

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Omaha troops welcomed home

■ 195th Forward Support Company Soldiers return to Nebraska after nine-month mission overseas

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer



Teary Homecoming: Jerry Schramm hugs his son, Sgt. Kyle Schramm, during a joyous reunion, March 5, at the North Omaha Readiness Center in Omaha, Neb. Schramm, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne), had just returned home from a nine-month overseas deployment.

When it comes to memorable dates, it's probably safe to say that Sgt. Edward Alvizar won't forget March 5, 2014, anytime too soon.

That's the day that Alvizar finally got the chance to hold his new baby daughter, Grace.

"It feels really, really good," said Alvizar as he stared into his daughter's face, frequently planting kisses on her wriggly forehead. "I'm really excited."

Alvizar, a mechanic with Omaha's 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne), had just returned home after spending the past nine months overseas at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. There he served as the ground vehicle fleet manager for special operations Soldiers serving in the Central Command area of responsibility, while also coordinating more than 15 distinguished visitor trips in the

area. He was one of six Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers from the Omaha-based unit that were completing their nine-month tours-of-duty on that day.

According to the Soldiers' commander, Maj. Russ Hewitt, the Guardsmen had a lot to be proud of as they returned to Nebraska after providing important support to special operations Soldiers operating in multiple locations overseas.

"On May 12, 2013, we said goodbye to six Soldiers from the 195th

See HOME on 4.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Happy Family: Sgt. Edward Alvizar grabs a quick look at his daughter, Grace, while his wife, Samantha, watches shortly after Alvizar returned to Omaha March 5, after a nine-month deployment overseas as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne).

Command change coming for Nebraska Air Guard aerial refueling wing

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon
Editor

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, announced recently the selection of Col. James "Bob" Stevenson as the next commander of the Lincoln, Neb.-based 155th Air Refueling Wing.

A change of command ceremony is scheduled for the beginning of August.

Stevenson will replace outgoing commander Col. Keith Schell, who has commanded the 155th ARW since June 2012.

Schell has seen the 155th ARW through multiple successful deployments, exercises and inspections during his command.

"Colonel Schell has done a tremendous job of leading the wing, particularly his compassion for his Airmen and their families and employers, which has led the way in the dynamic era we are in within the Department of Defense," said Bohac. "Under his leadership the men and women of the 155th Air Refueling Wing have continued the long history of excellence"

Schell began his career in June 1981 when he enlisted in the Nebraska Air National Guard as a photo processor specialist in the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance Group. He was selected to attend Undergraduate Pilot Training and

See AIR GUARD on 4.

Nebraska's top Soldiers battle for annual best warrior titles



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Oscar Mike: Spc. Stephan Laboy, 1167th Forward Support Company, takes one step at a time during a 12-mile ruck march during the first day of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, March 28, at Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Staff Photojournalist

Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers from across the state came together to compete for the Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior noncommissioned officer of the year and Soldier of the year during a March 28-31, competition at Camp Ashland Training Site near Ashland, Neb., Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., and Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

The nearly four-day competition started with six enlisted Soldiers and eight non-commissioned officers competing against each other in 16 physically and mentally demanding events.

Day 1:

Physically, Mentally Demanding Evening

The 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition started Friday, March 28, with in-processing, a welcome brief and a height and weight check. The first event of the competition was the Army Physical Fitness Test. With breezy winds and a temperature of 37 degrees, Soldiers performed the run portion of the APFT around the track at Camp Ashland Train-

See WARRIOR on 5.

Nebraska 67th Battlefield Surveillance brigade welcomes new commander

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade – an organization that traces back to the earliest days of the Nebraska National Guard – underwent a significant leadership change in April when Col. Kevin Lyons assumed command of the organization from outgoing commander Col. Brett Andersen.

Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman, Nebraska Army National Guard assistant adjutant general, presided over the April 12 ceremony at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb., in front of a formation of unit Soldiers.

"I feel honored and humbled to assume command of the 67th BfSB," said Lyons, who had commanded the Camp Ashland-based 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) prior to assuming his current command. "Starting my career as an armor crewman and being part of the 1-167th Cavalry Squadron – now the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) – for

See BfSB on 10.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

New Colors: Col. Kevin Lyons holds the colors of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade shortly after assuming command of the organization during a change of command ceremony held April 12 at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

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Chadron Soldiers cook for national championship

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NEWS DIGEST

■ Guardsmen improve health conditions for mudslide workers

OSO, Wash. (AFPS) – While search and rescue operations continued following the March 22 mudslide on State Route 530, new safety procedures were implemented to protect responders from contracting illness due to exposure to contaminants in the mud.

Toxins from household cleaners, septic systems, vehicles and other factors made several responders ill, causing incident command to implement further safety measures.

On March 29, the Washington Army National Guard's 790th Chemical Company deployed Soldiers to the impact area to set up decontamination points on both sides of the debris field, about a mile and a half apart.

The "decon" points included a station where rescue workers and search dogs were hosed down, as well as hand-washing stations and separated areas for before and after exposure to the mud.

"When we first got here, they were only using the fire hoses from the truck, and they weren't doing as thorough of a decontamination job as we would," said Pfc. Spencer Cutler, of Port Orchard.

"We make sure every single piece of contaminant is off of them before they eat or return to where they sleep."

The decontamination wasn't just for people and dogs, however, as the Guardsmen were able to assist with other items. Propane tanks found in debris and vehicles also were treated before they're removed from the site.

Cutler said he finds comfort in knowing he can help the volunteers searching through debris and assisting response teams, many of whom are former residents of the stricken area.

"Many of the volunteers are people who used to live here, and they can try and find their peace of mind and closure from this without getting ill in the process," Cutler said.

Pvt. Ann Marie Gonzalez of Mountlake Terrace had served in the Guard for only two months when the mudslide occurred. She said she was glad when she received the call from her unit to report to the site, because she really wanted to help.

"It's really humbling to see everything — to experience it and be able to help out," Gonzalez said. "Everyone's been very helpful to the community, but also to the Soldiers, so it's been a positive experience."

Many residents searching through debris were looking for missing loved ones and their belongings. Recovery teams were able to find personal papers, photos, children's toys and even a horse saddle in the mud field. The 790th was able to decontaminate the items and return them.

Spc. Daniel Brown of Anacortes said he has mixed feelings about being on the site. While decontamination is a primary task the Soldiers are trained to do, he said, this is a very unfortunate event.

"I'm happy to be able to be one of the people out here," Brown said. "I'd feel pretty useless if I wasn't here."

Soldiers with the 790th Chemical Company didn't know how long their activation would last, but they realized their contribution to the safety of the rescue and recovery efforts are worth the unknown duration of their mission. Cutler said they were prepared to stay as long as it takes.

■ Reserve forces provide flexibility, leaders tell Congress

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – The flexibility and dual skill set of National Guard and Air Force Reserve forces has strengthened national security, the chief of the National Guard Bureau told Congress April 3.

Gen. Frank J. Grass, chief of the National Guard Bureau; Lt. Gen. James F. Jackson, chief of the Air Force Reserve; and Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Clarke III, director of the Air National Guard, testified alongside Air Force leaders during a Senate Appropriations Committee budget hearing.

"I want to start by saying the National Guard does three things well — fighting our nation's wars, defending the homeland, and building partnership capacity overseas," Grass said. "These missions have come to us, both for the Army and Air Guard. We support the (combatant commanders) in every one of those missions."

Grass said the National Guard wants to maintain the same types of equipment, training and structure that the active force has today.

"Our equipment, training structure and unique, dual skills enable us to provide a cost-effective force that furthers our national security," he said.

During the past 12 years, the general said, Guardsmen have deployed overseas 760,000 times.

"Domestically," he added, "these Soldiers and Airmen responded to emergencies in all 10 (Federal Emergency Management Agency) regions during fiscal year 2013."

The general said the Soldiers and Airmen of the Washington National Guard demonstrated that capability with more than 140 Soldiers deployed around the world and more than 232 responding to the mudslides in their states, with assistance from Colorado.

"Fiscal challenges will continue to shape us in the future," Grass said. "I know that the Budget Control Act and sequestration is the law, so we are looking to the future to figure out what capabilities the National Guard will need, both for the governors as well as overseas."

Clarke said the total force is a "healthy total force."

"I've been on the job a year now," said Clarke. "I've had the chance to observe it at many levels here in Washington, but more importantly, out in the field."

It's a seamless total force, Clarke added, crediting Air Force senior leadership with designing the Air Force that way.

"We operate in a way that you can't tell the difference between Airmen and what they do," he said. "Behind that is the fact that we have challenges. We want to continue



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Beautiful Sight: Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne) conducted a combat parachute drop exercise at "Husker Drop Zone" on March 8, when they parachuted from a C-130 aircraft. Approximately 50 Soldiers participated in the daylight exercise at "Husker Drop Zone," which is located near the Nebraska Army National Guard's Mead Training Site. The Soldiers typically conduct a parachute jump approximately once every three months.

to modernize (and recapitalize) on par with the regular Air Force."

Clarke said the opportunity to continue to serve operationally next to active and Air Force Reserve Airmen is paramount to what the Air National Guard does.

The Air Guard's strategy going forward, he said, is to make sure that it can be the first choice for homeland operations, and to continue to be a prudent choice for warfighting operations and an enduring choice for security cooperation.

■ U.S. commander outlines posture to counter North Korean nuclear threats

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Readiness is critical to thwarting North Korea's effort to develop nuclear arms and long-range missiles, the commander of U.S. forces in Korea told the House Armed Services Committee April 2.

Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, who commands United Nations Command and Combined Forces Command in addition to U.S. Forces Korea, said his organizations will work closely with the South Korean military to develop its capabilities and stanch an increasing asymmetric threat on the Korean Peninsula.

"We will... combine (Communications) systems, an alliance countermissile defense strategy, and a procurement of precision-guided munitions, ballistic missile defense systems and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms," Scaparrotti said.

The general noted North Korea has the fourth-largest military in the world, with more than 70 percent of its ground forces deployed near the Korean Demilitarized Zone.

"(North Korea's) long-range artillery can strike targets in the Seoul metropolitan

area, where over 23 million South Koreans and almost 50,000 Americans live," he said.

In addition to violations of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions, Kim Jong Un's regime also is aggressively investing in cyberwarfare capabilities, the general reported.

"North Korea brings risk to the world's fastest-growing economic region, which is responsible for 25 percent of the world's (gross domestic product) and home to our largest trading partners," Scaparrotti said.

"Against this real threat, our nation is committed to the security of South Korea and to our national interests," Scaparrotti added.

The general pledged to transform, sustain and strengthen the alliance, maintain the armistice to deter and defeat aggression, and be ready to fight.

Priorities, he added, also include sustaining the force and family readiness and enhancing the United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and U.S. Forces Korea teams.

"An essential part of this is a positive command climate that focuses on the covenant between the leader and the led, and our mission together," he said.

"At the core of mission success is the close relationship we share with our South Korean partners; we benefit from an important history forged on many battlefields, shared sacrifices and democratic principles," he added.

Over the past 60 years, the general said, the United States and South Korea have built one of the longest-standing alliances in modern history.

"We will continue to ensure strong and effective deterrence posture so that Pyongyang never misjudges our role, commitment or capability to respond as an alliance," he added.

Hagel orders military decorations, awards program review

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has ordered a comprehensive review of the military decorations and awards program, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said March 20.

The secretary wants to capture the lessons learned from 13 years of combat to improve the program, Kirby said. The review will begin in June under the direction of Jessica L. Wright, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. It is due to be completed in June 2015.

Wright will consult closely with Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the military department secretaries and chiefs and the combatant commanders, Kirby said during a Pentagon news conference.

"Secretary Hagel believes this is a solemn obligation for

the Department of Defense, one that we can never take lightly," the admiral said. "The review will focus on ensuring that the awards program appropriately recognizes all levels of combat valor, as well as the service, sacrifices and actions of all our service members."

The review will examine how the awards program is structured to make sure that it fully reflects the joint nature of warfare, the admiral said.

"It will examine the processes and procedures of how medals for valor are nominated in order to determine whether they can be improved or streamlined and help make the overall awards process more timely," he added, "and it will determine the best way to recognize service members who use remote technology to directly impact combat operations, such as through cyber and remotely piloted aircraft."

Some awards and decorations are service-specific, and others cut across the military. The secretary

recognizes joint military operations have become the norm, Kirby told reporters.

"You don't have to look any farther than what we accomplished in Iraq and Afghanistan to see how joint the services have become," he said, "and I think it's a fair question to ask: do we need to look at the kinds of awards that we give, particularly for combat valor, in a more joint nature than perhaps some of them are? It doesn't mean that there will be changes, but I think he wants to look at everything across the whole scope."

Hagel wants the panel to examine how the services submit and evaluate and decide on major combat awards, Kirby said. "I think he would like to get a better sense of what discrepancies there may be between the services, and do those discrepancies need to be closed?" he added. "The answer may be no. But I think he wants to ask those questions."

Prairie Soldier

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

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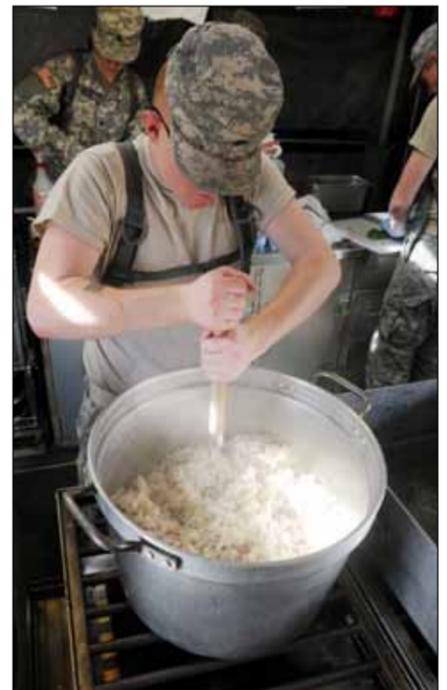
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Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Porkchops Anyone?: Pfc. Kyle Burton, a food service specialist with Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company, cooks pork chops during the Department of the Army level of the Philip A. Connelly Competition, April 5, at Camp Guernsey, Wyo. The pork chops were cooked on both sides for color and flavor before getting braised with different seasonings.



Mashed Up: Spc. Steven Parker, a food service specialist with Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company, mashes potatoes with milk, butter and white pepper during the Department of the Army level of the Philip A. Connelly Competition, April 5, at Camp Guernsey, Wyo. Parker left the skins on the potatoes for taste and added nutrition.

Chadron transportation unit gets long-awaited shot at Army cooking national championship

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Staff Photojournalist

Western Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers recently battled against eight other units for what some may call the biggest competition in the Army's food service category.

Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company, from Chadron, Neb., took it to the next level when they competed in the Department of the Army's 46th Annual Philip A. Connelly Awards Competition for Excellence in Army Food Service.

According to unit officials, the April scenario involved the members of Det. 1, 1057th Trans. Co., providing support to the Nebraska Army Guard's 734th Transportation Battalion, which was conducting convoy and logistical support for a fictitious firefighting mission. During this scenario, they would be responsible for continuing their support until the fires were 100 percent contained.

This wasn't the first time the Western Nebraska Soldiers had cooked the menu, which included Texas tortilla soup, braised pork chops, mashed potatoes, cream onion gravy, peas with mushrooms, tossed calico vegetable salad and oatmeal raisin bar served with assorted fresh fruit and beverages.

According to the Guard cooks, they had cooked this meal more than 10 times between drill, practices, and the three levels of the competition: state, regionals and nationals. But there was a long break between regionals and nationals due to the partial government shutdown in October, so this was one of the first times they had cooked the meal in 2014.

The few months off gave the unit time to get make sure everything was up to standard, they said.

"There is a lot more that goes into the Department of the Army level than the regional level," said Staff Sgt. Howard Taylor III, food operations sergeant for Det. 1, 1057th Trans. Co. "There is a lot more training involved, which the time off gave us a few more months to prepare."



Bon Appétit: A Soldier from Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company, walks very carefully with his full tray and bowl of soup so he doesn't spill as he goes into the dining facility tent during the field feeding portion of the Department of the Army level of the Philip A. Connelly Competition, April 5, at Camp Guernsey, Wyo.



Hot Potato: Steam rises off potatoes as they are drained from boiling water during the Department of the Army level of the Philip A. Connelly Competition, April 5, at Camp Guernsey, Wyo. The cooks had to make enough food for 100 Soldiers during the competition.



Open For Business: Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company, Soldiers serve their first Soldier, who happened to be one of the two Department of the Army evaluators, during the Department of the Army level of the Philip A. Connelly Competition, April 5, at Camp Guernsey, Wyo. One evaluator ate first while the other waited toward the end of the 100 Soldiers to see the difference in food quality from beginning to end.

"Plus there was a lot of behind-the-scenes preparation for the Connelly," added Taylor.

Even with a long break between competitions and a few changes in the members of the team, the Soldiers were ready to show their skills to the national evaluators.

"It's exciting," said Spc. Steven Parker, a food service specialist with Det. 1, 1057th Trans Co. "It's a really good showcase of our skills and for

us to make a name for ourselves in the 1057th."

Parker, who is the newest food service member on the team with less than two years in the military, said he was excited to be competing for such a prestigious award this quickly into his career.

"I didn't think I would be competing in a national level this early," said Parker. "But for me, this is exciting and it's a good stepping

stone, not only in my career, but in all of the Soldiers involved."

The Connelly competition evaluators used a 1,000-point evaluation list to determine who will be tops for all of the Guard and Reserve at the national level. Based on the fact that the evaluators were grading everything from entry control points, site security and command support, to the actual food service and field sanitation, every single point was important.

It also meant that every member of the unit, not just the Soldiers doing the actual cooking, played an important role: the security members, field sanitation team, the runners – also known as the roadies, and the mechanic.

According to the Soldiers, it is truly a learning experience because they get to see each others' roles and how they play into the overall competition.

"It's a pretty good experience," said Sgt. Dwayne Nielsen, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with Det. 1, 1057th Trans. Co., who was also the only mechanic for the generator and other machinery during the competition. "I get to learn about things that they do but I strictly do my mechanic duties."

It's an overall great learning experience for everyone, added

Nielsen.

In addition to the experience and training everyone received from all the practices prior to the competitions, the Soldiers agreed that each time they were together their teamwork improved immensely.

"The teamwork here is amazing," said Nielsen. "Everyone is working together very well. Everyone has different strengths that forms together and makes a good team."

But the team came together for one mission – to feed the Soldiers. "Our bottom line is to feed the troops and to provide a hot quality meal to them," said Taylor.

The unit commander, Capt. Timothy Buskirk, agreed with Taylor and couldn't express enough how proud he was of this team.

"The dedication of everyone makes me proud," said Buskirk. "They are that dedicated and interested in their jobs to spend extra time outside drill to get trained and prepare for the competition."

According to the Soldiers, they all hoped they had improved from the regional competition as they put so much time and effort in.

"I would like to hear we did things better than we did last time," said Parker. "I want to hear we remedied the things we might have not done so well on last time and upped our game a little bit."

Regardless of the outcome, the 2013 Det. 1, 1057th Trans. Co. Connelly team knows they did all they could do and were happy to be given the opportunity to compete in the Department of the Army level.

"Win or lose after this, the next step is continuing that training and passing on the knowledge everyone learned from the different competitions to the next members of the team," said Buskirk. "Take what you learn and keep it in the unit."

In addition, they are all looking forward to the results, which will be announced in the following months.

"I'm really looking forward to hear what our results will be," said Taylor. "We want to see where we stand against the rest of the United States."

Parker agreed. "Whether we win or lose we are going to compete every chance that we can get."



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Finally! Cindy Reinhard welcomes her son, Spc. Anthony Reinhard, home from a nine-month deployment to Afghanistan, April 11, at the North Omaha Readiness Center in Omaha, Neb. Reinhard is a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne).

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FSC... and it sucked to say goodbye," said Hewitt as he and other Nebraska National Guard dignitaries thanked the Soldiers and their families for the work and sacrifices made during the missions in a short ceremony held at the North Omaha Readiness Center.

"Early morning on a Sunday, we got together, said a few words, a prayer and then said goodbye to our families. For military families, this is an experience that we have to deal with, but few (others) ever have to experience... it's the type of goodbye that only military families can say."

"297 days.... It's a long time to be away from the ones you love," said Hewitt, to the knowing nods of the Soldiers and their families. "(Today) is the reward for giving of yourselves."

According to Hewitt, giving was exactly what the Soldiers of his unit did when they deployed to multiple locations. Like Alvizar, Sgt. Britni Sullivan deployed to Kuwait where she was responsible for handling ammunition for Special Operations forces. Sgt. Matthew Salomons also deployed to Kuwait where he served as the logistics manager, overseeing flight coordination, badge requirements and the shipping of logistical packages to distant forward operating bases.

Sgt. Josh Vogel and Staff Sgt. Kyle Schramm served in the United Arab Emirates where they served as the camp mayor cell, coordinated 56 convoys and coordinated the use and maintenance of more than two dozen vehicles. While in the UAE, the two also had the opportunity to earn the UAE's



Proud Commander: Maj. Russ Hewitt, commander of the 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne), thanks his Soldiers and their families for their work and sacrifices during the April 11 welcome home ceremony at the North Omaha Readiness Center in Omaha, Neb.

parachute wings.

Schramm said it felt particularly good to finally be home in Nebraska after being involved in an extremely important training mission.

"It's hard to explain," said Schramm, "but it feels awesome."

Second wave of 195th Forward Support Company Soldiers welcomed home

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Approximately a month after the 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne) welcomed six of its Soldiers home from a long deployment overseas, six more of its Soldiers returned to heroes' welcomes, April 11, at the North Omaha Readiness Center.

The Soldiers had just completed a nine-month deployment to Afghanistan where they assisted special operations Soldiers in turning in unused equipment as part of a special operations Equipment Recovery Team.

Returning home were Sgt. 1st Class Bryce Preister, Staff Sgt. Javier Arias, Staff Sgt. Nicholas Christy, Sgt. Taylor Sanchez, Spc. Robert Hayduk and Spc. Anthony Reinhard.

According to the unit's commander, the recently returned Soldiers had a lot to be proud of.

"It's difficult on a day like today not to smile," said Maj. Russ Hewitt, 195th FSC commander, as he spoke to an assembled crowd of families and fellow Nebraska National Guardsmen.

"This really is the good stuff... This is the feeling and the experience that a lot of people don't get the opportunity to have," said Hewitt.

Hewitt said the Soldiers accomplished amazing things while deployed to Afghanistan. Among the individual accomplishments, said Hewitt, were:

- Helping prepare turn-in packets for 480 pieces of equipment;
- Assisting in the recovery and turn-in of millions of dollars of special operations and conventional forces equipment;
- Helping with the inspecting, inventorying, transporting and turning-in of more than 2,000 pieces of excess and unserviceable equipment.

In fact, in one case, said Hewitt, Staff Sgt. Christy helped lead teams that identified and turned in more than 12,000 pieces of excess equipment - valued at more than \$300 million. "His efforts to streamline the retrograde process laid the foundation for future SERT missions and successfully postured SOF for post-2014 operations."

Other Soldiers had equal impact as well, Hewitt added. "In total, when you look at the amazing accomplishments of these Soldiers, I think they were key players and their mission was vital."

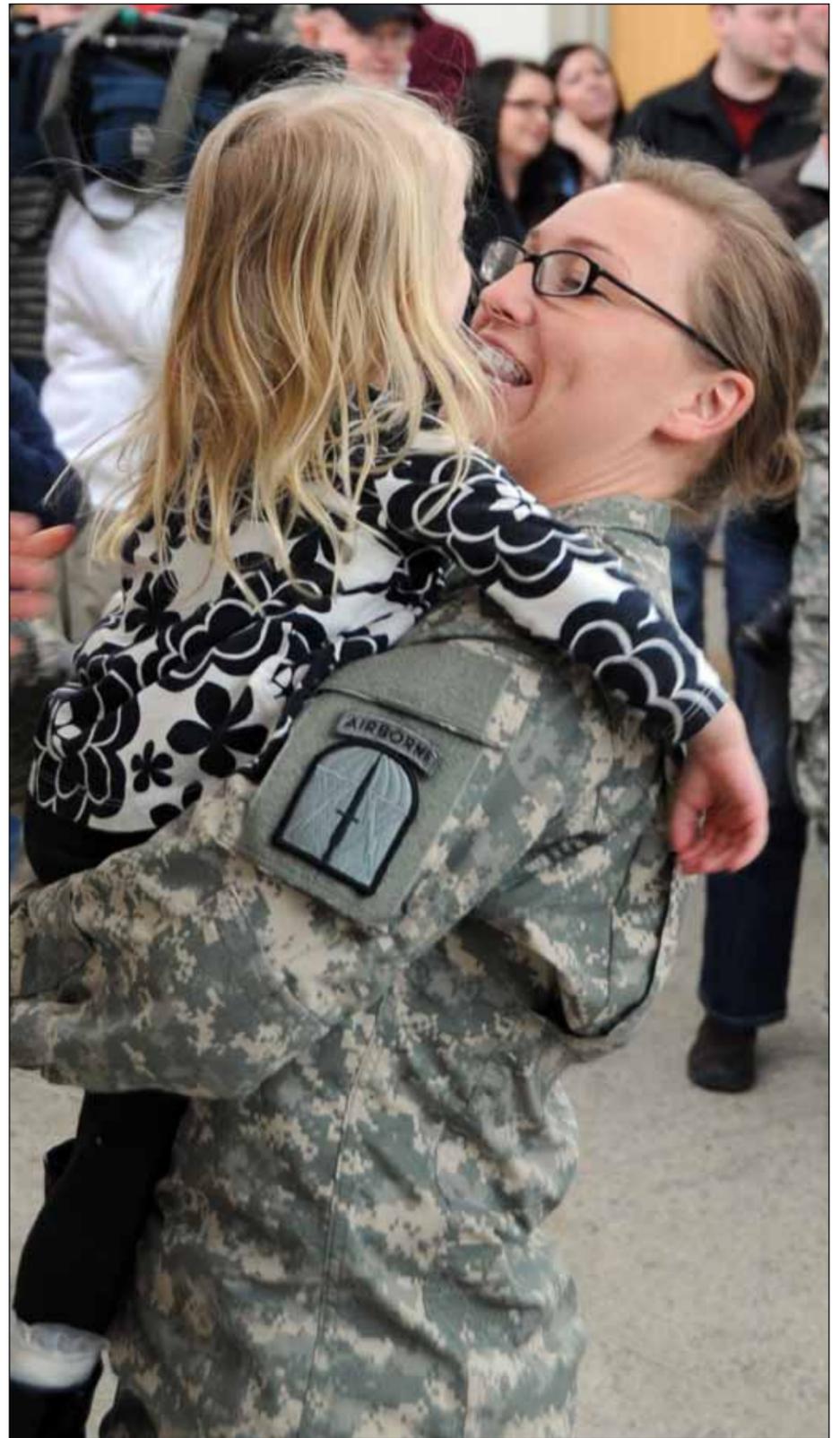
"Thank you to the family members who were supporting them while they were doing that mission," he added. "You were just as vital... you made an impact."

Among the family members welcoming the Soldiers home was Cindy Reinhard, who said she was filled with nerves waiting for her son Anthony to arrive back in Omaha. "Oh my gosh," she said, "there are a lot of emotions going on... happy... nervous... I just couldn't wait to hug him."

According to Anthony, it was great to finally be home after his first lengthy deployment overseas.

"It's great to finally be able to see loved ones," he said, shortly after the welcome home ceremony concluded. "Coming home to something like this... it's pretty sweet."

Sgt. 1st Class Bryce Preister agreed. "I'm just so proud of the guys that I deployed with," he said, after being welcomed home by his wife, Shelly, and their four children, "but I'm more proud and happy to just see my family. This is definitely the best day that I've had in the last nine months."



Sweet Reunion: Sgt. Shawna Tibbets, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne), is greeted by her niece, Faith Engel, shortly after Tibbets returned back to Nebraska on March 5 following a nine-month deployment in support of special operations troops operating in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

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was commissioned as a second lieutenant in December 1986. He was assigned as an RF-4C aircraft commander in the 173rd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron.

In the 173rd TRS, Schell served as intelligence officer. He became an instructor pilot in the RF-4C until converting to the KC-135R in June of 1994. Schell has held various leadership positions within the squadron. He served as the Air National Guard's lead KC-135R

instructor pilot in charge of the planning, development, and implementation of the Global Air Transportation Management System modification. He became the 155th ARW executive officer until serving as the 155th Maintenance Group commander.

According to Bohac, the Nebraska Air National Guard is blessed with amazing talent and Stevenson, who has served as the 155th ARW vice commander since March 2013, will only continue that tradition.

"Colonel Stevenson has the

perfect combination of experience, energy and vision to be the next wing commander for the 155th Air Refueling Wing," said Bohac. "He can build on the successes and lessons learned by his predecessors and I am highly confident of his ability to lead the wing to the next level of performance and engagement."

Stevenson began his military career when he received his commission through Officer Training School in 1989 after graduating from

the University of Nebraska, Omaha. He earned his pilot wings in 1990 and began his flying career as a First Assignment Instructor Pilot in

the T-37B at Vance Air Force Base, Okla. In 1994, he was reassigned to fly the C-130E with the 347th Composite Wing at Moody Air Force Base, Ga.

Stevenson joined the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1997 and became KC-135R qualified. He became the commander of the 155th Operations Group until taking command of the 170th Group at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha.



Schell



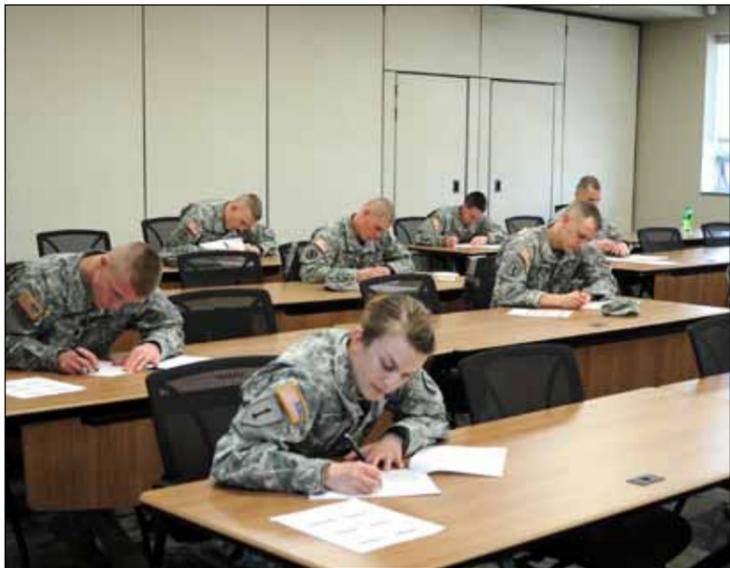
Stevenson

2014 Best Warrior Competition



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Fast Start: Soldiers competing in the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition begin a late-night 12-mile road march, March 28, at Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb. The road march was the third of 16 total events used to determine the competition's champions.



Writing Skills: 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior competitors work on written essays during the second event of the competition, March 28, at Atlas Readiness Center near Mead, Neb. The written essay portion consisted of writing a 300-to-500-word essay in an hour or less.

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ing Site in Camp Ashland, Neb. Despite the cold weather, many of the Soldiers achieved record scores on their APFT.

Following the APFT one Soldier dropped out of the competition leaving seven noncommissioned officers and six Soldiers.

After completing the APFT, Soldiers moved to the barracks for a quick change of uniforms and moved to Atlas Readiness Center near Mead, Neb., for the second event of the competition – the written essay.

The Soldiers had a short Army writing class before the 13 competitors starting the written essay, which consisted of writing a 300-to-500-word essay within an hour. During the written essay, the classroom was so quiet one could hear all 13 right-handed competitors turning their pencils to erase a word here and there.

As soon as the competitors were

done with the written essay, they got in line to receive their weapons before a 12-mile ruck march.

The sun was just starting to go down as the competitors lined up on the starting line of the ruck march. With 45 pounds on their back and their sponsor by their side, they started the long, grueling hike.

After only a few miles, it was nearly pitch black and started to drizzle. Despite the dark and cold conditions, the competitors pressed on and finished the 12 miles.

"The hardest part was the ruck march," said Spc. Stephan Laboy, Detachment 2, 1167th Brigade Support Company. "It was pretty physically demanding, pretty cold outside, a pretty good distance and the heavy weight all factored into the long ruck march."

The competing Soldiers were completely exhausted after the

See WARRIOR on 6.



Nice Stride: Staff Sgt. John Ferguson, a member of the Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion, strides out over the finish line during the running portion of the Army Physical Fitness Test at Camp Ashland on March 28. The APFT was the first event of the long, nearly four-day competition.

Soldier Competitors

Spc. Brenden P. Zegers

Wheeled vehicle mechanic
267th Support Maintenance Co.
Native of Lincoln, Neb.
1.5 years of military service

Spc. Jacob A. Kirchoff

Combat engineer
195th Forward Support Company
(Special Operations)(Airborne)
Native of Weeping Water, Neb.
4 years of military service

Spc. Stephan P. Laboy

Motor transport operator
Detachment 2, 1167th Brigade
Support Company
Native of Fremont, Neb.
1 year of military service

Spc. Andres Lara

Motor transport operator
189th Transportation Company
Native of West Point, Neb.
3 years of military service

Spc. Michael P. Manske Jr.

Interior electrician
623rd Engineering Company
Native of Omaha, Neb.
3 years of military service

Spc. Braxton C. SawyerKociemba

Cavalry scout
Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron
(Reconnaissance and Surveillance)
Native of Broken Bow, Neb.
5 years of military service

Noncommissioned Officer Competitors

Sgt. 1st Class Jenna M. Schneider

Program analyst
209th Regional Training Institute
Native of Basin, Wyo.
12 years of military service

Staff Sgt. John M. Ferguson

Internment/resettlement specialist
402nd Military Police Battalion
Native of the Ashland-Greenwood
area of Nebraska
8 years of military service

Sgt. Joshua S. Adler

Motor transport operator
Detachment 1, 1074th
Transportation Company
Native of Chadron, Neb.
5 years of military service

Sgt. Craig D. Hoppes

Human resources sergeant
Joint Force Headquarters
Native of Kimball, Neb.
4 years of military service

Sgt. Kyle D. Mostrom

Flight operations sergeant
Company D, 1-376th Aviation Battalion
Native of York, Neb.
6 years of military service

Sgt. Aaron T. Smith

Carpentry and masonry specialist
623rd Vertical Engineering Company
Native of Malcolm, Neb.
7 years of military service

Sgt. James R. Stapleton

Section sergeant
234th Signal Support Company
Native of South Sioux City, Neb.
5 years of military service

Sgt. Colton Stepp

Cavalry scout
Headquarters and Headquarters
Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron
(Reconnaissance and Surveillance)
Native of Pierce, Neb.
7 years of military service.

2014 Best Warrior Competition



You Are Here: A competitor uses his grid reader to find his starting point during the map reading portion of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition in order to plot the rest of his points, March 29, at Camp Ashland Training Site near Ashland, Neb.



Breaking Out The Big Gun: Sgt. Colton Stepp, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), disassembles an MK-19 grenade launcher during the weapons event of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition, March 29, at Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.



Help's On The Way: Sgt. Colton Stepp, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), calls in his 9 Line Medical Evacuation request after he evaluated an injured "casualty" during the second Army Warrior Task lane of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition March 29, at Camp Ashland Training Site near Ashland, Neb. The Army Warrior Task lane was an opportunity for the competitors to put all their skills to use during one overall mission.



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Show Me The Way: Sgt. 1st Class Jenna Schneider, 209th Regional Training Institute, takes a compass reading before determining which direction her first point lies during the day land navigation event of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition. Schneider was the only female in the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

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strenuous ruck march. Competitors said their feet took most of the punishment from the ruck march. The constant pounding against pavement, gravel and grass with the extra weight on their backs caused a lot of painful blisters. Every competitor had to have a medical check before moving on to the last task of the night.

After the ruck march, two competitors dropped out of the competition, leaving six noncommissioned officers and five Soldiers. Eleven competitors would finish all 16 events of the Best Warrior Competition.

By task four it was just past 11:30 p.m. and they had up to an hour and half to complete a 100-question written exam.

Following the written exam, it was finally time for the Soldiers to get a few hours of sleep before day two of the competition.

Day 2: In It To Win It

After a tough first day, both physically and mentally demanding, the Soldiers woke up before the sun rose to conduct Army warrior

tasks and weapons assembly. The Soldiers could see their breath as they completed the tasks by spotlight.

As the sun began to rise the temperature slowly rose.

"It was a very physically demanding first day with the APFT and the ruck march," said Staff Sgt. John Ferguson, 402nd Military Police Battalion. "Then still trying to recover on the second day made it hard."

In addition, the warriors had a timed assembly and disassembly of the MK-19 grenade launcher, 240B machine gun and a

few other weapons.

After a busy morning they moved to the land navigation course at Camp Ashland. The Soldiers put their map reading skills to the test in both a map reading exam and day land navigation.

The day land navigation course involved locating five different points in two hours before returning to the starting point.

After the land navigation portion, the Soldiers moved to task eight of the competition – the Army warrior task patrol lane. During this task Soldiers had 11 different Army warrior tasks to complete. The time in which they finished the lane would only be used if there were ties. Some of the tasks included loading and unloading an M16, performing a function check on an M16, performing a request for medical evacuation, operating a SINGARS (Single-Channel), performing first aid for bleeding of an extremity, and moving under direct fire.

After a long and exhausting day in the

See WARRIOR on 7.



Early Morning Weapons Check: Spc. Andres Lara, 189th Transportation Company, assembles a 240B machine gun as the sun rises during the second day of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition, March 29, at Mead Training Site, near Mead, Neb.



Lifesaving Measures: A "casualty" gets a tourniquet for a leg injury as a competitor calls in a 9 Line Medical Evacuation request for a helicopter to pick the patient up during the second Army Warrior Task Lane of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition, March 29, at Camp Ashland Training Site.

2014 Best Warrior Competition



Help Is Coming: Spc. Andres Lara, 189th Transportation Company, makes sure there is no one around him before providing aid to a "wounded Army pilot" during the urban operations task of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 30.



Ready, Aim, Fire: Spc. Stephan Laboy, Detachment 2, 1167th Forward Support Company, fires his M16 rifle during the stress-shoot task of the 2014 Best Warrior Competition at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 30.



Feeling Tired: Spc. Braxton Sawyer Kociemba, Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), flips a humvee tire during the stress-shoot task of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 30.



Ready...Go: Master Sgt. Curtis Koehler, an evaluator for the Best Warrior Competition tells Spc. Michael P. Manske Jr., 623rd Vertical Engineering Company, about the three to five second rushes and the hand grenade tasks of the stress-shoot task of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, March 30, at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.



In The Crosshairs: Sgt. Aaron T. Smith, 623rd Vertical Engineering Company, fires his training weapon at what he believes is a hidden sniper during the March 30 urban operations task of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.



Bombs Away: Sgt. 1st Class Jenna Schneider, 209th Regional Training Institute, throws a grenade simulator at an "enemy" bunker during the March 30 stress-shoot of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.



Pat Down: Sgt. James R. Stapleton, 234th Signal Support Company, searches a "local village person" after the villager was found with some of the missing pilot's gear during the urban operations task of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition on March 30.

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field, the competitors moved back to Camp Ashland to get ready for their Command Sergeant Major board.

The Soldiers freshened up, took one last look at their uniform before putting on their Army Service Uniform. The, taking a long breath, they walked into the board after what had already been a long and draining day of competition.

"This was my first sergeant major board I have ever had, so it was fun to gain the experience from the board," said Ferguson. "I hope to bring some of this back to the younger junior enlisted so they can end up doing this later and help them if they would like to compete next year or in the future years."

Last, but not least, was night land navigation. Already exhausted from a long day of competition, the Soldiers returned to the east side of Camp Ashland for the last task of the day.

The competitors had to find different points that were spread out on the training site by the light of their flashlights as another competitors' sponsor made sure there

were no issues along the way.

Day 3:

Hard Work Pays Off

According to some of the competitors, the next morning couldn't have started better. The competitors got a few more hours of sleep than the night before, had a nice morning chow and got to take a ride in a CH-47 Chinook before rolling straight into urban operations.

Many of the Soldiers had never been through the Greenlief Training Site urban operations paintball course, so they were looking forward to the opportunity to clear rooms, rescue a pilot and shoot paintballs toward opposing forces.

As the noncommissioned officers completed the urban operations the enlisted Soldiers zeroed and qualified with their M16s then traded positions.

"I had a lot of fun in the urban operations and the lanes," said Laboy. "I definitely got a gauge of what some of my strengths and

See WARRIOR on 8.

2014 Best Warrior Competition



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Nebraska's Top Warriors: State Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela (center) stands next to the top finishers of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, Spc. Stephan Laboy, who took top honors in the Soldiers category, and Sgt. Colton Stepp, who won the noncommissioned officer's category, March 31, at Camp Ashland.



Top Enlisted Soldiers: Spc. Jacob Kirchoff finished in second place, Spc. Stephan Laboy finished in first place and Spc. Braxton Sawyer Kociemba finished in third place in the enlisted category of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.



Top Noncommissioned Officers: Staff Sgt. John Ferguson finished in second place, Sgt. Colton Stepp finished first place and Sgt. Aaron Smith finished in third place of the noncommissioned officer category of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

WARRIOR

continued from page 7.

weaknesses are. I have also learned about perseverance and working through it in the end."

After urban operations and M16 qualifications were finished, the competitors moved to the call for fire trainer and stress shoot.

By the time the stress shoot came around, wear and fatigue on the competitors was evident. Every competitor pushed on and made it through the stress shoot, which included the Humvee tire flip, stress test, three to five second rushes, hand grenades, high crawl, and much more.

"The competition instills a lot of pride in what we do," said Sgt. Colton Stepp, a scout with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron. "I know for me, being a scout, this is the stuff we like to do."

"It almost goes back to being a kid and playing around in your backyard," he added. "You are getting to do the fun stuff. It's pretty grueling, but it's great to see everyone come out and push through the pain."

The Soldiers then traveled back to Camp Ashland to get a good night's rest.

Day 4:

Rest and Recognition

The long, exhausting weekend made Monday worth it for the Soldiers when they heard the final results.

"It's been very good, very fun and we had some great competitors," said Ferguson. "There was a lot of preparation beforehand. There are a lot of things that go into becoming a best warrior."

According to the competitors, they couldn't have done it all without their sponsors.

"My sponsor has been doing a great job with pushing me to keep going over the long weekend," said Laboy. "I couldn't have done a lot of this without him."

"It's great to have a coach," he added. "Someone I can bounce questions off of and keep me motivated – just someone to talk to when you were feeling lonely."

According to Stepp, having his sponsor rucking right beside him with the same amount of weight was motivational.

"My sponsor was giving me little bits of

2014 Best Warrior Competition Results

Soldier Category	Noncommissioned Officer Category
1st - Spc. Stephen Laboy	1st - Sgt. Colton Stepp
2nd - Spc. Jacob Kirchoff	2nd - Staff Sgt. John Ferguson
3rd - Spc. Braxton Sawyer Kociemba	3rd - Sgt. Aaron Smith
4th - Spc. Michael Manske	4th - Sgt. 1st Class Jenna Schneider
5th - Spc. Andres Lara	5th - Sgt. Craig Hoppes
	6th - Sgt. James Stapleton



Enlisted Competitors: The enlisted category competitors pose at the awards ceremony of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition. Pictured are Spc. Brenden Zegers, Spc. Michael Manske Jr., Spc. Stephan Laboy, Spc. Braxton Sawyer Kociemba, Spc. Jacob Kirchoff and Spc. Andres Lara.



Noncommissioned Officer Competitors: The noncommissioned officers category competitors pose at the awards ceremony of the 2014 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition. Pictured are Sgt. Colton Stepp, Sgt. Craig Hoppes, Staff Sgt. John Ferguson, Sgt. James Stapleton, Sgt. 1st Class Jenna Schneider and Sgt. Aaron Smith.

encouragement here and there," said Stepp. "You know you are sore, stiff and everything is hurting, but he is right there beside you doing the same thing you are."

"He is very knowledgeable on the technical side of things, so it was a pretty good fit to have him as my sponsor because I am more of the hands-on guy," he added.

Not only did their sponsors help them prepare and push them along the way but many of the Soldiers were thankful for their unit support in preparation for the competition and their support during the competition.

"My unit was really helpful," said Laboy.

"They had me come in and do some training on some of the weapon systems I wasn't familiar with and got me some of the online study information so I could do some of my own studying."

"Without the support of my unit I couldn't have been able to do this," he added. "They did an excellent job at preparing and motivating me to keep moving. They worked on it just as I did."

After winning the Soldier and noncommissioned officer of the year, respectively, Spc. Laboy and Sgt. Stepp both said they were excited to move on to regionals and pass on

all the information they've learned to the Soldiers at their units.

"It was a pretty challenging weekend overall," said Laboy. "Hopefully I can set a good example as a Soldier and inspire others to get squared away and do competitions like this."

"It feels really good," he added. "I put a lot of work into this so I am glad I was able to have a strong showing here."

Stepp echoed Laboy's comments.

"It feels good. It's kind of nerve wracking having to go to regionals and represent the whole state," said Stepp. "But everyone here deserved it just as much as I did."



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

Hot Stuff: Staff Sgt. Nicholas Driggs, 1st Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Site), deliberately starts a wildland fire, March 27, during wildland firefighting training at Camp Ashland, Neb. Nearly 30 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers from across Nebraska participated in the training to earn their "Red Card" wildland firefighting credentials.

Fighting Wildland Fires: Much more than 'wet stuff on the red stuff'

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon
Editor

In the past few years the Nebraska National Guard has been called to assist in multiple wildland fires within Nebraska and surrounding states. And based on current conditions in Nebraska, the state may be in store for another dangerous wildland fire season.

"If I had to make a guess right now I'd say there seems to be a pretty strong chance that it could be an elevated season," said Casey McCoy, wildland fire training manager for the Nebraska Forest Service.

Because of those elevated risks, nearly 30 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers from across Nebraska descended upon Camp Ashland to earn their wildland firefighting credentials.

According to Larry Vrtiska, Nebraska National Guard environmental program manager, the March 24-27 training was designed to give the Soldiers tools they need to protect the state's federal training areas and facilities from the devastating effects of a runaway fire.

"What we're trying to do is educate the Soldiers to look for conditions while they're out doing their military training at one of our training sites; what to look for to help prevent a wildland fire from occurring," said Vrtiska. "And if, unfortunately, one does occur, what kind of immediate action we do to suppress it and what to do if it gets out of hand."

Vrtiska said the course was part of the Guard's fire management



Wet Stuff On The Red Stuff: Sgt. 1st Class Jamie Frey, Headquarters, 1-376th Aviation Battalion, uses a fire hose to douse wildland fire deliberately set March 27 during wildland firefighting training at Camp Ashland, Neb. The fire, which was set to teach the Soldiers how fire acts, is part of the Guard's fire management program.

program.

"We have an integrated wildland fire management plan for the Nebraska Military Department and part of that plan states we need to have trained individuals to recognize and be able to address wildland fires on our federal training sites," said Vrtiska.

"We have a responsibility, not only to protect our infrastructure and our buildings, we have a responsibility that we don't start a fire and it hops off of our property line and impacts

our community around us," he added.

Conducted by members of the Nebraska State Forestry Service, the training consisted of classroom sessions about the various components that contribute to wildland fires such as weather, types of fuel and ignition sources. It also covered how firefighters react to wildland fires, the different types of tools used to suppress these blazes and how to deploy a fire shelter.

The course ended with a final written test and several outdoor hands-on exercises. Once the students pass the test they are given a "red-card" certification, which allows them to participate in a wildland fire response on federal land.

"The class we've been doing represents the introductory level that's required to fight fire on federal ground," said McCoy. "But it also sets a base of knowledge for any type of fire fighting they want to do after that."

McCoy said the main thing he wanted the Soldiers to take away from the training was simple.

"I think people in a grassland area kind of underestimate the power of fire and so to get a respect, not just for the power of fire, but what goes into putting it out," said McCoy.

"I think in general, people don't understand...how fast it can get away from you and how fast it travels," he added.

Not only does the Nebraska National Guard have the responsibility to protect assets paid for with taxpayer money, they are responsible for helping to protect the communities in which Guardsmen live and work.

"The Nebraska National Guard



Hold The Line: Nebraska National Guard Soldiers use tools to create a fire line, March 27, during wildland firefighting training at Camp Ashland, Neb. The fire line removes fuel a wildland fire needs to continue burning.



Tools Of The Trade: Casey McCoy, wildland fire training manager for the Nebraska Forest Service, shows Nebraska National Guard Soldiers tools used to fight wildland fires, March 27, during wildland firefighting training at Camp Ashland, Neb. The training was designed to give the Soldiers tools they need to protect the state's federal training areas and facilities from the devastating effects of a runaway fire.

is supposed to support the state and with having these trained Soldiers who have this red card certification, we have those assets and those people to pull to support the state in the event of a natural disaster – which a wildland fire really can be classified as," said Vrtiska. "So this provides the state and the governor and the (adjutant general) that ability to support the needs of our citizens."

McCoy said a large portion of fire departments throughout Nebraska rely on volunteers and often lack the equipment needed to battle a fast-moving wildland fire, so having an organization like the Nebraska National Guard to call for help is invaluable.

"Having these guys that have a base knowledge of how to function as a hand crew is something that is very uncommon on this end of the state," said McCoy.

"Knowing that the resource is there is always positive and I think should they get called to respond out to something like that, I hope the volunteer firefighters know it's not just a group of guys coming in, it's a group of guys that also have some training in wildfire," he added. "From here on out, whenever they see someone with that certification they'll know what they've gone through, they know what their background's going to be and I think that's going to be a benefit to those guys knowing it's a trained resource coming to them."

Vrtiska couldn't agree more. "We now have another tool to support the state of Nebraska and our military mission as it relates to the state," he said. "It also relates to our federal mission – this protects our federal training sites and that's a big deal. We have millions of dollars of assets out here at Camp Ashland alone."

According to Soldiers in the class, the training was definitely educational.

"The training's been very eye-opening," said Sgt. 1st Class John Ruden, a range control sergeant with Training Site Command, who is in

charge of training areas at Camp Ashland. "It breaks it down for you as far as everything to think about with fire hazards, weather conditions, how the change in the patterns of the fire can go. It even goes into leadership if you're working on a team trying to put out a fire."

"It's been a lot of information like types of fires, ways to fight them and fire lines," said Spc. Shavin Barnhart, of Detachment 2, 1057th Transportation Company in Sydney, Neb.

Barnhart said she wanted to attend the training because being from western Nebraska, firefighting knowledge is very important, especially if she wants to follow in her father's footsteps and become a firefighter.

"I think if it comes down to it, I might join a (firefighting) unit because I feel like I might be an asset now," said Barnhart. "Now I know a little bit more about it and I feel safer doing it."

And because many of the training scenarios the Nebraska National Guard performs at training sites throughout the state have the possibility of starting a fire, having Soldiers trained to recognize the threats of fire is another important tool in the tool box.

"My biggest thing I want them to take away is awareness...and how (quickly) what we do for business can turn from something simple to something that can be very, very dangerous," said Vrtiska. "Hopefully they go back and at least review their standard operating procedures and incorporate what they learned here into that risk assessment that they already do for their training."

According to Ruden, he now knows to pay more attention to the fire risk when planning any training.

"If something were to happen at Greenleaf Training Site or here at Camp Ashland, people would know and understand how to react to that, so you're kind of a force multiplier within the organization by not having to use outside assets – but if outside assets were to come in you could still assist."

And in the case Nebraska Guardsmen are called to assist in a wildfire response, they could assist the communities they call home.

"I think it's hugely important to have that type of interaction between the Nebraska National Guard and the civilian populace," said Ruden. "Anytime we can show what we do and provide additional duties to the population, I think that just adds more credibility and more trust in what we can do."

Barnhart agreed and said she takes helping her community to heart.

"I think it would be a huge, huge honor because that's what I signed up to do and I haven't seen any action like that where I've actually been hands-on with the community... and helping people and seeing how we make an impact on people's lives – because that's what we're here for," said Barnhart. "I think it would be rewarding and if that were to happen to me I would be extremely grateful for the help."

Grand Island aviation unit welcomes new commander

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Staff Photojournalist

Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation Battalion (Security and Support) welcomed Lt. Col. Robert Kadavy as their new commander during a March 2 change of command ceremony held at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb.

Kadavy took command from Lt. Col. Richard Gray in front of Soldiers of the 1-376th Aviation Battalion, distinguished guests, friends and family.

Gray reflected on many accomplishments during his command.

"As a whole, our battalion integrated new aircrafts and new companies into our formation in the past two years, which has been quite historic for us," said Gray. "Specifically, we acquired Delta Company of the 1-376th Aviation Battalion, which is a medevac Lakota. They are brand new aircraft right off the factory line."

"We also acquired our new Alpha Company Lakotas which are almost identical but run the mission equipment package," added Gray. "Our other great boon for us was (when) our Bravo Company Chinook unit acquired the CH-47 F model Chinook helicopter. So, growing brand new aircraft for the Guard was quite historic for us."

Gray said the 1-376th is a great formation of Soldiers with a rewarding mission and he will miss serving as their commander.

Gray enlisted as a private in January 1987 as a member of the



Photo by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

New Leadership: Col. Brett Anderson, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade commander, passes the 1-376th Aviation Battalion (Security and Support) colors to incoming commander, Lt. Col. Robert Kadavy, during a March 2 change of command ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb.

134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance). He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in October 1995 at the Nebraska National Guard Military Academy.

Gray has held numerous leadership positions including commander

of Company C, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, Nebraska National Guard counterdrug coordinator and the state army aviation officer.

Gray has also been mobilized numerous times through his career.

He mobilized in 1999 to Bosnia-Herzegovina for Operation Joint Forge serving as a platoon leader for 24th Medical Company, in 2003 for Operation Iraqi Freedom as the 110th Medical Battalion's operations officer, and in 2006 for Operation

Iraqi Freedom as commander of the Company C, 2-135th GSAB. Gray has also served short tours to Egypt, El Salvador and Kyrgyzstan.

According to Kadavy, he is looking forward to being back with the aviation troops of Nebraska and making sure the Soldiers grow and excel in their career fields within the unit.

"It's a great opportunity to become the commander of this unit," said Kadavy. "The unit has great federal and state missions, lots of energized Soldiers that want to work hard for the nation and I'm very proud to take command of this unit."

Kadavy joined the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1986 as an enlisted UH-1M helicopter repairman. In 1989 he attended Warrant Officer Flight School in 1989 flying UH-1, OH-58 and AH-1 aircraft as a maintenance test pilot.

In 1995, Kadavy received a direct commission and has served in multiple leadership positions throughout the Nebraska Army National Guard including State Family Program director, commander of the 41st Rear Operations Center and AASF No. 1 facility commander.

Kadavy mobilized in 1998 for a 20-month tour in Bahrain, in 2001 for Operation Enduring Freedom, in 2002 for SFOR 13, and in 2006 for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Kadavy said getting caught up on training and schools is one of his top priorities as he takes command.

"We are going to have to switch from the every other year deployment cycle to try and catch up on some of our schools and training that we have had to bypass due to the deployments," said Kadavy.

Camp Ashland training regiment conducts change of command

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Writer

Brig. Gen. Richard H. Dahlman, assistant adjutant general for the Nebraska Army National Guard, presided over a change of command ceremony handing command of the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) to Lt. Col. Curtis L. Abendroth at Memorial Hall at Camp Ashland Training Site in Ashland, Neb., March 6.

Col. Kevin D. Lyons relinquished command and said the 209th has always been a special place for him because he started his career as an officer there in 1989.

"As I take my next assignment, I take a lot of memories from here with me," said Lyons. "I will do my best to encourage the Soldiers in my new brigade to come out here go through (Noncommissioned Officer Education System) and (Officer Candidate School) knowing that they are going to be well taken care of."

Lyons later assumed command of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade in Lincoln.

Abendroth said he couldn't pass on the challenge when Dahlman offered him the position.

"Never say no to an opportunity when it comes looking your way," said Abendroth. He said it was an honor to command such an excellent group of Soldiers.

"Excellence is what the 209th is about," said Abendroth. "The accomplishments of the 209th say a lot about what the Soldiers standing in this formation continue to do day in and day out... Together we are going to continue to do that."

Abendroth comes to the 209th with a long background of military experience having served as battalion commander of 734th Transportation Battalion in Kearney, Neb., since 2012. He



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Passing The Guidon: Lt. Col. Curtis L. Abendroth accepts command of the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) from Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman, assistant adjutant general for the Nebraska Army National Guard, at Memorial Hall at Camp Ashland Training Site in Ashland, Neb., March 6.

started his career in 1985 as an enlisted Soldier in Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 5th Brigade in Lincoln, Neb., receiving his commission in 1991 from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Reserve Officer Training Corps.

After serving as an armor officer in the Army Reserves in Lincoln, Abendroth transitioned to the Nebraska National Guard, deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as the support operations officer for the 867th Corps Support Battalion in Taji, Iraq in 2000. He served in various leadership positions before becoming the assistant inspector general in 2008 and became the first battalion commander of 3rd Battalion, 209th Regiment, at Camp Ashland, Neb., in 2010.

Abendroth graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln receiving a Bachelor of Science in construction management in 1992.

He works at UNL as an Assistant Director for Facility Maintenance of Housing. He and his wife Michele reside in Lincoln with their children Colton and Peyton.

BfSB continued from page 1.

many years, I feel privileged to lead such a great organization and the great personnel associated with the 67th BfSB."

"I appreciate the command group's confidence in my abilities to lead this organization into the future years," he added.

Lyons, who currently serves as the superintendent of schools at St. Edward Public Schools in St. Edward, Neb., began his military career in 1986 when he enlisted into the Kearney-based Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-195th Armor. After graduating from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School at Camp Ashland, Neb., Lyons' first assignment as a commissioned officer was in the Fremont-based Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry.

Since then, Lyons has served in a variety of leadership positions including commander of Troop A, 1-167th Cavalry in Hastings and Fairbury, and as commander of the Officer Candidate School at Camp Ashland. He has also served as an assistant operations officer and operations officer for the 209th RTI, and as commander of the 209th RTI's 2nd Battalion. Following these assignments, Lyons went on to serve as the operations officer for the 67th BfSB, commander of the Pre-mobilization Training Assistance Element, and as the state operations officer.

Lyons is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom, deploying to Afghanistan as a member of the Training Assistance Group, 53rd Infantry Brigade. While in Afghanistan, Lyons served initially as the commander/mentor for the Advance Individual Training Brigade of the Afghan National Army at the Kabul Military Training Center. Lyons was later reassigned as the operations officer for the Training Assistance Group, where he also served as mentor of the Kabul Military Training Center's Operation-Training and Education Officer.

Lyons holds a Master of Arts degree in School Administration and an Education Specialists Degree in School Superintendency from the



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Congratulations On A Job Well Done: Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman, Nebraska Army National Guard assistant adjutant general, congratulates Col. Brett Andersen after presenting him with a Meritorious Service Medal, April 12.

University of Nebraska-Kearney. Lyons is also a graduate of the U.S. Army War College where he received a Master of Science in Strategic Studies.

Lyons and his wife, Amy Jo, have five children: Stephanie, Heather, Paige, Alexander and Olivia.

According to the incoming commander, the brigade faces a number of challenges in the upcoming months.

"I feel the most significant challenge facing the BfSB will be the continued discussions on Army cutbacks and down-sizing as a whole," he said. "With reductions in personnel and budget cuts across the Army and National Guard, we will have to be proactive and creative in our future training plans and missions. In addition, we must continue to take care of the Soldiers and families through a period of time we have not faced since pre-9/11."

Lyons said he believes the brigade's Soldiers have what it takes to successfully navigate through this cloudy future.

"The current personnel of the BfSB is one of the biggest strengths to prepare it for future challenges," said Lyons. "The knowledge and experience of the Soldiers across the organization will work together to maintain readiness for both federal and state missions."

Lyons replaces Andersen, who

actually served as commander of the 67th BfSB two separate times, first as acting commander in 2011, and then again beginning in 2013.

According to Andersen, who began his military career in 1985 when he enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company E, 2-134th Infantry, the experience he gained during his most current stint with the 67th BfSB made him a better officer.

"I'm better because of the Soldiers who serve in this brigade," said Andersen. "You made me a better officer, a better Soldier and a better person."

Andersen said he knows the 67th BfSB is in good hands.

"I've worked with and served with Colonel Lyons on numerous occasions and I know that he is going to do great things with this organization," he said.

Andersen, who became the Nebraska Army National Guard chief of staff in late April, earned his commission as a second lieutenant in 1996 after graduating from the Nebraska National Guard Military Academy at Camp Ashland, Neb. During the course of his career, he has served as a Cavalry platoon leader, automation officer, personnel officer, comptroller, commander of the 1-167th Cavalry Squadron and then as executive officer of the 67th BfSB.

Andersen is a veteran of two overseas deployments, serving first as the Training and Plans mentor and commander of the Soldier Training Brigade during a deployment to Afghanistan in 2006, and then as executive officer and commander of the 67th BfSB during its deployment to Iraq in 2010-2011.

Andersen is a 1985 graduate of Lincoln Northeast High School and a 1998 graduate of Doan College where he earned a bachelor's degree in Business. In 2012 Andersen earned a master's degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College. He and his wife, Col. Georgia Kroese, have five children: Austen, Kramer, Katie, Hannah and Cole.

'Chopped' or Champs?

Nebraska National Guard chefs compete in modified version of popular TV cooking program

By Lt. Col. Jerry Meyer and Sgt. Brody Mayberry
Prairie Soldier Contributors

Cooks from across the Cornhusker state recently competed in a modified version of "Chopped," the popular TV show hosted by culinary expert Ted Allen. During the Food Network cooking competition, chefs compete by cooking three-course meals with a twist: each course must include ingredients from a mystery box, which leads to delightful creations as chefs struggle with incorporating such things as Animal Crackers and seaweed.

For the Nebraska Army National Guard cooking competition, which took place in February at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., cooks were given pork tenderloin, couscous, salad and dessert and told to get started...with mid-course deviations led by the cooking panel of judges/panel.

The judges paid close attention to each team's skill, used thermometers, and followed Army cooking guidelines to score how each team prepared its meal.

Extra points were earned during a break in the competition when the cooks were asked if they'd brought

safety belts to Greenlief Training Site and then had three minutes to retrieve them.

The judges also modified the competition by handing the teams butterscotch pudding and Coco Puff cereal with instructions "to make them work."

The teams took various paths while making the pork and rice main entrée, although each team was given a specific time to have their work completed and ready to

be presented to the judges and an assembled group of "volunteers."

Creativity was abundant. Variations on the pork included using coffee grounds in a rub and searing the meat, creating a Mirepoix (a combination of carrot, celery and onions as stock), stuffing the pork with onions, and using a strawberry glaze.

Couscous varied by spice level and decorative displays of the rice. Salads included homemade vinaigrettes and decorative displays.

The dessert was a modified version of strawberry shortcake. The

teams were required to make an almond poundcake as the base and use ingenuity and other ingredients to impress the judges. When all was said and done, Team 1 was declared the winner, with the other three teams following closely behind.

Team 1

Sgt. Brittney Douglas
Sgt. Keith Tinnell
Spc. Janie Konyek
Spc. William Cozad
Spc. James Struss

Team 2

Sgt. 1st Class Blake Sohl
Sgt. John Carothers
Spc. Claudia Hernandez
Spc. D. Taylor
Spc. Briar Broyles
Spc. Crystia Michalski

Team 3

Sgt. 1st Class Jason McAtee
Sgt. Marisa Martinez
Spc. Taylor Nekuda
Spc. Thomas Shupe
Pfc. Marisela Castillonegrete

Team 4

Staff Sgt. Brent Benes
Sgt. Channon Price
Spc. Josue Cleveland
Sgt. Kimberly Mahlberg
Pfc. Marshall Burnett



Photo by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

It's Official: Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Jeff Bender, senior military liaison for economic development for the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, are joined by members of the Nebraska Air National Guard recruiting team, leadership from the 155th Air Refueling Wing, and an Army Corps of Engineers representative to cut a ribbon officially opening the Nebraska Air National Guard's new storefront during a ceremony, March 26, in Omaha, Neb. The new storefront is located in the Harvey Oaks Plaza on 144th Street and West Center Road and should allow for greater visibility from passing vehicles and foot traffic.

Nebraska Air National Guard opens new recruiting storefront in Omaha

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon
Editor

Those in Omaha have a new option when it comes to their Nebraska Air National Guard recruiting needs.

The Nebraska Air National Guard's new storefront was officially opened during a ribbon cutting ceremony, March 26, in Omaha, Neb. Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Jeff Bender, senior military liaison for economic development for the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, were joined by members of the recruiting team, leadership from the 155th Air Refueling Wing, and an Army Corps of Engineers representative to cut a ribbon officially opening the facility.

The new storefront is located in the Harvey Oaks Plaza on 144th Street and West Center Road and should allow greater visibility from passing vehicles and foot traffic. The previous facility was located in a strip mall area, which couldn't be seen from the street.

"We started out over at Rockbrook Village in a place that was good, but a little hidden," said Bohac. "Yet it served its purpose

and got us exposure in the right market area in a way we hadn't had before where the recruiters were really operating out of their cars most of the time. Now they have a place that's even better because of the exposure on 144th here and a lot of high visibility."

According to Tech. Sgt. Jeremy Dean, a production recruiter who works in the new facility, he's already seen a valuable increase in foot traffic at the new 144th Street location.

"In Omaha it's a very popular street...versus the other one we were kind of tucked back in and when people drove by we didn't have any signage on the street," said Dean. "They actually had to go in the shopping center and had to drive by to see our sign. Now it's lit up and you can see it at night and everything."

Dean added that the new storefront is also well branded inside, but more importantly, offers a safe location to discuss opportunities with possible new members of the Nebraska Air National Guard.

"Prior to our storefront being here, we used to have to drive to Omaha and meet people at a Denny's or something like that," said Dean. "This allows us to meet with them in a secure location privately."

After helping to cut the ribbon,

Bender thanked everyone for their work in making the storefront a reality and said his door was always open to help those willing to sacrifice, not only for Nebraska, but for the nation.

"On behalf of the Omaha Chamber, I'd like to congratulate you guys on opening your career center here," said Bender.

"You get the guys in uniform and they also need the possibility of a job in their other world, so we can hopefully team up on that avenue there," he added.

Bohac thanked the Omaha Chamber of Commerce and the Army Corps of Engineers because it's ultimately about sustaining the Air National Guard's most important resource, its people.

"It's a great facility," said Bohac. "It gives us a presence in the Omaha community that we're grateful for and we're looking forward to great things as the recruiting force continues to be the high-performing organization that you are and producing to make sure the Nebraska National Guard's got folks it needs to do its mission."

The new Nebraska Air Guard storefront is located at 14430 West Center Road in Omaha, Neb.

Bylaw change expands Executive Committee to six at-large members

Greetings from the Nebraska Military Retiree Council and the Army National Guard Retirement Services Office. We all hope you're starting to enjoy spring time in Nebraska - snow, cold, wind, ice, you know, the usual spring events in this great state!

A bylaw change to expand the Executive Committee to a total of six at-large members was sent to the members and numerous ballots were received. Thank you for taking the time to vote on this important change.

As a result of the ballots, members overwhelmingly approved expanding the at-large members to six (three Army Guard and three Air Guard). As a result, Chief Warrant Officer 5 (Ret.) Tom Dahlgren has been appointed as an at-large member to fill this new position. Welcome, Tom. We look forward to having your input at our meetings.

By the time you read this, the spring social will have taken place. This year, we had a joint banquet with the National Guard Association and Enlisted Association at the Wick Alumni Center on the University of Nebraska campus.

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

It was a very nice event and we honored retired Lt. Gen. (Neb.) Ed Binder with our Founders Award. General Binder was instrumental in the formation of the NMRC and we thank him for his continued great support to the National Guard. If you happen to see him at the County City Building, congratulate him on his well-deserved recognition.

If you want specific information on any retirement issue, please contact us and we'll do the research for you. Our contact numbers are (402) 309-7303 or (402) 309-7305.

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

If you like to rise early to meet fellow retirees and share stories, here's the breakfast site information for

those in the immediate areas:
Lincoln:

Army National Guard retirees: **FIRST** Monday of each month, 7:00 a.m., Virginia's Travelers Café, 3820 Cornhusker Highway, Lincoln

Air National Guard retirees: **LAST** Monday of each month, 7:00 a.m., Stauffer's Café, 5600 S. 48th St, Lincoln.

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

From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Bonnie Frazier. My phone number is (402) 309-8162 and email address is bonnie.d.frazier@mail.mil. Staff Sgt. Mandy Hatcher's phone number is (402) 309-8164 and mandy.r.hatcher@mail.mil. We are located in the Joint

DEERS/ID Card Stations

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

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

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

Force Headquarters Building at the Nebraska National Guard air base, 2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, NE 68524. Your Tri-Care manager is Staff Sgt. Travis Garrett. His number is (402) 309-1541. Contact him for all your Tri-Care related questions.

The Army National Guard personnel section is holding a Retiree Briefing at the Combined Reserve Center in Kearney on Saturday, May 31, starting at 8 a.m. Notifica-

tion has been sent out to the retirees in the Kearney and surrounding areas.

If you're interested in attending, RSVP to (402) 309-7500.

A wide variety of subjects from an overview of the Guard to retiree benefits will be presented. Booths will also be set up so you can visit with each area individually. We're looking for a great turnout for this event.



Guard Family NEWS You Can Use



Easter festivities held across state in April for military kids

By Sgt. Jason Drager
Staff Writer

Easter-themed games and activities followed by an Easter egg hunt were held April 5 at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. The event, which was coordinated by the Nebraska National Guard Child and Youth Program, was one of five Easter celebrations planned. “We wanted to provide a fun and enjoyable time to celebrate being a military child,” said Kristyn E. Kocsis, child and youth program coordinator. “The event was very successful and this year’s numbers surpassed those from last year.”

April is also the month of the military child, said Kocsis. This event gave the opportunity for

military kids to come together and interact with one another.

“It was awesome,” said 9-year-old Anthony Dennis. “I chased my brother and looked for eggs.”

In addition to the egg hunt, children had the opportunity to participate in a chicken dance, color paper eggs, pet real rabbits, and pose for pictures with the Easter bunny. The children also competed in an egg drop.

“It was really fun,” said 7-year-old Jude Burton. “My eggs kept falling out of my basket because I was running so fast. Luckily, my sister gave me hers.”

In addition to the child and youth program, volunteers from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion Riders were on hand.

“We’re here for the kids,” said



Can I Take It Home? Parker Amen, son of Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joseph Amen, with the Nebraska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters, holds a bunny during a fun-filled morning of Easter activities at the Lincoln Air Base in Lincoln, Neb.

James Kirk of the American Legion Riders. “It’s always for the kids and making sure they are happy.”



Photos by Sgt. Jason Drager

It’s My Egg... Military kids of all ages run after Easter eggs during the Easter egg hunt held April 5 at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. There were 88 youth in attendance at the Lincoln Easter-themed activities. The event was hosted by the Nebraska National Guard child and youth program at five locations across the state.

Four more Easter events planned throughout the state for April. The child and youth program also sup-

ported an egg hunt and games in Grand Island, Omaha, Kearney and Scottsbluff.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Here’s To You: Maj. Brian Scholtes, 155th Air Refueling Wing, clinks glasses with his son Zach, 4, during a cupcake toast at the first-ever Nebraska Military Kids Ball, held March 29 in Lincoln, Neb. The ball was designed to kick off Nebraska’s annual “Month of the Military Child” activities.

Military kids honored during ball

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard’s Penterman Armory hosted dozens of pint-sized Cinderellas and Prince Charmings – all decked out in their finest dresses and suits – Saturday, March 29, when the Nebraska National Guard’s Child and Youth Program Office held its first-ever Military Kids Ball.

According to Kristyn Kocsis, a Nebraska National Guard contractor who serves as the state Child and Youth Program coordinator, the event was designed to begin the annual “Month of the Military Child” observance in style.

“The main purpose behind the Military Kids Ball was to kick off the Month of the Military Child by focusing the ball on the kids,” said Kocsis. “It also gave military children and their families an opportunity to have a fun and enjoyable evening together.”

Kocsis said a total of 63 kids and 57 adults attended the evening festivities that included a banquet consisting of

parmesan chicken strips with marinara dipping sauce, pulled barbecue pork, macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes and gravy, roasted mixed vegetables, glazed baby carrots, side salad and a roll.

The ball also had an open (candy) bar, traditional toasts conducted with cupcakes placed in champagne glasses, and a dance deejayed by Lt. Col. Will Prusia, deputy personnel officer for the Army National Guard.

According to Prusia, the feedback from those attended was extremely positive.

“Several of the comments I received were from people who said that this was by far the best and most fun military ball they had ever attended,” said Prusia, adding that he enjoyed seeing the kids dressed up in suits and fancy dresses accompanied by their parents who wore their formal military uniforms to the event. “It was just a lot of fun.”

“It was a very successful event,” echoed Kocsis, adding, “We are hoping the Military Kids Ball will become an annual event to be held in either March or April.”

Guard children gear up for mobilization

By Sgt. Riley Huskey
Staff Writer

Nebraska National Guard youth had the opportunity to learn about the mobilization process, complete with junior “Soldier readiness processing” (SRP) checklists, at the Youth Mobilization Day, March 1, at the East Campus Readiness Center in Lincoln, Neb.

The Warrior and Family Support directorate’s component, the National Guard Child and Youth Program, coordinated the three-hour event for children of Army and Air National Guard members, ages six to 13.

“We did push-ups, learned how to fold the flag, made a picture frame and made a flag,” said Kaiser Huskey, age 7, son of Capt. Cory Huskey. “It was fun.”

Sixteen youth turned out to complete the SRP stations, which included U.S. flag history and folding etiquette, military uniform standards and appearance, a variety of crafts aimed to teach and showcase military values, and physical training standards and basics.

“It was pretty good—fun,” said James Zak, age 12, son of Army Sgt. Jim Zak. “There were fun crafts and activities to do. My favorite part of the day was the PT. We did push-ups, sit-ups, planking and other stuff”

Kelli Czarnick and Kristyn Kocsis, Child and Youth Program coordinators for the Nebraska National Guard, said the planning that went into the event was based on the parent or guardian going through a mobilization. It aimed to give kids a chance to experience specific topics that their service member might go through and give them a feel for what it means to be a service member.

“I think it was very successful and the kids really enjoyed it, got into it and thought for just a little bit (they) were actually a member of the military,” Kocsis said, “which was awesome – that was our goal. Hopefully the interest will grow and we can do this again.”

The ultimate goal of the Child and Youth Program is for kids to gain specific skills, such as leadership, teamwork, self-confidence, and an understanding about different



Photos by Sgt. Riley Huskey

Decked Out In Camo: Sgt. Faiymeen Mumtaz, Nebraska State Family Program Office, shows military children Meal Ready-to-Eat meals during the Youth Mobilization Day, March 1, in Lincoln, Neb. The event aimed to give the youth a chance to experience topics like their parent or guardian would go through during a mobilization.



Learning Flag Folding: Pfc. Kyle Block shows a child how to properly fold a United States of America flag during the Youth Mobilization Day, March 1, in Lincoln, Neb.

topics and learning how it feels to be a military child, Kocsis said.

“How is the process? How is everyday life? How does it feel to be on a deployment?” Kocsis said. “It is about kids being able to connect with each other and share a bond because they’re military children.”

The event concluded with a surprise guest, Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman, assistant adjutant general - Army, and medals for comple-

tion of the SRP tasks.

“It’s hard to include families and especially kids sometimes in what we do, because a lot of what we do can be dangerous,” Dahlman said at the ceremony. “So, it’s nice to do something local and be able to bring our family along, because there aren’t a lot of opportunities to do that.”

“The strength of our Army is our Soldiers and our Airmen, and the strengths of our Soldiers and Airmen are our families.”

Parents and families were invited to attend the ceremony and reactions to the event were unanimously positive.

“The kids really got a kick out of the general being here and I don’t know if they realized how much that means to have him take time out of his day, but it looked like they all enjoyed it,” said Stina Huskey, mother of Kaiser and a former Nebraska Air Guard member. “It was fun as a parent to see them get those honors. Everyone seemed so bright and happy when that happened.”

“I would definitely encourage everyone to bring their kids out to participate or even volunteer, because it does help our kids get more of a concept of what we are doing, and also learning about integrity, honesty and discipline.”

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Brigadier General

Richard H. Dahlman

Captain

Harry I. Swartzfeger Jr.

Chief Warrant Officer Three

Robert P. Davis
William C. Score

Master Sergeant

Jonathan C. Panipinto

Sergeant First Class

Jason D. Douglas
Andrew J. Filips
Christopher G. Gross
Ryan H. Harris
Shawn M. Humphrey
Gary M. Jacobsen
Anthony J. Jensen
Christopher J. King
Jeffrey S. Rexus

Staff Sergeant

Robert D. Bare
William E. Byrd
Raquel L. Carlin
Cody D. Gibbons
Derek J. Harris
Andy J. Kallhoff
William P. Nolan
Todd P. Poehlman
Barbara K. Pope
Michael L. Ritterling
Neil A. Scrivens
Josiah A. Smith
Matthew S. Wonder

Sergeant

Evan I. Biederman
Jason M. Dailey
James R. Flores
Brandon C. Girard
Seth A. Gorham
Dion W. Hixson
Christopher E. Johnson
Owen P. Karre

Cyle L. Kling
Kyle E. J. Knieval
Patricia H. Lee
Travis M. Morrison
Tony B. Mueller
Anthony W. Reinard
Korey L. Thompson
Nathan J. Vancura
Brandon L. Waltemath
Kevin J. Weyers Jr.

Specialist

Andrew J. Allgood
Austin J. K. Alm
Kyle S. Block
Robert W. Bradshaw
Katherine E. Brandt
Alexander Calderon
Trevor A. Carter
Anthony A. M. Casto
Keith A. Copeland
Jacob M. Davenport
Corey E. Doorlag
Jonathan R. Emme
Mitchell I. Erickson
Dustin T. Fosbinder
Brian E. Froshbell
Devan L. Graham
Justin L. D. Grimm
Phillip J. Harmon
Dylan J. Hergenrader
Ryan L. Hoffman
Dalton M. Hopson
Spencer K. Hoffman
Thaddaeus C. Immink
Kippar J. Irene
Lincoln T. Johns
Rainier S. L. Juaneza
Nickalos E. Keenjacobson
Skylar R. M. Kellison
Jacob I. Kendrick
Tucker D. Lanz
Brandon C. Lenner
Erika M. McCarthy
Concepcion D. Millanadame
Cody C. Nelson
Steven Z. Parker
Lian T. Pau

Andrew P. Percic
Dylan D. B. Peters
Zachary A. Poppas
Brandon T. Portrey
Gabriel J. Reinke
Alec J. Rockford
Casey R. Rozell
Jessie R. Schellhorn
Hunter L. Smith
Joshua J. Thomas
Ethan L. Tracy
Aaron R. Winberg
Brenden P. Zegers

Private First Class

Tethloac Chut
Zachary Faraj
Andrew J. Fielder
Sabrina M. Herchenbach
Alex M. Hulewicz

Dustin J. Ligon
John S. Martin
John M. O'Connell
Abigail T. Reagers
Thomas M. Springhower
Eric J. Sutton
Rafael Vargas III

Private Two

Major Armstead
Dakota R. Barber
Jay G. Bicking
Zachary R. Foreman
Corey W. Klassen
Shane E. Kuntz
Jeffrey P. Linscomb
Tyler G. Nickel

Air National Guard

Major
Matthew N. Van Cleave

Captain

Amanda L. Whitney

First Lieutenant

Michael R. G. Brodersen
Douglas D. Carlson
Travis D. Carlson

Senior Master Sergeant

David B. Nelson

Master Sergeant

Paul E. Feltes III
David S. Gerdes
Thomas K. Guilford
Marsha R. Lane
Jamison M. Nitz
Jon D. Quissell

Technical Sergeant

Christina N. Ebel

Philip J. Francis
Rashelle D. Knickerbocker
David P. Mace Jr.
Kyle B. Martin
Jarod M. Wozniak

Staff Sergeant

Bryan A. Bach
Anthony M. McLeod
Terrance M. Smith

Senior Airman

Steven J. Dethlefs
Gus E. Stamps

Airman First Class

Amanda M. Hohnstein
Nicholas J. Jackson

Airman

Joseph E. Ashmore

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Legion of Merit

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Robert E. Hansel

Meritorious Service Medal

Col. Brett W. Andersen
Lt. Col. Richard A. Gray
Maj. Vernon A. Chandler
Maj. Brett E. Petit
Capt. Jonathan D. D. Wymer
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Cory D. Languis
Command Sgt. Maj. Marty L. Baker
Master Sgt. Robert C. West Jr.
Sgt. 1st Class Steven M. Swisher
Staff Sgt. Dean P. Martin
Staff Sgt. Justin R. Olson
Sgt. Megan L. Curry

Joint Service Commendation Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Bryce A. Preister
Staff Sgt. Javier R. Arias
Staff Sgt. Nicholas C. Christy
Sgt. Taylor C. Sanchez

Spc. Robert C. Hayduk

Army Commendation Medal

Capt. Greg S. Beran
Capt. Christina Krcilek
Capt. Robert J. Schepers
1st Lt. Matthew B. Rippenkroeger
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert P. Davis
Chief Warrant Officer 3 K.C. Sohl
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Tood C. Smovich
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Keal S. Bockelman
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kristopher J. Schauf
Chief Warrant Officer 2 James A. Score
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Boe J. Searight
1st Sgt. Richard D. Schneider
Master Sgt. Marlon D. Timm
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas W. Mitchell
Sgt. 1st Class Steve M. Swisher
Staff Sgt. Robert A. Market
Staff Sgt. Connie L. Smith
Staff Sgt. Jeffrey L. Wilkins
Sgt. Benjamin J. Briggs
Sgt. Nathaniel L. Chitwood

Sgt. Joshua J. Michaelson

Spc. Jalon D. Denion
Spc. Matthew E. Schortheide

Army Achievement Medal

Staff Sgt. Erin D. Youngblood
Spc. Jalon D. Benion
Spc. Brian H. Hamilton
Spc. Matthew E. Schortheide

Military Outstanding

Volunteer Service Medal

2nd Lt. Ryan W. Cho
Sgt. 1st Class Gary M. Jacobsen
Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hartmann
Sgt. Brandon C. Girard

Combat Infantry Badge

Spc. Matthew E. Schortheide

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Chad M. Bruce

Cpt. Jonathan D. D. Wymer

Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal

1st Lt. Bradley L. Gonzales
Sgt. Adam M. Pitts

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Master Sgt. Monte R. Davison
Master Sgt. Daniel E. Fullerton
Master Sgt. David Hayes
Sgt. 1st Class Lance Zobel
Staff Sgt. Carl D. Bassemier Jr.
Staff Sgt. Calvin G. Hubbard
Staff Sgt. MaryJo A. Yager
Sgt. Paul R. Larsen

Shorttakes

Nebraska Air National Guard recruiter reaches milestone

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Master Sgt. Paul Dion, recruiting supervisor for the Nebraska Air National Guard, hit a major milestone in March when he helped enlist his 100th accession into the unit.

Dion hit the century milestone on March 27 when Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac administered the oath of enlistment to Tarrah Quinn Montgomery, a native of Lincoln, Neb., who joined the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Maintenance Squadron as a personnel specialist. Montgomery, who works as a dental assistant in civilian life, is the granddaughter of retired Chief Master Sgt. John Ware, former 155th Air Refueling Wing command chief master sergeant.

According to Dion, who began recruiting in 2008, hitting the milestone was both exciting and a time to think about what he's accomplished.

"You kind of reflect upon all the ones that are in and where I started from in comparison to where I'm at now," said Dion, shortly after the enlistment ceremony that was held in front of members of the 155th Support Group.

Dion, who said he was unaware he was approaching the milestone until a co-worker pointed it out, said the key to his success was the quality of recruits looking to join the Nebraska Air Guard.

"The key was hard work and just working with great applicants like Tarrah. She's been a lot of fun to work with."

Montgomery said she didn't realize she was going to be Dion's 100th accession or that she would take the oath of enlistment before a conference room filled with people until roughly five minutes before the ceremony. She said it



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Happy Occasion: Master Sgt. Paul Dion (second from right), recruiting supervisor for the Nebraska Air National Guard, poses with Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, Tarrah Quinn Montgomery and retired Chief Master Sgt. John Ware, former command chief master sergeant for the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing, after Montgomery enlisted into the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Maintenance Squadron in the personnel career field. Montgomery is the granddaughter of Ware and represents Dion's 100th accession into the Nebraska Air National Guard.

was an extremely overwhelming event.

"Sweaty palms, that's for sure," said Montgomery. "It's pretty cool."

Bohac said it was indeed a significant occasion for Dion and the entire unit.

"Someone pointed out to me today, think of 100 recruits," said Bohac. "That's 10 percent of the force at any one time in the Nebraska Air National Guard. That's not insignificant."

Col. Wendy Johnson, commander of the 155th Support Group, echoed Bohac's thoughts and said the contribution Dion has made to the unit is great.

"Paul, it's a credit to your dedication and your professionalism," said Johnson



Dotted Line: Tarrah Quinn Montgomery signs paperwork to enlist into the Nebraska Air National Guard as Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Master Sgt. Paul Dion, recruiting supervisor for the Nebraska Air National Guard, watch at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

Department of Defense salutes military kids in April

Month for the Military Child designed to tell nation military kids serve, too

WASHINGTON (AFPS)—The Defense Department believes military children serve their country alongside their service member parents, DoD's director of the office of family policy/children and youth said.

When military children serve, they do so by making sacrifices when parents are deployed, through frequent moves, starting new schools and making new friends on a continuing basis, Barbara Thompson said in a recent interview with The Pentagon Channel for the Month of the Military Child that were celebrated in April.

"We feel it's important for the nation to know that military children also serve their country," Thompson said.

To honor military children for their sacrifices and service, DoD and the services planned activities throughout the month that ranged from installation-based fairs, parades, and literacy and art events, she said.

Military Kids Day, April 15, also marked the third-annual "Purple Up!" day when adults wear purple to show support of children from all the services, Thompson said.

DoD has numerous year-round programs and awareness efforts to honor military children, and Thompson elaborated on some of those initiatives.

To help children build their resilience, DoD has coordinated programs with Sesame Street

to help with ongoing change in military children's lives, Thompson noted.

"Sesame (Street) has been an outstanding contributor to the well-being of military children," she said, naming a series of DVDs that cover such topics for military children as divorce, grief, separation and deployment, resilience skills, and visible or invisible injuries.

Sesame Street also recently launched two new smartphone applications.

"One (app) covers relocation, and another is to help children learn self-regulation skills so they become more resilient," Thompson said. "And everything is free."

Thompson emphasized that April also is Child Abuse Prevention Month and said awareness in this arena is important to DoD.

"Child Abuse Prevention Month is particularly important because it's a social responsibility for all of us to make sure children are safe and their well-being is protected," she said. "Everybody has a responsibility."

Giving parents the tools to make them strong supporters of their children and to keep them safe from predators and from violence within the family is crucial, she added.

"Parenting is tough, regardless of the situation and the age of the child. They each bring their nuances to the table, whether it's children at (age) 2 who say 'no,' or a teenager who's sometimes a little defiant," she said.

DoD offers parenting skill resources, Thompson noted, such as the newly launched Parenting Course.

The course, she explained, examines parenting from the context of the military lifestyle, which revolves around deployments and parental separations from their children at different stages of their development.



Courtesy photos

A Family Affair

Nebraska company command passes from wife to husband

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon
Editor

When a Soldier goes home after a long, hard day of Guard drill, they often vent to a supportive spouse despite the fact that the spouse may have little idea what actually goes on. But for two Nebraska National Guard Soldiers, they are now uniquely qualified to walk a mile in each others' shoes.

Capt. Christina Krcilek commanded Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade for 18 months following the 67th BfSB's deployment to Iraq in 2011-12. During that time she focused on getting the Soldiers of the unit current on standard Army requirements. Their physical fitness scores rose from a 55 percent passing rate to 85 percent, they dramatically lowered the number of Soldiers with height and weight issues, and they were able to get every single Soldier under her command qualified on their primary weapon system.

As is normal in the Army, time came to pass on command of the unit and move to the next step of her career as a platoon lead trainer for the 209th Regional Training Institute. She relinquished command of the HHC, 67th BfSB during a ceremony at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb., March 16.

According to Krcilek, when the unit's new commander was chosen, she couldn't think of a better person to take the helm at HHC, 67th BfSB. It turned out to be Capt. Nate Krcilek, her husband.

Christina has no doubt her husband will be able to take on the difficult duties of a company commander.

"Obviously he's able to make good decisions...because he married me," said Christina. "There wasn't anybody better that I thought could have been chosen to take over HHC."

"It was an honor and a privilege to be able to lead this company," she added. "And I knew I'd be leaving them in good hands."

For Nate, this represents his first command. He said he never expected to be assuming command from someone so close to him.

"The opportunity to take command is an honor and a privilege in itself," said Nate. "Taking it from



Parting Words: Capt. Christina Krcilek speaks after relinquishing command of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade colors to incoming commander, and husband, Capt. Nate Krcilek, during a March 16 change of command ceremony at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

someone you're married to just makes it all that much more special."

Nate said his goals as the new commander are simply to act as a facilitator and allow his Soldiers to do their jobs. And thankfully he's got a pretty knowledgeable source of information on speed dial.

"It's nice having her around every day, so if I have questions about what training has been conducted I don't necessarily have to dig around, I can just ask her," said Nate. "So it's definitely not something where she left command and now she's done with it — she'll still get questions from me constantly."

Christina said she didn't really have command advice for her husband, but saw some of his ideas implemented immediately.

"I started seeing him take the company to the next level because as soon as we got home he got on the computer and started doing a shared drive (on Guard Knowledge Online)," said Christina. "He's much more computer savvy than me, so he's already taking the company basically into the 'techy' generation."

"I'm proud of him, but at the same time I'm really mad he didn't show me how to do that," she added with a laugh. "We could have been at that point two years ago."

According to Nate, he wasn't holding out on his wife, he was just making sure he wasn't trying to influence her leadership.

With both of the Krcileks serving in the Nebraska National Guard,

they understand the sacrifice involved.

"There's an understanding that we have responsibilities to the Army that go beyond just one weekend a month and two weeks a year," said Nate.

And although Christina may occasionally look over his shoulder to see what he's up to, she's already walked a mile in his shoes and knows how to deal with Army life and life at home.

"He's going to do his own thing and I know that," she said. "I try to separate our personal life from our Army life as much as we can."

Christina was born in Los Angeles and earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a minor in Military Science at California State University of Fullerton. She was involved in the school's Reserve Officer Training Corps program and was commissioned in 2005 into the California National Guard as a Military Intelligence Officer.

Christina's military education includes Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course, Intelligence, Reconnaissance and Surveillance Management Course, Intelligence in Combating Terrorism Course, and Captain Career Course Phase I and II.

Christina's civilian employment is at Rose Blumkin Jewish Nursing Home.

Nate was born in Giltner, Neb., and enlisted in Company D, 1-134th Infantry, in Grand Island, Neb. After completing high school he transferred to the active duty Army. In 2001, he re-joined the Nebraska National Guard where he received a direct commission in 2006. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science with a minor in History from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Nate's military education includes the All-Source Intelligence Analyst Course, Primary Leadership Development Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, and the Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course. This fall he is scheduled to complete the Maneuver Captain Career Course and the Intelligence Community Advanced Analysis Program.

Nate is an Air Force Civilian at Offutt Air Force Base working for United States Strategic Command. The Krcileks live in Omaha.

Family Business: Col. Brett Anderson, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade commander, passes the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th BfSB colors to incoming commander Capt. Nate Krcilek during a March 16 change of command ceremony at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb. Krcilek took command of the unit from his wife, Capt. Christina Krcilek, who relinquished the position after 18 months in command.



Quality Line-up: Capt. Nate Krcilek, Col. Brett Anderson, 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade commander, and Capt. Christina Krcilek stand in formation during a March 16 change of command ceremony at the "Spirit of 1776" Armory in Lincoln, Neb., where Nate took command of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th BfSB from his wife, Christina.

Defense leaders: Quality troops key

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — As the services face reductions to their force strength and overall budgets, they remain focused on retaining and attracting the highest quality troops and civilian workers, military personnel chiefs told Congress April 4.

"We stand at a pivotal moment in our history," Lt. Gen. Howard B. Bromberg, the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel, told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee's personnel subcommittee.

"Due to budgetary reductions, we are executing an historic drawdown of both our military and civilian personnel while in an unpredictable global security environment," Bromberg said.

The uncertain security environment makes it critical that force reductions are conducted carefully and responsibly and in a way that guarantees force quality and readiness are protected, he said.

Bromberg was joined in his testimony by Navy Vice Adm. William F. Moran, chief of naval personnel and deputy chief of naval operations for manpower and education; Air Force Lt. Gen. Samuel D. Cox, deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel and services; and Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Robert E. Milstead Jr., deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs.

"Every tough choice we made in this budget was in favor of main-

taining quality of service for our sailors," Moran said. "Our objectives were to maintain and improve manning at sea, retain our best and brightest sailors, and increase the readiness of our sailors and their families."

The Air Force also sought to balance quality with readiness, Cox told committee members.

"As we get smaller, we will continue to integrate our total force by leveraging the flexibility of our regular Air Force with our Guard and Reserve partners, balancing full-time and part-time Airmen where and when it makes sense," he said.

To support the demands of a 21st-century Air Force, the service must become more agile and efficient, Cox said. With this in mind, the Air Force will implement a wide variety of force management tools. Voluntary force reduction programs will be used as much as possible, he said, and incentive programs will be applied where needed. Involuntary force reduction programs will be used only if required, Cox added.

Bromberg noted that recruiting challenges will go hand in hand with a smaller military, as an increasing percentage of America's youth become ineligible for military service.

"As the Army looks to the future, we must take advantage of all America's diverse talents," he said. "We're expanding opportunities for

women by opening up previously closed positions and career paths, while ensuring all Soldiers can meet the required physical and professional standards."

The officials noted that quality-of-life programs are an important part of the effort to attract and retain quality personnel.

The Army has implemented an "unprecedented number" of programs designed to reduce and ultimately eliminate sexual assault and harassment from its ranks, Bromberg said.

"I'm confident that our efforts are putting the right processes and procedures in place to ensure a climate of safety, trust and respect for every member of the Army family and enhancing the accountability of every member of the Army team," he added.

The nation owes its military personnel the tools, the training and the professional work environment they need to succeed in their missions, Moran said.

"All of what American seapower means today and might become is due to the selfless service of the men and women who make it so," the admiral noted.

As the military services seek to meet the budget challenges, it is the commitment, ingenuity and hard work of military personnel that will help the services navigate the future, Cox said.

Air Force secretary reports on Total Force balance

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James outlined the service's progress in leveraging the talent and capabilities of the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve within the total force concept.

James, along with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, testified at an April 29 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

A tiger team of three generals from each reserve component conducted a comprehensive review of mission requirements, recommended ideas for improving collaboration and sought avenues to balance total force capabilities, James told the senators. "We laid in force structure changes to take advantage of the Guard and Reserve's strength," James said. "For example, in the area of (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), we've increased reserve components' presence in the MQ-1 and (MQ-9) fleets of remotely piloted aircraft, so we're going from 17 percent to 24 percent representation in that arena."

In the cyber arena, James said, three new Air Force Reserve units will reflect an increase in that capability in fiscal year 2016.

Meanwhile, James said the Air Force will decrease its active component end-strength by 17 percent while decreasing the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard end-strength by 3 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively, by fiscal 2015.

"In the future, we hope to garner enough savings by moving capability and capacity to the reserve component so that future end-strength cuts may not be necessary," she said.

James told the senators that Air Force leaders agree with 86 percent of the suggestions put forth by the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force, established by Congress as part of the fiscal 2013 defense spending bill. However, she added, they differ with the commission's recommendation that Air Force Reserve Command be disestablished.

"We're all for integration, and of course, that is the basis of that recommendation," James said. "But we feel...in fiscal year 2015, we don't have a good alternative way to manage and provide for ... 70,000 members of the Air Force Reserve, so we would disagree with that proposition, at least for (fiscal 2015)."

Street Talk

“How would you change your unit’s annual training to make it more beneficial to you?”



Master Sgt. Megan Zuver
155th Air Refueling Wing

“I would like to see a set of days where we can work them together as a wing without having the stress of an exercise and have a morale boosting event at the end.”

Sgt. Seth Kennedy
Detachment 2, 1057th Transportation Company

“As a member of a transportation company, I would say we need an annual training that puts us on the road with our trucks. One that is fast paced and has real-world benefit.”



Staff Sgt. Howard Taylor III
Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company

“I wouldn’t change anything about annual training. In recent ATs my cooking section has been able to train with equipment we don’t use regularly and it’s a great learning experience for everyone.”

Tech. Sgt. Daren Rademaker
155th Civil Engineer Squadron

“I would like to see more opportunities to go to other bases so that we can train and use equipment that we don’t have here. As well as train in more live-fire facilities.”



Spc. Steven Parker
Detachment 1, 1057th Transportation Company

“I would like to continue to cook every chance we get in the Connelly competition or a cooking competition for our annual training. It’s a great overall learning experience.”

Airman 1st Class Leilani Beal
173rd Air Refueling Squadron

“I would like to complete all my annual training at the beginning of each year.”



Leadership Lessons

Develop your own learning strategy

I have been posting quotes on the glass wall outside of my office for about a month.

One of the recent postings asked the question, “Which is larger in your car, the windshield or the rear-view mirror?”

Someone asked me where I get these sayings. They come from a variety of sources, mostly from books or leadership blogs or columns I run across or from others who share with me.

One of the attributes I admire about many successful leaders is that they are voracious readers. I try to practice this habit to world wide.

For example, I try to allow enough time in the mornings to read the local papers and scan on-line news sources before I come to work. I also receive a daily public affairs update from National Guard Bureau. That tends to keep me abreast of current events; local to national to world wide.

I also read books on leadership and enjoy the lessons offered by biographies. I am currently reading “The Power of Inclusion: Unlock the Potential and

“Here To Serve”

The Adjutant General

Daryl Bohac



TAG Reading List

- “Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action” by Simon Sinek, (check out Sinek’s TED Talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action_to_see_why_you_might_want_to_read_this_book)
- “The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today” by Thomas E. Ricks
- “Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy” by Eric Metaxas
- “Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption” by Laura Hillenbrand
- “Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant” by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne
- “Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times” by Donald T. Phillips
- “Who Kidnapped Excellence? What Stops us From Giving and Being our Best” by Harry Paul, John Britt and Ed Jent

first few chapters I have read.

Finally, I also read for fun. I like murder mysteries. It helps me shut my brain down at the end of the day and relax.

Once in awhile I find a book that is compelling and I end up staying up later than I really should. But it always seems worth it in the end.

I encourage you to develop your own life-long learning strategy. It should be balanced between personal and professional pursuits and should never be a burden.

Allow yourself a break when you need one and then re-engage.

I am convinced you and the organization will be better for it. After all, there is no greater threat to your development and the organization than the status quo. Something I read in an airline magazine 20 years ago.

By the way, in response to the question about windshields and rear-view mir-

rors, I posted a second question, “Which one do you spend most of your time looking through?” Your answer might tell you something.

Productivity of Your Work Force” by Michael Hyter and Judy Turnock. I believe this would be worthy of your time as well based on the

Mustache March: Not for the faint of heart

Thank you, peer pressure.

This past March I had the “opportunity” to participate in an Air Force-wide esprit de corps event that ended up being way tougher to complete than I ever imagined: growing, and then maintaining, a mustache for a complete month.

Let me explain. On the first Monday of March, a Nebraska Air Guard leader (whom I will not name) stopped by my office and asked me a very simple question: “So, are you participating in Mustache March?”

Not knowing what he was talking about, I of course immediately agreed. Why not, I thought, it might be a good chance to see what I would look like in a mustache.

Besides, it’s only a month. How hard can it be?

What I didn’t know at the time was this whole effort was a big deal, well at least in some quarters of the Air Force.

The effort actually seems to have begun decades ago within the flying community as an homage to the late Brig. Gen. Robin Olds, a legendary Air Force triple ace who, during the Vietnam War, grew an elaborate handlebar mustache in complete disregard to Air Force grooming standards. Every March, flyers would grow mustaches in a semi-jovial protest against the grooming standards.

This year’s effort actually grew out of comments by the current Air Force chief of Staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, who essentially called out the entire Air Force this past February to follow suit.

Granted, this year’s Mustache Month was not without controversy (if you don’t believe me, do a ‘Google’ search), but overall it seemed to serve its purpose well.

More personally, though, it was undoubtedly one of the longest months of my life.

What I found is that, one, growing a mustache hurts a whole lot

more than I ever thought, especially toward the end of the month when it caused my upper lip to swell from the irritation. Two, people won’t ask you about your mustache growing effort, unless you bring it up first. And three, I look absolutely idiotic with a mustache.

So, with that in mind, I’d like to share a few thoughts that I had, as well as some that I shared on Facebook, this past March:

March 7: (Eldest son) “Dad, are you growing a mustache?” (Me) “Shhhhh. Don’t tell your mom.”

March 14: (Second son) “Dad, what the heck is that on your face?” (Wife) “Yeah, I was wondering about that.” (The fact that this was nearly two weeks into the effort should give you a sense of how well I can grow a mustache.)

March 15: (Facebook Post) “Two words: Mustache Month. Four more words: Thank you Air Force. Final four words: How many days left?” (Response from Facebook friends): “Three words: Add an ascot.” “June is mullet month, start now.”

March 18: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... This morning my wife said I look like Lt. Dangle from Reno 911.”

March 19: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... When talking to people I keep noticing their eyes wandering to my upper lip. This causes me to want to say, ‘Hey pal, my eyes are up here.’”

March 20: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... Funny thing about growing a mustache is that you suddenly find yourself friends with those who have been wearing these things for decades.” (True story, people who have worn

your nose, is it time to reconsider this whole endeavor?”

March 24: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... Yesterday at breakfast, (my son) Michael (6) looks at me, pauses, looks again, pauses, and then says: ‘Dad, did you know you’re growing a mustache?’”

March 25: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... Yesterday I had some work to do at the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, which is collocated in the building that I work in. After taking what has become pretty much expected ritual abuse about my ability — or lack thereof — to grow a “proper” mustache, one of the ladies said this: “I don’t know, I think it looks distinguished. You look like Goose from Top Gun... but of course he died.” Thoughts on whether this is a compliment or not?” (Overall consensus was that no, this was not a compliment.)

March 26: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... I think I now understand what guys who have had a mustache for decades are feeling when they have to shave it off. Often, it is describes as akin to losing a lifelong friend, etc. With that in mind, I sure do miss my upper lip.”

March 31: (Facebook Post) “End of Mustache Month... As we complete this year’s Air Force Mustache Month — or rather as we approach Free My Upper Lip Day — I present to you the finished product.

Let this be a caution to you all — peer pressure is not something that should ever be toyed with as the results can be both ugly and significantly disturbing!!!!”

My Turn

State Public Affairs Officer

Kevin J. Hynes



mustaches for decades suddenly want to come up to you talk about mustaches.)

March 23: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... When the hairs above your lip start to compete with the hairs in

your nose, is it time to reconsider this whole endeavor?”

March 24: (Facebook Post) “Mustache Month Fun Fact... Yesterday at breakfast, (my son) Michael (6) looks at me, pauses, looks again, pauses, and then says: ‘Dad, did you know you’re growing a mustache?’”

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Lincoln-based support maintenance company gets hands-on training during annual training in Iowa

By Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Staff Photojournalist

One hundred and twenty Soldiers from the 267th Support Maintenance Company, based out of Lincoln, Neb., traveled to the National Maintenance Training Center at Camp Dodge, Iowa, for the unit's annual training.

The training took place from Feb. 22 to March 8, which provided the unit ample training time.

According to National Maintenance Training Center staff members, their mission is to provide technical and tactical logistics training for sustainment units through the use of subject matter experts who mentor logistics warriors in a scalable, full-spectrum operations environment.

During its time there, the 267th SMC trained in automotive, ground support equipment, communication and electronics, allied trades and armament repair.

The 267th's overall goal for annual training was simple.

"The mission is to make sure our Soldiers are proficient in both individual and technical skill sets that is required to set up operations in maintenance in areas," said Capt. Ronald Jones, commander of the 267th SMC. "We also want to promote a great sense of safety awareness in accordance with our composite risk managements."

According to Jones, the training was beneficial for the entire unit.

"This training helps the Soldiers understand how to become proficient in their military occupation specialties," said Jones.

Spc. Matthew Petersen, a power generation equipment repairer with the 267th SMC, said he learned a lot during the Iowa annual training, adding that he enjoyed the training.

The National Maintenance Training Center provided a lot of important information for everyone and the Soldiers were all able to receive information about each others' maintenance equipment as



Photos by Sgt. Heidi McClintock

Not So Fast: Pfc. Brandon Portrey, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 267th Support Maintenance Company, cleans a brake valve during the unit's annual training, March 3, at Camp Dodge, Iowa. During the unit's time there, the 267th SMC trained in automotive, ground support equipment, communication and electronics, allied trades and armament repair.



Tackling New Machinery: Members of the 267th Support Maintenance Company work on equipment they wouldn't normally see in Nebraska during their annual training at Camp Dodge, Iowa, on March 3. The Soldiers were happy they got to put their skills to work on different pieces of equipment.

well, said Petersen.

It was overall a great experience, he added.

In addition, the Nebraskans were very thankful for all the help they received from the subject matter experts at Camp Dodge, which made their experience worthwhile.

"The staff here is very helpful," said Jones. "They walk the Soldiers through, line by line, on the way to service equipment."

According to the staff at Camp Dodge, the Nebraska Soldiers are part of a very technical unit that functions just fine.

A staff member at the NMTC said the Nebraska Soldiers just need to continue some of the leader functions they received through the training when they get back home. Some of those functions include maintenance meetings, shop office

operations and communicating back to different sections.

"It was a nice change from what we do at drill," said Spc. Seth McDougall, a radio and communications security repairer with the 267th SMC. "But it's been a pretty good experience. I can't complain."

Jones agreed.

"They like the fact they get to work on equipment here that we don't have as a state," said Jones. "Camp Dodge, Iowa actually gives our Soldiers the chance to work on equipment we don't have and what that does is gives the Soldiers the ability to have a head start on equipment they possibly might see."

"They love the training," added Jones. "If it was up to them, they would be doing this training every year. They want to come back."



More Power: Two power-generation equipment repairers with the 267th Support Maintenance Company work on a generator March 3, during the unit's annual training at Camp Dodge, Iowa. The Feb. 22 to March 8 AT provided ample time for the Soldiers to have hands-on learning and experience.

Army Guard's Training Center Command receives national honors for helping units prepare for overseas deployments

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Training Center Command added some significant color to their uniforms, March 23, when the organization was presented with the U.S. Army Superior Unit Award during a ceremony at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

Commanded by Lt. Col. Ross Finley, the Nebraska Army National Guard command is responsible for providing safe and operational training facilities capable of supporting the training needs of Nebraska National Guard and other U.S. military and non-Defense Department organizations. The Training Center Command is responsible for operating training sites at Greenleaf, Camp Ashland and Mead, Neb.

Numbering between 24 and 35 during the award's time period, the TCC Soldiers were responsible for providing adequate training maneuver space, maintaining the sites' marksmanship ranges, and operating various simulation-based training aids to enhance units' training requirements.

According to the award's citation, which covers the time period between March 2010 and February 2011, the TCC provided training support for a total more than 1,300 Soldiers scheduled for mobilization and deployment to three different theaters of operation, which equated to a 28 percent increase of training days over the previous training year and a 50 percent increase over the year preceding that.

"The most amazing statistic is how much the weapons qualification ranges were used during this period," the award's narrative reads. "TSC supported 467 range events where 607,488 rounds were expended without any serious injury."

"The warriors of the TSC were a critical asset and force multiplier during the Nebraska Army National Guard's largest deployment rotation for the Global War on Terrorism," the narrative further states. "These Soldiers unselfishly provided all additional time and resources required to ensure mobilizing units were supplied with world class training facilities and ranges for pre-mobilization certification activities."

According to the organization's commander at the time, the Soldiers involved have a lot to be proud of.

"When the year started, the unit had 40 soldiers supporting all of the training sites," said Lt. Col. Kevin Hittle. "As the Soldiers were pulled to fill openings in deploying units, that number had been reduced to 24 and stayed there for over four months. Many Soldiers had to drill three weekends a month to support operations."

Hittle said that the unit recognition really is an example of a unit-wide effort to ensure that deploying units were as ready as they possibly could be by the time they left Nebraska.

"The Superior Unit Award was a culmination of all the hard work and dedication of the Soldiers in support of the training performed in the state," said Hittle. "They worked hard as individuals and worked so well as teams."

TSA expands expedited screening

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Beginning April 15, Defense Department and Coast Guard civilian employees will be able to take advantage of the TSA Pre-check expedited screening program at more than 115 airports across the country.

"We've worked closely with TSA over the past few months to expand the Pre-check program to include the department's 800,000 civilian employees," said Mary Snavely-Dixon, director of the Defense Manpower Data Center. "Our civilian employees play vital roles in our nation's defense each and every day. Expanding TSA's program to include them is great news."

All military and Coast Guard personnel, including those in the reserves and the National Guard, already are eligible for the program, which began in March 2012.

A secure and reliable data-sharing agreement between the Defense Department and TSA provides verification of eligibility, officials said. Participating members can keep their shoes or

boots, light outerwear and their belts on during preflight screening, and can keep their laptop computer in its case. They also may have a 3-1-1 compliant liquids and gels bag in a carry-on bag in select screening lanes.

To participate in TSA Pre-check, military personnel and DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees must provide their DoD Identification number — the 10-digit number on the back of their common access card — when

making travel reservations. This can be done through the Defense Travel System, through a travel management center, or when booking leisure travel through airline or travel websites. The DoD ID number is to be used in place of the "Known Traveler Number."

It's important to note, officials said, that DoD and Coast Guard civilian employees first must "opt in" to the TSA Pre-check program by visiting the "milConnect" website at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect>.

After selecting the "My Profile" menu tab after logging into the website, users will be guided through the opt-in process. Civilian employees need to opt in only once, officials said. Military members already are eligible and do not need to opt in, they added.

Another major change to the TSA Pre-check program is the phase-out of service members having their common access cards scanned at 10 domestic airports. With the transition to using the DoD ID number in making airline reservations,

officials said, scanning of ID cards is no longer required and will be eliminated soon. Those who have been used to scanning their CACs should begin following the new process now to have uninterrupted participation in the TSA Pre-check program, officials added.

TSA always will incorporate random and unpredictable security measures throughout airports, officials said, and no one is guaranteed expedited screening.

"We've worked closely with TSA over the past few months to expand the Pre-check program to include the department's 800,000 civilian employees. Our civilian employees play vital roles in our nation's defense each and every day. Expanding TSA's program to include them is great news."

— Mary Snavely-Dixon
Director of the Defense
Manpower Data Center

Survivors of Nebraska's fallen meet peers, get pampered

By 1st Lt. Alex Salmon
Editor

When one of this nation's bravest falls, there is often a spouse, and many times children, left to grieve their loved one.

Along with that grief, questions remain. Questions only someone who has been through a similar experience can answer.

To help answer those questions, survivors of fallen Nebraska service members can turn to the Nebraska National Guard's Survivor Outreach Services. SOS is a military-wide program designed to provide dedicated and comprehensive support to survivors of deceased service members.

The Nebraska SOS hosted a retreat at the Lied Lodge and Conference Center in Nebraska City, Neb., April 4-5, for five spouses of fallen Nebraska service members.

There were several goals for the retreat.

"The reason we like doing these is we find that the best support that survivors can have is their own peers," said Randy Amundson, SOS support coordinator. "So we can bring them together as a group and let them support each other and talk and learn from each other because they've all experienced the same basic thing – the loss of someone significant to them."

"It's a chance for them to talk and ask their questions and to learn from each other in a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental environment," he added.

Amundson said Americans live in a society very adept at avoiding grief and often when someone loses a spouse, their circle of friends changes dramatically. One-time good friends can become distant as the spouse works through their grieving process.

During the retreat the women were treated to dinner, displayed artifacts and photos of their loved one, attended question and answer sessions, and heard briefings on benefits they could utilize. They were even treated to some pampering in the form of a massage. And to cap off the event, they heard from Gold-Star wives from the Vietnam War era.

"They can go through and talk with them as well because they're



Photos by 1st Lt. Alex Salmon

New Friends: Spouses of fallen Nebraska service members enjoy a cocktail during a Survivor Outreach Services retreat at the Lied Lodge and Conference Center in Nebraska City, Neb., April 4. During the retreat, the survivors were able to connect with peers sharing a similar experience, ask questions, hear briefings on benefits, and were even treated to some pampering in the form of a massage. Pictured from left to right are: April Kielion, Rhonda Robinson, Kara Alexander and Tiffany Schlote.

farther down the road dealing with grief," said Amundson. "Stuff like, when do you start dating again, how do you deal with kids and in-laws and all the kinds of questions that they're dealing with."

"There's a connection of them being spouses and wives dealing with death," he added. "There's a time difference, but they've gone through the lessons learned, how to deal with things. So we're hoping they can provide some wisdom and expertise."

According to Amundson, SOS makes no distinction between branches of service and works with the families of all military fallen in Nebraska.

"We're, to some extent, full service," said Amundson. "Anything they have issues or questions with they can come to us and we then become the resource that can find that answer and provide that information to them."

Tiffany Schlote of Omaha lost her husband, Nebraska Army National Guard Sgt. Robert (Bob) Schlote, on May 14, 2011, while he was on leave from a mission in Afghanistan with the Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company. Bob, 26, died of an unexpected medical episode at Omaha's Methodist Hospital.

He was on leave to witness the birth of their first child, a daughter named Blair, now three-years-old.



Memories: Tiffany Schlote displays mementos of her husband, the late Nebraska National Guard Sgt. Robert (Bob) Schlote, during a Survivor Outreach Services retreat at the Lied Lodge and Conference Center in Nebraska City, Neb., April 4-5. Bob Schlote died on May 14, 2011, while on leave from a mission in Afghanistan with the Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company to see the birth of the couple's first child.

Schlote said without the SOS program she would have never met many of the people she now relies on often.

"The few women that I do know I've connected with through Survivor Outreach Services and they've been amazing," said Schlote.

"It gives us the chance for just the spouses to get together to talk about what it was like, to talk about family problems, things that we're going through now," she added. "Most of us are at least three years out and the first year's kind of a fog and then after that you come out of it and bills still have to be paid, choices have to be made."

Schlote said she's leaned on survivors who had lost their spouses before her for many questions.

"Where do we go from here?" said Schlote. "What's my future going to look like now that I'm not going to have a 10-year anniversary, now that I'm not going to take family vacations, you know? What do I do now? And so to be able to talk with some of these spouses that are eight years, 12 years out is extremely encouraging."

And the questions don't end there. But, Schlote said, she can now share her own experiences as well.

"We're able to connect and say, 'I've been here,'" said Schlote. "I've had that moment when you see a father carrying his daughter

through the park and you want to melt down and die because you know your husband died and left you with a little girl. But it's so encouraging to know you're not alone, that everybody is feeling those things. How did they deal with that on a daily basis and how did they move forward? Can you be happy again? Can you someday love again? What is your child's life going to be like at 16?"

"How do I deal with problems that come up when she's eight and wants to know who daddy is?," she added. "When she's angry at me at 13 – why isn't daddy here? I have people I can call now and say, 'How did you deal with this? What's the best way to go about dealing with this?'"

Before SOS, Schlote said she had no idea a woman living only five blocks away from her was going through a similar situation when her husband died just three months after Bob. Since finding each other they've formed a bond and have often relied on each other for support.

"She's become such a support that I can call with totally random stupid things like in-laws or children problems or school problems and ask how did she deal with it," she said. "It's amazing."

Schlote's friend is Rhonda Robinson, who lost her husband, Marine Sgt. Josh Robinson, Aug. 7, 2011,

in Afghanistan.

"This is a small state," said Robinson. "You kind of think, 'Oh, it happens to people in California, it happens to people in Florida.' It's just kind of rare for Nebraska, I guess, for something like this to happen to us small-town people. It's nice to know that I have that connection and we're both going through the same things."

"Knowing that there is a future and you can move on and what the future holds as far as relationships or with the kids and the insurance that the military does or doesn't provide," she added. "The biggest challenge probably in the last three years is knowing that you have to make decisions by yourself and you don't have a spouse to bounce off ideas with," she added.

Schlote agreed life after the loss of her spouse has been difficult. Both women face challenges most won't.

"It's hard living in the past and trying to move forward at the same time and trying to find a balance between the two is probably the hardest," said Schlote.

"Trying to balance how do I remember and honor you, but still be okay to move forward with my life and still find happiness and not feel guilty about it?," she added. "And with my daughter, how do I try to explain to her how wonderful of a man he was? She was only three-weeks-old; she's not going to remember at all. How do I help her understand what an amazing person he was and how much he sacrificed for her?"

Ultimately, SOS aims to link survivors because it's all about a shared experience. Schlote said she now understands that thanks to an experience she had with an older woman years ago who told Schlote her own story of losing her husband at the age of 19.

"There was something about seeing this woman, who at 80-years-old was still alive, was still okay," said Schlote. "She'd moved on, she'd had her life and in whatever way had found a way to move forward. That was so encouraging and touched me."

"It's so important to see that," she added. "My life isn't going to turn out the way that I thought it was going to. But it can still go forward; it can still go on in a different way, and in a way that's good for me and good for our daughter."

Nebraska Joint Operations Center prepares for summer hazards

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Writer

Relative humidity below 15 percent, gusty southwesterly winds between 25 and 35 mph and below normal rainfall in early spring have left parts of western Nebraska dry and ready to burn prompting the governor to authorize the use of National Guard aviation and ground firefighting assets to assist civilian authorities in containing a wildfire.

No, this not a look into the future of what Mother Nature will bring this spring, but it is a realistic disaster scenario for the summer and fall seasons in the plains of Nebraska.

In the event of a natural disaster or emergency, Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from the staff sections of Joint Force Headquarters convene in the Joint Operations Center at JFHQ in Lincoln, Neb., to provide 24-hour support managing military resources for immediate initial response and long-term recovery.

On any given day the JOC is staffed by a small group of Guard members and is the main point of contact for the Army and Air National Guard. They handle everything from Red Cross messages to state emergencies.

The JOC boasts a wealth of communication media including 28 computer workstations, five large TV screens and a podium for conducting in-house briefings and network communications for Army, Air Force and state personnel. The center is also outfitted

with video tele-conference and Defense Connect Online.

These capabilities allow JOC personnel to communicate in real-time with outside entities from inside the control center.

Soldiers and Airmen from the JFHQ staff sections got a chance to practice their skills during Joint Operations Center exercise 'Blazing Prairie' March 15.

Blazing Prairie was a domestic response exercise designed to prepare the JFHQ staff for a real-world natural disaster in Nebraska.

More than 30 Guard members got a chance to test their ability to function effectively in a domestic environment, collaborate, share information and update applicable standard operating procedures during the day-long JOC exercise.

"The exercise was a great opportunity for all the sections to work together, even though we only do it twice a year," said Brigadier Gen. Scott Gronewold, assistant adjutant general – joint operations. "These exercises are critical because it is an on-call mission. There is no ramp up time for a natural disaster compared to a mobilization and we need to be ready to go at a moment's notice in the event of a natural



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Operation Blazing Prairie: Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from the staff sections of Joint Force Headquarters convene in the Joint Operations Center at JFHQ in Lincoln, Neb., during exercise "Blazing Prairie" March 15. The exercise is designed to prepare the Guard members for real-world natural disaster in Nebraska.

exercise.

"Making sure everyone understands what they need to do and information they need to provide so that we can provide the (adjutant general) the information necessary for him to make sound decisions was a major component of this exercise," Jensen added.

The JOC exercise is usually conducted two times per year and incorporates natural disasters associated with each season. There were a few new things that the JOC added to the Blazing Prairie scenario this time. First, they had asked representatives from the Kansas National Guard to come up and observe this exercise.

"They have a lot of processes in place that we don't have, so we asked them to come up and observe what we do and get their feedback and incorporate some of it into our response

disaster."

"The purpose of Blazing Prairie was to exercise the staff sections and work through communication processes," said Maj. David Jensen, the exercise battle captain and training officer at JFHQ in Nebraska.

Jensen said a lot of lessons were learned during the exercise.

"We really need to do it more than twice a year for continuity because of the natural turnover of people at Joint Force Headquarters," said Gronewold.

Blazing Prairie ended seven hours after it had begun with representatives from each section of the JOC briefing Gronewold about the status of personnel and equipment within his respective section.

"Setting (the exercise) up is what takes so much time," Gronewold said. "I'm really proud of all the effort that was put into the design of the exercise. It's a pretty intense day for everybody involved and I appreciate all of the hard work. We are just going to continue to march on and do what the Nebraska National Guard does best...support the citizens of our state in times of need."

Alaska Shield 2014



Photos by Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen

Careful: An evaluator monitors the progress of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear high-yield Explosives search and rescue team at a simulated collapse site during Alaska Shield 2014 in Anchorage, Alaska. The Nebraska National Guard's 72nd Civil Support Team used the exercise to train on difficult terrain near Anchorage, south of the Brooks Mountain Range.

72nd Civil Support Team helps Alaskans 'prepare for the big one'

By Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

The Nebraska National Guard sent the Lincoln-based 72nd Civil Support Team, or CST, to the rugged outdoor terrains of the Last Frontier in support of "Alaska Shield 2014" this March.

The 72nd CST looked to train in an austere environment – one that would pose many challenges – and near the Municipality of Anchorage, south of the Brooks Range, that's exactly what they found.

"This (exercise) has better prepared us by helping develop our strike-team concept," said Lt. Col. Jan Behn, commander of the 72nd CST. "This involves not taking all of your equipment; so you're having to figure out what are those must-have things."

Surrounded by treacherous geographical features, emergency responders, Guardsmen and civil authorities – such as FEMA – may find themselves relying upon nontraditional methods of transportation.

"For example, some of the things they're responding to, they're getting on snow mobiles and responding to those incidents," said Behn.

Behn said positive interactions and well-versed individuals are a staple in the CST's line of business. "It doesn't seem to matter where we go, the professional interaction with other CSTs and civil authorities is some of the best that I see," she said.

The mission of the CST is to support civil authorities at a domestic Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear high-yield Explosives, or CBRNE, incident site. They do so by identifying CBRNE agents and substances, assessing current



He's No Dummy: A Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear high-yield Explosives operative evaluates a "casualty" before moving it on to awaiting medical staff during Alaska Shield 2014 in Anchorage, Alaska. Evaluating casualties in a simulated dynamic environment was a key piece of training during the exercise.

or projected consequences, advising on response measures, and assisting with appropriate requests for additional follow-on state and federal military forces.

"There is a big trend surfacing out there: the CSTs are going in to strike teams," said Officer Candidate Cassandra Day, a CST operations group member. "Today we really got to exercise sending out a strike team to a remote location where the operations section is not there and the survey section is in a completely different area."

"Alaska Shield 2014 commemorates the anniversary of the 1964 magnitude 9.2 Alaska earthquake by



Aftermath: A volunteer "injured" actor is led toward a triage site by Guardsmen during Alaska Shield 2014 in Anchorage, Alaska. The exercise is designed to help prepare Guardsmen for the complexities of mass casualties and care.

replicating the earthquake's effects and resulting tsunami," according to the State of Alaska's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Office of Public Affairs. "As in 2010, (Alaska Shield) has two large full-scale exercises linked to it: the National Guard's Vigilant Guard exercise and DoD's Arctic Edge exercise."

More than 130 people from Alaska, California and Oregon lost their lives during the 1964 earthquake – a number that could be much higher today as the populations have swelled significantly.

Because of that, the National Guard stands by its slogan: always ready, always there.

"Our mission is life, safety and property," Day said with confidence. "We're here to protect and serve."



Picture Perfect: Members of Nebraska's 72nd Civil Support Team pose near a mountain range during Alaska Shield 2014. The 72nd CST operated in many challenging environments during their visit to Alaska for Alaska Shield 2014.

*"Our mission is life,
safety and property.
We're here to protect
and serve."*

— Cassandra Day
Nebraska OCS Candidate