

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Nebraska Guard Soldier dies in Chinook crash

By David Nore

Public Information Officer

A Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier serving in Afghanistan was killed Aug. 6 in Wardak province when the CH-47 Chinook helicopter in which he was flying crashed during a combat mission.

Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger, 30, was a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Grand Island-based Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion. Hamburger was among 30 American and eight Afghan service members killed in the crash, which Central Command officials believe was caused by a Taliban rocket-propelled grenade.

Hamburger, who was posthumously promoted to the rank of staff sergeant, leaves behind his fiancée Candie Reagan and their two-year-old daughter, Payton, and step-daughter Veronica. He was buried with full military honor's at Lincoln's Wyuka Cemetery on Aug. 20.

"Our National Guard family is deeply saddened by the loss of our Soldier, Sergeant Pat Hamburger," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, in announcing Hamburger's death. "Our most sincere thoughts and



Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger

prayers are with his family and the Soldiers he served with."

The son of Joyce Peck of Lincoln, Neb., and Douglas Hamburger of Knoxville, Tenn., he graduated from Lincoln Southeast High School in 1999. He had been a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard since his enlistment into the organization as a helicopter mechanic in July 1998.

Hamburger, who spent his entire military career serving in Nebraska Army National Guard aviation units, was an Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook

See DEATH on 9.

Nebraska Army National Guard Cavalrymen welcomed home from mission to Afghanistan

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

After intense training and a tense mission advising the Afghan police, the first members of the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) finally returned home on July 24 after a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Family members, friends, fellow service members and distinguished guests officially welcomed the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop Soldiers home at the Lincoln East High School gymnasium.

Among the family and friends waiting for their Soldiers to arrive was Stephanie Cunningham, wife of Staff Sgt. Robert Cunningham, along with their four kids, Keisha, Zane, Noah and Robert III, who were all ready to see their dad.

"I'm ready for him to be home," said Stephanie. "The boys listen to their dad better and with him gone it made the parenting a little harder for me."

"The hardest part of the deployment was probably when Zane, (who is six years old) struggled towards the last half of school," added Stephanie. "He really missed and wanted his dad there."

When Staff Sgt. Cunningham, the readiness non-commissioned officer for HHT, 1-134th Cavalry,



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Home At Last: Lt. Col. Thomas Rynders, commander of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), hugs his family outside of Lincoln's East High School, July 24, after ending a year-long mission to Afghanistan.

walked off the bus, his wife and children rushed toward him to see who could get the first hug. It ended up being one big family hug.

"I'm glad to know I will be home for awhile and don't have to tell my family I'm leaving in a couple weeks like I had to do during leave," said Cunningham.

"I'm also ready for some good home cooking from my wife and to eat with the family," he added.

Another Soldier with the 1-134th Cavalry who was more than ready to be home was Sgt. Jonathan Andreasen.

While he was gone he missed home, but it drove him to work harder and keep busy because he knew coming home would soon follow, said Andreasen, a personal security detail sergeant with the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron.

See HOMECOMING on 4.

Actions during attack on base net Soldier Bronze Star

By Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

On the morning of April 2, Spc. Eric Blackburn, an Osceola, Neb., native and infantryman with Beatrice's Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, reported to the front gate of Camp Phoenix near Kabul, Afghanistan, for entry point guard duty.

What Blackburn didn't know at the time was that soon after he had relieved the night shift at the gate,

he and Spc. Stephen Leon, a Soldier with the 1-181st Infantry, as well as others would become involved in a complex ambush launched by multiple insurgents and suicide bombers.

Blackburn took cover with Leon and began to return fire, ultimately repelling the enemy forces

trying to enter the base. The fight lasted approximately 15 minutes.

When it was over, Blackburn realized he'd suffered several injuries from shrapnel, so he walked to the Troop Medical Center to be treated.

"The medics were already on the ground, but I just walked to the TMC to get treatment," said Blackburn.

What Blackburn didn't know at first was that those injuries were bad enough that he needed to be airlifted to Bagram Airfield for

precautionary surgery to remove pieces of debris from his shoulders and legs.

Shortly after the surgery, Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), pinned Blackburn's newly earned combat infantry badge on to the Soldier's shirt while Brig Gen. John Uberti, 101st Airborne Division, awarded Blackburn a Purple Heart for the wounds he'd suffered during the

See BRONZE STAR on 4.



Blackburn

9/11 anniversary to be commemorated during Sept. 10-11 'Guardians of Freedom' airshow

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

For those attending the free Sept. 10-11 "2011 Guardians of Freedom" air show in Lincoln, Neb., the memorable action won't just be taking place in the skies over the Lincoln Municipal Airport.

It will also be taking place on a stage at the center of the tarmac.

According to Lt. Col. Bob Stevenson, airshow director, his staff has spent months preparing for the show that will feature the world renowned U.S. Navy Blue Angels and a myriad of other aircraft and vehicle displays.

Probably the most poignant activity, however, will take place at 11 a.m. on Sept. 11 during a planned ceremony

See AIRSHOW on 12.



Civil support team conquers unique naval challenge in California bay

By Sgt. Koan Nissen

Staff Writer

An elite group of joint force Guardsman left land-locked Nebraska this summer for the golden shores of California's Bay Area. The Nebraska National Guard's 72nd Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) conducted a maritime operations exercise aboard the SS Grand Canyon State in Alameda, Calif., June 7-9.

"For us to be trained in maritime operations is important," said Maj. Mary Mangels, commander of the 72nd CST. "We'll be better prepared to assist local responders with what they need."

Mangels has been the CST's commander since 2010, but she has been with the group since 2004 when she came on as the medi-

See SHIP TRAINING on 10.



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Don't Look Down: Sgt. 1st Class James H. Mckeehan, logistics sergeant for the 72nd Civil Support Team, climbs a ladder to board a crane ship adjacent to the SS Grand Canyon State during a training exercise in Alameda, Calif., on June 8.

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NEWS DIGEST

■Soldiers to begin 2012 with nine-month deployment

ARLINGTON, Va. (ARNEWS) — Beginning Jan. 1, deploying Soldiers will go for nine months, meaning more time at home with their families.

Secretary of the Army John McHugh signed a directive instituting a nine-month "boots on the ground" policy for deployed Soldiers, providing more "dwell" time at home for Soldiers and families.

"Implementation of this change is based on the projected demand for Army forces, and remains contingent on global security conditions and combatant commanders' requirements," said Lt. Col. Peggy Kageleiry, an Army spokesperson.

Corps units and above, and individual augmentee deployments, will remain at 12-month deployments. The goal for the corps units is to eventually get to nine-month deployments.

Most augmentees — those with particular skills or those in low density skill sets and grades — will remain on 12-month deployments.

This change in policy, to be fully implemented by April 1, will affect Soldiers in all named operations, including Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Operation Noble Guardian in Kosovo, and Multi-National Forces Sinai in Egypt.

Reserve and National Guard unit tour lengths will be the same as active duty -- nine months. In their case, though, deployment and mobilization are two different issues. Even though these units may still be mobilized for 12 or more months, they will only spend nine months of that mobilization deployed.

It is clear to Army senior leadership that there are still issues tied to Guard and Reserve Forces that will need to be worked

■Guard members now have one-stop information shop

ARLINGTON, Va. — The departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have created a one-stop website for Guard members to access and administer their service benefits-related information in a secure manner, said the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

In a November 2010 memorandum to all the branches, Clifford L. Stanley announced that a new VA eBenefits web portal had been created as a solution for benefit-related information availability to current and former service members, to include all Guard members.

"The DS (DOD Self-Service Logon) is a secure, self-service logon ID that allows beneficiaries affiliated with the DoD or the VA access to several websites using a single username and password," Stanley said.

Developed by the 2007 President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, eBenefits will allow Guard members to apply and track the status

of their VA claims and access a catalog of direct links to assist them with needs ranging from education benefits to life insurance.

"DS Logon will allow all service members and veterans secure access through the eBenefits web portal to benefits information specifically tailored to their needs, for the lifetime of their affiliation with the DoD or VA," he said.

All service members in possession of a common access card should be directed to obtain an eBenefits logon, Stanley said.

On June 11, the DoD and VA Joint Executive Council approved the plan, directing service members to obtain a DS Logon when either first enlisting or re-entering the service and directed all current service members to obtain a logon by November 2013.

Guard members can access for sign-up with their common access card, through myPay, a defense enrollment eligibility reporting system real-time automated personnel identification system terminal or go directly to the closest VA center for face-to-face assistance, he said.

■Air Guard emphasizes motorcycle safety

ARLINGTON, Va. — The summer began early this year for many after what seemed higher-than-normal temperatures early on, but the season officially began June 21, thus beginning the summer safety programs of the Air National Guard.

Though the Air Guard traditionally uses the active duty Air Force's safety campaigns for summer, this year Airmen will see a change to focus more on motorcycle safety and awareness.

"This year is the year of motorcycle safety, so they're focusing more specifically on motorcycle safety issues and awareness because that has been (a rising) trend in the last few years," said Col. Doug Slocum, director of safety for the Air National Guard.

Slocum said that motorcycle safety emphasis is the biggest change to the summer safety campaign of the Air Guard, which falls under the Air Force 101 Critical Days of Summer campaign.

"The Air Guard, in conjunction with the Air Force, always has its 101 Critical Days of Summer campaign where we focus on many things related to summer activities and people being outside more," Slocum said.

"If you look at the statistics, (summer) is when we see a higher rate of incidents and mishaps... so the focus is on training and programs associated with outdoor activities."

Slocum said motorcycles seemed like the perfect thing to focus on, especially given the fact that they are usually ridden by less experienced riders and after long periods when they are stored for the off season.

He does not want Airmen to forget about the other areas where safety can be an issue, such as sports and recreational activities, fishing — especially at night — and other water activities.

"We want Airmen to keep the wingman ethos in mind," Slocum said.

Mullen: Afghans must address corruption, criminal networks

KABUL, Afghanistan (AFPS) — The Afghan government must address corruption and criminal organizations subverting the will of the people, Adm. Mike Mullen said July 31.

Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held a press conference at the headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force. He squarely warned of the dangers that corruption poses in Afghanistan.

The surge in American and coalition forces has strengthened Afghan security. Now, good governance needs to step to the forefront Mullen said, noting that there are many courageous and dedicated Afghan civil servants working to improve their country.

"I am encouraged by what I have seen happening in Arghandab district in Kanadhar province," he said. "And I am grateful for the efficiency and the leadership of public servants like Governor Mangal of Helmand."

But there are others who are using public office to line their own pockets or improve their tribes' standing in the nation.

"I think it's fair to say that in the main, Afghan government officials must work on becoming more responsive to the needs and aspirations of their people," he said.

The federal government must connect with the province and district governments. National leaders must work with local leaders to strengthen the rule of law, build an infrastructure and programs to join the entities and be responsive to the needs of the people for basic services, he said.

National leaders are aware of the problems, and are beginning to address them, Mullen said. But many governors still do not receive funds from Kabul. Other officials "pursue narrow agendas that exclude key elements of the population and perpetuate popular discontent or frustrate reintegration efforts," he said.

Many agencies and department of the Afghan government have been infiltrated and subverted by criminal patronage networks, the chairman said, and, in most agencies, there is no such thing as merit-based hiring or promotion.

"None of these deficiencies are

insurmountable," he said. "But overcoming them will require energy and effort, political courage and international support."

Addressing corruption and organized crime has to be a priority, the chairman said. These networks weaken Afghanistan, and their "predatory behavior angers the populace, siphons resources and undermines the credibility of Afghan institutions," he said.

The U.S. military has examined \$27.5 billion worth of locally let contracts to ensure that American money is not used by these criminal networks, said a senior western official speaking on background before the chairman's news conference. The U.S. government has debarred more than 50 firms from any business dealings, but more needs to be done.

"We must end impunity for criminals who are subverting the state and victimizing the Afghan people," Mullen said.

The chairman said he understands that any changes will be difficult to put in place and take time to accomplish, but it must happen for success of the Afghan state.



Photo by David Nore

Final Goodbye: The Nebraska National Guard's Honor Guard folds the U.S. flag adorning the casket of the late Sgt. Omar A. Jones, an electrician with the Wahoo-based 623rd Engineer Company, July 26, at McPherson National Cemetery. Jones, died of a non-combat injury July 18 at Forward Operating Base Deh Dadi II, in Balkh Province, Afghanistan.

Nebraska Army Guardsman who died in Afghanistan buried

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

Many family members, friends and Soldiers gathered in the sweltering Nebraska heat as Sgt. Omar A. Jones, 28, of Maywood, Neb., was laid to rest with full military honors at Fort McPherson National Cemetery near Maxwell, Neb., on July 26.

Jones, 28, died of a non-combat injury on July 18 at Forward Operating Base Deh Dadi II, in Balkh Province, Afghanistan.

Jones was an electrician assigned to the 623rd Engineer Company, Nebraska Army National Guard, from Wahoo, Neb. He is survived by his wife, Ava L. Jones, his daughter, Airiana G. Jones, his son Malachi A. Jones, his father, Dennis D. Jones, and his mother, Luz A. Jones.

"Sergeant Jones was an exceptional individual with an intense desire to better himself and in turn better his Soldiers," said Capt. Chris Pelchat, commander of the 623rd Engineer Company, in an email interview. "He was excited about joining the 623rd and deploying with the Company" Pelchat continued in his statement from Afghanistan.

"Sgt. Omar Jones was a very caring person," added Pelchat. "He would go out of his way to help anyone. His presence always brought a smile to all around him and his sense of humor kept the Soldiers

in high spirits. He truly was a great person to have in the 623rd."

Jones was born in Jackson, Miss., Sept. 16, 1982. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in October 2001 as an infantryman and, while serving on active duty, deployed to Iraq from May 2003 to July 2004.

After completing his active duty tour, he joined the Nebraska Army National Guard's 134th Infantry Detachment in Crete, Neb., as an infantry scout in March 2005.

In July 2005, Jones transferred to the 1074th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) at North Platte, Neb., as a truck driver before transferring to Ogallala's Detachment 2, 1074th Transportation Company in June 2006 and deploying with this unit to Iraq from July 2006 until November 2007.

In August 2008 he was reassigned to the 1195th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) in Kearney, Neb., before transferring to the 623rd Eng. Co. as an electrician in July 2010.

"He was a hard working young man, committed to his fellow Soldiers, and quite honestly probably had the biggest heart of any Soldier that I met," said Maj. Steve Collins, Jones' commander with the 1074th Trans. Co. during their deployment to Iraq.

"He loved people and always looked out for people. During our deployment with the 1074th he spent a lot of time talking to me, and unbeknownst to everybody else they just thought I was an ear to bend and get things off of his chest, but it was me that benefited most to be quite honest with you."



Sgt. Omar Jones

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

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Helping Hand: A "victim" is cleaned of any contamination during the Nebraska National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package (CERF-P) exercise at the Lincoln Fire & Rescue rubble pile in Lincoln, Neb., July 16.



Close Confines: Pfc. Joseph Muren, a firefighter with the 317th Firefighting Detachment, searches for 'victims' during the Nebraska National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package exercise at the Lincoln Fire & Rescue rubble pile in Lincoln, Neb., July 16.

Disaster exercise tests cooperation between Guard, Lincoln teams

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Laying in a pile of crushed concrete, with bent and broken metal, rebar and wood all around him, Ronald Horne waited as patiently as he could.

After what must have seemed like an eternity, he was found by several people in baggy white full-body suits, orange rubber boots, hard hats and respirators, who pulled him from the rubble pile and carried him to a long line of tents where he encountered more people fully suited up. There, he was put through a series of processes before he finally received medical attention.

Fortunately for Horne, a private first class and wheeled mechanic with the 126th Chemical Company, he crawled into the already-existing pile of rubble intentionally for an exercise designed to simulate a collapsed building disaster.

Members of the Nebraska National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package — better known as CERF-P — teamed up with Lincoln Fire & Rescue to conduct the disaster recovery exercise, July 16, at the LFR Rubble Pile in Lincoln, Neb.

More than 150 Nebraska Army and Air National Guard Soldiers and Airmen participated in the simulated incident in which a building has collapsed resulting in injured and trapped victims. The teams located, extricated and evacuated victims.

Victims were then screened for chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological substances, triaged and provided whatever medical assistance they needed.

The goal of teaming with LFR for the exercise was simple.

"To understand their capabilities and for them to understand ours," said Lt. Col. Troy Paisley, commander of the CERF-P. "We're here to try to develop a relationship with LFR, heaven forbid we ever have an incident where we have to come in and help local officials with casualties on an incident that happened here in Lincoln."

Those living in the Midwest are used to severe storms and tornadoes that have the potential to do more damage than local first responders can handle. That's where the Nebraska National Guard comes in.

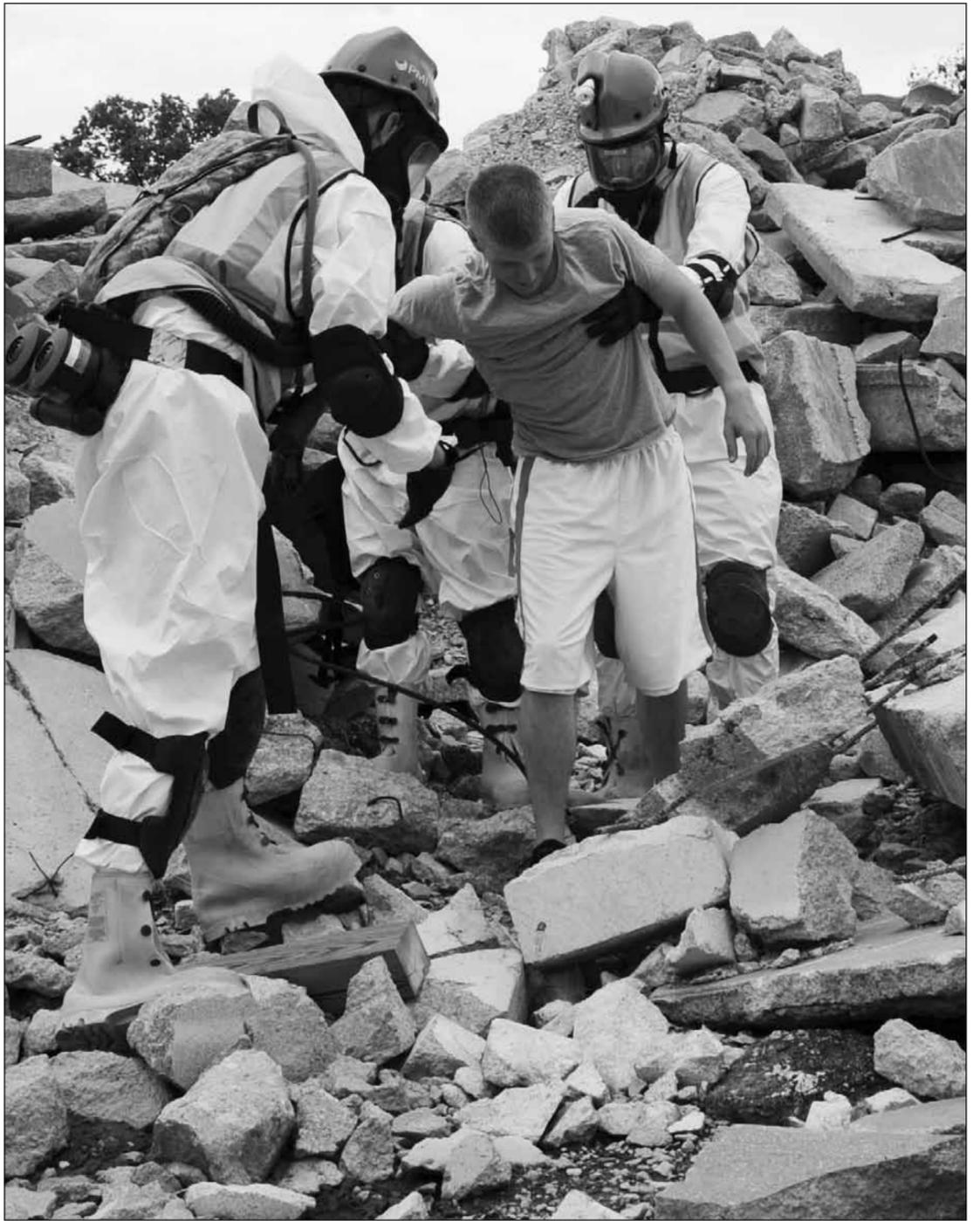
"If an incident occurs like they're planning for — what they're exercising today — it will overwhelm us," said Pat Borer, interim assistant chief of LFR. "We don't have the capability of managing an incident of that magnitude, so we will go to the county, the county will go to the state and ask for help. When it gets to the state level the state will reach across and to the CERF-P and say 'We need your help.'"

"The benefit of today is now I know what their capability is and I know what I'm asking for and I know what I'm going to get when they arrive on location," he added.

Reacting to storms and tornado damage aren't the only capabilities of the CERF-P, however.

"If there's a building that is ever collapsed, or heaven forbid on a Saturday afternoon during a football game, or something like that, there's a terrorist attack," said Paisley. "Often times (with) that number of casualties...the folks here at LFR might be exhausted and not be able to provide the support that they need, so they would ask us to come."

The CERF-P trains two times a



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Watch Your Step: Members of the Nebraska National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package search and extraction team help a 'victim' out of a rubble pile, July 16, during a disaster recover exercise at the Lincoln Fire & Rescue rubble pile in Lincoln, Neb. The CERF-P teamed up with LFR so that each group could learn more about the capabilities of the other.



Medical Attention: Nurses with the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Medical Squadron attend to a 'victim' during the Nebraska National Guard's Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package exercise at the Lincoln Fire & Rescue rubble pile in Lincoln, Neb., July 16.

year, but this was the first time they had teamed up with LFR.

"Prior to today we really didn't have a good idea of what they were doing," said Borer. "Now that we have a good idea what they're doing, we can work closer together to be more efficient and be more effective for the benefit of the community."

And that dedication to the community is paramount for both the Nebraska National Guard and LFR.

"It is our responsibility as first responders in the community to prepare for whatever may occur," said Borer. "It prepares emergency responders...to help the community when a disaster occurs and as we've seen over the past year, or couple of years, it's not if, but when."

The CERF-P is not only dedicated to the Midwest communities, however. They also can be utilized nationwide quickly.

"We have to be ready to deploy within six to seven hours," said Paisley. "To the east coast, west coast, south, wherever, we're always

ready to go."

Both agencies were happy with the success of the exercise.

"I think we've really been successful," said Paisley. "It's really been a great event developing this relationship with LFR."

"It's invaluable to have this type of relationship," he added. "I think we need to do it more in the future."

"It is definitely impressive," added Borer.

Participants in the exercise took advantage of the early morning cloud cover which offered a slight respite from the hot and humid July day. Participants were also happy to be a part of a team that could play a huge role in an emergency.

"This has been one of the smoothest exercises that we've had," said Tech. Sgt. Matt Jordan, the non-commissioned officer-in-charge of the 155th Medical Squadron's immunization clinic and part of the CERF-P hot-zone triage team. "It's a good feeling to know that if stuff did go down, the Nebraska National

Guard is well prepared."

Jordan said he's happy that something like the CERF-P exists in the event of an emergency. He added he's learned a lot and is proud to be on the team.

"I've learned a lot about triaging patients, what level of care they need and a lot of the decontamination process," said Jordan. "To my knowledge there's only a couple other organizations that exist that can do this kind of level of care and if something really hit the fan and it's nationwide, this is one of the areas we can help out and make Nebraska look good."

"It's an awesome feeling to be a part of something like this," he added. "Not everyone can say that they do it."

Now that LFR is more familiar with the people and capabilities of the CERF-P, they look forward to training together in the future.

"We try to take advantage of every opportunity to work with them because the more that we exercise and play together, the better off we're going to be when the emergency comes," said Borer. "We're sure appreciative of the invitation today and we extend a welcome for them to come back to our facility any time."

And now that Horne has been rescued from the rubble pile he can use his experience as a 'victim' to improve his own skills when he's actually working on the CERF-P team.

"You get it from the other side," said Horne. "I don't think that it felt like it could possibly be real because you can never put yourself into that situation until it actually happens, but I thought it was good training to get the knowledge of what it's like to be the victim and use those experiences to help further our training and education."

Standing Tall: A member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry holds his organization's colors out during a July 12 End-of-Tour Ceremony.



Security in Kabul transitions to Afghans from Nebraska Soldiers

KABUL, Afghanistan (Task Force Yankee news release) — The 1st Squadron, 134th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Fury, Nebraska Army National Guard, commemorated the end of their mission during an End of Tour Ceremony on Camp Phoenix, July 12.

Lt. Col. Thomas Rynders, commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, the command sergeant major of the 134th cased the unit's regimental colors to signify the official completion of their tour in Afghanistan. Although the troops of the 134th still had a long journey back home, they can rest easy knowing that they've done their part to ensure the success of the Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army in Kabul.

The commander of the 134th's

higher headquarters, Col. David Correll, 2-34th Infantry Brigade Combat Team said, "We know that Task Force Fury and their Afghan security partners have made much progress in bringing peace and stability to this area. We all know that work still remains to be done. Yet for the moment, we can all stand proud knowing that the members of Task Force Fury did their part," said Correll.

Unlike times in the past when a unit leaves, and another comes in to take over the mission, the 134th leaves its mission solely in the hands of its Afghan counter parts. Successful transitions such as this are part of a plan presented by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and supported by the international community



U.S. Army photos

Transferring Authority To The Afghans: (From left) Lt. Col. Tom Rynders, commander of the 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), and Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, squadron command sergeant major, prepare to case their squadron's colors during a July 12 End-of-Tour Ceremony at Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan.

to begin transitioning full control of national security to the Afghan National Security Force beginning

in the summer of 2011 and ending in 2014.

In the Kabul Province, the be-

ginning of a successful transition is evident in the conclusion of the 134th's mission.



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Happy Anniversary: Spc. Brody McLean, a scout with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, gives his wife, Cassy, a hug at Lincoln East High School after returning to Lincoln, Neb., July 24, after a year-long deployment to Afghanistan. The McLeans had extra reason to celebrate the homecoming - it was their first anniversary.

HOMEcoming continued from page 1.

Waiting for him to get home was girlfriend, Angela Orne. She said she tried to stay busy and had very supportive friends and family who helped her pass the time.

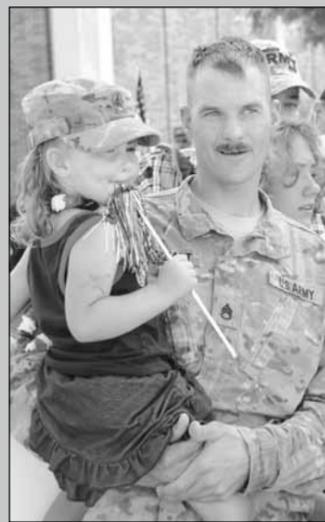
"The hardest thing was telling him my daily routine because of the time difference," said Orne. "By the time I wanted to tell him about my day, he was sleeping, but Skype gave us the opportunity to talk and instant message each other when we both were free."

After the Soldiers reunited

with their families and friends, they filled the gym for a welcome-home ceremony. The distinguished guests thanked the families of the Soldiers for supporting them and also told of their mission while overseas.

The squadron served in Afghanistan alongside the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, from the Iowa Army National Guard. The troops provided training, mentoring, security, assistance and everything the Afghan police needed to be able to stand on their own.

"Your Soldiers made the Afghan



Battle Dad: Staff Sgt. Corey Hackbart, a battle captain with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, holds his daughter, Kylie, during a welcome home ceremony at Lincoln East High School, July 24.

police the most effective they could to stand-on their own," said Lt. Col. Thomas Rynders, commander of the 1-134th Cavalry, "which the Afghans are doing by themselves today."

The troops also helped construct 45 schools, two medical clinics and 55 water wells, along with 35 deliveries of medical supplies, 35 humanitarian assistance missions and more than 4,000 combat patrols.

With all these missions and projects done, the Soldiers know that Afghanistan is a better place now, said Rynders.

"They have done more than been there done that and got a t-shirt," added retired Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke. "They really made a difference over there."

And now that their military missions are complete in Afghanistan, the Soldiers only have one more mission to complete - to reintegrate with the civilian world, their families and back to their normal life.

"Your mission is over when you successfully reintegrate with your families and employers," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska's adjutant general. "But welcome home 1-134 Cavalry."



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Medal Ceremony: Gov. Dave Heineman pins the Bronze Star with "V" device on Spc. Eric Blackburn's uniform, July 17, in Lincoln, Neb.

BRONZE STAR continued from page 1.

attack.

By and large, that would be the last time that Blackburn would see another member of his unit.

Blackburn was transported to Germany and then to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, where he underwent months of rehabilitation to ensure he maintained range of motion in the limbs affected by the shrapnel.

It wasn't until July 27 that Blackburn would get a chance to see his fellow Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry, Soldiers when they were greeted back to Nebraska during a welcome home ceremony attended by around 1,000 family members and friends.

Blackburn, who had returned to Nebraska about a month earlier, said he wouldn't have missed the welcome home ceremony.

"That's why I came here today," said Blackburn as he stood outside of Lincoln East High School. "I'm proud of the guys in my unit."

Blackburn's presence was definitely felt by the Soldiers of his unit. Especially when it came time for the quiet farm kid to be called to the front of the gym by 1st Sgt. Kenneth Winn, Troop C first sergeant, and take his place in front of Gov. Dave Heineman and Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general.

"Attention to orders," Winn called out, causing the uniformed members of the audience to jump

to their feet. "This is to certify that the President of the United States of America authorized by executive order 24 August 1962 has awarded the Bronze Star with "V" Device to Spc. Eric R. Blackburn of C Troop, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron. For Exceptionally valorous action during a complex attack against Camp Phoenix's main entry control point..."

Later, following the ceremony, Blackburn said being awarded the Bronze Star by the governor was a great honor. Still, he just wants to get back to life as it used to be.

"I'm looking forward to going back to work," said Blackburn, who works on a farm near Osceola as a hired hand. "I'm just a simple guy."

He also firmly states that despite the award, he is no hero.

"No. That's a stupid question," he said in answer to one reporter's question.

A humble and honest response from a young Nebraskan who just wants to return to farming. Still, the truth of the matter is Blackburn displayed valor during his fight against the insurgents. Valor that has earned him the admiration of his fellow Soldiers.

"A lot of people like to say that America's youth isn't what they used to be," said Winn following the medal ceremony. "I present to them Eric Blackburn as my proof that it is."

Hastings Soldiers, families celebrate deployment's end

By Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

Soldiers from Hastings' Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), reunited with family and friends during a welcome home ceremony held at the Greenlief Training Site, July 25.

The 42 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers deployed to Afghanistan last year and spent nearly 12 months training members of the Afghan National Army and Police Force to take over security duties within the country.

Families of the Soldiers were glad to see their Stetson-clad Cavalrymen come home.

"I'm so excited to see him," said Ashley Dack, wife of Staff Sgt. Adam Dack. "It's like your wedding day."

Ashley said she missed the small things the most, like simple conversations, spending time with one another—and yes—having him take the trash out.

For the couple's almost 3-year-old daughter, Madison, there was only one thing that she really missed... her daddy.

"My daughter, Madison, said 'Mommy, my heart is sad because I miss daddy, but tomorrow my heart is going to be happy,'" said Ashley.

Deployments often put the lives of the not only the Soldiers, but family and friends on hold. Baby's first words, birthdays, anniversaries and even wedding plans have to be shared and planned over the phone or internet.

That is the case for Jackie Sp-



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Tight Squeeze: Staff Sgt. Michael Belleci, a senior scout with Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, hugs his son, Dyllan, and step-daughter, Amber, at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., July 25, after returning from a nearly year-long mission to Afghanistan.

renkle, the fiancée of Pvt. 1st Class William Dittmer.

"It's great to finally be getting him back home in my arms. I've missed him so much," said Sprenkle. "Sometimes I would be up at three o'clock in the morning waiting on him (to call)."

They are planning a wedding for July 7, 2012.

The welcome home ceremony also gave Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy an opportunity to address the 1-134th Cavalry Soldiers and their families and friends.

"Today, you can see there is

a whole community behind you, there is a whole state behind you," said Sheehy. "You are heroes. You prepared for a mission, you executed that mission. But today, your mission is complete. And you have completed that mission successfully."

The success of the group's mission was measurable. With the group building dozens of schools and multiple hospitals for the people of Afghanistan, Sheehy spoke of the true value of their mission.

"Because of your service, and what you preformed in Afghani-



Happy Homecoming: Spc. Calab McLeod, a gunner with Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, shares a long-overdue hug with his girlfriend, Hilary Allen, at Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb., July 25, after returning from a nearly year-long mission to Afghanistan.

stan, you will make our world much better," said Sheehy. "You also

exemplify the words, 'Duty, honor and country.'"

Fremont's cavalrymen receive heroes' welcome

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

If Brianna Brettey ever sees another M&M, it'll be too soon.

That's because for the past year, the young 7-and-a-half-year-old has steadily eaten one hard-shelled chocolate candy for each day her father, Staff Sgt. Shane Brettey had been away, effectively marking down the days until he would return from a nearly year-long mission to Afghanistan.

On July 25 she ate her last one, marking the day that her father would finally return home. She said she's grown to dislike eating the candy.

"They hurt my tummy," said Brianna as she stood in the stands with her mother, Cynthia, at Fremont's Memorial Stadium, waiting somewhat patiently for the bus to arrive with her father and the rest of Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry, which had spent nearly a year helping train members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.

According to Cynthia Brettey, the last days were the hardest.

"The hardest part was just not having him here for the everyday life issues that happen," she said.

The welcome home ceremony at Fremont was actually one of four ceremonial reunions that took place during the course of less than a week as the 1-134th Cavalry returned home after its fourth overseas deployment since 2002. However, unlike the other unit reunions, Troop B's was different because of the fact that the Soldiers actually marched into the stadium after forming up outside of their charter buses.

Still, despite the fact that families had to wait an extra few minutes before kissing, hugging and shaking the hands of their returning Soldiers, the Fremont welcome home was definitely one of the defining moments of a historic deployment, said the unit's commander, Capt. Matt Misfeldt.

"Someday all of this will sink in that you were cavalry troopers on a foreign battlefield and you definitely helped shape the future," said Misfeldt, who spoke during the brief welcome home ceremony attended by Lt.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Missed You: Staff Sgt. Garret Shultz kisses his wife, Rebekah, shortly after arriving home in Fremont, Neb., July 25, after having served with Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry, in Afghanistan.

Gov. Rick Sheehy, Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons and several other state and local dignitaries. "Be proud of that."

According to Sheehy, the Soldiers and their families definitely completed the mission with much to be proud of.

"You trained for your mission, you executed your mission... and now your mission is complete," said Sheehy. "You truly exemplified the meaning of the words, 'duty, honor and country.'"

Sheehy added that the families share in all the accolades the cavalry Soldiers received. "You are as much a hero as our warriors who were fighting over in Afghanistan," Sheehy told the families, "because each and everyone of you endured the difficulties back here at home and you loaned us your warriors for the last year. I truly want to thank you for that."

For Staff Sgt. Shane Brettey and his family, the words were definitely music to his ears. Still, for all the words of congratulations he and the Soldiers of his unit received, the best part of the mission was the fact that he was finally able to hug his family in his arms.

"It's awesome," he said as his daughter snuggled in tightly against his chest. "It's just great to be home."

"It's been a long year and I'm just so glad to finally be home," Brettey said, a huge grin cracking his face.

Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry welcomed home

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

With three other welcome home ceremonies finished for the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, the cavalrymen were finally all home after Troop C returned to Lincoln, Neb., July 27. Troop C was officially welcomed home during a ceremony held at Lincoln East High School.

The Beatrice-based Troop C (Long Range Surveillance) returned home after spending nearly 12 months in Afghanistan.

Among the crowd of family and friends at the ceremony was Spc. Joey Hatzenbuehler's "fan club." The large group of family and friends included his mother, wife, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews and friends.

"The hardest thing while my husband was gone was plain and simple just missing him," said Jessica Hatzenbuehler, Hatzenbuehler's wife. "I worked more overtime to help me keep busy and not miss him as much. I can't wait to give him a giant hug and know he's home."

Hatzenbuehler's fan club was very proud of him serving to protect America's freedoms but they also couldn't help but worry about his safety.

"The span of time not knowing if he was safe made it really hard," said Chris Hatzenbuehler, Hatzenbuehler's mother, tears building up in her eyes. "The first six months was pretty easy to communicate, but the last ones didn't seem to have as much communication so it made me worry more."

Another large crowd of family and friends there to support their Soldier was the family of Spc. Joshua Moldrup. Kasie Moldrup, wife of Moldrup, drove two and half hours from Kansas with their two kids, family and friends to welcome Joshua home. Kasie relied heavily on her large family for support.

"Having a great family and church life really made it easier on me," said Kasie.

While deployed Joshua missed the birth of the couple's son, James, said Kasie. Not having him at the hospital made it more challenging but she was really proud of what he was doing and is fully supportive of his military career.

Finally, three buses carrying the Soldiers of Troop C pulled up in front of the school to the cheers of the crowd.

After Hatzenbuehler found his fan club he gave everyone a much overdue hug.

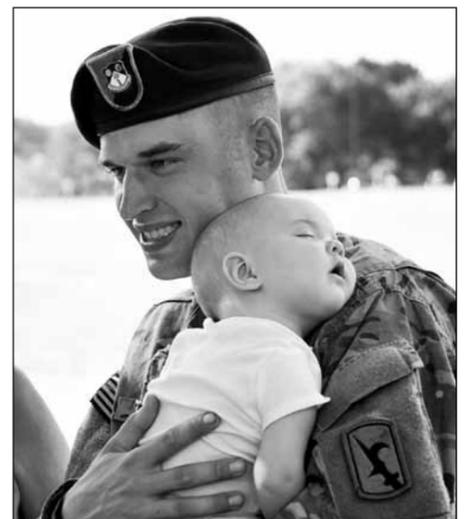


Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Proud Uncle: Sgt. Jedediah Struck, Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry, holds his sleepy 5-month-old niece, Emma, after completing a nearly year-long mission to Afghanistan.

"It was hard to be away from family and friends," said Hatzenbuehler, a radio operator and police logistics team member while deployed. "I'm ready to take it easy and relax now that I'm home."

His first request surprised many of his fan club: a family camping trip for one of the first things to do once he's back, said Chris. "I'm not sure why after being in Afghanistan, but it will be great to spend time as a family doing something Joey loves."

The Soldiers and their fan clubs made their way into the gym for a ceremony where distinguished guests welcomed the Soldiers home and thanked them for all that they did.

"We will never forget the scarifies you gave up for our freedoms," said State Sen. Bill Avery.

"We could not be more proud of you," said Maj. Gen. (ret.) Roger Lempke. "God Bless you and your families."

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska's adjutant general, followed by having all the non-commissioned officers stand up while thanking them for all they did.

"This was a sergeant-led mission," said Lyons. "They made the Afgan National Army and police the most effective as they can possibly be."

Come 'n get it!



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Good Cookin': Pvt. Erin R. McNeil, a chef with the 267th Support Maintenance Company based in Lincoln, Neb., uses a thermometer to check the temperature of garlic roasted potatoes during the 44th annual Philip A. Connelly competition, July 16, at the Mead Training site near Mead, Neb.

Nebraska Army National Guard chefs compete in annual cooking competition

By Spc. Heidi Krueger

Staff Writer

The smells of Salisbury steak on the grill and freshly baked chocolate chip brownies coming out of the oven usually come from a restaurant or home kitchen. That wasn't the case July 16, when those smells emanated from a mobile kitchen tent in the middle of a field at Forward Operating Base Husker at the Mead Training Site near Mead, Neb.

Chefs from the 267th Support Maintenance Company were competing in the 44th annual Philip A. Connelly Competition, a regional competition. They advanced to the regional competition by winning the state-level competition in May.

"It's kind of like Hell's Kitchen...with a twist," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tollie Yoder, 267th SMC food service officer.

The chefs were required to prepare food within time constraints while always ensuring proper temperatures. They had to prepare a meal by noon to feed 70 Soldiers under the same circumstances of a real deployment environment.

The hot, sunny day along with the fact that their mobile kitchen having no air-conditioning made the competition even more realistic to a deployment climate.

"One of the biggest challenges out here is trying to stay nice and cool in this heat next to hot stoves and grills," said Sgt. James Wieting, first chef for 267th SMC.

Not only did the chefs have the heat of the day and a cramped mobile kitchen to worry about, they also had judges and field sanitation teammates watching their every move to make sure everything was handled and cooked properly.

"Sanitation is a very important role," said Sgt. Michael Folkerts, a field sanitation noncommissioned officer for the 267th SMC. "There are certain temperatures everything has to be at. For example, the Salisbury steak has to be at least 150 degrees before it can be served to anyone."

Food sanitation was clearly important to the participants.

"You always have to worry about

sanitation anywhere you cook but being in the field you have to be more aware of sanitation all the way around," said Pvt. Erin McNeil, 267th SMC chef.

Each chef brings a unique skill set to the competition.

"It's great that the Soldiers all have different sorts of training to prepare for this," said Yoder. "Plus their different amounts of experience from being in the Guard, their civilian lives and cooking in general really play an important role."

The key to excelling in these competitions is teamwork.

"This is the best team we've had in a long time," said Yoder. "They are remarkable and their communication is one of the team's strong spots."

"It's not an individual effort... it's really a team effort," he added.

During the competition the team of chefs prepared seven lunch entrées. The menu included French onion soup, Salisbury steak, garlic roasted potatoes, brown gravy, glazed carrots, cucumber and onion salad and brownies.

The main goal of the competition is to provide a balanced meal while meeting all food and health regulations necessary to feed Soldiers who have their own missions to complete.

"If the Soldiers are sick, they can't complete their mission," said McNeil. "My mission is to provide them food at the right temperatures so we don't have sick Soldiers."

A win at the regional level means the team would compete in the national competition. And although the Soldiers are hopeful they can represent the Nebraska National Guard at the national level, they are happy with the valuable field experience the team gained during the regional competition.

"We each have our own responsibilities as part of the team but we are here working together to do our best," said Folkerts. "If we don't make it to nationals, we still learned all this great field experience and grew closer together as a unit."

Army Guardsmen tackle South Dakota training



Photo by Pfc. Justin Zdan

Lending A Hand: Members of the 1-376th Aviation train on first aid during Golden Coyote at Camp Rapid, S.D. This year's Golden Coyote exercise involved more than 2,100 service members including members Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who were responsible for a wide array of missions.

Look for this and other Nebraska National Guard annual training stories in the October 2011 Prairie Soldier.

Employers get first-hand look at Nebraska Guard Soldiers' training

By Pfc. Justin Zdan

Staff Writer

Information can be a crucial factor for decisions made by leaders on a battlefield. The same can also be said for civilian leaders who need information to help understand the reserve component's critical missions overseas and at home.

Nebraska bosses were able to get that information when the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves hosted a boss lift to Golden Coyote, at Camp Rapid, S.D., June 18.

The boss lift was intended to show civilian employers what their employees in the Nebraska National Guard do when they are training away from their civilian jobs.

"The significance of the boss lift is huge," said Sgt. 1st Class Robert Sons, a committee member of the ESGR and retention noncommissioned officer. "Because it allows the employers to see what their individual Soldiers, or employees, are doing."

"In previous boss lifts the one thing I didn't get to do as a Soldier is stay embedded with the employer, because I was responsible for my Soldiers," said Sons. "Now I get to see how impressed they are with the cohesiveness and commitment that the Soldiers have."

It is mutually important for employers to support Soldiers, and Soldiers to support employers.

"The ESGR is there to ensure we have a coordinated understanding of what we do and make a positive impact in the community," said Brig. Gen. Michael D. Navrkal, assistant adjutant general, Army.

"Our job is to make the Soldiers' employers aware of what the Soldiers are doing," said Sons. "The importance of what we do is to spread a positive word and explain what

the law says to retain and gain employer support."

This fosters a better relationship and recognition of value between employers and Soldiers. The boss lift also allows an opportunity to maintain or increase benefits and networking.

Through rigorous training, the employers can see first hand the amazing things Soldiers are capable of and let them know how valuable and useful uniformed personnel really are," said Navrkal. "They can also see the level of professionalism."

The goal is to make a connection – to let employers see that leadership and other characteristics are what makes a great Soldier a great employee.

There have been three boss lifts this year and there were seven last year. Golden Coyote is great for boss lifts because service members can come together under multi-functional commands, said Navrkal.

"Golden Coyote is an exercise that gives us a flexible training schedule and gives us an opportunity to work with multiple services, one team one fight," said Navrkal.



Photo by Pfc. Justin Zdan

Demonstration: Members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) demonstrate a car-crash emergency response at Operation Golden Coyote at Camp Rapid, S.D., June 18, for Nebraska employers who were taking part in an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves boss lift.

companies, task lists, a real headquarters element, we can focus on communications in a controlled exercise," said Navrkal.

This year's boss lift participants included employers, civic leaders and educators.

"We need to have a broad range of attendees because our Soldiers have a broad range of jobs," said Bill Nelson, ESGR program support specialist.

Some of the attendees had never been around military operations.

"The teamwork, training and expertise are amazing," said one participant. "I've never been around the military and never realized there was so much time and effort put into the training. The details that have been thought of to train on are incredible, so when they go overseas they're ready."

The best way to experience it is to witness

"Camp Rapid provides a terrain and atmosphere that is much like a real world environment in that a medical battalion can support a transportation company in joint force operations," said Sons.

"With subordinate units, aviation, transportation

it first hand, said the participants.

"Seeing where everyone is and what they're doing gave me perspective, and seeing it makes it real," said Angela Carlow, a child psychologist from Lincoln.

"Something that surprised me was the number of Soldiers that were here and how even 'real life support' had to be present, because life happens," said Carlow.

"I expected everyone contained in one training center, but here you can see the separation and everyone is still working together through communication," said Matthew Williams, Mount View Elementary principal in Omaha.

"I have a new level of respect seeing how everyone comes together and coordinates to get the mission done," said Carlow.

The boss lift provides a chance to see that training is taken seriously.

"From an education standpoint, hands-on is better than classroom, which is very impressive to see at this scale," said Williams.

The training is very well prepared, Williams said. The Guardsmen and Reservists train in the field and it's continual and repetitive to ensure their quality of training is up to par. Seeing this creates an understanding that just because they're Guardsmen and Reservists, that doesn't mean they aren't just as prepared as the full time Army, said Williams.

For some of the attendees, this was an eye-opening experience.

"It's humbling to know the guys dedicated to keeping us safe and the sacrifices they had to endure by being away from their families," said North Platte Mayor Marc Kaschke as he watched the training, "all I can think of to say is thank you."

Nebraska aviators pitch in on flood response

■Black Hawk crew help erect crane at Plattsmouth Water Treatment Facility

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

Nebraska National Guard aviators delivered a 500-pound steel-frame base intended to support a roof top crane on top of the Plattsmouth Water Treatment Plant, July 12. The delivery was made with a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter and its crew during emergency flood support to the city of Plattsmouth.

The crane and base was engineered to hoist 50-pound bags of lime to the top of the building, reducing the amount of labor required to get the bags in position on the roof.

The lime is used by the plant to soften and purify water for the city of Plattsmouth. With recent flooding, getting lime to the plant has proven challenging.

"When the Missouri River reaches flood stage, parts of Schilling Road become covered with water, thereby making the plant inaccessible by truck," said Erv Portis, Plattsmouth city administrator. "Our crews then switch from bulk to bagged lime."



Photos by David Nore

Steady Hands: Sgt. McKenzie McCarter keeps an eye on the delivery point for a 500-pound crane base created by local engineers for the city of Plattsmouth's water treatment facility, July 12. Precision placement was the key for success as pilots Maj. Thad Fineran and Maj. Grant Siedenburgh maneuvered the base plate. Rounding out the crew was Sgt. Zack Marshall.

Plant officials said the operation was successful and should save a lot of labor.

"Looks like they set it on there just about perfect," said Gary Hellwig, Plattsmouth public works director as he observed the aerial delivery. "This saved us tons of work trying to get that frame up there and it's much (safer.) This is a huge help."

The delivery of the crane base was the initial phase of getting bags of lime to the roof top and also

saved Nebraska National Guardsmen stationed at the Plattsmouth Water Treatment Plant a lot of time and effort.

"We would have had to manually pull each 50-pound bag to the roof with a rope and pulley, but this way we can hoist six bags at a time," said Pvt. Nicholas Welander, 1167th Support Company, who was on duty at the plant.

According to plant operator, Brian Wagner, it takes about 2,000 pounds of lime to soften and purify water each day for the city of Plattsmouth.

"This is basically a water softening facility using lime instead of salt to soften and purify water," he said.

Wagner said he had 50,000 pounds of chemical coming the next Monday, just in time for the newly delivered crane to start operating, saving the city workers and Soldiers time and effort.

And with the amount of water surrounding the treatment plant the crane may be in use for some time to come.



Lower, Lower, Lower: Nebraska Army National Guard aviation Soldiers complete the delivery of a crane base for the city of Plattsmouth's water treatment plant during flood emergency duty, July 12. "This may be the first time we have made an aerial delivery of this sort," said Maj. Thad Fineran, UH-60 Black Hawk pilot.



Picture Perfect: The crane base for the Plattsmouth Water Treatment Plant is 'placed almost perfect' according to Gary Hellwig, Plattsmouth public works director.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Sharing A Lift: Two members of the Omaha Fire Department's swift water rescue team are lifted up to a hovering Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, July 7, while training at Omaha's Wehrspann Lake. The training was designed to help the groups learn to work together in the event that they needed to respond to an emergency situation as the Missouri River experienced historic flooding.

Guard helicopter crew trains with Omaha's swift water rescue team

By Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

Members of the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility #1 and the Omaha Fire Department practiced for swift-water rescues at Wehrspann Lake, July 7.

With the Missouri River flood this summer, the need for aviation-assisted water rescue training became important to the Omaha Fire Department, who utilized the Army Guard's aircraft to complete this exercise.

"The opportunity to actually get in a Black Hawk and do this training is second to none," said Brian Demery, an Omaha firefighter who was one of the swift water rescuers who practiced descending and ascending from a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter over both the ground and in the water.

"Without the help of these pilots and their crew, we don't get to experience what it's like to dangle from a line several feet below the helicopter and work in the water."

Water rescue from a helicopter is dangerous by nature, but it gives first responders the ability to seek out those needing assistance in areas inundated by flood water and floating debris.

The rescue operation is a several-step process. The helicopter lands and a few rescuers are loaded onto the aircraft. They are outfitted with special harnesses designed to hook-up to a motorized pulley system mounted in the aircraft.



Flippeded Flight: A member of the Omaha Fire Department's swift water rescue team practices his techniques while being lifted from Wehrspann Lake into a hovering UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, July 7.

From there, the pilots maneuver over a potential victim needing to be extracted.

The pilot then carefully hovers over the area where a rescuer will descend via that rescue hoist. The rescuer then swims to the victim and tethers him or her to the lift apparatus, gives the lift signal to aircraft personnel and up the victim goes.

Demery, a hazardous materials specialist and department diver, is also a member of the rescue team that will go out and rescue potential victims.

The Missouri River flooded several areas this summer putting

Nebraska Guardsman and local and state authorities in vulnerable positions at times. Rescue teams like Omaha's swift water rescue team will be the first line of defense should a Soldier, Airmen, civilian or public worker fall into the mighty Missouri.

Omaha Fire Department Capt. Brad Hildebrandt, commander of the rescue team, said that training with the National Guard's Black Hawk is an awesome experience that they have not had a chance to do in the past. It's also a needed piece of the puzzle in case the usual means of extraction by boat is not

See RESCUE TEAMS on 8.

Nebraska Air Guardsman follows father's footsteps, assists in epic flood response

By Sgt. Koan Nissen
Staff Writer

Like an unstoppable force, the Missouri River continues to redefine its banks as it cuts across the Nebraska landscape and through Omaha's north and east shores.

The sheer amount and momentum of unmitigated water hastening southward, carrying trees and debris like missiles, truly escapes the mind as it displays the awesome destructive power Mother Nature can bring to an area once occupied by recreationalists, joggers and bicyclists, partygoers and boaters.

So it only seems fitting that Nebraska, in return, would retaliate with its own impressive force to challenge this formidable opponent. Helicopters, sandbags, levees and a good bit of preparation are essential, but no piece of equipment is as important as the troops on the ground that provide the necessary components to ensure the safety of the citizens of the river city.

One of those troops was Senior Airman Sara Chadwick, a 22-year-old Madison, Neb., native. Chadwick, a medical technician with the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing, Nebraska Air National Guard, and a full-time Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear Explosives Enhanced Response Force Package team member, joined 27 other Airmen who volunteered for state active duty on June 26 to assist in the Nebraska National Guard's ongoing response to the flooding along the Missouri River.

The Nebraska National Guard turned over the responsibility of monitoring the state's levees to local community officials in late July.

Chadwick, along with the other Airmen, served as a watchful eye along Omaha's Missouri River levee system. They patrolled the levee in three different areas, two to the north and one to the south of Omaha's downtown area. The northern levee protects Omaha's Eppley Airfield, while the southern



Photo by Sgt. Koan Nissen

Watchful Eye: Senior Airman Sara Chadwick, a 22-year-old Madison, Neb., native and a medical technician with the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing, inspects a portion of levee near Omaha's now-flooded Freedom Park, June 30.

levee area protects the Omaha Public Works Missouri Wastewater Treatment Plant.

And although these Guardsmen were not filling sandbags or slinging loads for helicopters, they were walking or driving directly on the levees in sweltering conditions to prevent further damage.

"We're looking for sand boils, animal burrows and any type of erosion," said Chadwick during one patrol. "But we're keeping safe. We always travel with a wingman and we drive slowly. We can't help anyone if we don't stay safe ourselves."

When the Nebraska Air Guard was first tasked to assist in the flood response, the majority of the Airmen had no idea what work would lie ahead, yet they still volunteered

for the mission.

"When we were first given the tasking to support Douglas County and the Omaha area we didn't realize what levee surveillance was," said Senior Master Sgt. Carl Oestmann, the 155th ARW Headquarters' first sergeant and noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the Airmen's flood response.

"They thought they were going to be filling sandbags. Yet you had people like Sara say, 'You know what, I want to help my neighbor.' This isn't a training exercise. This isn't a deployment overseas. This is why they joined the Guard."

And once the mission was clear, it took little time for the Airmen to tackle the challenge.

"The levee is being stressed by the flood water," said Oestmann. "Our Guard members have done a very good job of identifying those stressors. Within 12 to 14 hours we had our training. Within 24 hours we were on the levee."

"Sara and all the other Airmen here are doing a fantastic job," he added.

Chadwick said she volunteered to help in the flood response because she felt she could make a difference for the citizens of Nebraska, but Chadwick's sense of military duty didn't come from any television commercial or recruiting campaign; it came from her late father, Robert H. Chadwick. Robert Chadwick retired as a senior master sergeant with the Nebraska Air National Guard after proudly serving for 27 years. He lost his battle with cancer in 2008.

Being a part of a bigger community is important, said Chadwick. Serving in the military allows her to be that part of that bigger community, a message that was relayed to her by her father many years ago.

"I'm really proud of our military system," said Chadwick. "Whether you're Army, Air Force, Navy or Marines, we're all part of a big family."

"The military treats me well and this is a way I can give back," she added. "We're making sure that if anything happens we are here to help — this is my state."

Levee mission beneficial to Guardsmen, golf course owner

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

The Nebraska Army National Guard's 189th Transportation Company has had 12 Soldiers patrolling and providing security for the South Sioux City, Neb., levee from early June until late July after the Missouri River rose and covered up to a half-mile of land, reaching 10-feet deep in some places.

The Soldiers patrolling the levee also proved beneficial for Covington Links Golf Course in South Sioux City. The Soldiers patrolled the levees, but they also helped deal with any trespassers near the golf course, which was a big relief to the local family-owned business already stressed with nearly half of their golf course under water.

"With this levee it's the front line, the levee is holding all the water," said Gerald F. Uhing, Covington Link's course superintendent. "People don't realize what the Guard is actually doing. If they see a problem they tell us and help with the most that they can do."

The levee was constantly beginning patrolled and watched for any slight change.

The Soldiers either walked or drove all terrain vehicles to monitor the three miles of levee.

"During each eight hour shift the ATVs get over 55 miles on them," said Staff Sgt. Riley P. Beaman, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of South Sioux City's levee. "The Soldiers go out and check on the levees making sure nothing is damaged or needs to be changed, along with other tasks that change from day-to-day."

The tasks and conditions changed daily, even shift-by-shift with the different water issues arising.

"The Guard is stopping the water and saving the levee," said Uhing. "They are monitoring it and keeping an eye on it for all of us here in South Sioux City."

"The Guard is trying their best

to help us get some sand bags and whatever little help we can get," added Uhing. "We appreciate and love that the Guard is making sure the levee is secure and holding back the water."

On the other hand, the Guardsmen were thankful that the Covington Links Golf Course has been there for them, also.

"When the troops first arrived we didn't have a place for our command center," said Beaman. "They let us use their parking lot and a building as a central place for us to gather in for briefings and a work place if we needed it."

"It's been so great that they have made us feel like home," added Beaman.

The golf course even opened their doors to the Soldiers for a place to take well-deserved breaks. "They allow us to take our breaks in the air-conditioned club house to get away from the heat and always ask if we need anything," said Beaman. "We are thankful they have been so kind, generous and nice to us."

Marty Johnson, Uhing's father-in-law, owns the golf course and was more than happy to help and support the Guardsmen as they needed it.

"The Guard helps us out the most that they can and we try to do the same for them," said Johnson. "We are happy with the Guard being here."

With the help of the Guard members, the golf course, along with local farmers, was able to keep trespassers off their land and make it safe for people having to leave their farms, businesses and houses due to the flooding.

"We are thankful for the Guard presence," said Uhing. "We will do whatever we can ourselves to help the Guard because they are helping us."

"It's really a win-win situation."

The Nebraska National Guard turned over the responsibility of monitoring the state's levees to local community officials in late July.

Guardsmen assisting in flood response rewarded

By Spc. Heidi Krueger
Staff Writer

Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen patrolling levees along the flooded Missouri River from mid-June until late July ensured any damage was reported and dealt with quickly. It was often long, hot, monotonous work.

Their day got a little brighter, July 22, when several of the Guardsmen, all of whom volunteered for the duty, had some surprise visitors.

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska's adjutant general, Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, Nebraska's command sergeant major, and Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska's assistant adjutant general — Air, visited the Soldiers and Airmen as they monitored different levees along the river.

It wasn't just a friendly visit, however. Lyons awarded the Nebraska Emergency Service Medal to the Soldiers and Airmen who had been working to protect Omaha from rising flood waters.

The Emergency Service Medal is awarded to all members of the National Guard participating in an emergency service while on state active duty. Similar cases for the award besides flooding are snow duty, fires and tornado duty.

Lyons also 'coined' each troop for their dedication to the Nebraska National Guard's flood response.

"This coin is my two-star adjutant general coin that I give out for excellence," said Lyons. "You all deserve to be recognized for



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Pinned: Spc. Eric Ruggiano, a supply specialist with the 1167th Forward Support Company, receives the Nebraska National Guard Emergency Service Medal from Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons during flood duty at Plattsmouth, Neb., July 22. Ruggiano volunteered for flood duty only a few weeks after he got back from a deployment with the 1167th FSC.

volunteering to make a difference and assist with the flooding."

During the first stop of the day, Bohac had some additional good news for an Airman patrolling the levee near Eppley Airfield by Omaha Bohac caught Airman 1st Class Cody Williamson by surprise when he performed his promotion to Senior Airman on the spot.

"I was shocked," said now Senior Airman Williamson, a vehicle maintenance personnel for the 155th Refueling Wing based out of Lincoln, Neb. "I knew my time was coming to get promoted but I never thought General Bohac would

promote me while I was on duty for patrolling the levee."

The day wouldn't have been complete without the team getting the opportunity go out on a boat and see Soldiers at work trying to save the water treatment plant in Plattsmouth, Neb.

"This wasn't the first time I saw the water treatment plant," said Valenzuela.

"The water has come down a good two feet since I was here last," added Valenzuela. "I'm glad to see the water is slowly coming down and the Guardsmen are doing a great job assisting with the flooding."



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Wet Walk: Brian Demery, a member of the Omaha Fire Department's swift water rescue team, walks away from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter after training with the National Guard at Omaha's Wehrspann Lake.

RESCUE TEAMS continued from page 7.

an option.

"This has been a fantastic chance to train with helicopters," said Hildebrandt. "We're very thankful the National Guard has been able to help."

Following a day of ground classes, the practical exercise consisted of a day of training at Wehrspann Lake. There, the teams practiced their skills approximately 25 feet above the ground on the lake's shore. By day's end the firemen were descending from 75 feet above the lake — a task not for the faint of heart — where they practiced pulling a "victim from the water" and then ascending back into the helicopter as it continued to hover 75 feet above the lake's surface.

According to Demery, the training was definitely an important part of getting ready for any scenario he or his team might meet in the future.

"The fear of heights can be enough to make any person nervous," said Demery. "But this is why we train."

Fallen Guardsman laid to rest in Lincoln

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

The single deadliest incident in the nearly decade-long war in Afghanistan hit home for the Nebraska National Guard family.

Hundreds of family, friends and fellow service members came together, Aug. 20, at Christ's Place Church in Lincoln, Neb., to honor and remember the late Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger, one of 30 U.S. armed forces members killed when their CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed in the Wardak province of east central Afghanistan, Aug. 6.

Hamburger, who was posthumously promoted to the rank of staff sergeant, was a flight engineer with the Grand Island-based Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, which had recently deployed to Afghanistan.

He was remembered as having a big personality and a great sense of humor, but beyond that, he was a dedicated Soldier.

"In talking to Patrick's family and fellow Soldiers, the one thing that sticks out the most is that Staff Sergeant Hamburger was an extremely dedicated Soldier who was not only committed to being the best flight engineer that he could be, but who also knew the true value of a positive attitude and a well-developed sense of humor," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, adjutant general for Nebraska.

A 1999 graduate of Lincoln Southeast High School, Hamburger enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1998. He worked as a plumber until 2008 when he became a full-time helicopter flight engineer with the Guard in Grand Island. Hamburger met Candie Reagan in 2005 and moved to Grand Island in 2008 with Candie and her daughter Veronica. In 2009 Candie Reagan and Hamburger welcomed a daughter, Payton.

Soldiers he served with remembered how much Hamburger's family meant to him.

"Pat liked to act like the tough guy or the comedian of the group,"

said Staff Sgt. John Nicola, a fellow flight engineer with Co. B, 2-135th GSAB, via email. "Much more though, Pat was a great family man. Pat was the father to a 13-year-old stepdaughter, Veronica, of his girlfriend Candie's. He also had a two-year-old daughter, Payton. Payton was his pride and joy. All three of those girls had Pat wrapped around their finger."

"In Fort Hood, Pat told me that he planned on getting married to Candie when we got back," he added. "To me, they were always a family and always will be."

His co-workers also remembered his attitude and dedication as a Soldier.

"Patty could make anyone smile," said Sgt. Burton Vculek, another flight engineer with Co. B, 2-135th GSAB, via email. "He could turn even the darkest days bright. He was one of the hardest working people I know, but he did it in such a way that you couldn't help but laugh even when the work was hard and the conditions terrible."

"He was an amazing father, brother-in-arms, and last but not least, a true friend," added Vculek.

Hamburger's brothers shared stories describing the kind of person and Soldier he was.

Michael Hamburger recalled a time he was visiting in Grand Island when Hamburger took him to see the Chinook he was responsible for. Michael said he was taken aback at the complexity of the aircraft and how much knowledge Hamburger had of all of its systems.

Minutes later, in the room of Hamburger's daughter, Payton, both Hamburger brothers sat down for a pretend tea party with the then one-year-old.

"To some, this behavior may seem surprising," said Michael Hamburger. "A man who spends hours working on machines of war and then a few minutes later can sit down to tea with his little girl."

"But to us it wasn't surprising at all," added Michael. "In both cases Pat was simply taking care of things."

"Pat was a protector," said



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Final Resting Spot: Members of the Nebraska National Guard's Honor Guard carry the casket of the late Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger to its final resting spot at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Neb., following the fallen Nebraska Guardsmen's funeral, Aug. 20. Hamburger was killed in the Wardak province of east central Afghanistan, Aug. 6.



On Behalf Of A Grateful Nation: Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, adjutant general for Nebraska, presents the U.S. flag to Candie Reagan and Payton Hamburger, the fiancée and daughter of Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger, Aug. 20, during Hamburger's burial at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Neb.

Christopher Hamburger. "He was a Soldier. He was a father, a son, a grandson, a nephew, a cousin and a brother."

"It didn't take him serving this country for us to know that he was a hero and the kind of person that we all wanted to be," added Christopher.

Following the funeral, Hamburger was interred with full military honors at the Wyuka cemetery in Lincoln. Hamburger was further

honored with a dramatic fly-over by three Chinook helicopters. The fly-over was made extra special by the link that Hamburger had to one of those helicopters.

"It turns out that these Chinooks were ones that Pat's unit trained on here at Nebraska and at Fort Hood before they deployed," said Lyons. "You may notice some nose art that's painted on the helicopters...in fact, it was Pat who painted the artwork on those Chinooks before the unit

left for Afghanistan."

"Feel free to look up when they fly over today and you'll see a little bit of Pat here with us again," he added.

Lyons also spoke of what Hamburger's service meant to Nebraska and the National Guard.

"I also know that I speak for all his comrades-in-arms – both here in Nebraska and those overseas – that we, too, are so deeply proud of him and the life he lived, the service he gave and the ultimate sacrifice he made while serving all of us in Afghanistan," he said. "Staff Sergeant Patrick Hamburger, you will be forever missed, but never forgotten."

Michael Hamburger also reminded those in attendance about the type of person his brother was.

"A number of people have described Pat as the happiest person they have ever known, and while I agree with that, I think that what set Pat apart was how much attention he gave to everything – his work, his family and his friends," he said. "He placed everyone above himself and in the end he sacrificed everything for the people and the country that he loved."

Soldier remembered as 'one of a kind'

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

"Sergeant (Patrick) Hamburger was one of a kind."

That's how the commander of Grand Island's Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, remembered the loss of one of their own, recently.

Hamburger, 30, was one of 38 American and Afghan service members who died when the CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed in eastern Afghanistan. Hamburger, a CH-47 Chinook helicopter flight engineer, was part of a five person helicopter crew that was ferrying 25 U.S. Navy and Air Force special forces personnel and eight Afghan military members to a firefight in the Wardak province when it crashed, killing all on board.

Also killed in the crash was Chief Warrant Officer David R. Carter, 47, who was a member of the unit's Colorado-based detachment.

According to Capt. Marcus Wilhelm, commander of Co. B, 2-135th GSAB, the loss of two valued unit members was felt throughout the tightly knit unit. The unit held a memorial service for the fallen air crew a few days after the crash, during which a number of Soldiers spoke about the fallen Soldiers.

Wilhelm also shared his own thoughts about Hamburger a few days after the memorial service. He recalled the fallen sergeant as a dedicated Soldier who had a disarming sense of humor.

"Nobody could light up a room with laughter like he could," said Wilhelm in an email interview. "His non-stop humor turned even the toughest moments into something bearable."

"On top of a great personality, he was a true professional and really knew his stuff when it came to crewing a Chinook and maintaining them," he said. "(Staff Sergeant) Hamburger took pride in being one of the few who could crack the code on the everyday nuisances that troubled Chinooks and kept them flying."



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon

Tools Of The Trade: Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger adjusts his night vision goggles before a night-time door-gun training exercise at Smokey Hill Gunnery Range at Salina, Kan., March 22.

"He also had one of the best work ethics in the unit. I could give him the most daunting task and an unrealistic timeframe to complete it in, and (he) would take that as a personal challenge, most of the time succeeding," Wilhelm added. "He will be greatly missed as an outstanding Soldier, a fellow co-worker at (Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2), a great friend and a loving father."

Hamburger was buried with full military honors in Lincoln's Wyuka Cemetery on Aug. 20.

DEATH continued from page 1.

helicopter flight engineer. He was mobilized for Operation Enduring Freedom this past May as a member of Company B, 2-135th GSAB. The unit left Grand Island on May 29 for follow-on training at Fort Hood, Texas.

The unit had just arrived in Afghanistan recently, where it was responsible for conducting medium-lift missions including the aerial movement of troops, supplies and equipment.

Hamburger was one of a five-person Chinook crew that was killed in the crash. The other crew members were:

- Chief Warrant Officer David R. Carter, 47, of Centennial, Colo. He was assigned to Detachment 1, Co. B, 2-135th GSAB;

- Chief Warrant Officer Bryan J. Nichols, 31, of Hays, Kans. He was assigned to the 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation);

- Spc. Alexander J. Bennett, 24, of Tacoma, Wash. He was assigned to the 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation);

- Spc. Spencer C. Duncan, 21, of Olathe, Kan. He was assigned to the 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (General Support Aviation).

Although the actual details of the crash are still under investigation, Department of Defense officials have said that the CH-47 crew were airlifting 25 U.S. Navy and Air Force special operations personnel and eight Afghan military members to a firefight in eastern Afghanistan's Wardak province.

It was the deadliest incident in the decade-long war in the country.

Following the crash, President Barack Obama and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta both expressed their sorrow over the loss of the American and Afghan personnel.

"My thoughts and prayers go out to the families and loved ones of the Americans who were lost earlier today in Afghanistan," said Obama, Aug. 6. "Their deaths are a reminder of the extraordinary sacrifices made by the men and women of our military and their families, including all who have served in Afghanistan."

"We also mourn the Afghans who died alongside our troops in pursuit of a more peaceful and hopeful future for their country," the president added.

Panetta echoed the president's thoughts. "I am deeply saddened by the loss of many outstanding Americans in uniform and of their Afghan counterparts earlier today in Afghanistan," the secretary said Aug. 6. "Their courage was exemplary, as was their determination to make this a safer world for their countries and their fellow citizens."

"We will stay the course to complete this mission, for which they and all who have served and lost their lives in Afghanistan have made the ultimate sacrifice," Panetta said. "They and their families are in my thoughts, in my prayers and in my heart."

(Editor's Note: Maj. Kevin Hynes and the American Forces Press Service contributed to this article.)

Panetta discusses security challenges during Stratcom visit

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta spoke to service members about national security concerns and the defense budget during a visit to U.S. Strategic Command headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., Aug. 5.

“It’s a challenging time for the United States,” Panetta said. “But with regard to our missions, they really do relate to making sure that we secure this country for our children. We’ve got a number of challenges and threats that are out there that we are responsible for confronting.”

The defense secretary talked to the troops about progress made since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.

“We have confronted terrorists since 9/11, and even before that,” he said. “Since 9/11, we’ve been going after al-Qaida. And we have made progress in weakening al-Qaida.”

U.S. forces have conducted operations

against the terror organization in Pakistan, Afghanistan and other parts of the world, Panetta said. “But in particular,” he added, “we have seriously weakened the ability of al-Qaida to plan attacks on this country.”

Panetta said the most significant achievement thus far in the fight against terrorism was finding al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden.

“That was, for me, probably one of the proudest moments I’ve had, with the ability to get the intelligence on where we thought he might be located, but then to work with the military to develop the plans to actually go after him,” said Panetta, who was CIA director when bin Laden was killed in Pakistan. “This was really a tremendous example of the intelligence community and the military community working as a team to accomplish a very important mission: to try to rid the world of this criminal. And we were successful at that.”

That helped to continue the effort to

weaken al-Qaida, he added. “(But it) doesn’t mean that they’re gone,” he said. “They’re still around, and there are elements of al-Qaida that are still out there whose main purpose is to attack our homeland.”

The defense secretary emphasized keeping pressure on the terrorist network no matter where they hide.

“We’ve got to continue to put pressure on them in Pakistan... The biggest concerns we have now are the nodes where they’re located in places like Yemen, Somalia, North Africa,” he said.

“We’ve got to continue to put pressure on them and we will do that. We will do that because our goal is to make sure that someday we can secure the world from the threat of that type of al-Qaida terror.”

Panetta also discussed other issues he said could affect U.S. security interests.

“We’re confronting the problem of rogue nations today – nations like North Korea (and) Iran, who continue to seek a nuclear

capability,” he said. “And because they are rogue nations, they remain dangerous in terms of the threat to the rest of the world. So we have to continue to focus on that threat as well.”

Panetta reminded the troops that attacks are not just limited to places and people, but also can be mounted against critical infrastructure.

“We have to continue to focus on the threat of cyber attacks,” the secretary said. “We’re now in a very different world, where we could face a cyber attack that could be the equivalent of Pearl Harbor. Someone using cyber can take down our power grid system, our financial systems in this country, our government systems (and) our banking systems.”

“They could virtually paralyze this country,” he continued. “We have to be prepared to deal with that. We have to have both a good offense and a good defense with regards to the cyber world.”



Photo by Sgt. Koan Nissen

No Dummy: Sgt. 1st Class Lucas L. Poppe, the operations sergeant for the 72nd Civil Support Team, ties a knot to secure a dummy to a skid during a maritime training exercise in Alameda, Calif. on June 7. The need for maritime operations training is now mandated for the team.



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Safety First: Sgt. 1st Class Lucas L. Poppe (middle) and Sgt. 1st Class James H. Mckeehan (front) of Nebraska’s 72nd Civil Support Team and Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Shiik (left) of the Nevada National Guard CST, put a dummy on the skid during a maritime training exercise in Alameda, Calif., on June 7. The 72nd CST conducted this training with members of the Kansas and Nevada CSTs.

SHIP TRAINING continued from page 1.

cal operations officer.

The need for maritime operations training is now mandated for the team by the federal government. The exercise gave the troops an opportunity to not only fine-tune their chemical, biological, radiation and nuclear detection skills, it also gave them a chance to extract and assist would-be medical casualties aboard a massive naval vessel.

These operations are difficult enough for a Soldier or Airman not used to wearing personal protection equipment or having to board a ship while carrying self contained breathing apparatuses and various monitors, but when adding to the fact that operating aboard a massive ship is a completely different scenario than most of the Guardsmen were used to, a whole new dynamic comes into play.

The SS Grand Canyon State, assigned to the Military Sealift Command Ready Reserve fleet, is a towering crane ship capable of posing multiple dangers to an unprepared first-responder team boarding it, including small hatches and doorways, pitch-black cargo holds and an all steel-encased structure. And then there’s the sweltering heat caused by a lack of air circulation below deck, which elevated the challenges to a completely different level.

Still, it was all in a day’s work for Capt. Sean Thurmer, the CST’s survey team leader.

“Our team’s mission is to monitor, detect and identify hazards that would be down range,” he said. “We have several different detection and monitoring devices we take with us at all times.”

The SS Grand Canyon State



Photo by Sgt. Koan Nissen

Proving Grounds: The SS Grand Canyon State located in Alameda, Calif., was used during the maritime operations exercise for Nebraska’s 72nd Civil Support Team. The SS Grand Canyon State provided a different training scenario than most Nebraska National Guardsmen are used to.

provided this essential piece of realistic training for the CST. In this particular case, Thurmer’s surveyors were responsible for extracting an injured person from a cargo bay 30-feet below a walkway, which was already well below the main deck.

The team had only themselves to rely on.

As Thurmer’s surveyors made their way below deck, the need for adapting and overcoming was readily apparent. Ropes, ladders, protective and rescue equipment, and a general lack of good visibility challenged the group — but they were ready. The team’s helmet-mounted flashlights provided the vast majority of light they had to

work with.

Anchor points set, pulleys and rescue lines in place, the extraction began. Pull by carefully-orchestrated pull, they hoisted the simulated injured casualty to safety.

Mission accomplished.

“It’s absolutely critical for a unit to train in the area, or simulated area, that they could be called to in the future,” said Thurmer. “You couldn’t ask for a better training facility.”

Staff Sgt. Donovan Garcia said the training was an eye-opener for him. Training on a real ship, in a real harbor, was an excellent experience that will help him with future missions, he added.



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Getting A Grip: Staff Sgt. Donovan A. Garcia, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear sergeant with the 72nd Civil Support Team, arranges ropes during a training exercise in Alameda, Calif. on June 7. The ropes were used to pull a dummy up from a lower cargo hold.

“Being on an actual ship gives us an experience of how it’s actually going to be,” said Garcia, a member of Thurmer’s survey team who has been with the CST since 2009. “It shows us our capabilities.”

The CST is a self-contained unit that does much more than rescue injured persons during times of crisis. They have the capability of delivering real-time, on-site preliminary analysis of potentially lethal

compounds to command staffs and local authorities. The unit can also occupy a small area of land and establish life saving communication capabilities for, perhaps, a city decimated by a hurricane or tornado.

Ultimately the 72nd CST returned to the Cornhusker State better prepared to meet the challenges of a natural disaster or terrorist incident in a maritime environment.

Engineers practice contingency skills at Florida base

By Airman 1st Class Mary Thach
Staff Writer

Sixty-four Airmen from the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron traveled to Silver Flag, a military training site near Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., July 9-16 to train with newly developed engineering equipment and operating in a contingent environment.

Silver Flag allowed the members of the CES to perform combat support training during a four-day course with another day of bare-base construction with war scenarios. They also participated in classroom instruction directed specifically toward services, personnel support for contingency operations and Civil Engineering career fields.

The CES is required to train at Silver Flag every 45 months to ensure operational readiness and keep Airmen current on their knowledge of operating the latest equipment.

"We go there to prepare to operate in a contingent environment," said Tech. Sgt. Sarah A. Bredthauer, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the simulated deployment. "It's as close as we can get to contingency operations. We are the first ones there setting up tents, generators, reverse osmosis water purification units, and plumbing."

Generally, civil engineers arrive early in the building or maintaining of a base in a real-world deployment. Their job is to ensure the base is functional, complete with latrines, showers, electricity, roads, pure water, air conditioning or heat, and many more modern conveniences to provide a comfortable environment for deployed troops. But their main priority is paramount for the mission.

"Our main priority is repairing the airfield, so if there is any kind of runway damage, that is our main priority before we bed



Fire In The Hole: A firefighter ignites jet fuel to allow members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's firefighting team to train on putting out a blaze during Silver Flag, a military training site near Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., July 9 through 16.

down the base," said Bredthauer.

If the training itself wasn't difficult enough, the weather provided a major challenge the entire week.

By the third day of training, so much rain had fallen that four tents housing the Airmen flooded forcing them to move to different living quarters. Along with the rain, heat and humidity were constant issues, but the Airmen continued their training, completed their classes and learned new skills.

For many Airmen, this was their first trip to Silver Flag. Staff Sgt. Tyler Loos, a fireman from CES and first-time traveler to Silver Flag, said his favorite part of the training was working with live fires. The fires



Photos by Senior Airman James Lieth

Rocky Start: Members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Civil Engineering Squadron work on replacing a patch of concrete during Silver Flag, a military training site near Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., July 9-16. Silver Flag allowed the Airmen to practice skills at a location with no interruptions and with equipment they normally don't have access to.

were started with jet fuel to be an accurate representation of what the firemen might deal with in a real-life situation.

Airman 1st Class Brandon J. Dejong, a member of the roads and grounds shop, was also a first-time participant and said he was prepared for the scenarios presented during the week because of the training the CES received in November 2010 in North Dakota. Dejong was responsible for digging up and replacing a patch of concrete slab to demonstrate his ability to perform this task down range. He said he was glad to participate in the training because he was able to practice the detailed work his job requires.

According to Chief Master Sgt. Jeffrey A. Horne, fire chief in the CE Unit Control Center, team-building among members of different units was the key for the training to be successful.

"One of the biggest challenges was trying to bring all of the firefighters from different bases together to make one team," said Horne. "We had Guard, Reserve and active duty firefighters from four different bases."

It didn't take long before the units came together and successfully proved the mission came first.

"Silver Flag gave us the opportunity to practice our war skills at a location where there (were) no interruptions and we had the opportunity to train on equipment that we don't currently have on base," said Horne.

Horne added that he was happy with the performance of the Airmen and pleased they were so highly motivated.

"They are performing well above standards," he said. "Due to the ongoing deployment cycles, it is a must that Airmen are highly-trained and ready to deploy."

State dedicates two armed forces reserve centers

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

Brand new Armed Forces Reserve Centers in Columbus and McCook were dedicated Aug. 5 by state and local officials in the latest completion of new construction projects for the Nebraska National Guard.

"As governor of the great state, I am proud of all the work that our Nebraska Soldiers, their families and their employers do for the greater good of all Americans," Gov. Dave Heineman said of the military members who will work and train in the new facilities. "I am also extremely proud that Soldiers and their families will now have a facility that will help position them for the challenges that await them in the future."

The new AFRCs saw good attendance at their individual ceremonies and open houses that showcased the state-of-the-art buildings.

"These Armed Forces Reserve Centers are the next step in realizing the Nebraska National Guard's goal to build efficient, sustainable, world-class facilities for Nebraska Soldiers and citizens," said Col. Timothy Zegers, construction and facilities management officer for the Nebraska National Guard.

The \$9.5 million Columbus AFRC will house the 1075th Transportation Company and the U.S. Army Reserve's 45th Military Police Detachment. The building has 42,349 square feet of training and administrative space for six full-time staff and 126 part-time Soldiers. The new building replaces the old armory that was built in the 1950s.

The \$7.2 million McCook facility replaces an armory built in 1962 and will house Detachment 2, 1195th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) and the U.S. Army Reserve's Detachment 1, 1013th Quartermaster Company. The new building boasts 34,978 square feet and will allow space for five full-time staff and 98 part-time Soldiers.

Both facilities feature geo-thermal heating systems, environmentally efficient lighting and were built as a result of Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission funding and meet new Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

"These facilities were designed to help

Columbus Armed Forces Reserve Center

- ◆ Consists of 42,349 square feet of training and administrative space
- ◆ Will house six full time staff and 126 part-time Soldiers.
- ◆ Project is the result of Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission funding and is constructed to the new Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

McCook Armed Forces Reserve Center

- ◆ Consists of 34,978 square feet of training and administrative space.
- ◆ Includes state of the art classrooms, distance learning capabilities, administrative areas, family support and recruiting offices.
- ◆ Will house five full time staff and 98 part-time Soldiers.
- ◆ Project is the result of Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission funding and is constructed to the new Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

us better prepare our Army National Guard Soldiers for the challenges they will meet when deployed overseas or when responding to emergencies here at home," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, adjutant general for Nebraska. "The new facility provides a visible and known community location to support other military members and retirees in Columbus and McCook and surrounding areas whether they are Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines, or perhaps a retiree."



Courtesy Photo

Ribbon Cutting: State and local officials cut the ribbon to the new Columbus Armed Forces Reserve Center, Aug. 5, officially opening the facility that will house the 1075th Transportation Company and the U.S. Army Reserve's 45th Military Police Detachment.



Photo by David Nore

Ribbon Cutting: State and local officials cut the ribbon to the new McCook Armed Forces Reserve Center, Aug. 5, officially opening the facility that will house Detachment 2, 1195th Transportation Company (Medium Truck) and the U.S. Army Reserve's Detachment 1, 1013th Quartermaster Company.

Home from deployment, brigade welcomes new commander

By Pfc. Justin Zdan
Staff Writer

When Col. Michael L. Deger enlisted in 1985 into the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Infantry Brigade's Company A, 1-134th Infantry, he never knew that he would one day be commanding the brigade.



Andersen

But that is exactly what happened, July 9, when Deger assumed command of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, the direct descendent of the venerable 67th Inf. Bde. (Mechanized).

"Clearly this is an extremely significant day for me," said Deger. "I would like to look back to 1985 when the 67th welcomed me to the Nebraska National Guard. The legacy of the 67th has never been different and the organization has always belonged to the Soldiers."

Members of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade (BfSB) are anticipating a smooth transition.

"I've known (Colonel) Deger for over 20 years," said Capt. Matthew S. York, rear detachment officer in charge of the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron and a friend of the family. "He's always been a level-headed straight-shooter and never held back the truth; I'd trust him about anything."

Deger's senior noncommis-

sioned officer also has confidence in Deger's ability to command. "He is calm, intuitive and he's always thinking how a decision will affect the Soldiers. But he's also not afraid to make a decision," said Sgt. Major Philip J. Perrone, brigade command sergeant major.

Deger described how he felt about his upcoming assignment, and thanked the staff and everyone who trusted him to perform it.

The change of command ceremony was held at the brigade's home drill floor in the "Spirit of 1776" armory in Lincoln as Deger replaced the outgoing commander, Lt. Col. Brett W. Andersen.

Deger was born in Topeka, Kan., on Nov. 26, 1963, and has made Nebraska his home since 1968. He graduated from Humphrey Public High School in 1982 and attended the United States Military Academy at West Point from 1982-1984.

"This could be the most significant assignment to date for my career," said Deger.

"I'm anxious to embark on the next chapters of my career with you and definitely will attack the opportunities of tomorrow and will persevere through the challenges of today," Deger said.

Coincidentally, the outgoing commander, Lt. Col. Andersen, enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard the same year and the same brigade as Deger.

Andersen, however, was part of the first National Guard BfSB deployed to an operational theatre. The brigade was responsible for multiple source intelligence-collection operations in more than 40 locations across Iraq. They



Photo by Spc. Heidi Krueger

Assuming Command: Col. Michael L. Deger is presented with the colors of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade by Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons during a July 9 change of command ceremony held at the Spirit of 76 Armory in Lincoln, Neb. Deger took command after the brigade returned home a few weeks prior from a deployment to Iraq.

returned in June.

"This mission you all accomplished in Iraq was challenging to say the least," said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, the adjutant general for the Nebraska National Guard. "You accomplished the mission in arduous conditions, both physical and otherwise."

The general commended Andersen for his exceptional performance.

"When the unit needed you, you and the staff were always there"

The next step for Andersen is the Army War College where he will be a resident student. It is an uncommon honor.

"To put this in perspective, we

had only one quota. It's extremely competitive," said Lyons. "This nomination says a lot about his leadership, character, commitment, his caring for his Soldiers and his devotion to the mission."

Deger thanked Andersen for bringing the Soldiers of the 67th home safely.

2011 "Guardians of Freedom" airshow

Featuring:

- U.S. Navy Blue Angels
- U.S. Air Force Wings of Blue
- Indy Boys Jet School Bus
- F-18 Super Hornet Demonstration Team
- A-10 East Coast Demonstration Team
- B-29 "Fifi"
- Tora 101



U.S. Air Force Wings of Blue



B-29 'Fifi'



A-10 East Coast Demonstration Team



U.S. Navy Blue Angels

AIRSHOW continued from page 1.

designed to mark the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon and a grassy field in Pennsylvania.

Stevenson said he hopes the ceremony will give everyone involved an opportunity to look back at all that has transpired since the start of the current conflict.

"The purpose of the ceremony is a commemoration of the sacrifices the nation has made in response to the 9/11 attacks," said Stevenson. "It seeks to be an opportunity for us all to stop and reflect on all that has happened, but also to reflect on all who have served: military, civil authorities, police, fire, utilities, emergency management agencies, elected officials and the community itself through volunteer organizations."

The commemoration ceremony will be just part of what Stevenson says will be an amazing weekend.

Along with the Blue Angels, the free airshow will feature a number of military and civilian acts including the U.S. Air Force's "Wings of Blue" parachute demonstration team, the Jet School Bus, B-29 "Fifi" and the "Tora 101" demonstration

team. The airshow, which is the largest in Nebraska this year, is being sponsored by the Nebraska National Guard, the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and the Lincoln Airport Authority.

Stevenson said he hopes the show will make a lasting impression on all those who attend. "We hope the audience takes away from the airshow a sense of all their military has done in the last decade, but also a close up look at our military members, specifically those who are National Guard members in their community," he said.

"We hope they gain a sense of appreciation for our professionalism, and our commitment, and we hope it will renew their patriotism through pride in us and in their country," Stevenson added.

Gates to the free show – which will take place at Lincoln Air Park – will be open at 9:30 a.m. each day. The show begins at 11 a.m.

For more information, check out the airshow website at www.lincolnairshow.com



Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



Nebraska teens attend National Guard seminar in Kentucky

By Jess Shottenkirk-Cooley
State Youth Coordinator

This year's National Youth Symposium took place in Louisville, Ky., recently.

Two Nebraska National Guard teens were picked. Representing the Nebraska Army Guard was Natasha Siebrandt and representing the Nebraska Air Guard Air was Tristan Hilderbrand.

Natasha currently has two brothers serving in Afghanistan with the 623rd Engineer Company, while Tristan's father is with the 155th Air Refueling Wing.

While at the Symposium, the teens were kept extremely busy attending training sessions and after-hours activities.

Some of the presentations at the symposium included a breakthrough session by Craig Hillier about the ins and outs of becoming a great leader and the benefits and burdens of leadership. It explained personal evaluation, examining strengths and weaknesses, and areas of improvement. Craig taught the five leadership laws.

He also introduced the TEAM Dynamics Leadership Indicator during the fun, hands-on interactive session.

Dee LaMay (Cochran) presented the Teen Team Challenges seminar. This was a high-energy,

challenging, insightful, fun and silly session designed to help the teens learn more about themselves and the other teens, while trying different activities. This was defined as "Challenge by Choice."

This was followed by Dr. Sameer Hinduja's "Not Cool: Things you shouldn't be doing online" session. This presentation dealt with responsible uses of the internet including the right ways to use Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. He also talked about how a simple Facebook status could ruin one's chance at jobs, friends, etc. Dr. Hinduja also conducted a survey by using the teens' cell phones. He would ask a question and they would text their answers, in which the polls would appear anonymously on the screen. This was a very interactive power point and the teens got very involved.

The last presentation the teens had was called The YOGOWYPI Factor by Bill Cordes. The acronym for YOGOWYPI is "You Only Get Out What Put What You Put In" and it is the key strategy to support students in transition. In this captivating, high-energy program students learned to incorporate these strategies into their daily lives. Topics covered included: "You Choose-Expanding Your Ozone," "Great Efforts Yield Rewards," "Oz Be Responsible," "Wisdom of Mission," "Y2 Learn" and "People

Are Your Great Resource and Integration."

Along with the seminar sessions, Nebraska's two youth also attended a pizza pool party and went to the Louisville Slugger Museum where they took a tour of the factory and watched baseball bats being made, some of which were going to players in the Major Leagues. At the end of the tour each person took home a mini bat.

The teens also toured a local science museum, where they explored three floors of science in fun ways. They also made homemade ice cream at the museum.

The teens also had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity when they attended the first USO concert on American soil. Montgomery Gentry performed at the USO concert. The teens got a close look at the concert, first five rows close to be exact. The concert was live on the pentagon channel, which is viewed all around the world.

The very last thing the teens did before saying their goodbyes was a Youth Symposium Farewell Ball. The teens dressed up semi-formally and then walked into the event by their individual regions. Each Region also had a chance to make a poster board and pick a song in which they would walk into the ball to.

Region 7, which includes Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri,



Courtesy photo

Cornhusker Delegates: (From left) Natasha Siebrandt and Tristan Hilderbrand pose for a photo during the National Youth Symposium in Louisville, Ky.

picked "Firework" by Katy Perry. The teens enjoyed a sit down formal dinner. The dinner was followed by hours of dancing.

Overall, the teens had a very

busy, but very fun week. I had a blast with the two teens and couldn't ask for two better teens to take. I am looking forward to next year's edition.

Resources for job hunters

Service members have many resources available to aid them in their search for a new or better job.

Most of these services are available to service members regardless if they just entered military service, just returned from deployment/mobilization, or served years ago. A few services may be restricted to returning deployers, or in some cases, our wounded heroes.

The Nebraska Department of Labor is finalizing details for two job fairs in September.

The first will occur in Bellevue on the Sept. 15 and the second will be in Lincoln on Sept. 27.

Job fairs connect employers who are actively seeking to hire with prospective employees. Individuals seeking employment should dress appropriately (a suit, or polo and slacks, updated resume, and be prepared to have a preliminary interview on the spot): <http://www.dol.nebraska.gov/center.cfm?PRICAT=3&SUBCAT=2H>

The Nebraska Department of Labor recently developed a post deployment employment survey in cooperation with Nebraska's Transition Assistance Advisor and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve to get an idea of where unemployed veterans live and what type of work they are interested in.

If a service member has a particular desire or need, they can put their name and contact info in the comment section. See the survey here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WCVWNQN>

The Nebraska Department of Labor also provides specialized services to the men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces who have bravely served our country. Career centers have specially-trained veteran's staff to assist other veterans with employment and training opportunities: <http://www.dol.nebraska.gov/center.cfm?PRICAT=4&SUBCAT=7Z0>

Military One Source website has great resume and interview materials for both the Service Member as well as a spouse career center. Click on Career & Education / Career, or try doing a search for Civilian Job at: <http://www.militaryonesource.com>

The USAJOBS website lists many opportunities for federal technicians: <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/>

The Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces is Defense Department-sponsored and links Reserve component service members with military friendly employers: <http://www.employerpartnership.org/>

The National Guard Association of Nebraska website lists Nebraska employers who are military friendly and actively hiring: http://www.nanguard.org/extra/job_opportunities.html

The VetJobs website is not government sponsored, but is another popular source to find military friendly jobs: <http://www.vetjobs.com/>

Please contact the following for additional information

Ms. Bonnie Bessler
Neb. Transition Assistance Advisor
(402) 309-1543
bonnie.bessler@us.army.mil

Mr. Bill Nelson
ESGR
(402) 309-7105
william.nelson1@us.army.mil

Not-so-known benefits of TRICARE

Greetings. At our last NRMC meeting we discussed our current practice of mailing our quarterly minutes and attachments as opposed to email or placing them on the website for easier access.

We determined we would send out one more mailing with a query to all members to see if they want snail mail, email, or website access. We will be posting minutes and other pertinent information on our website at www.nanguard.org (Retirees). Check us out.

Reminder, our NMRC meetings are held the second Wednesday of every month at 1 p.m. at the Spirit of 76 Armory. Anyone is welcome to attend.

■From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Mary Moss:

This year is already half way over. Tax time will be here before we know it.

This would be a good time to check and see how much you have had withheld year to date for taxes and see if you need to make an adjustment. You can get that information from MyPay, by calling DFAS or by calling me to view your account information via the DFAS program that I have access to.

The beginning of each year brings many callers and visitors who didn't have enough taxes withheld and now have to pay

in when doing tax returns. Even though I love talking and visiting with you all, I am sure that you would rather not talk or visit me and not have to pay in when tax time rolls around.

My contact number is (402) 309-7323. The DFAS contact number is 1-800-321-1080.

In my next article, I will give information on getting a MyPay account if you do not already have one. I hope that you all enjoy the rest of your summer. Enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

■National Guard retiree breakfast schedules:

Every month, retirees meet for breakfast to hear presenters, share stories and learn more about retirement. Locations are:

• **Lincoln:** Army National Guard retirees: First Monday of each month, 8 a.m., T&R Garden, 48th Street and Cornhusker Highway. Air National Guard retirees: Last Monday of each month, 8 a.m., The Pantry, 3939 N. 48th Street.

• **North Platte area retirees:** Second Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., Village Inn, North Platte, Neb.

If other groups meet, please contact Bill Nelson at (402) 309-7105 or william.nelson1@us.army.mil to publish the information.

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

■Link to important retiree information:

• **Retired Pay:** To check on your retired pay, go to <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>, you can also print your 1099 for tax purposes each year.

■Not-so-known benefits of TRICARE:

Here are several not-so-well-known benefits from TRICARE

• TRICARE beneficiaries can sign up and receive an explanation of benefits (EOB) electronically and eliminate the cost and clutter of paper EOBs

• Members of the Retired Reserve who are not yet 60 are able to purchase TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR) (www.tricare.mil/trr)

• There are no co-payments or cost-shares for the well-child benefit (www.tricare.mil/baby)

• Hospice care is a zero-deductible benefit. For more information, beneficiaries can contact their regional health care contractor or their TRICARE Area Office (www.tricare.mil/contactus). Beneficiaries can view a list of covered TRICARE services on TRICARE's website or contact their regional health care contractor for more information.

Questions? Contact 2nd Lt. Nick Curto, TRICARE manager, at (402) 309-1738 or Nicholas.curto@us.army.mil.

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Colonel
Anita K.W. Curington

Lieutenant Colonel
Ross N. Finley

Major
Kyle R. Matouch

Captain
Timothy M. Buskirk
Eric J. Sattelberg
James M. Seibert

First Lieutenant
Melanie A. Hemmingsen
Tyler E. Horning

Master Sergeant
Kyle D. Diefenbaugh

Sergeant First Class
Kelli J. Hatzenbuehler
John J. Ruden
Ethan B. Schreurs
Matthew D. Simms
Jason J. Winer

Staff Sergeant
Zeb R. Noyd
Jessica K. Pan
Joshua D. Starr
Jay M. Steadman
Michal C. Swanson
Kole W. Talkington

Sergeant
Christopher D. Anderson
Rodney M. Andrews
Gregory T. Butacan
Benjamin R. Chambers
Brenda J. Dutcher
Anna L. Ehlers
Michael A. Frakes
James D. Hart
Charles W. Hollingsworth
Kirk R. Jensen
John L. Monheiser
Sean P. Niekum
Andrew K. Roberts
Carley L. Sherard
Jeremy J. Sudbeck
Daniel J. Tenorio

Specialist
Celso Bernal
Nathan T. Clash
William R. Floe
David A. Halstead
Benjamin R. Henry II
Craig D. Hoppes
Lucas W.C. Hurlbert

James R. Johnson
Alayna J. Kechely
Peter K. Lass
Joshua D. Moldrup
Kate E. Myrtue
Ricky T. Parker
Michael D. Rager Jr.
Sean P. Reynolds
Clayton K. Shaw
Jerrod J. Silver
Britni J. Sullivan
Matthew T. Tenorio
Zoe L.N. Urtel

Private First Class
Creighton B. Booth
Erik J. Campbell
Marco A. Flores
Jeremy J. Foos
Ian C. Foster
Kagan K. Kirk
Austin T. Kucera
Caleb M. Larsen
Joshua A. Linder
Joseph T.D. Muren
Cody G. Pagel
Dustin T. Pennington
Zachary D. Peterson
Tyler D. Petty
Alexander L. Powell
Jessica A. Reicks
Arik J. Swartzfeger
Justin L. Taylor
Alexandre Tschampdiesing

Private Two
Daniel J. Cameron

Air National Guard
Colonel
Tami Thompson

Technical Sergeant
Lindsay M. Bustamante
Travis J. Dyer
Thomas Guilford

Staff Sergeant
Jesse D. Albrecht
Travis D. Carlson
Luciana C. Jarzynka

Senior Airman
Bryan A. Bach
Jessica L. Helmink
Arin E. Kudlacek
Beau L. Meier
Michael J. Morrison
Martin S. Oborny
Jared T. Stubbendeck

Airman
Danielle E. Boger

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Combat Action Badge
Sgt. 1st Class Ryan K. Faulkner
Sgt. 1st Class David R. Fink
Sgt. 1st Class Timothy S. James
Sgt. 1st Class Jennifer A. Luhr
Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Kozak
Staff Sgt. Jeffrey L. Meyers
Staff Sgt. Phillip J. Wemhoff
Sgt. Joshua A. Armon
Sgt. John M. Ferguson
Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Sgt. Whitney M. Ritter
Sgt. David J. Barrett
Spc. Robert J. Bell
Spc. Mario A. Chavez
Spc. Michael C. Jarvis
Spc. Jonathan L. Jerry
Spc. James R. Koch
Spc. Katie T. Lopez
Spc. Colton C. Magill
Spc. Jacob A. Martinez
Spc. Troy E. Parra
Spc. Zachary W. Spurgeon
Spc. Brandon L. Waltemath
Spc. Matthew D. Wetjen
Pfc. Sarah K. Byrne
Pfc. Robert A. Rasmussen

Army Commendation Medal

Maj. James M. Allen
First Lt. Daniel S. Claessens
First Lt. Andrew B. Iler
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Shawn P. Leckenby
Sgt. 1st Class Christofer J. Alt
Sgt. 1st Class Christopher H. Kidd
Sgt. 1st Class Jacob W. Robinson
Sgt. 1st Class Patrick S. Sitter
Sgt. 1st Class James C. Uhing
Staff Sgt. Andrew D. Arnold
Staff Sgt. Jason C. Brooks
Staff Sgt. Joseph J. Dunlap
Staff Sgt. Andrew J. Filipis
Staff Sgt. Corey A. Hackbart
Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Marcello
Staff Sgt. Nicholas C. Reis
Staff Sgt. Casey N. Sorensen
Sgt. Joshua A. Armon
Sgt. Randall W. Barnason
Sgt. Cody L. Barry
Sgt. Cody S. Carlson
Sgt. Shephen P. Dorcey
Sgt. Justin J. Eickmeier
Sgt. John M. Ferguson
Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Sgt. Michael J. Gillott
Sgt. Cody A. Graff
Sgt. Joshua C. Johnson
Sgt. Justin L. Modrell
Sgt. Christopher E. Moulton
Sgt. Whitney M. Ritter
Sgt. Jason E. Sautter
Sgt. Drew P. Scott

Sgt. Jay M. Steadman
Sgt. Jedediah J. Struck
Sgt. Michal C. Swanson
Sgt. Ray C. Underwood
Sgt. Timothy J. Vanlaningham
Spc. Taylor R. Ashcroft
Spc. Melissa N. Becci
Spc. Ethan C. Case
Spc. Christopher M. Casey
Spc. Mario A. Chavez
Spc. Manuel S. Molina
Spc. Travis M. Morrison
Spc. Brandon W. Rudloff
Spc. Zachary D. Saunders
Pfc. Jonathon M. Asbach
Pfc. Sarah K. Byrne
Pfc. William J. Seier

Army Achievement Medal

Sgt. Stephen P. Dorcey
Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Spc. David J. Barrett
Spc. Mario A. Chavez
Spc. Mark A. Marta
Spc. Jacob A. Martinez
Spc. Calab T.J. McLeod
Spc. Matthew J. Pawley
Spc. Joseph E. Pritchard
Spc. Narciso San Juan
Spc. Zachary W. Spurgeon
Pfc. Jonathan L. Jerry
Pfc. Robert A. Rasmussen

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jeffrey A. Husa
Master Sgt. Genine M. Hovick
Sgt. 1st Class Kristine A. Loeck
Sgt. 1st Class Mark A. Zimmerman
Staff Sgt. Timothy L. Vershaw
Sgt. Todd B. Walton

Air National Guard

Senior Master Sgt. Curtis S. Wiebe

TAPS

Army National Guard

Staff Sgt. Patrick Hamburger
Sgt. Robert Schlote
Sgt. Omar A. Jones

Nebraska Guard's first female general retires

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska Army National Guard's first female general officer was honored by the Nebraska adjutant general when he presented her with the federal and Nebraska National Guard legion of merit medals in recognition of her decades-long military career and service to the Nebraska Guard.

According to Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Roma Amundson, who capped her 33-year-long military career as the assistant adjutant general, Army, distinguished herself numerous times while serving as a public advocate of the Nebraska National Guard through her efforts to enhance leadership development, and through her work in developing a more diverse force.

"One of her legacies, I believe, is her willingness to go out and tell our stories in our communities," said Lyons, shortly before presenting Amundson with her medals before a formation of Joint Force Headquarters, Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen, April 30, "and also to spend time with our young enlisted Soldiers at places like the Warrior Leaders Course at Camp Ashland, the Basic Noncommissioned

Officer Course and the other NCOES courses."

"She has literally spoken to more than 3,000 of our young warriors about leadership, about taking the next step in their career, about stepping up and doing our duty for our state and nation," Lyons said. "She truly is an outstanding officer."

According to Amundson, her last day in the Army National Guard was a bittersweet moment.

"We all put the uniform on for the very first day. And then there is that day when we put on that uniform for the very last day," said Amundson. "And that day for me has arrived."

Amundson said that as she approached that last day, she thought about people she'd talked with about how retirement approaches so fast and how she leaves with memories of committed Soldiers willing to do their duty for the nations and communities.

"My life has been enriched by what I have experienced in the Guard," said Amundson, who said it was now time to drop the Soldier from her title of Citizen Soldier and become simply a citizen. "I have made wonderful friends both here in Nebraska and around the nation."

"It's been a privilege to serve with all of you."



Amundson

Shorttakes

Air Guardsmen at Offutt's 170th Group welcome new commander

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard's leading organization at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., conducted a change of command, July 9, as the unit said farewell to its second commander and welcomed a third.

Lt. Col. James "Bob" Stevenson, who had served as the commander of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Operations Group in Lincoln succeeded Col. Mark H. White as commander of the 170th Group during a ceremony held at the Air Force Weather Agency auditorium at Offutt Air Force Base. Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska Air National Guard assistant adjutant general-Air, officiated over the ceremony.

According to White, who assumed command of the 170th Group, which is part of Offutt's 55th Wing, in September 2007, less than two months after it gained group status, he is proud to have been a part of the organization's "amazing" team.

"Truly, being part of this great mission and this great team are what I'm most thankful for," said White, adding that the relatively small group made major accomplishments during its first few years of existence. These accomplishments included a mobilization rate that saw 40 percent of the unit deploying overseas in a given year, a number of individual national awards, successful inspections, recent mobilization for state flood support and an overall eagerness throughout the unit to contribute wherever possible.

"I would say that we have a really high thrust-to-weight-ratio," White said before adding: "Being the commander has been the heavy. Being part of this team... that's what

I'm really proud of."

White, who will be retiring from the Air National Guard in the near future, began his commissioned military career in 1988 when he graduated from Officer Training School after graduating from Purdue University with a bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering. He then attended specialized undergraduate navigator training where he graduated at the top of his class before being named the distinguished graduate of his Electronic Warfare Officer class.

During the course of his active Air Force career, White served as an electronic warfare officer on a B-52G Stratofortress, as an RC-135 RIVET JOINT instructor and evaluator training coordinator, and as an instructor at the U.S. Air Force Weapons School. From 1997-2000 he served as an instructor and assistant operations officer at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., before returning to the 55th Wing at Offutt Air Force Base to serve in the Advanced Programs and as the chief of 55th Wing Weapons and Tactics.

Following those assignments, White transferred to the Nebraska Air National Guard, serving as the 170th Operations Support Squadron commander and operations officer. He also served as the commander of the 763rd Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron, Southwest Asia.

White has accumulated more than 4,500 flying hours, which included combat and contingency operations as part of Southern Watch, Provide Comfort, Deny Flight, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

According to Stevenson, he is ready to take his place among the Nebraska Airmen currently serving within the 170th Group.

"There is a tremendous amount of skill and leadership here," said Stevenson, shortly after accepting the colors of the group from Bohac.

Stevenson said that along with learning more about the work that the 170th Group members do on a daily basis, he's also excited to be able to contribute to the overall 55th



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

New Commander: Lt. Col. James "Bob" Stevenson (right) accepts the colors of the 170th Group from Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, assistant adjutant general-Air, Nebraska Air National Guard, July 9.

Wing. "I'm really looking forward to being part of this unit's exciting mission."

Stevenson received his commission through Officer Training School in 1989 after graduating with a bachelor of Science degree from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. After earning his pilot's wings in 1990, he began his flying career as a first assignment instructor pilot in the T-37B at Vance Air Force Base, Calif. While at Vance, he also served as an undergraduate pilot training instructor, class commander and squadron executive officer.

Stevenson was reassigned to the 347th Composite Wing at Moody Air Force Base, Ga., in 1994 where he became a C-130 pilot.

He also served as a tactician, chief scheduler and mobility flight commander.

Stevenson joined the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1997, serving in a variety of roles including flight commander in the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, chief of training, chief of tactics, director of operations and squadron commander. His most current assignment was as the 155th Operations Group commander.

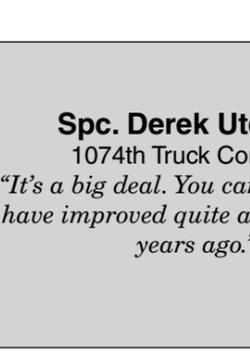
Stevenson is a command pilot with more than 4,000 flying hours, which includes combat and contingency operations as part of Allied Force, Southern Watch, Northern Watch, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Street Talk

“What does the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 mean to you?”



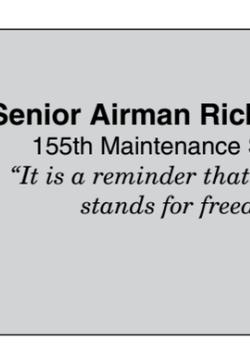
Pfc. Alex Fritz
1057th Truck Company
“The important things are to remember what we have lost, what we have done and how we have grown from it as the Army. It’s really a day of sorrow for me.”



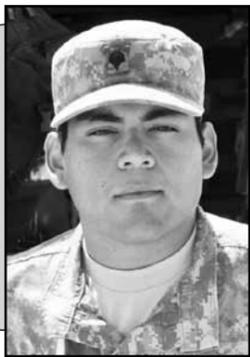
Spc. Derek Utemark
1074th Truck Company
“It’s a big deal. You can see how we have improved quite a bit from ten years ago.”



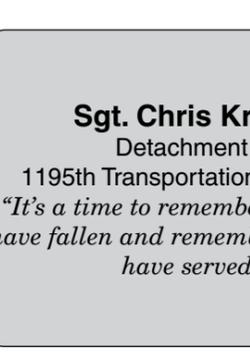
Spc. Jessica Montemayor
168th Quartermaster Battalion
“I’m honored to be in the military. But it’s really time to remember all that have passed since then.”



Senior Airman Richard Owen
155th Maintenance Squadron
“It is a reminder that our nation stands for freedom.”



Spc. Eric Servellon
Nebraska Medical Detachment
“It’s been a decade since American culture has really changed; I think it’s really been for the better.”



Sgt. Chris Kruger
Detachment 2,
1195th Transportation Company
“It’s a time to remember those that have fallen and remember those that have served.”

Telling our story

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, we will pause to reflect on the many contributions made by the Nebraska National Guard, our Airmen and Soldiers, our families and our communities.

Yet, we should not wait for national holidays or anniversaries of significant events to take the time to remember those contributions and the sacrifices, particularly when the ultimate sacrifice, has been made by our Soldiers and Airmen.

We need to tell our story often and with pride.

Our story is an amazing tapestry of courage and sacrifice, of commitment and patriotism, not only by our Airmen and Soldiers, but by our families, employers and communities.

How many of your neighbors know what you do for your state and nation? When do you take the time to tell our story? Have you taken the time to know our story?

In 2011 we had more than 1,200 Soldiers and Airmen deployed in service to our state and nation. Of those deployed, 84 percent are traditional Soldiers and Airmen who left behind families, civilian careers, educational opportunities and more.

We deployed 17 personnel and one aircraft within 48 hours of no-

Another Voice

Brigadier General

Daryl Bohac



“You are the rest of the story. Tell it. Connect our federal and state missions to your daily commitment and service and help your neighbors and friends more fully understand what we do. By continuing to tell our story in many places with many voices, we remain engaged with our communities, employers, families and each other.”

tification in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn, now Operation Ultimate Protector. We had more than 130 Soldiers and Airmen on state active duty in support of flood mitigation and infrastructure protection measures this year.

These facts are just part of the story.

At a recent proclamation ceremony at the State Capitol, Governor Heineman invited the audience to be present to witness homecoming ceremonies.

We have multiple opportunities to invite our friends and neighbors to

these ceremonies and I encourage you to do so.

Just as importantly, tell your story to your friends and neighbors. Reflect the pride each of you have for your service and our National Guard.

Don’t underestimate what you do, individually and collectively, to make our organization great.

You are the rest of the story. Tell it. Connect our federal and state missions to your daily commitment and service and help your neighbors and friends more fully understand what we do.

By continuing to tell our story in many places with many voices, we remain engaged with our communities, employers, families and each other.

Most importantly, we honor those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in order to preserve the rights and freedoms we all enjoy.

Editor’s Note: Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac is the deputy adjutant general for the Nebraska National Guard and the assistant adjutant general, Air, for the Nebraska Air National Guard.

Remembering Sept. 11, 2001, Part I

As hard as it is to comprehend, we will soon mark the 10th anniversary of the devastating Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

10 years. A decade. A chapter of our nation’s and our organization’s history that I doubt any of us who have lived through it will ever, ever forget.

When I was growing up, I often remember my mom talking about where she was when she heard the news that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated and how that moment has remained frozen in her memory.

I’ve also heard similar stories from World War II vets about how they learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and how this singular moment came to represent a profound change in their lives.

Prior to Sept. 11, 2001, the most defining moment for me was the day I heard that the Space Shuttle Challenger had exploded shortly after liftoff on Jan. 28, 1986. I was a high school senior at the time and I still have vivid memories of the explosion, which took place while I was in study hall. Those memories are still with me today.

The 9/11 attacks, however, were of such a magnitude and had such a far-ranging impact on so many, many people, that I can’t help but believe that they will continue to be one of the defining moments for this generation.

Sitting here as I write this column, I am surrounded by the memories of that day. The TVs where I watched as the second aircraft struck the World Trade Center, the Army National Guard aviation support facility where I stood with several members of the media as we waited for the last AH-1 Cobra helicopters leave Nebraska, with telephones to our ears as we heard that the first tower had collapsed, that the White House was being evacuated, that the Pentagon had been struck.

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency office where I sat with now -retired Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke as he conducted a telephone news conference with then-Governor Mike Johanns about the state’s initial efforts to protect critical in-

My Turn

Editor, Prairie Soldier

Kevin J. Hynes



rastructure. The telephones where I answered the first of hundreds and hundreds of telephone calls that would flood the public affairs office in the days and weeks that followed.

The gas station I drove by that afternoon where cars stood in a long line waiting to refuel based upon a panic that gas would suddenly become short in supply. The sound of the door to my house as I finally arrived home after what may have been the longest day of my professional life.

The most lasting memory, however, will always be that of my son, Thomas, and I placing our American flag into the flag holder by our door and then standing in our driveway and staring up at a strangely empty blue sky – a sky emptied of airplanes and their contrails as part of the first ever closure of American airspace in history – and thinking to myself that things had utterly changed.

My son Thomas was about 1-and-a-half that day. He is now 11.

Ten years. It just seems so hard to fathom. But then again, so do the changes that this organization – and each and every one of us for that matter – has undergone.

Even the numbers seem to defy all reason.

For the Nebraska Army National Guard, more than 6,000 Soldiers have mobilized and deployed for service around the globe since Sept. 11, 2001, putting their lives on hold, to serve their nation overseas. The impact upon our Guard’s Soldiers, their families, employers and the entire state community has been profound and even to this day cannot be adequately measured. And many of these Soldiers have deployed multiple times.

Sixteen Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers have received the Bronze Star with “Valor” device for the heroism they displayed while under fire, including the Nebraska National Guard’s first two women to receive the honor. Many others have

received such awards as the Purple Heart, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Combat Action Badge or the Combat Medics’ Badge for their service.

We’ve also said farewell to 14 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers

who died while mobilized for active duty in support of either Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom, the memories of whom will remain with this organization forever.

For the Nebraska Air National Guard, the numbers are equally impressive. Since Sept. 11, 2001, nearly 2,600 Airmen have been deployed around the world in support of an amazing array of missions. While the majority of these deployments have been for substantially shorter periods than those typically experienced by Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers, the time between these deployments has also been shorter, meaning that many of these Airmen have also deployed many different times.

What makes these numbers even more remarkable is the fact that the majority of the Nebraska Army and Air Guardsmen who are currently serving overseas or have just returned home from a deployment are actually recent enlistees, meaning that they joined our organization after watching 9/11 unfold from their high school or elementary school classrooms. They joined knowing that deployments weren’t just a possibility, they were a near certainty. Their impact on the organization has also been transformational.

Today, this state’s Guard is a different organization than it was 10 years ago. It’s a combat-proven, lean force that has proven itself capable of performing not only its national mission, but also its state mission simultaneously, just as we did this past summer during the historic flooding on the Missouri River.

The individual members of this organization are the ones who made that happen.

Someday, someone will come along and write a book about the first 10 years following Sept. 11, 2001. I hope that they will be equal to the task.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Boom! Runners begin the first steps of the 2011 KFOR/National Guard "Thunder Run" 5-kilometer race as Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac fires the ceremonial cannon from the Lincoln tarmac, Aug. 13.

2011 Thunder Run

Runners bring sounds of 'thunder' to Lincoln tarmac

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Since its inception several years ago, the annual KFOR/National Guard "Thunder Run" has gained quite a reputation, not the least of which due to the fact that the annual race has been held in a myriad of weather conditions ranging from hot and humid to windswept rains.

Few who competed in the Aug. 13 5-kilometer and 1-mile race were complaining this year though. That's because the races were held in almost picture-perfect conditions.

"It was a good day to run," said Logan Watley, a 24-year-old Lincoln runner who placed first in the tightly competitive 5-kilometer race. "It was definitely a lot cooler than it was last year."

This year a total of 412 runners completed the 5-kilometer race while a total of 134 competed in the 1-mile fun run.

According to Watley, who narrowly beat fellow Lincolnite Tom Nichols in the last half-mile of the race, the conditions definitely contributed to his winning time.

"I knew that there was going to be a group of about four or five of us who would run really well," said Watley, who finished the 3.2-mile race with a time of 16:01 – just eight seconds ahead of the runner-up competitor. "I think that helped me a lot because I figured if I could just hang up there with them, I would have a chance."

Taking first in the women's division was Amber Brandenburger, 25, of Lincoln. Brandenburger's time of 19:00 beat the second place finisher, Jeralyn Poe, 14, of Lincoln by 30 seconds.

She said that the Thunder Run was her first chance in months to compete in a 5-kilometer race after having spent much of the summer competing in 10-kilometer races.

"It was fun to run fast again," said Brandenburger, who said the shorter distance allowed her to concentrate on quickening her pace substantially. "It was fun to get up and go again."

This marked the first time that Brandenburger had competed in the Thunder Run. She said it won't be her last though.

"It was really fun," she said. "It plays with your mind a little bit because you can see (the turn around point), but it was still far away. But it was fun."

"I will definitely come back."

For complete results, check out the Lincoln Track Club's Website at www.lincolnrun.org/thunder/



Small Shoes, Big Stride: One of the youngest KFOR/National Guard "Thunder Run" competitors completes the final steps of the annual 1-mile fun run, Aug. 13, in Lincoln, Neb.

Air Guardsmen participate in opening ceremony for Cornhusker Games

By Master Sgt. Vern Moore
Staff Writer

The 95-degree hot and humid heat didn't deter twenty volunteers of the 155th Air Refueling Wing as they readied to unfurl the large U.S. flag during the 27th Annual Cornhusker State Games opening ceremonies held at Seacrest field in Lincoln on July 15.

The opening ceremonies are the showpiece of the Cornhusker State Games, featuring lively entertainment and Olympic-style pageantry.

The spirit of the Games filled the air as thousands of athletes of all ages marched into the stadium in the Parade of Athletes. Following the competitors, the Air Guard members were honored by the generous applause of thousands of standing spectators as they marched down the sideline just before performing the flag presentation.

"It gave me goose bumps when the crowd stood and clapped for us," said Staff Sgt. Robert Kozisek, from vehicle maintenance. "It was pretty cool."

This was Kozisek's first time volunteering for the flag detail at the games.

"I just came out to support the Air National Guard and carry the flag out," he said.

After the competitors' parade, skydivers landed in the stadium and then as the national anthem was sung the volunteers unfurled



Holding Strong: Staff Sgt. Robert Kozisek, 155th Air Refueling Wing, holds the American flag during the opening ceremonies of the 27th Annual Cornhusker State Games.

the nearly 50-foot-long American flag on the football field.

"Being involved with something like this is good-to represent the unit with our uniformed presence," said Brig. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, assistant adjutant general, Air. "It's a great opportunity for us because it gives us a chance to be part of the community that we live and work in each and every day."

"We helped sponsor the torch run along with the Army National Guard," Bohac said. "So we got all



Photos by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Old Glory: Twenty volunteers from the 155th Air Refueling Wing endure 95-degree heat as they carry the nearly 50-foot U.S. flag during the opening ceremonies of the 27th Annual Cornhusker State Games.

that exposure coming across the state and then it culminates here at the opening ceremony with the flag presentation. It helps represent the Air National Guard in a positive way."

The flag was then carried up the stadium end zone to a crane waiting

to hoist the flag high in the air for everyone to see.

Senior Airman Jacob Bowder, from vehicle maintenance, summed it up by saying, "I just think it's fun and I like coming out here and seeing all the athletes and carrying the flag."

The Cornhusker State Games is a statewide amateur sports festival for all Nebraskans. The purpose of the Games is to provide top-quality amateur competition for the more than 11,000 athletes from 86 counties who will compete in more than 40 sports.