimmer," Meyers said. "That way, when they get into the water, they know that their buddies are going to be there for them."

It was all about gaining confidence, Meyers said.

"Without the practice and proficiency, you can't send guys in," Meyers said. "You just don't have the confidence…. This gives us a combat multiplier."

Sgt. Dustin Stoner, a Co. C team leader agreed. While working on a Zodiac engine that, for some reason, refused to start the afternoon before the exercise, Stoner talked about the amount of training that had gone into getting to this point.

"Safety and safety hazards that we have to consider," he said. "We have gone through every step as in-depth as possible to make sure that it's safe for everybody."

He said that, in turn, made the exercise all the more anticipated.

"Oh yeah, they love doing it," Stoner said. "It's something you don't get to do every day."

This actually marked the second time this year that the unit has conducted a water insertion exercise, said Yates, adding that company Soldiers conducted a practice exercise at Fort Riley during its March drill weekend.

This time was different, however. All eyes were on the Soldiers as they prepared to conduct the operation for real, as was evident by the amount of senior Nebraska Army National Guard and Fort Riley officers and NCOs who gathered at Lake Milford's rocky shore to watch.

"Everybody's excited," Yates said. "It's a long annual training, so this is always a motivation-building training… so everybody's motivation is pretty high, despite the lack of sleep."

The exercise actually involved multiple steps. First, a crew of Co. C Soldiers aboard a third rubberized Zodiac laid out orange buoys in the lake in a box roughly 100-feet by 300-feet. The Soldiers, who served as the safety boat crew for the exercise, then pulled back and kept civilian boaters out the area as the CH-47 helicopter pulled into a hover over the box, roughly a couple feet above the waves created by its rotor blast.

Within moments, a single boat was pushed out of the back of the helicopter, which was then followed by six Guard Soldiers, who jumped into the lake from varying heights. The Soldiers then swam to the boat, pulled themselves in, and unwrapped plastic water-proofing material from their weapons and equipment as the Chinook moved off to pick up the next boat crew.

Once done, the Soldiers moved off tactically to their final insertion point roughly a mile to the west of their initial "swim."

The operation was repeated a second time just as successfully.

The final step of the exercise involved roughly eight Co. C Soldiers who jumped out of the helicopter into the water, who then swam to the waiting safety boat for the final ride into the lake shore. This jump, referred to as the "Hollywood Jump," gave the final Soldiers an opportunity to learn more about what it takes to conduct a water insertion.

Among these Soldiers was 1st Lt. Christopher Moore, Co. C's executive officer and self-described "not very good swimmer."

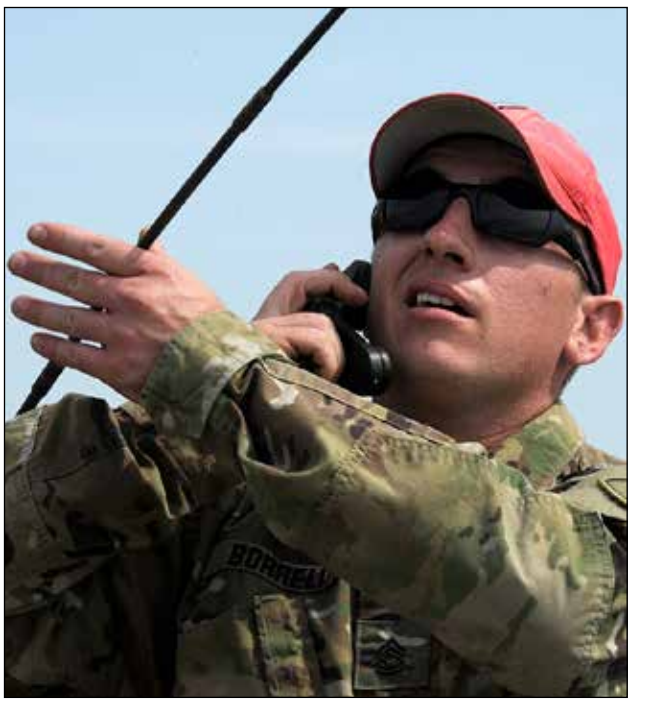
"It was actually my first time jumping out of a CH-47… so it was pretty exciting," Moore said, water dripping from his face and uniform as he stood on the rocky Lake Milford shore. "I was very nervous. I was very, very, very nervous.

"I had some pretty good guidance from the sergeant major and the first sergeant. They told me what I needed to do, where to swim and everything, so it wasn't too bad."

Moore said the training was an excellent opportunity to build both personal and team confidence. "It's important for the LRS to get out and do our mission. At the same time, it lets guys build up courage – like myself – to know that you don't need to be afraid. That you can do this."

Overall, Meyers rated the exercise an overwhelming success. "I think it went well," Meyers said. "The boats got out without flipping, everybody got into the both and on to their mission.

"The guys had a good time," added Meyers, who actually used the occasion to reenlist into the Nebraska Army National Guard before taking the plunge from the helicopter. "This is what guys sign up to do."



Clear Signals: Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy Borrell speaks to the crew of the CH-47 Chinook helicopter as it prepares to conduct the water insertion operation.

On The Move: Members of Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, move off to conduct their water insertion exercise shortly after jumping into Milford Lake near Fort Riley, Kan., during a June 11 exercise.

Final Ride: The final group of Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, Soldiers receive a ride to the shore from the crew of the safety boat after the Soldiers jumped into Milford Lake near Fort Riley, Kan., during a June 11 HELOCAST water insertion exercise.

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Colonel
Brent D. Flachsbart
Gary A. Ropers

Lieutenant Colonel
Darin E. Huss

First Lieutenant
Andrew J. Callahan
Seth P. Roskens

Chief Warrant Officer 3
Kristopher J. Schaaf

Chief Warrant Officer 2
Kassidy C. Nelson

Command Sergeant Major
Jeremy R. Tenkley

Sergeant Major
Larry W. Martin Jr.
Daniel P. Mitchell

Master Sergeant
Jeffry S. Drager
Robert L. Johnson
John R. Price Jr.
Matthew J. Rouse

Sergeant First Class
Reggie D. Barent
Erik M. Becker
Terrence M. Dow
Brenda B. Erickson
Wade O. Kopetzky
Casey J. Lindsay
Dane M. McGinley
Daniel J. Rocha
Gregory S. Wortman

Staff Sergeant
James A. Carlson
Mark A. Duncan
Amber J. Gralheer
Matthew T. Hawke
Benjamin A. Heimes
Casey J. Hughes
Benjamin S. Mattox
Justin M. Reavis
Vincent M. Ross
Dominic Rossitto
Jessie M. Seifert
Shawna M. Tibbetts

Sergeant
William T. Bushhousen
Caleb A. Dewey
Austin C. Dutcher
Zachary D. Findley
Bryce J. Fowler
Samantha M. Garcia
Raymond E. Hulett
Joshua A. Linder
Matthew J. Lueninghoener
Aimee J. Miller
David M. Mueller
Anthony W. Rischling
Thomas B. Roth
Andrea J. Salisbury
Jacob H. Shindollar
Austin L. Stenger
Benjamin P. Stewart
Bradley J. Warnick

Specialist
Treu G. Anderson
Kevin N. Boyle
Rachelle D. Carmin
Jameson J. Collier
Alexander S. Fandrich
Ethan J. Feltes
Shawn M. Fleischman
Jonathan T. Gifford
Tyler S. Goosic
Selena R. Gray
Andrew C. Greedy
Triston A. Grieser
Taylor S. Hartwig
Damian R. Hort
Robert R. Jordan
Kurtis K. Kirkendall
Guadalupe D. V. Lopez
Taylor L. Markuson
Jose O. Martinez Hernandez
Timothy R. McClure
Haley M. Munson
Oleg Petrusev
Perry J. Pierce
Austin R. L. Roach
Gregory L. Salnicky II
Juan D. Sarmientoborrego
Luke I. Schlueter
Kristin A. Schutte
Benjamin A. Serr
Jack B. Smith
Roger K. Strander
Nicholas C. White
Lorenzo B. Williams
Jesse A. Windham

Private First Class
Dylan T. Bludorn
Nicholas A. Bucy
Austin G. Chitty
Trevor L. Courter
Samantha S. Gardner
Jalen K. Grant
Jacob M. King
Michael A. Lange
Logan J. Paben
Jared G. Pohlmann
Xavier R. Sagaste
Benjamin C. Sandquist
Desiree L. Wadsworth

Private Two
Dustin K. Dean
Tysen L. Taylor

Air National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel
Michael W. Holdcroft
Wade R. Holen
Andrew J. Malousek

Major
Bradley A. Bohn

Senior Master Sergeant
Sherri M. Bejvancesky
Robert Bogle
Shannon M. Nielsen
Brandon Viet

Master Sergeant
Rene Arriola
Boyd Bowder
Kenneth Brown
Matthew Jordan
Daren D. Rademacher

Technical Sergeant
Wesley Boggs
Kristopher Bousquet
Gage Bowder
Daniel J. Dibbern
Corbin J. Hamernik
Ruben A. Jaquiz
Robert K. Simon
Neal Stocking
Andrew Starbuck
Mary Thach

Staff Sergeant
James P. Cherecwich
Mayte Dingman
Brandon A. Lindholm
Evan H. McConnell
Zachary Olsen

Senior Airman
Samuel Albertson
Allyssa M. Castoral
Reid Dalton
Jonathan Lippy
Samantha Nice
Matthew Parker
Brigette Staack

Airman 1st Class
Connor Desimone
Kyle Holton
Madalyn Kelley
Aaron A. Link
Jamie Titus
Jackson Young

Airman
Simon Naumann

En Memorium

Maj.James Carrier
Command Sgt. Maj. Wallace Selby
Master Sgt. Loren Leatherman
Sgt. 1st Class Teresa Flynn
Sgt. Anthony Rischling
Mr. Jon Schwarz

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal
Lt. Col. Thomas R. Mortimer III
Maj. Edwin W. Davis
Capt. Timothy M. Buskirk
Master Sgt. Troy L. Armstrong
Master Sgt. Marlon D. Timm
Sgt. 1st Class Christopher P. Herndon

Army Commendation Medal
Capt. Matthew D. Bartling
Command Sgt. Maj. William B. Beiber
Staff Sgt. Kelly L. Allsman
Staff Sgt. Robert B. Thompson
Sgt. Calvin J. Koziol
Sgt. Like D. Potts
Sgt. Brandan S. Regier
Sgt. Stephanie M. Williams
Spc. Brice J. Beckman
Spc. Brandon J. Kapke

Army Achievement Medal
Maj. Robert J. Mendez
Capt. Christina Krcilek
1st Lt. Bradley D. Steinman
2nd Lt. Brody C. Telfer
1st Sgt. James H. Mckeehan
1st Sgt. Marc A. Sheehan
Sgt. 1st Class Trent S. Hellbusch
Staff Sgt. Barbara K. Pope
Staff Sgt. Channon Price
Staff Sgt. Justin P. Tramp
Sgt. Connor H. Alberts
Sgt. Chad M. Allely
Sgt. Brianna N. Boecker
Sgt. William P. Cozad
Sgt. Darron D. Taylor
Sgt. Andres J. White
Spc. Jordan M. Funk
Spc. Isaac D. Hartman
Spc. Christopher S. Mercure
Spc. William R. Scheller

Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal
Capt. Ryan E. Thompson
1st Lt. Nathan J. Reicks
Master Sgt. Carl K. Dehling

Nebraska National Guard Commendation Medal
Staff Sgt. Joshua J. Kushen

Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal
Lt. Col William J. Prusia
Maj. Jason D. Barber
2nd Lt. Kalee M. Boden
2nd Lt. Kyle D. Gaudreault
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Matthew D. Greathouse
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Marcus A. Groetzinger
1st Sgt. William C. Cary
Sgt. 1st Class Travis D. Arner
Sgt. 1st Class Landen C. Koopman
Sgt. 1st Class Daniel R. Malizzi
Sgt. 1st Class Robert J. Ternus
Staff Jason A. Kilcoin
Staff Sgt. Brison G. Kuhn
Staff Sgt. Carley L. Schultz
Sgt. Jonathan R. Steager
Spc. Kaleb P. Bateman
Spc Jordan A. Miller
Spc. Mohamed A. Musa
Spc. Jaiden B. Thomas
Spc. Cogan W. Thompson
Pfc. Sterling J. Reeves

Air National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal
Lt. Col. Robert Barnhill
Lt. Col. Spencer Hansen
Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
Maj. Elizabeth Micek
Senior Master Sgt. Michelle Laframboise
Senior Master Sgt. Darren Miller

Air Force Achievement Medal
Col. Kevin Hittle

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Col. Anita K. W. Curington
Lt. Col. Jeffrey M. Kilgore
Lt. Col. Dale A. Krueger
Spc. Christopher D. Gies
1st Sgt. Adam L. Homan
Spc. Michael S. Jones
Staff Sgt. Scott A. Jorgensen
1st Sgt. Marlon D. Timm
Staff Sgt. Randall S. Zimmerman

Revamped Prairie Soldier newspaper: Chance to reconnect

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

Greetings. I am so glad to be able to sit down and write an article for the revitalized *Prairie Soldier* for your reading pleasure.

There has been a lot happening in the retiree world, and I know many of you are on top of the events. Please continue to share your experiences as you wind your way through the myriad of retiree benefits and programs.

We will keep sending information out as we get it as well.

Prairie Soldier

I am so glad to see the *Prairie Soldier* back in print. You can get copies at our office, or any Armory or Reserve Center.

Unfortunately, due to budget restrictions, they cannot be mailed to your home address. But, this will give you a chance to go to your local armory and visit with the service members there – share your stories with them.

The legacy of the National Guard begins with you.

Retiree Briefing

The Army Guard hosted a Retiree Briefing event at the Kearney Readiness Center, 5710 Airport Road, Kearney, on Saturday, June 25. The briefing provided updates on the National Guard and representatives from Tri-Care, Army Survivor Outreach Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs were there to give information and handouts.

Additionally, a representative from the Nebraska National Guard Museum gave an update on the museum happenings in Seward. If you've not been to the museum yet, you are missing a great showcase of Nebraska National Guard history. Some recent events at the museum were the "Run to St. Lo Memorial" 5K Run and 1 mile run/walk, on Saturday, June 11, starting and ending at the museum. You can find more information at www.nengm.org.

DEERS/ID Card Stations

- G1 – 2433 N.W. 24th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524: (402) 309-8167/8168/8169;
- "Spirit of 1776" Armory 1776 N. 10th St. Lincoln, NE 68508 (402) 309-7359/7373;
- 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;
- Norfolk Armory 817 S. 1st St. Norfolk, NE 68701 (402) 309-8900/8908;
- Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney: (402) 309-7758/7752;
- 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), 220 County Road A, Bldg. 508, Ashland, NE 68003, (402) 309-7809/7628;
- Offutt Air Force Base: (402) 294-2374;
- The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.

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

Some other recent events at the museum included a volunteer weekend on June 25th and 26th which set up temporary displays and artifacts for the museum ribbon cutting on Saturday, July 4.

On July 4, the displays were dedicated at the museum followed by tours. Last year they had almost 4,000 visitors!

Offutt Airshow

For your info, there will be a Defenders of Freedom Open House and Air Show at Offutt AFB, July 30-31. Many displays will be there, in addition to the thrills of seeing vintage and modern aircraft in action.

Honoring Our Past Members

Many of you have asked us to provide notices when retirees pass. We will do so, electronically, when we receive notice from you. I know all of us have made many friends over the years and sometimes lose touch, so it's nice to know when someone makes the final journey. We will do what we can to ensure notices are sent out when we hear about them.

Retiree Websites

Army Echoes for the Army Guard and the Afterburner for Air Guard folks are good websites to visit to find out more information on retiree appreciation days, upcoming events, and general retirement information. The Army Echoes is at https://soldierforlife.army.mil. The Afterburner is at http://www.retirees.af.mil/afterburner.

License Plates

Have you gotten your distinctive military service plate from DMV? It's easy to do and a good way to showcase your proud service as a member of the Army or Air Guard (or any other service, for that matter).

If you haven't done so, and wish to get a plate, either a generic or personalized, you have to register with the Nebraska Department of Veteran's Affairs to have a Veteran's designation displayed on your Nebraska license or ID card. It's easy, painless, and quick.

Go to the registry site at http://www.veterans.nebraska.gov/ or contact the VA at 402-471-2450. Questions related to this registry should be directed to: Nebraska Department of Veteran's Affairs, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68509. If the "Veteran" designation is added when you renew your driver's license, there is no extra fee to do so. If you want to apply for a replacement license to have the designation shown, you will have to pay a replacement fee. All veterans and retirees who are eligible and who want to add the "Veteran" designation to their driver licenses or State ID cards are encouraged to do so at www.CLICKDMV.Nebraska.gov. They may also do so at any driver licensing office.

Once that's done, you can then apply online for a veteran's plate. Its' very easy to do.

Additional Information

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us at (402) 309-7303 or (402) 309-7305. We'll get you pointed in the right direction to ensure you start receiving your retirement benefits on time. We strive to ensure all our members receive quality information and service. We look for suggestions and comments to make our product better.

Check the expiration date on your ID card. Have you updated your ID card? Your Retired ID card is your identification for Tricare, Tricare for Life, and to validate your Medicare eligibility.

Have you moved, changed a phone number or added an email address? Please contact us to update your information so we can keep our information current.

As always, thank you for your dedicated military service. The Nebraska National Guard is rightfully proud of its heritage and you were part of that legacy.

Retiree Breakfasts

For the early birds, here's the breakfast site information as we know it:

Lincoln:

Army National Guard retirees: **FIRST** Monday of each month, 7 a.m., Virginia's Travelers Café, 3820 Cornhusker Highway, Lincoln.

Air National Guard retirees: **LAST** Monday of each month, 7 a.m., Stauffer's Café, 5600 S. 48th Street, Lincoln.

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

If any other towns have retiree breakfasts and want to share that information, please let us know and we'll add you to the list so others can join you.

From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Ed Luhn.

Contact us to assist you with your retirement processing and questions. Contact info for me is (402) 309-8162 and email address is Vincent.e.luhn.mil@mail.mil. We're located in the Joint Forces Headquarters Building, 2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, NE 68524. Call us at any time.

Your Tri-Care manager is Staff Sgt. Travis Garrett and he may be reached at (402) 309-1541 or travis.s.garrett.mil@mail.mil. Contact him for all your Tri-Care related questions.

The United Health Care for Military and Veterans phone number is 1-877-988-9378.

New unit merges Nebraska Guard with active Army division

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

A new tune was heard echoing through the muggy Nebraska Army National Guard's "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, June 26:

'Toast of the Army, Favorite Son! Hail to the brave Big Red One!

Always the first to thirst for a fight.

No foe shall challenge our right to victory.'

What made this song particularly unique was not that these were the lyrics to the 1st Infantry Division's "Big Red One," which was written in 1943 while the famed U.S. Army infantry division fought the German and Italian armies in North Africa, but rather it was the fact that it was sung by approximately 90 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who, following the activation of the Guard's new 1st Infantry Division Main Command Post Operational Detachment, became the newest members of the active Army division based at Fort Riley, Kansas.

The unit – which goes by the acronym MCPOD – is a new venture that is designed to augment active Army division headquarters with Soldiers from the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve. According to Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Preister, the Nebraska Army National Guard MCPOD provides expandability for the 1st Infantry Division headquarters by providing increased capacity and capability for simultaneous execution of missions, extended operations and/or support for forward deployment of the main command post.

The MCPOD consists of numerous military specialties such as Infantry, Artillery, Intelligence, Aviation, Signal, Administration, Military Police, Engineers, Chemical, Logistics, Public Affairs and Staff Judge Advocate. There are 91 National Guard Soldiers assigned to the MCPOD, with five additional positions filled by the U.S. Army Reserves. Those 5 positions are Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations.

The MCPOD began organizing for its new mission earlier this spring. On Sunday the unit – which has already participated in several training events with the 1st Infantry Division including a Warfighter Exercise – received its official U.S. Army recognition and was presented with its new colors. Sitting in attendance among the dignitaries were Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Maj. Gen. Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., commander of the 1st Infantry Division.

According to the MCPOD's commander, Lt. Col. Darin Huss, the Soldiers are ready for their new mission and the challenges that are rapidly approaching.

"As a new battalion, we have become accustomed to a lot of firsts," said Huss, shortly after his unit's colors were unfurled. "Let's face it, it's a whole different Army today. It's a different time. The truth is, the nation needs new breeds of Soldiers, like these standing out in from me, that are able to reach out to the populations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa."

"When you stand back and think about it, today we have Soldiers in our ranks that were adolescents and pre-teens on the day the terrorists attacked New York City," Huss said. "They are standing where other Soldiers stood, ready to do their part. These Soldiers will fight an enemy our predecessors never considered with capabilities they never could have imagined. What I have seen over the last two months, I know in my heart that these Soldiers are ready, trained and experienced to do the job."

Following the activation ceremony, Grigsby and Bohac both took time to gather the Nebraska Soldiers around them and speak about what the activation ceremony symbolizes.

"This is big for our Army because we are one Army… and we could not be more proud," said Grigsby, who added that he has family members who are currently serving in both the National Guard and U.S. Army Reserves. "To bring you guys onto the team is tremendous because we are a division that wing. There is no second place – not in our business – so we have a winning attitude and a winning culture."

Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Unfurled: Lt. Col. Darin Huss and Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Preister unfurl the new colors of the 1st Infantry Division Main Command Post - Operational Detachment during a June 26 activation ceremony in Lincoln.

New Patches: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1st Infantry Division Main Command Post - Operational Detachment wear their new "Big Red One" unit insignia during the detachment's activation ceremony in Lincoln on June 26.

"Having you guys come aboard from the state of Nebraska is really going to help us, enable us and make us a lot better," Grigsby added. "We need each and every one of you to embrace our mission and our intent as we prepare for this operation and to become part of this team."

Bohac echoed those comments, saying that the Soldiers now have a unique culture from which to draw from.

"You know that you are Soldiers of the Big Red One, but you are also Soldiers from the Nebraska National Guard. Never forget where you come from and never forget who you are," Bohac said.

"You're American Soldiers. You signed up to do something few others wanted to do… defend them," said Bohac, pointing at the assembled families who listed to the conversation from a short distance away. "So we ask hard things of you and we will ask hard things of you. And I want you to know how much confidence I have in General Grigsby and his team that they will do everything they can to ensure that you are taken care and are part of the team."

The new MCPOD is headquartered in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Nebraska Guard's victim advocates continue to serve as 'change agents'

By Spc. Anna Pongo
Assistant Editor

Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention, or SHARP, is – as the name suggests – a program instituted in response to the growing awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and assault in the military.

But it wasn't always so.

A few years ago preventing sexual harassment or assault wasn't nearly as prominent on the military's radar. There wasn't yearly required SHARP training. There weren't victim advocates whom a victim could turn to.

That's all changed. Now, across Nebraska there are 23 Army and four Air Force victim advocates who have the extremely important job of being there to help when Soldiers and Airmen need someone to talk to about sexual harassment and assault. These victim advocate are there to make change happen.

"We are the agents for change," said Sgt. 1st Class Christine Hytrek, Nebraska National Guard sexual assault response coordinator. "We're the ones that are facilitating that no tolerance of the inappropriate behavior the jokes, stopping it at the most basic, bottom level."

Hytrek said it about changing a climate and culture, where what was once considered to be an acceptable part of military culture no longer is.

"Saying, you know what? There is no tolerance. We are professionals and we need to act like it," Hytrek said.

To keep their certification the advocates are required to receive 32 hours of Victim Advocate Continuing Education training every two years. This training not only helps victim advocates meet the requirements for recertification, but also helps them receive important updates about trends in society so they can be better prepared to deal with the challenges that come with their jobs.

"A lot of our Soldiers are 90 percent civilian and 10 percent Soldier," Hytrek said. "So, we see what kinds of things they might be dealing with and how we can identify that in our training."

On March 21-22 the Army victim advocates gathered in Kearney, Nebraska, for some extended training.

"Last year we hosted it here in Lincoln," said Hytrek. "It was good, but there are so many options for assistance and help through Lincoln and Omaha, we wanted to go somewhere centrally located to help the advocates that are out there. To get to people who don't know the resources… plus it was nice just to get away, just to show people that there is more to Nebraska than just Lincoln and Omaha."

Each victim advocate has a different story… a different reason for wanting to do their job. And for loving it.

Sgt. 1st Class Jeramey Anderson of the 72nd Civil Support Team was one of the advocates who gathered for the training in Kearney. He's been with the program since it started in 2005.

"I just feel passionate about helping out," Anderson said. "There's been a lot of times where people have seen things and never did anything about it. I really truly believe in the program."

Photo by Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Denim Day: Nebraska Military Department employees pose for a photo, April 27, during Denim Day at Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln. Denim Day was designed to show support of the Nebraska National Guard's stand against sexual violence. Wearing jeans on this day was a statement against erroneous and destructive attitudes towards sexual assault and is in direct support of Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month.

"Just make sure that you live those values in yourself," Anderson added. "You have you really have to have a passion for the program because some of the experiences and things you'll have to hear with survivors are really emotional and you're not there to judge them or to tell them what they need to do. You're there to support them through their road to recovery."

April was Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention month. So, victim advocates got to choose what to do in their units and in their communities, Hytrek said.

Some chose events such as a phone drive, a donation drive or a fun run.

For example, Nebraska National Guard employees were able to participate in an event called Denim Day on April 27. It was a day where those who normally have to dress up for work every day, such as wearing a uniform for military members or slacks and dress shirts for state employees, could choose to wear jeans. The event was chosen to illustrate that "it doesn't matter what you wear, no one deserves to be assaulted," Hytrek said.

"(My goals are) for every Soldier at the bottom level to know what their options are, who their resources are, what to do in the event of, and how to be an active by-stander. Those are ultimately my 'right-now' goals."

Street Talk

"In light of the summer blockbuster movie season, if you could have a superpower, what would it be and why? "

Master Sgt. Ben Radke
67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade
"I would choose flying because you can avoid traffic and get places a lot faster."

Senior Airman Saleasha McClurge
155th Communications Flight
"My superpower would be to cool off, of course. I want to be able to get super cold in the heat of the summer."

Staff Sgt. Hillary Dolan
155th Communications Flight
"My superpower would be teleportation. I love to travel and it would be much cheaper."

Spc. Bradley Pierce
Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron
"To never sleep, to never be tired, so that I could do a bunch of stuff all of the time. "

Spc. Jacob Garrelts
Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron
"If I had a superpower it would probably be to fly so that I could go all over the place wherever I want to."

Maj. Johanna Missak
67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade
"I would stop time so that I can get another two hours of sleep a night and still get all of my work done."

Where did 19 years go?

My Turn

State Public Affairs Officer

Kevin J. Hynes

Where did the time go?

Nineteen years ago this month, I took the opportunity to use my bi-monthly *Prairie Soldier* column to write about the birth of my first child, Patrick Michael. It was mostly a tongue-in-cheek article about what it was like to be a first-time parent and being there when my son was born.

Looking back at that column now, it's definitely clear how very little I actually knew about what it takes – or would take – to be a dad to a wriggly newborn and the three other siblings that would eventually join our family. All I had was just a vague notion of the principles that I hoped to use while I met the completely misunderstood challenges of being a dad.

I've thought a lot about that article in recent weeks, especially this past month when I sent Patrick on his way to Air Force basic training as a new member of the Nebraska Air National Guard.

Let me say that I am absolutely proud of the man that Patrick has turned into and the devotion and drive he has taken toward achieving his goals in life.

Still, as I watched him walk down the corridor of the airport for the last time – the too-small camouflaged backpack into which he had packed the items he would need in the coming weeks and months of military duty bouncing off of his shoulders – I couldn't help but wonder where did the time go and had I done all that I could to help him meet the challenges he was now facing?

At that moment, the entire 19 years passed by my eyes in a series of snapshots: Christmases and birthdays; science fairs and band recitals; family vacations and holiday activities; Little League baseball games, junior high basketball games, high school cross country and track meets; first bikes, first cars and first jobs… all these images that we accumulate that add up to a life, they all came flooding over me as he processed through the security check point and then moved out of my view.

Where does the time go? Did I do enough? What will change? Am I ready?

Which brings me back to the original June 1997 article and how I concluded it: *"Finally, my last thought has to do with things I hope to one day use to explain to my son why his 'old man' has to sometimes be gone for extended periods during the summer and throughout the year. Hopefully when the time comes, I will be able to tell about the reasons why I stayed in the Nebraska National Guard, why I had to be away from home sometimes and why, no matter where I went, he was always on my mind."*

"Things like dedication, service to country and community, sacrifice, the value of hard work and the fact that sometimes there are people who need a helping hand and that his dad wanted to be with the people that had the ability to lend it are all things that I want to one day tell him."

As I read through those lines, a couple things stood out. First, they were written before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, which completely upended our previous concepts of what it meant to be a National Guardsman. They were written before the "October Surprise" blizzard that would come later that year or the major domestic emergency call-ups we would see in the decades that followed for Hurricanes Katrina, Gustav and Ike or the floods on the Platte and Missouri Rivers. And they came before we withstood the deaths of our brothers and sisters in arms during Nebraska National Guard deployments to Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

And second, I never really did talk to Patrick in the way that I mentioned in the article about why I stayed in the Guard for as long as I have. The reasons really are still the same, but I don't know that I have actually articulated them to him in this way.

Yet, through it all, Patrick knew. He has had the chance to see what Guard service is about, the impact that it has on Soldiers, Airmen and their families. He knows what kind of missions we are sometimes called upon to do. And he has seen, at least from an outside perspective, what the costs can sometimes be.

And yet he still chose to join, to raise his hand and pledge himself toward what I still believe is a noble calling. Hopefully, we who have served in the ranks leading up to his enlistment, have done a good enough job in creating and maintaining our organization for those, like Patrick, who are now joining us fully aware of what is now going to be asked of them as members of the military's Total Force.

Having Patrick leave for basic training was definitely a defining moment in his and his parents' lives. I will also say that it was way more difficult than I ever imagined it would be.

Yet, the pride I feel for him and in him has only been magnified. It's a pride that I felt back in 1997. It's a pride I still feel today.

'I will never accept defeat'

Another Voice

Staff Sergeant

Heidi McClintock

Have you ever set a goal in your life that you never thought you would accomplish?

I know I have and I'm not afraid to admit it.

Everyone struggles with staying positive, remaining motivated and reaching his or her goals.

But you have to remember to give yourself the time to refocus, change up the pace or start something new. No matter how small this change is, it is ultimately a big deal and will pay off in the long run.

Starting something new was exactly what I needed to do in order to finish my bachelor's degree; a goal I had since before I graduated high school.

A few years ago I was going to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. All my friends told me such great things prior to going. But after going there a semester, I realized I hated it.

I wasn't happy and didn't like their college environment. But I stuck it out there a few more semesters because I felt like that's what I had to do.

But I just didn't feel like I fit in. I wasn't your traditional college student. I was working full-time for the military department in addition to being a traditional drilling Soldier.

And then I got pregnant with my son, Beau. I continued to take classes up until two months before having him. Instead of getting burnt out from school, I gave myself time to refocus by taking a semester off to enjoy my maternity leave and my new little boy.

Taking that time to refocus and to find a new university was all I needed. I found Bellevue University, a college geared toward working adults and military personnel. That was exactly what I needed. Not only did find a college I liked but I was able to get refocused and was motivated to finish my degree.

> *"Against the odds, I finished, I never gave up."*

Bellevue took time to understand my busy schedule and workload to make sure I could get all my classes done in a timely manner.

I would recommend to anyone wanting to finish their degree to try out Bellevue University. Their cluster courses really help you.

It's three classes taught by one instructor to make it seem like one work load and not three. I can only say amazing things about these classes.

Now here I am, seven years after graduating high school, with my bachelor's degree.

In June I completed my degree plan that I looked at for so many years and felt like I was never going to make it. Every semester the number of credit hours would go down, but it just never seemed like I was ever going to graduate.

But I told myself to not give up. Not to let that goal of graduating college disappear because I didn't have time, because I had a baby or because I was working full-time. I just kept my eyes on the goal.

If I would have told myself seven years ago it would take me this long to get my degree, I would have laughed and said "are you joking me?" But regardless of all the bumps and turns in my road of life, I can say. I met my goal. I finished my bachelor's degree.

And to top that, I am the first person in my intermediate family to have a bachelor's degree.

And if it wasn't for the support of my friends and family, I wouldn't have been able to do it. So many nights of missing out on the opportunity to play with my son or going out with friends and staying up late after putting my son to bed and getting no sleep for work the next day was all worth it in the end.

Because I can say, I did it. Against the odds, I finished, I never gave up.

I may not be your average 25-year-old but I have a happy-go-luckly toddler that keeps me on my toes, just shy of seven years in the National Guard, five years full-time with the military department and now I have a communication of arts degree with emphasis in mass media and a minor in organizational communication.

I feel nothing can stop me, so don't let anything stop your goals. Now I'm looking forward to the next opportunity to pop up in my life.

‘Good Life State’ delivers bad weather for Lincoln National Guard Marathon

Oregon, Kentucky Soldiers claim top individual Guard running titles

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Time To Race: A member of the Puerto Rico National Guard prepares to set his watch as the 39th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon prepares to get underway, May 1, in Lincoln, Neb. Guard runners from 41 states and three territories participated in this year’s event.

By Tech Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Photojournalist

Rain-soaked and shivering, more than 13,500 marathoners braved a misting rain and 42 degree weather to participate in the 39th annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon, May 1, in Nebraska’s capital city.

Among the thousands of athletes participating in this year’s race were 124 Army and Air National Guard members representing 41 states and three U.S. territories competing for positions on the All Guard Marathon Team.

“The weather conditions are not optimum, but I am happy with the turnout and I am excited with the quality of runners we have here,” said Sgt. 1st Class, Christine Raftery, All Guard Marathon team coordinator. “They are a group of positive people, even with this weather. I think most of them are excited to be here.”

Leading the way for all National Guard runners was Command Sgt. Maj. Seven Richmond of the Oregon Army National Guard, with an official time of 2:44:48. Placing second in the National Guard for the second consecutive year was Sgt. Javier Torres from the Puerto Rico National Guard, who finished with a time of 2:49:11.

“I feel good, but I probably went out a little too fast,” Richmond said. “I ran four minutes slower than I am used to, but I attribute that to the wind and rain. I’m good with that, though.”

This was Richmond’s fifth time running in Lincoln after a four year break and this eighth marathon overall.

Finishing first in the women’s division for the Guard was Maj. Varinka Barbini Ensminger from the Kentucky Army National Guard with an official time of 3:09:18. Ensminger maintained a narrow lead over 1st Lt. Meg Landymore of the Maryland Army National Guard, who placed second in the National Guard woman’s category with a time of 3:11:07.

“It’s been a while since I’ve won this race,” said Ensminger. The veteran Lincoln National Guard marathoner said she usually comes in first or second place in the Lincoln race. “Being surrounded by Guard athletes makes this weather tolerable.”

“I’m lucky to be here,” she said. “There are some really good runners here today, but sadly there were many Air Guardsmen that couldn’t be here today because of funding. We’re running for them because they couldn’t be here with their legs.”

According to marathon officials, the National Guard had 162 original Air and Army registrants, but due to a drawdown of Air Guard funds, most Air marathoners were not able to compete. Fifteen Air Guard members, however, came self-funded and participated in the event.

The All Guard marathon team is comprised of 60 athletes consisting of the 40 fastest males, the 15 fastest females with a newly added master category of three males and two females over 40.

Besting the rest of the National Guard units were teams Pennsylvania, New Mexico and Ohio, respectively.

Despite less-than-favorable weather conditions, Richmond, Ensminger and all the other finishers braved the chilly May morning for a tough, but rewarding 26.2 miles. “Phenomenal mental and physical readiness is what brings these amazing athletes out on a day like this,” Raftery said.

Even though National Guard participation was significantly lower this year—down from 185 last year, Raftery said the program is going well and serves a very important purpose. “The All Guard team is putting health and fitness awareness front and center, adding to the recruiting and retention element that it focused on in the past. We have top-notch athletes in this program and they bring so much value to their units and the National Guard as a whole.”

“We are focusing on what these individuals can do for their respective units in regards to health and fitness. Being on the team is a good opportunity for our runners to showcase their wellbeing, discipline and physical fitness. Most of them are multi athletes so they can help with strength training exercises as well.”

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

First Place Male: Command Sgt. Maj. Seven Richmond of the Oregon Army National Guard crosses the 2016 Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mary Thach

First Place Female: Maj. Varinka Barbini Ensminger from the Kentucky Army National Guard celebrates as she completes the final steps of the 2016 Lincoln National Guard Marathon, May 1.

The Army Guard is interested in having these athletes be a part of their newly designed Fit for Life Annual Training program .

“These are the epitome of National Guard athletes and they are setting an example for all Guardsman to make physical fitness a top priority,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Brunk W. Conley, command sergeant major of the Army National Guard, speaking on behalf of Lt. Gen. Timothy J. Kadavy, the director of the Army Guard. “This is an important thing for him to promote readiness and physical fitness is part of readiness. We have some world class athletes out here doing a great job.”

Fallen Airmen honored during Air Guard chief’s 13-mile ruck march

By Tech Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

Among the nearly 13,000 participants wearing brightly emblazoned bibs, shoes and wicking apparel at the 39th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half Marathon, held May 1, one Nebraska Air National Guardsman stood out in boots, Rip-Stop Airman Battle Uniform and a 35-pound rucksack on his back.

Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, the Nebraska Air National Guard’s state command chief master sergeant, completed 13.1 miles in less-than-ideal attire and footwear to remember and raise awareness of the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen who have made the ultimate sacrifice while mobilized to active duty.

“This is my way of reminding folks that, like generations of Nebraskans before them, these Americans gave all for a greater purpose,” Forster said. “Marching 13 miles won’t bring them back or ease the loss their families still feel, but it is a small way to ensure they aren’t forgotten.”

Forster, who wraps up a 33-year career this year, is continuing a tradition started by former Nebraska State Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela in 2013. That year, Valenzuela stated he wanted to recognize Nebraska’s fallen Soldiers in a tangible way that people could see.

Photo by Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom

Finishing Strong: Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster completes his 13-mile ruck march at the 50-yard-line of Nebraska’s Memorial Stadium.

Valenzuela accomplished the trek again in 2014 before retiring.

For Forster, a former intel analyst and boom operator, the decision to pick up where Valenzuela left off was an easy one.

“If we let a tradition like this die out and stop honoring our fallen, we lose a piece of our heritage and ourselves,” Forster said. “I don’t want to see things like this go. It’s the least I can do to honor those we’ve lost.”

While Forster is an experienced cyclist, as an Airman, he was new to the world of ruck marching, also known as forced marching. It is a grueling activity that puts significant strain on the legs to constantly move forward and back, and to hold a person upright with a significant amount of additional weight burden.

In anticipation of the march, Forster trained by starting with short distances and lengthening his excursions over time.

“Anytime, I got tired, I reflected on my purpose and it gave me a renewed sense of vigor,” Forster said. “It also helped that I probably got 5,000 pats on the back from spectators who wished me well along the way. It was awesome to see how much they cheered for, not just me, but all the dedicated men and women in uniform,” he said.

Forster’s completed the 13.1 miles in just under 3 hours and 30 minutes.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

On The Go: Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, Nebraska Air National Guard state command chief master sergeant, begins the opening steps of his ruck march during the 39th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half-Marathon, held May 1, 2016. Forster marched the entire half-marathon carrying a rucksack honoring Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen who have fallen.

Nebraskans earn All Guard team berths

By Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Editor

Drizzling rain and cold weather couldn't keep the Nebraska National Guard Marathon Team from performing their all at the 39th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half-Marathon held May 1 in Lincoln.

Four members of the Army and Air Guard made up the 2016 Nebraska National Guard Marathon team.

"Wet shoes aren't always the fun to run in but the weather conditions didn't really affect the overall performance of the race," said 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion and member of the 2016 Nebraska National Guard Marathon team.

"My run was good, surprising good," Kirchner said. "I finished with 3 hours and 18 minutes. A little slower than I hoped for. But given my busy life style, I was happy to go out there and run and happy to finish with the time I did."

Another member of the team, Capt. Amanda Homes, a survey team leader with the 72nd Civil Support Team, said that being a part of the team was a wonderful experience and was glad to be a part of the 'home team'.

"I just love to run," Homes said. "Just an opportunity to test the limits of your body and endurance. And to share that moment with 13,000 people who are in the same state of mind just using their talents and gifts is amazing."

The Nebraska National Guard Marathon team all had individual goals of their own, but overall they just wanted to do their best and build the team for the coming years.

"I love this course and it is nice that it is our home turf and builds a sense of competition since we are home team," Kirchner said.

According to the Nebraska team they wanted to do a better job of Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen knowing about the team and becoming a part of the team.

"It's fun to compete at this level," Kirchner said. "And to see at the end how your time is and how you finish and to be a part of the home team."

After it was all said and done, two members of the Nebraska Marathon Team made it to all the All Guard team, including Capt. Amanda Homes and Spc. Ryan Linder.

The two Guardsmen will have an opportunity to run races around the United States with other members of the All Guard team and promote the National Guard.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Award-Winner: Spc. Ryan Linder of the 2016 Nebraska National Guard Marathon team poses with Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman and Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker after Linder placied in his age division at the Lincoln National Guard Marathon, May 1.

Photo by Capt. Alex Salmon

Gu To Go: 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, and member of the 2016 Nebraska National Guard Marathon team, reaches for a packet of Gu gel for energy as he runs in the 39th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half-Marathon held May 1.

Guardsman's civilian career supports Soldier-athletes

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Staff Photojournalist

Major Jason Barber will be the first to tell you he has "the best job in the military, hands down."

A senior aeromedical physician assistant with Grand Island's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation, Barber also has the unique opportunity to hold that same military position he loves so much in his civilian capacity. Barber is the physician assistant and strength and conditioning coach for the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program.

Barber

"The WCAP is a great avenue for Soldier-athletes to thrive," Barber said. "It is also a great place for people with supportive skills to work with high-level athletes. Not everyone can say they've worked with Olympians."

WCAP is a unique unit within the U.S. Army. Composed of active duty, reserve and National Guard Soldiers, the unit's mission is to train "to compete and succeed in national and international competitions leading to Olympic and Paralympic Games, while maintaining a professional military career and promoting the U.S. Army to the world."

Founded in 1997, 55 WCAP Soldier-athletes have participated in the summer and winter Olympic Games, winning gold, silver and bronze Olympic medals. Army Soldiers have represented the U.S. at the summer and winter Olympics since 1948, and have earned 111 medals in a variety of sports, including bobsled, boxing, shooting, track and field and wrestling.

"These athletes are the best of the best," Barber said. "They're dedicated and motivated, not only to being amazing Soldiers, but also world-class athletes – with goals to become Olympians."

This year, — a summer Olympic year — there are approximately 85 Soldier-athletes in the WCAP unit. Barber said the best part of working with these Soldier-athletes is watching them grow physically – and mentally – stronger through their training.

"I love getting everything I can out of somebody," Barber said. "Being a strength coach, I get to push athletes further than they've ever gone before. They surprise me and they often surprise themselves as well. And as a physician assistant, there is nothing more gratifying than to see an athlete returning to the fight after recovering from an injury."

Barber ensures all sports medicine issues are taken care of, from both the medical side and the high performance side where he oversees a sports dietitian, a sports psychologist, an athletic trainer, three combat medics, strength and conditioning and rehabilitation. Barber said the athletes conduct 10-12 workouts a week, so he typically spends mornings assisting with strength and conditioning. His afternoons are focused more on rehabilitation and meetings preparing for upcoming competitions.

"The most unique part of the WCAP unit is our Wounded Warriors; the Paralympic athletes," Barber said. "There really is no difference between these Soldiers and the other athletes. They compete just as hard as everyone else. And it's even more rewarding for me to get to help keep them motivated. They're truly inspiring."

Barber said the WCAP is always looking for the best Soldier-athletes – either recruiting from current Army personnel or enlisting civilian athletes interested in bringing their passion for an Olympic sport into the military.

"It's a great way to serve your country, make a living and still chase your dream," Barber said.

Barber's military career began in 1991 as a cavalry scout in the active Army. He later joined the National Guard for tuition benefits, earning a degree in Exercise Physiology from the University at Buffalo, attending Officer Candidate School to earn his commission and finishing his education at the University of Nebraska Medical Center where he earned his master's degree in Physician Assistant studies.

Barber also attended the Army School of Aviation Medicine to become a flight surgeon.

Throughout his career, Barber worked as an assistant strength and conditioning coach at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., and at Miami University in Ohio. He was also the first strength and conditioning coach for U.S. Army Rangers in Fort Benning, Georgia.

In 2012, just before the Olympic Games, Barber applied for an open strength and conditioning coach position with WCAP. He received Title 10 active duty orders to work with the program for three-and-half-years, all while maintaining his relationship with his National Guard unit.

When his orders expired, Barber returned to traditional, part-time military service. He said he expected that was the end of his time with the WCAP. But, shortly after he left, the program felt it was necessary to continue to have a full-time civilian physician assistant.

Barber applied for the position and, to his surprise, was hired for the job.

Because of his military background, Barber feels he can relate to WCAP athletes more, especially when it comes to balancing work, personal life, physical training and additional Army responsibilities. With his home and family in Colorado, Barber is constantly balancing many of those same items.

"I'm very fortunate to have a great relationship with the command of my unit," Barber said. "My family moved out to Colorado a few years ago, so now I am often traveling the country – and sometimes out of the country – with WCAP and still trying to drill with my unit in Grand Island."

Barber said schedule conflicts and bad weather often keeps him from making predetermined drill dates with his unit, but his leaders graciously allow him to make them up at more convenient times.

"My wife has asked me before if I should transfer from the Nebraska National Guard to the Colorado Guard, but I always tell her no," Barber said. "In my 25 years in the Army, I've moved a lot and been in a lot of states. The Nebraska Guard really takes care of their Soldiers better than anywhere else I've been. I have a great relationship with my command and I don't think I'd be able to do both – Guard and WCAP – if I was anywhere else."

To learn more about the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program, including qualification requirements and application procedures, visit http://www.armymwr.com/wcap/.

Photo courtesy of Jason Barber

Stretching Out: Maj. Jason Barber, a senior aeromedical physician assistant with Grand Island's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation, works with a Soldier athlete in this undated photo. Barber is the physician assistant and strength and conditioning coach for the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program. He is currently traveling the country with Soldier athletes looking to earn spots in the 2016 Olympics in Rio.