

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Battle of Bismark: One Year Later



Courage Under Fire

Video Photo courtesy of the 1075th Transportation Company

Taking Charge: Spc. Jennifer Beck leans from her truck to talk to a wounded Sgt. Terrance Ricketts and Ron Hart, a civilian contract driver, during an ambush near Salmon Pak, Iraq on March 20, 2005.

Young Soldiers forced to grow up quickly

One year after Nebraska Army Guard truck convoy caught in deadly ambush near Salmon Pak, Iraq, Prairie Soldier pieces together what happened. **Second of three-part series begins on 12.**

Special Report



Scars Of War: Pfc. Richard DeLancey (left) holds a scarred helmet that was struck twice by bullets during the Battle of Bismark. Standing behind DeLancey is Spc. Michael Sharples.



Air Guardsmen practice survival skills in March

See story and photos on 3.

Retired general appointed to reserve panel

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A retired Nebraska Army National Guard brigadier general is part of a new 13-member independent Congressionally-appointed commission conducting a far-reaching review of the National Guard and U.S. Reserves.

Retired Brig. Gen. Larry Eckles was recently appointed to the national commission along with other senior retired military and Department of Defense leaders, and business executives to study some of the most important issues facing America's reserve forces

See COMMISSION on 8.

Joint headquarters staff tested during exercises

By Sgt. Jeff Kassal
Staff Writer

For the first time ever, Nebraska activated its Joint Task Force headquarters (JTF) for a March 16-17 homeland security exercise at the Lincoln Airpark.

The exercise, named Terrex 5.5, was under the command of Brig. Gen. Robert Bailey, and involved members of the Nebraska Air and Army National Guard.

See EXERCISE on 4.

Norfolk, Wayne troops tackling simultaneous missions

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

When the nearly 200 members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 189th Transportation Company from Norfolk and Wayne mobilized for Operation Iraqi Freedom late last year, the Soldiers said they were ready for anything the Army might hand them.

They got that and much

more.

Along with providing transportation support to American and coalition units serving in central and southern Iraq, unit members are also working as guntruck crews and members of a military transition team, helping train Iraqi transportation soldiers to eventually take over the logistical support mission in Iraq.

According to Capt. Darin Huss, company commander,

unit leaders have had their hands full trying to accomplish everything the unit's been handed since arriving in Iraq late last year.

"For the leadership, it has been a real challenge," said Huss, who served as a full-time Guard officer in Lincoln before deploying to Iraq. "Trying to organize, plan and execute six totally separate missions simultaneously each day, plus trying to meet the individual and per-

sonal needs of the Soldiers has really made us look outside the box."

Huss said before arriving in the Persian Gulf, unit members trained primarily on conducting transportation missions with their M-915 truck systems. However, as the situation has changed in Iraq, so too has the mission.

Now, said Huss, members of the unit are conducting daily

See TRUCKERS on 9.

New program allows Guardsmen to earn cash for helping unit recruiters find recruits

The Nebraska Army National Guard recently unveiled a new program allowing Guardsmen to earn \$2,000 for helping the state's recruiters enlist new Soldiers into the Nebraska Army National Guard. The program is called the National Guard Recruiting Assistance Program (GRAP).

Find out more about the National Guard Recruiting Assistance Program in the insert included in this edition of the Prairie Soldier.

Injured medic hoping to take something positive from near-death experience



Photo courtesy of the 313th Medical Company

Combat Medic: Spc. Rachelle Spors prepares for a mission in Iraq shortly before she was injured by a roadside bomb attack that also took the life of fellow Nebraska Army Guardsman Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson. Stories and photos of the 313th Medical Company's year-long deployment to Iraq begin on page 18.

By Sgt. Katie Loseke
Associate Editor

A Nebraska Army National Guardsman is recovering fully after her vehicle struck an improvised explosive device last July.

Spc. Rachelle Spors, a healthcare specialist with the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), sustained numerous injuries in the explosion that killed fellow Soldier, Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson.

"I never dreamed that anything like this could happen to me, but it did. I'm just trying to learn from it and take something positive out of the experience," said Spors.

See RECOVERING on 20.

Operation Iraqi Freedom Round III

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NEWS DIGEST

■ **Bush: Terrorists can't 'face our forces in battle,' so use IEDs**

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Terrorists in Iraq resort to using improvised explosive devices because they lack the ability to engage in conventional military operations, President Bush said March 13.

"After the terrorists were defeated in battles in Fallujah and Tal Afar, they saw they could not confront Iraqi or American forces in pitched battles and survive, and so they turned to IEDs, a weapon that allows them to attack from a safe distance without having to face our forces in battle," Bush said during a speech at George Washington University's Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Bush said a Defense Department organization called the IED Joint Center of Excellence was established to deal specifically with the IED issue in a three-pronged approach.

"The first part of our plan is targeting and eliminating the terrorists and bomb makers," he said. "Across Iraq, we're on the hunt for the enemy, capturing and killing the terrorists before they strike, uncovering and disarming their weapons before they go off and rooting out and destroying bomb-making cells so they can't produce more weapons."

The second part of the plan involves specialized training so U.S. troops can identify and clear IEDs before they explode. Nearly half of all IEDs found in Iraq are now disabled before they can be detonated, he said, and in the past 18 months, the casualty rate per IED attack has been reduced by 50 percent.

The third leg of the plan is to develop new technologies to defeat the IED threat.

■ **Army must change to remain relevant, general says**

TACOMA, Wash., (AFPS) – The U.S. Army is the greatest it's ever been, but to remain effective for the future, it must make changes, a top Army commander said March 11.

"As good as the Army is today, we will need a better one tomorrow," Army Gen. Dan K. McNeill, commander of U.S. Army Forces Command, said at the Pacific Northwest National Security Forum. "We will need it because the strategic landscape in which we operate is changing; it is becoming considerably more complex."

The U.S. no longer faces enemies with traditional armies like in the Cold War, but rather a network of insurgents employing irregular tactics and

have no regard for human dignity, McNeill said. The Army, along with the other services, is changing to more effectively fight these enemies and to be prepared for unforeseeable future threats, he said.

As the Army undergoes transformation, leaders must keep in mind four key ideas that bring the force together, McNeill said.

First, Army leadership remains committed to producing units that are trained and ready for the challenges they will face, he said. To do this, the Army has overcome years of under-funding and has changed the way it does business to ensure resources will always be available, he said.

Second, the Army recognizes that intellectual change precedes physical change, so the Army is changing the way it trains leaders to make them more versatile, McNeill said.

The third idea is that Soldiers' effectiveness depends on a national commitment to recruit, train and support them properly, McNeill said.

Lastly, as the Army transforms, leaders must remember where they started, McNeill said. At the beginning of the war in Iraq, many units were under-equipped or ill-prepared for deployments, especially reserve and National Guard units, he said. To fill these slots, the Army pulled people from other units, which created a domino effect in readiness, he said.

"We have to change to maintain this great Army as a relevant force tomorrow," he said. "To remain the preeminent land power on Earth, it is clear to all of us who have leadership responsibilities that we have to change."

■ **Air Force seeks new tanker**

WASHINGTON (AFPN) – The Air Force wants a new refueler aircraft, something commercially available now, which can be modified to replace the existing KC-135 Stratotanker fleet.

That testimony came from Air Force leaders associated with the tanker replacement program, Feb. 28 in front of the House Armed Services Committee subcommittee on projection forces.

Lt. Gen. Donald Hoffman, the military deputy for Air Force acquisition, told congressional members that his first choice would be to replace the service's fleet of aging KC-135s with a new airplane.

"It should be a new aircraft, a commercial derivative, and I think we ought to buy one kind," he said.

The general said he has no opinion on



Air Force photo by Master Sgt. James Biggerstaff

Mixing It Up In Afghanistan

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – Col. George R. Skuodas, commander of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Mission Support Group, mixes Pavement 15.0 for repairs to the Bagram Air Field runway recently. Skuodas is currently deployed to Afghanistan where he is serving as the 455th Expeditionary Mission Support Group commander

who should manufacture the plane, only that the new aircraft be the same as each other in both size and design.

Hoffman told congressional members his second choice for recapitalizing the tanker fleet would be to modernize the current KC-135 fleet, which involves converting existing KC-135E models to KC-135R models. But one problem with modernizing aircraft already owned by the Air Force is the rate of conversion.

Hoffman said the Air Force can af-

ford to convert about 15 aircraft a year to the R model. At that rate, the Air Force would be modernizing those aircraft for some 40 years. At the end of that cycle, some of the aircraft coming out of the modernization process would be nearly 80 years old.

Various estimates of the lifespan of the KC-135 project the retire date out as late as 2040, but as the aircraft get older, the Air Force discovers more things wrong with the aircraft.

Getting Dirty

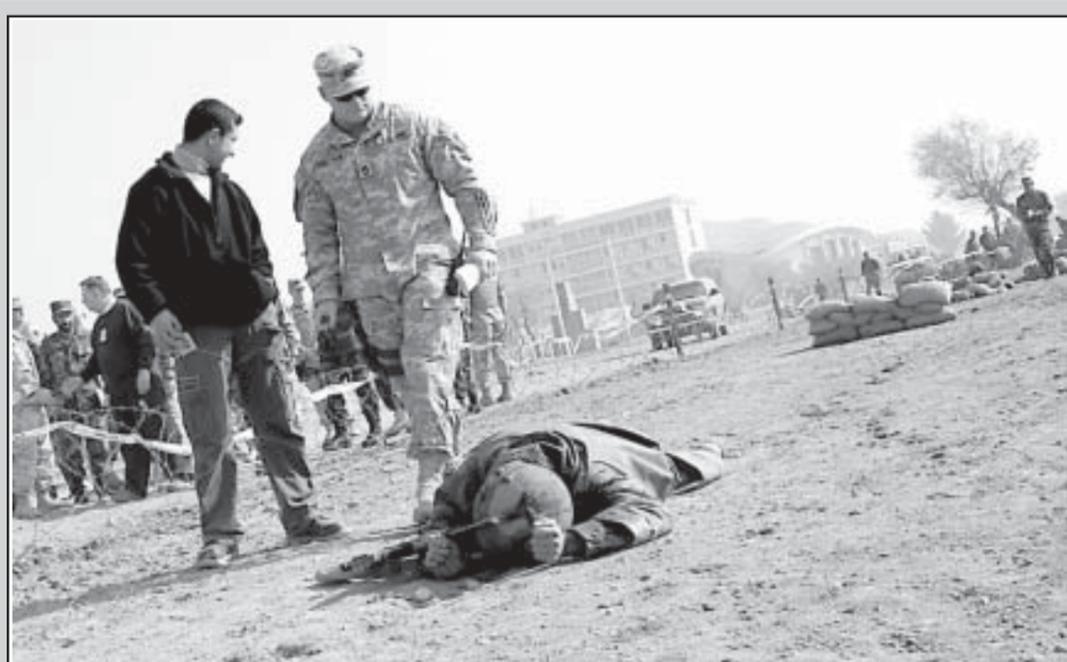


Photo courtesy of 1st Lt. Mark Ruiz

Hard Training: Master Sgt. Richard Cruickshank, Wahoo, watches as a new Afghan National Army soldier low crawls during end of cycle testing at the Kabul Military Training Center in Afghanistan. Cruickshank is currently serving with the Camp Ashland-based 209th Regional Training Institute in Afghanistan where members of the unit are helping train new members of the Afghan National Army. The unit has been in Afghanistan since last summer.

Prairie Soldier

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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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Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Lee Straube

What Does It Say? Master Sgt. Deb Hraban (left), Tech. Sgt. Suzanne Baden (Middle) and Staff Sgt. Penny Gray of the 155th Financial Management Office study an Airman's Manual while participating in the March Ability To Survive and Operate exercise.



Photo by Master Sgt. Alan Brown

Working In A Dangerous Environment: Senior Airman Audrey Kai and 2nd Lt. Amy Johnson (center) and members of the 155th Medical Group decontaminate an Airman during the Ability To Survive and Operate Exercise.



Photo by Master Sgt. Alan Brown

Where There's Smoke: A Nebraska Air National Guard fire fighter prepares to battle a simulated building fire.



Photo by Master Sgt. Alan Brown

Are You Okay? Tech. Sgt. Ronald Spaulding and Senior Airman Megan Dozler of the 155th Logistics Squadron practice giving first aid to new recruit Nick May.

Training to SURVIVE

■ Exercise gives Airmen chance to practice skills in contaminated environment

By 2nd Lt. Camara Minks
Staff Writer

Sirens blared and Nebraska Air Guardsmen could be seen running for cover.

Fortunately, it was all an exercise as members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing rehearsed an array of critical skills during the annual Ability to Survive and Operate (ATSO) exercise during the March drill. The purpose of the ATSO is to demonstrate war-time survivability and operability.

In other words, it helps Air Guard members know how to respond to chemical, nuclear or biological attacks during a war-

time mission.

The training is performed annually, but this year's training has even more importance. The 155th ARW will be inspected on how it performs these tasks in just over a year.

Tech. Sgt. Duane Eivins, Ceresco, was a crew chief on one of the Air Guard's firefighting engines that participated in the exercise. He said the ATSO was good training.

"It isn't easy," said Eivins. "There is a difference. You are being a Soldier and a firefighter at the same time. The extra equipment we have to wear makes everything twice as hard."

Firefighters wear their normal fire protective gear as well as the appropriate chemical warfare protective gear. The training Eivins' crew received during the exercise was particularly helpful for the new members on his team.

"We have a new guy on the crew who was our nozzleman. I was able to see how he's doing and make sure he's seeing the right things and doing things the right way," said Eivins. "It's a



Photo by Master Sgt. Alan Brown

Lifesaving Training: Senior Airman Rene Arriola checks the vital signs of a 'rescued' dummy he carried from a simulated building fire during the Ability To Survive and Operate exercise conducted by the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln.

mentoring position. I like that."

Senior Airmen Rene Arriola, a graduate of Bellevue East High School, participated in the ATSO for the first time as a qualified firefighter. He said the experience was critical to maintaining his military firefighting skills.

"I was on a search and rescue truck. Our job was to rescue a trapped victim in a building that was on fire," she said. "Since I don't do this full time, I can get rusty."

One new aspect to this year's ATSO exercise was the Base Attack and Recovery Training System or BARTS.

"It's a visual display of the installation's readiness status,"

said Maj. Chris Collins, ATSO coordinator. "It's used to track alarm conditions, damage, injury and casualty information on base."

Tech. Sgt. Bryon Eloge, 155th Communications Flight, was one of the individuals responsible for the initial implementation of BARTS.

"(BARTS) makes data much easier to get to and much more readily available since it's web-based," said Eloge. "People can access data from all computers on base."

The system also provides a messaging utility, similar to instant messaging, giving base officials the ability to post mes-

sages to all unit control centers.

"They (the UCC) can see that message and reply instead of being limited to only phones for communication."

Eloge said the system has increased unit members' ability to know what chemical gear to wear and what is happening on the rest of the base.

Members also practiced self-aid and buddy care during the exercise.

"When you're put in those positions you don't know what to do," said Senior Airman Megan Dozler, a traditional Guardsman from Albion, Neb. "I learned tricks to do when (treating) others."

Afghanistan veteran new Army Guard chief of staff

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A Nebraska Army National Guard helicopter pilot and returning combat veteran from Afghanistan has been named the new Nebraska Army National Guard chief of staff by Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, adjutant general of Nebraska.

Col. Thomas E. Schuurmans, 44, succeeds retiring Col. William "Steve" Rein, 56, as chief of staff of the Nebraska Army National Guard. Rein has served as chief of staff since June 2004.

As chief of staff Schuurmans will serve as the chief advisor and principal assistant to the Nebraska Adjutant General in all matters relating to the Nebraska Army National Guard. Schuurmans assumed the position in early March.

Schuurmans, the youngest son of Maxine and the late Virgil Schuurmans, was born in Tyndall, S.D. He graduated from Tyndall-Tabor High School in 1979 and went on to receive a bachelor of Arts degree in Human Relations from Doane College, a master of Science degree in Administration from Central Michigan University, and a masters degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army

War College.

Schuurmans' military career began in 1979 when he enlisted as a private into the South Dakota Army National Guard as a combat engineer assigned to Company D, 153rd Engineer Battalion. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in July 1981 at the South Dakota Military Academy and then initially served as a Medical Clearing Company platoon leader with the South Dakota Army National Guard.

Schuurmans transferred to the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1983 and has since held a number of different leadership assignments including section leader, maintenance officer, flight operations officer, company commander and battalion commander.

His full-time assignments have included medical recruiter, state training specialist, marksmanship coordinator, operations and training officer, executive officer of the 92d Troop Command, supervisory aircraft instructor pilot, director of Army Aviation and Safety,



Schuurmans



Rein

commander of the Army Aviation Support Facility, and deputy chief of staff for Operations.

Schuurmans is an Operation Desert Shield/Storm veteran, deploying with the Nebraska Army National Guard's 24th Medical Com-

pany (Air Ambulance) as a helicopter pilot, and an Operation Enduring Freedom veteran, deploying to Afghanistan where he commanded the 1st Infantry Brigade (Embedded Training Team) and the Regional Corps Advisory Group of the 203rd Corps.

Schuurmans and his wife, Beth, have two children, Kaitlin and Race. They reside in Lincoln.

Rein, 56, was born in Scottsbluff on June 13, 1949. He graduated from Scottsbluff Senior High School in 1967 and received a bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Engineering, a master of Science degree in BioSystems Engineering both from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a masters degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S.

Army War College.

Rein enlisted in the Nebraska National Guard in 1972. Following his commissioning, he was assigned to the 1-168th Field Artillery from 1976-1987, serving as a forward observer, fire support team chief, target acquisition platoon leader, commander of two batteries and battalion logistics officer.

He became a full-time National Guardsman in 1987 and since that time has served as the logistics officer for the 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized); recruiting and induction officer, State Area Command; executive officer, 67th Infantry Brigade (Mech.); commander of the 1-168th Quartermaster Petroleum and Supply Battalion and commander, 209th Regimental Training Institute.

Prior to becoming chief of staff, Rein served as joint director of Personnel for the Joint Forces Headquarters.

Rein was promoted to the rank of brigadier general (Nebraska) upon his retirement.

Rein's wife, Nancy, is the daughter of Dorothy Flint of Lyman, Neb. The Reins have two children, Eric and Heather and 5 grandchildren. He is the son of Bill and the late Mildred Rein of Scottsbluff, Neb. Bill Rein currently resides in Surprise, Ariz.

Air National Guard crew to perform Memorial Day flight over 72 cemeteries

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard is once again planning to fly on Memorial Day, honoring the state's fallen veterans at 72 Nebraska cemeteries and events.

According to Col. Rick Evans, commander of the Guard's 170th Operations Support Squadron, who planned this year's flight for the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing, the flyover list will include many different locations from last year's flight.

"75 percent of the locations planned for flyovers this year are different from last year," said Evans, one of four Nebraska Air National Guard volunteers who will fly this year's May 29 flight.

"We try to change our route each year to give more communities the opportunity to include a flyover in their ceremonies."

This year's route stretches from Dawson in the southeast to Jackson in the northeast and Litchfield in the central part of the state.

Among the large cemeteries planned for flyovers are Lincoln Wyuka and Lincoln Memorial, and Omaha Forest Lawn. The crew will also fly over special events at Ashland, Omaha's Memorial Park and Grand Island's Veterans Park.

The following is a complete, al-

phabetical list of the communities that will be saluted during the Memorial Day flight by a KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft. According to Evans, times are shown to the closest minute.

The flyover plan is subject to change or cancellation based upon weather and other operational factors.

The list can also be accessed at www.neguard.com.

Akron	10:52	Laurel	10:32
Allen	10:28	Lewiston	9:19
Ashland	9:54	Lincoln Memorial	11:45
Bancroft	10:16	Lincoln Wyuka	9:45
Beatrice	9:15	Litchfield	10:06
Bee	11:39	Loup City	11:04
Bellwood	11:33	Lyons	10:14
Blair	10:04	Martell	9:09
Cairo	11:14	Millard	9:58
Central City	11:22	Neligh	10:45
Chapman	11:19	North Loup	11:00
Clarks	11:25	Oakland	10:12
Coleridge	10:33	Omaha Forest Lawn	10:00
Columbus	11:31	Omaha Memorial Park	9:59
Concord	10:30	Pickrell	9:14
Cook	9:36	Plainview	10:41
Davey	9:50	Ravenna	11:10
David City	11:36	Raymond	9:48
Dawson	9:26	Silver Creek	11:27
Duncan	11:30	South Sioux City	10:23
Eagle	9:42	Spalding	10:54
Eden Valley	10:40	St Michael	11:12
Elgin	10:48	Steinauer	9:21
Emerald	11:43	Stella	9:28
Fort Calhoun	10:03	Sweetwater	11:09
Garland	11:40	Syracuse	9:38
Grand Island	11:17	Table Rock	9:23
Greeley	10:57	Tecumseh	9:34
Gretna	9:56	Telbasta	10:08
Hallam	9:10	Uehling	10:11
Havens	11:27	Virginia	9:18
Hazard	11:08	Walthill	10:18
Homer	10:21	Waterbury	10:27
Howe	9:29	Wausa	10:37
Humboldt	9:24	Winnebago	10:20
Jackson	10:25	Winslow	10:09

Boomers make history during flight

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

A KC-135R Stratotanker crewed entirely by boom operators took off recently from the National Guard air base in Lincoln.

To be more exact, the aircraft was actually piloted by fully trained KC-135R pilots who had previously served as boom operators. When combined with two current boom operators, the early February mission was historic in the fact that it was the first time a Nebraska Air Guard jet was crewed entirely by current and former boom operators.

Flying the mission were Capt. Randy Douglas, pilot, and 1st Lt. Matt Siemsen, co-pilot, who both served as enlisted boom operators prior to being commissioned and attending flight schools. According to Douglas, it's not an novel occurrence to see former boom operators go on to become pilots.

"Boom operators who become pilots are not uncommon and Nebraska has two pilots with two more presently in school," Douglas said.

Along with several years' previous experience as a boom operator, Douglas held his private pilots license and always had a passion for flying. Siemsen was a boomer for only about six months before the opportunity to attend flight school came up.

"I will be the first to say that I was lucky to have a slot open in flight school as fast as it did. Because of that I get some good natured comments about being a 'short timer' boom operator," said Siemsen.

Master Sgts. Mark Stocking and Matt Ellison were the actual boom operators for



Photo by David Nore

Historic Flight: (From left) Capt. Randy Douglas and 1st Lt. Matt Siemsen pose on the flight deck of a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker shortly before an early February flight. The flight marked the first time that a Nebraska Air Guard aircraft was crewed entirely by boomers. Both Siemsen and Douglas are former boom operators while Master Sgt. Mark Stocking and Matt Ellison served as the mission's actual assigned boom operators.

the flight. "We get the business end of the aircraft. But where else can you have two officers drive you to work?" asked Stocking.

More seriously he added "Being a boom operator is a great opportunity to fly. If you want to be a pilot it is good aviation experience. Randy (Douglas) comes from a strong aviation background with his degree and private pilot's license when he was a boom operator."

The differences of the crew check lists are definite, but the team work of each crew member is what makes for a strong crew according to Siemsen

"Once we get the engines started and into the flight, especially during air refueling. Then it becomes more of a coordinated effort. That is when we really become a crew."

EXERCISE continued from page 1.

According to Bailey, a combination of good cooperation and the right people made the exercise run very well.

"(The exercise) was a strong first step in the right direction for the Joint Task Force," said Bailey.

The premise of the exercise was a hypothetical terrorist chemical attack in which Nebraska county officials were at a conference in a Kearney hotel where some consumed food contaminated with salmonella

from the hotel salad bar. Later, the officials were also exposed to an airborne aerosol plague.

After becoming initially infected, the officials left the conference for their various Nebraska residences, causing the illnesses to spread.

That was the situation in which the exercise began. At that point, it was up to the JTF to supply victims throughout the state with medical supplies.

In a real world situation, Nebraska would request approxi-

mately \$50 million of medical supplies from a strategic national stockpile. The supplies would be brought by semi trucks and left at a central location for distribution to the areas needed.

For this training exercise, two semis dropped off replication containers at the Lincoln Airpark, where the containers were then transported to various Nebraska locations by members of the Air and Army Guard.

The mission of the JTF was

coordinating the distribution of the supplies as well as controlling the security of the reception sites.

Lt. Col. Randy Amundson, Nebraska National Guard Military Support Branch chief, said that while there were no major problems during the exercise, many valuable lessons were learned.

"Anytime you get people together for training exercises, it is always good preparation in case the real thing ever hap-

pens," said Amundson.

Terrex 5.5 was one of two major homeland defense exercises that took place in March. The other was executed in Salina, Kan., and called "Vigilant Guard." That exercise involved Guard members from Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas. The focus of "Vigilant Guard" was reacting to terrorist chemical attacks on farm animals.

Amundson said that exercise was a success also.

Forward Charge

After months of tough training Task Force Saber marches off to war

By Capt. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The largest contingent of Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to be deployed during war-time since World War II was officially bid farewell, March 16, during a rainy ceremony held at Camp Shelby, Miss.

Standing in a rainy formation with approximately 3,900 other Soldiers now assigned to the 1/34th Brigade Combat Team that soaked them and thousands of families, friends and dignitaries to the bone, the departure ceremony marked the official end of state-side training for around 300 Nebraska Army National Guardsmen assigned to the 1-167th Cavalry and 134th Infantry Detachment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

According to the commander of the Nebraska squadron, which has been joined by Soldiers belonging to the New Jersey Army Guard and the Individual Ready Reserve from Kansas, Minnesota and Kentucky, the Soldiers are ready for whatever their mission requires.

"After six months of training and the (Joint Readiness Training Center) rotations...we're ready to go. We're ready to get this on," said Lt. Col. Martin Apprich, commander of Task Force Saber, which has been reorganized from a traditional cavalry mission to one that now focuses on reconnaissance, intelligence gathering, and surveillance.

The Nebraska Soldiers were first mobilized to duty in early October 2005. Units from Lincoln, Fairbury, Beatrice, Crete, Fremont and Wahoo as well as Soldiers from other units across Nebraska were affected by the call-up.

Since then the Guardsmen have been training hard at Camp Shelby, Miss., and Fort Polk, La., to learn to use newly issued equipment, function as a team and successfully conduct missions in an extremely stressful environment, said Maj. Eric Teegerstrom, task force executive officer.

"The really big thing (we focused on) at Fort Polk, and it's really been the big thing for us all along, is the basic squad and platoon-level missions," said Teegerstrom. "That's really where most things in Iraq happen."

"We have done many troop-level and squadron-level missions, which is important because it gives everybody a real high level of confidence, but the focus has remained on the individual, squad and platoon levels because that's really where you're going to save Soldiers' lives and really have the most impact on the mission," Teegerstrom said.



Heading Out: Members of the 1-167th Cavalry Squadron and 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance) march in review during the drizzly send-off ceremony for the 1/34th Brigade Combat Team, March 16 at Camp Shelby, Miss.

That focus was especially put to the test when the task force deployed in February to the Joint Readiness Center at Fort Polk, La., for final validation training, said 1st Lt. Kyle Hildebrand, commander of the Crete-based 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance).

Hildebrand said that while at the JRTC, unit Soldiers focused on such things as surveillance and reconnaissance, including building and village searches in attempts to locate weapons caches.

Hildebrand said the training was particularly important for his unit, which has seen its ranks increased by Soldiers from several other different Nebraska Army Guard companies as well as approximately 25 Individual Ready Reserve Soldiers.

The mobilization for Operation Iraqi Freedom marks the third mobilization for the 1-167th Cavalry Squadron – second for the 134th LRSB – since 2000. Many members of the unit have already served in Kuwait and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

According to Teegerstrom, having a core-group of mobilization-savvy Soldiers serving in mid-level leadership roles was beneficial in getting the unit off on the right foot when training began.

"It's been helpful because those folks really have a big impact on the Soldiers' training," he said. "And that makes a big difference as far as getting out of the gate quickly."

Still, the training was any-



Patrolling Fort Polk: Members of the 1-167th Cavalry Squadron prepare to conduct a patrol during the unit's training at the Joint Readiness Training Center in February in preparation for a deployment to Iraq with the 1/34th Brigade Combat Team.

thing but easy. Sgt. 1st Class Ronald Spitsnogle, a platoon sergeant with Beatrice's Troop B, said his Soldiers were extremely busy during their months-long training, practicing a wide variety of skills including convoy operations and security, and forward operating base security.

Some Soldiers were even retrained as mortar crewmen.

Spitsnogle said the Fort Polk training, which at times seemed to be designed to make Soldiers fail, was particularly difficult and important.

"Fort Polk itself was pretty hard," he said. "Guys were getting hit pretty hard right and left."

"They set you up to fail just so you learn how to react in a really tough situation," Spitsnogle said. "The training up there is hopefully a lot harder than what we're actually going to run into once we get into country over there."

Now, he said, the Soldiers

simply want to get overseas and get started.

"Considering all of the training we've gone through, they're pretty antsy to go. They're glad it's over. We've gotten a lot of good training, (now) they just want to go," he said.

Hildebrand said that sentiment also existed in the 134th LRSB.

"The guys are anxious," he said. "They're ready to go do their job. They've been training to do this for so long, they just want to finally get over there and do it."

Hearing about it on the news all of the time, you're thinking about the game but never get to play...now they're going to go and do their job."

"The Soldiers are all ready to get out of Camp Shelby and get to their mission," said Teegerstrom. "After six months of mobilization, our clock is just now beginning."

In sending the Soldiers off, thousands of family members, friends and dignitaries representing the dozens of states involved in the deployment weathered a drizzly day to fill the grandstands in a massive show of support to the Soldiers.

Among the Nebraska family members watching the March proceedings were Judy Schultz and her two daughters, Danielle, 14, and Dayna, 10, of Kearney who had flown to Mississippi two days earlier to say farewell to husband and father, Sgt. 1st Class Doug Schultz.

"Pride," said Schultz as she attempted to describe her feel-

ing at the start of the ceremony. "I just feel really proud."

Also included in that show of support were Nebraska's Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy, Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke and Command Sgt. Maj. Tom Shunk.

"It could be worse," joked Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, keynote speaker during the Camp Shelby ceremony, "it could be snowing."

Pawlenty then spoke of his pride in addressing the huge formation of Soldiers representing more than 39 states.

"The Soldiers that we're honoring here today are living an important and meaningful life," said Pawlenty, quoting a popular book. "We live in challenging times. Ease and comfort don't build the world we want to live in. That takes hard work. It takes guts. It takes persistence and it takes character."

"And it takes people who are willing to walk the walk. It takes people who will raise their right hand and say, 'I'll serve,'" he added.

Pawlenty said that America not only owes a debt of gratitude to its military men and women, but also to the family members who stay behind.

"They have stepped forward and said, 'I'll go. I'll do it,'" he said. "They are role models for selfless service, sacrifice and they are our heroes."

"The burden is heavy, the task in front of them difficult. But we should remember that these men and women are strong and their shoulders are broad. These are not average people. We didn't just happen to go out and find these people on a street corner. These are individuals of enormous and extraordinary character, extraordinary dedication and extraordinary strength."

"These men and women are the greatest generation reborn."

Lt. Gen. Russell Honore, commander of the 1st United States Army agreed with that assessment, calling the 1/34th Brigade Combat Team "absolutely the best trained, the best equipped and the most modernized brigade in the 1st Army."

"This is what you get from a great volunteer Army that's ready to fight anytime, anywhere to protect the Constitution of the United States of America," said Honore.

According to Apprich, the members of Task Force Saber are ready to do just that.

"We're absolutely ready," he said. "It's kind of sad to leave families, but we've got to get our boots on the ground and our clocks clicking and get the heck out of here."

The unit has since deployed to Iraq.

Omaha battalion headquarters, western Nebraska truck company mobilizing

By Capt. Kevin Hynes

Editor

An Omaha-based Nebraska Army National Guard unit and a western Nebraska truck company have received word they will mobilize for Operation Iraqi Freedom in June and July, Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, adjutant general for Nebraska, announced in February.

The mobilization orders affect approximately 65 Soldiers assigned to

Omaha's Headquarters, 867th Quartermaster Petroleum Supply Battalion, and 150 Soldiers assigned to North Platte's 1074th Transportation Company, which has detachments in Sidney, Ogallala and Broken Bow.

Normally, HHD, 867th Quartermaster Battalion would be responsible for running fuel farms and fuel truck operations, however, Maj. Ken Boatman, battalion executive officer, said that battalion officials have been informed they will instead be responsible for providing

a higher headquarters for approximately 10 companies ranging in missions from ammunition and transportation to petroleum supply.

After mobilizing in mid-June, the unit will undergo several months of post-mobilization training at Camp Shelby, Miss., before finally deploying overseas into the Central Command area of operations. The unit's final destination is not being released at this time.

The 1074th Transportation Company is responsible for transporting dry and

refrigerated containerized cargo, general non-containerized cargo, bulk water and bulk petroleum products.

Following its mobilization in July, the Soldiers are scheduled to conduct training at Camp Shelby for their mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Following that training, the unit is expected to deploy into the Central Command area for a mission that is expected to last approximately one-year.

The unit's final destination is not being released at this time.

Helicopter unit takes wing again

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

A large audience of people gathered March 24 to once again wish farewell and good luck to Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers deploying for war.

This time the farewell was for members of the Lincoln-based Company C, 2-135th General Service Aviation Battalion. The unit deployed to Fort Hood, Texas, following the ceremony to begin preparation for a year-long deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

While this marked the first mobilization for this particular unit, most Soldiers assigned to the medical air ambulance unit are far from being rookies when it comes to deploying overseas.

According to Maj. Rick Gray, commander, the unit – recently reorganized from the 24th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) – has seen more than its share of overseas duty in its 46-year history.

Of the approximately 90 Soldiers assigned to the unit, 15 are combat veterans – two of whom have served in Army or Army National Guard aviation roles since the Vietnam War. Between 60 and 70 percent of the unit has been deployed at least once to such places as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, El Salvador, Egypt or New Orleans.

Gray said 26 unit Soldiers have also already been called to duty once for the Global War on Terrorism and have volunteered again to deploy with Co. C, 2-135th GSAB.

Despite having been deployed overseas multiple times since Operation Desert Shield/Storm in 1990, Gray said this mobilization will be the longest and perhaps the most difficult mission the unit has ever faced.

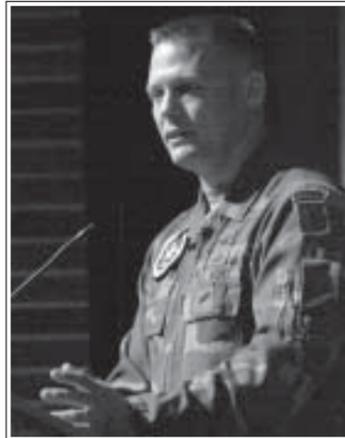
"We fly wherever and whenever we are called. It's a great job," said Gray, a veteran of the unit's deployment to Bosnia and the 110th Medical Battalion (Evacuation) deployment to Kuwait in 2003 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, while speaking during the send-off ceremony at Lincoln East High School.

Gray added: "Fortunately we have excellent Soldiers who have embraced the urgency of their life-saving mission."

Among the Soldiers assembled at Lincoln East High School was Sgt. James Nordman, a UH-60 Black Hawk crew chief, who quietly played with his two-year-old son James



Photos by Capt. Kevin Hynes
I'll Miss You Daddy: James Nordman Jr. holds a sign wishing his father, Sgt. James Nordman, luck during the send-off ceremony for Company C, 2-135th General Service Aviation Battalion, March 24.



Command Presence: Maj. Rick Gray, commander of Company C, 2-135th General Service Aviation Battalion, addresses the crowd during his unit's send-off ceremony, March 24.

Jr. while his wife, Tami, and daughter Hope Elizabeth sat next to him. Nordman said his mind was filled with emotions that afternoon.

"A lot of anticipation," said Nordman, a veteran of a previous deployment who will now be serving with Co. C, 2-135th GSAB for the first time. "I don't know

what I'm going to encounter when we get to Fort Hood and then Iraq. Nervousness about leaving my family... just a whole ball of feelings wrapped into one."

His wife said she also was having a hard time containing her emotions.

"It makes things real right now that he really is leaving," said Tami Nordman. "(I'm) just worried about the kids and how they're going to react."

"(The kids) have been ready for Daddy to go... I don't know if they really understand the whole situation," she said.

Following the ceremony, Co. C, 2-135th GSAB deployed to Fort Hood where they joined approximately 20 other Soldiers from other Nebraska detachments.

The first two of an expected 12 Nebraska-based helicopters departed for training at Fort Hood, March 25.

Gray said that the unit will undergo several months of training at a variety of posts before finally deploying into the Central Command area later this summer.

Thunderous applause greets Afghan trainers after year-long mission

By 2nd Lt. Russell Wilbanks
Staff Writer

Eighteen Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers walked through the doors of the Pentherman Armory and onto a packed drill floor to thunderous applause and cheering, Feb. 19, officially ending a year-long mission to Afghanistan.

The Soldiers were part of the first rotation of the Afghanistan National Army Embedded Training Team Task Force, commanded by Col. Thomas Schuurmans, to return to Nebraska.

Schuurmans said the Soldiers served in an extremely complicated mission in an extremely trying environment.

"We had a number of challenges that we had to overcome," said Schuurmans referring to the preparations the Soldiers had to make during their mobilization training.

"Very few of us had ever met each other or trained together before.

And we didn't have much time."

The Afghanistan National Army Embedded Team Task Force trained members of the country's new army on how to be professional officers and non-commissioned officers.

The Nebraskans were among a group of over 190 soldiers who represented 11 National Guard states and three Army Reserve divisions.

The Soldiers all returned wearing either the Combat Infantryman's Badge or the Combat Action Badge, meaning that they were engaged in combat operations in which they received direct enemy fire.

In greeting the friends and families of the returning Soldiers who had turned out to welcome the Guardsmen, Schuurmans said hometown support was key.

"What was truly important

to us for the success of our mission and for the success of all of the Soldiers deployed, is the support that we had back home. It truly makes a huge difference and we also recognize that certainly you sacrifice at least as much if not more than the Soldier does when we go away," said Schuurmans.

He echoed comments made by both Gov. Dave Heineman and Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, adjutant general for Nebraska, who also thanked the families during the welcome home ceremony for the sacrifices made during their Soldiers' deployment.

Schuurmans also told the returning Soldiers that they can be forever proud of the work they accomplished during their year-long mission.

"I want you to know that you really did make a difference, and the country of Afghanistan is better for you having served there," said Schuur-

mans.

"Not only did you train the Afghan National Army and improve their readiness, their ability to step up and provide for their own security, but in the process of doing that you also provided a better secure environment for the citizens of Afghanistan."

Lempke agreed, saying: "What you have accomplished in your year there, in working with the people, in helping to solidify the government, in helping to gain confidence in that these people can restore themselves to what they were before the Soviet invasion and other invasions, will be long remembered."

"You will be able to look back years from now and having played a role in what I think will be a great success story in that part of the world."



Photo by 2nd Lt. Russell Wilbanks
Glad To Have You Home: Sgt. Justin Vonloh is welcomed home after a year-long mission with a kiss from his aunt, retired Maj. Vicki Vonloh.

Study: Most reservists earn more when called-up

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Despite general perceptions that National Guardsmen and Reservists lose income when called to active duty, most actually earn more in uniform than as civilians, a new Rand Corp. study reveals.

The nonprofit research organization's study, commissioned by the Defense Department and released Jan. 25, shows that 72 percent of the more than 100,000 troops surveyed saw their earnings jump 25 percent when called to active duty. Their average pay hike amounted to about \$10,000 a year, Rand officials said.

However, Rand researchers also found that 28 percent of Reservists studied lost pay after being called to active duty. About one-fifth of the survey group lost

10 or more percent of their normal income.

DoD commissioned the study to determine the financial effect of mobilization and deployment on reserve component members.

Survey results and anecdotal reports had suggested that a large fraction of mobilized Guardsmen and Reservists lost income while serving on active duty, but DoD wanted empirical evidence, Stone said. The study shows that while some reserve component members lose money during mobilization and deployment, many are actually better off financially, said a DoD Reserve Affairs spokesperson.

"Our findings contradict the prevailing belief that most Reservists lose pay when called to active duty," said Jacob Klerman, a Rand senior economist and lead

author of the study. "But there is a group of reservists who experience a drop in income when activated."

Rand researchers based their findings on a review of pay records of more than 110,000 Army and Air Force reservists mobilized in 2001 and 2002.

The new study found that average earnings increase and the percentage of reservists who experience earnings losses drops the longer reserve-component members serve. For example, reservists who served for 270 or more days in a year saw their earnings jump by an average of 44 percent over normal pay, the study showed. However, about 17 percent of Reservists who served on active duty for a similar duration lost 10 or more percent of their normal wages.



Photo by Capt. Kevin Hynes

Sending sweet tastes of home

Members of Lincoln's Girl Scout Troop 178 work together to prepare boxes of Girl Scout cookies for shipment to Soldiers serving in Iraq. The girls prepared approximately 150 boxes of Girl Scout cookies, Kool-Aid and hand-written letters they sent to Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers at Lincoln's Transcript International, which donated the cost of the shipping expenses for the effort.



Photos by Capt. Kevin Hynes

Rolling Along: A group of civilians, played by U.S. Army Reservists, attempt to slow down a convoy of Hum-Vees during the 126th Chemical Battalion's March annual training at the Francis Greenleaf Training Site in Hastings.

Back to School

■ Chemical battalion Soldiers train for new mission during annual training

By Capt. Kevin Hynes

Editor

For eight days in mid-March, members of the 126th Chemical Battalion descended on Hastings' Francis Greenleaf Training Site to begin in-depth training for a new mission of providing armed escorts to convoys operating in a combat zone.

While many units may have found such a situation extremely stressful, the Soldiers of the 126th Chem. Bn., seemed to take the situation in stride. That's what happens when an organization spends the better part of the last decade constantly training for new missions.

"Just a few drills ago we were looking to be truck drivers. We'd even started training to go on the truck driving missions," said 1st Lt. Vincent T. Dvorak, commander of O'Neill's 755th Chemical Reconnaissance and Decontamination Company. "Around the first of the year, they shifted that mission...they wanted us to learn how to conduct convoy security."

"The troops - not just O'Neill - are extremely motivated," Dvorak added. "It seems like any kind of mission you put in front of them, they just all come together to get the job done."

Formed from several infantry, signal and cavalry units that were reorganized in the late 1990s and early 2000s as the 67th Infantry Brigade transformed into an area support group, battalion Soldiers have had plenty of practice rallying around new missions over the past few years.

First, battalion Soldiers had to learn how to be chemical reconnaissance and decontamination troops. Then, following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, battalion Soldiers were retrained to provide security at several Nebraska airports. In 2003, Soldiers again were retrained, this time to help beef up security at Offutt Air Force Base and the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln.

Now, they're retraining again.

"We training for a potential mission of armed escort," said Capt. Martin Neal, commander of Omaha's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 126th Chem. Bn.

"But, even if that mission doesn't happen, this is still important training. The Army has come out and said that, in light of the challenges units are currently encountering overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan, this is training that all units, no matter what they do, must now conduct on an annual basis."

Neal said 146 Soldiers participated in the March 11-18 training, which focused on convoy security, fixed site security and drivers training. Soldiers also



Hey GI, Got Any Food? A civilian attempts to disrupt a 126th Chemical Battalion convoy commander's communication to the rest of his convoy during a training exercise held near Hastings. The scenario required the convoy commander to coordinate his convoy's operations after his Hum-Vee was hit by a roadside bomb.



Roadside Classroom: Capt. Brian Scales, U.S. Army Reserve, conducts a class for Soldiers on the side of a road using rocks and a stick to make his points.

participated in mounted marksmanship, mechanic and combat life saver training during the eight-day exercise.

Supporting the training were members of the Nebraska Guard's 1-167th Cavalry Squadron, Medical Command and the 1-134th Aviation Battalion, and Army Reserve Soldiers from Fort Riley, Kan.'s Training Support Battalion, 75th Training Division.

According to the Army Guard Soldiers involved, the training was extremely beneficial.

"Its excellent training," said Dvorak as he watched a platoon negotiate through a winding convoy training lane. "There are a lot of different tasks that we're training on. We're training for a possible mobilization in the future."

"With the events that are going on around the world, we're looking at different things...we're just trying to get our troops ready in the event that they could mobilized someday," he said.

Probably one of the most difficult aspects of the training occurred when members of the battalion were required to successfully escort a convoy along a route across the training site. In watching his Soldiers make several mistakes while attempting to move a vehicle "disabled" by an improvised explosive de-

vice as civilians pounded on their Hum-Vee windows pleading for food and water, or struggling over whether to engage a sniper who shot at the convoy or to continuing moving on, Dvorak said the unit still has a way to go.

Yet, he's confident the Soldiers have the right mindset to successfully tackle the challenge.

"(The Soldiers' skills have) been leaps and bounds forward in just eight days."

One of the skills that the Soldiers need to refine further, said Capt. Brian Scales of the 75th Training Div. who served as a convoy evaluator during the training, is simply learning how to drive and operate as a team while convoying along potentially dangerous roads.

"You own the road," he told members of the 3rd Platoon - a collection of Soldiers from several of the battalion's units. "Drive like you stole the damn thing."

"What you're doing is extremely complicated and difficult," he later told the Soldiers during an after action review. "And the insurgents are constantly watching us, changing their tactics and making it even more difficult."

"You've got to learn to operate and communicate as a team. You've got to do a lot more rehearsing and battle drills," he added. "The good news is, you've still got time."

Later, the platoon's sergeant said despite the mistakes he was confident that his Soldiers would quickly pick up the nuances of successfully escorting a convoy. "They're cramming a lot of info in this timeframe," said Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Meyers who works as a security guard at a power plant in civilian life. "We still have a lot of battle drills and rehearsals to do before we get better at it."

"We've been staying up late doing rock drills and thinking up scenarios that could happen and how we would deal with it," he said.

"Right now, we're brand new at this, so we're still in the learning stage," said Spc. Tara Grof, a combat life saver with the 173rd Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Reconnaissance Company from Nebraska City. "I am confident in our leadership and our ability to do a lot better than we are."

Grof, a Tecumseh native who works as a dental assistant in Lincoln, said the key to doing well is trusting first instincts.

"Your first reaction is basically your most important reaction," she said. "That's kind of what we're learning here today: what our first reaction should be if something happens."

New Guard, Reserve facilities taking form

■ Design work begins on new Hastings, Kearney readiness centers

By Lt. Col. Bob Vrana

State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard will receive approximately \$15 million from the federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Act for the construction of new facilities in Kearney and Hastings, Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, Nebraska adjutant general, announced April 4.

Design work was scheduled to begin this month with construction anticipated to begin in late spring 2007.

The money will be used to expand the existing Kearney armory and build a new facility at the Guard's Greenleaf Training Site east of Hastings.

The construction will result in improved facilities and will ultimately save money for the Department of Defense by consolidating National Guard and Army Reserve facilities, and in the case of Hastings, also co-locating several Guard units.

The Kearney facility will be enlarged to accommodate the Army Reserve's Detachment 1, 295th Ordnance Company, which is currently located in a separate Reserve Center in Kearney.

Guard units currently operating out of the Kearney facility are the 734th Transportation Battalion and the 1618th Transportation Company.

The 25,000 square foot addition will cost approximately \$4 million.

The Greenleaf Training Site facility will be a combined Armed Forces Reserve Center for Guard units currently located in Hastings, Grand Island and Crete along with an Army Reserve unit from Hastings. The approximately \$11 million, 75,000 square foot facility will house the Guard's A Troop, 1-167th Cavalry; the 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance); and the Army Reserve's Headquarters, 295th Ordnance Company.

Construction on both projects is expected to take approximately 12-18 months.

Following the construction, the Hastings and Crete Guard armories and the Hastings and Kearney Reserve centers will be closed. Grand Island's Guard armory, however, will remain open.

Lempke said the new facilities will benefit the Guard in several ways.

"Many of our armories in Nebraska need modernization and this will provide for that. We're also looking forward to working with the Army Reserve; the shared facilities will help improve both the integration of the services and joint operations."

The 2005 BRAC process was authorized by Congress to eliminate excess physical capacity from the Department of Defense.

BRAC's primary objective is to realign DoD base structure to meet post-Cold War force structure and implement opportunities for greater cooperation among the services.

Orphanage Visit: Afghan boys line up outside an orphanage near Kabul, Afghanistan, during a Dec. 23 visit by members of the Theater Assistance Group to distribute clothes, health items, school supplies and toys.



Photo by Master Sgt. Robert Morgan

From their Hearts

Nebraska Army National Guardsmen help deliver gifts to Afghan villages

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

When members of the 209th Regional Training Institute deployed to Afghanistan last summer, the Camp Ashland-based training organization Soldiers knew that their mission to Afghanistan was critical in helping train the nation's newly forming Army.

What the Soldiers probably didn't know, however, was that their year-long mission to Kabul, Afghanistan, would also give them the opportunity to help out some of the war-torn country's most needy citizens.

According to Master Sgt. Robert Morgan, a long-time Camp Ashland instructor and training sergeant, the Soldiers have conducted more than a dozen humanitarian support visits to local Afghanistan orphanages, schools and impoverished villages to distribute clothes, shoes, health supplies and toys since arriving in Afghanistan.

Morgan said the effort is extremely important in helping rebuild Afghanistan into a self-sufficient nation.

"I've lost track of the number of school, orphanage and village visits I've made," said Morgan during an e-mail interview. "Because we deal with children, both boys and girls, who are the fu-

ture of this nation, most of us feel that we are doing more long-term good with visits like this than through our 'regular' jobs."

"Although we have made great strides in training their Army, there also has to be social and economic development in the country for it to survive," he said.

"That is where we hope the children we have come in contact with comes in to play. Hopefully they have a very positive relationship with an American Soldier and can start looking to a future that is built together."

Among the things distributed at the different sites have been shoes and clothes, soccer balls and kites, toothbrushes and toothpaste, even stuffed animals.

According to 1st Lt. Mark Ruiz, Theater Assistance Group public affairs officer, members of the Nebraska Family Readiness Group recently sent more than 2,000 pounds of supplies to Afghanistan. The donation was coordinated by Staff Sgt. Christina Howe with help from Heidi Hergott, Autumn Sterns, Maj. Drey Ihm and Brian Howe during their January group meeting.

"It was quite a large project and we were not able to finish that night," Howe was quoted as saying in a recent edition of the TAG newsletter.



Photo courtesy of 1st Lt. Mark Ruiz

Winter Clothes: Command Sgt. Maj. David Hauschel helps a young Afghan child find the perfect hat during a humanitarian assistance effort Feb. 17 at the tiny village of Katah Kheyli, Afghanistan.



Photo courtesy of 1st Lt. Mark Ruiz

Gift From A Friend: Master Sgt. Robert Morgan hands a shirt and hat to a tiny Afghan boy, Feb. 17. Morgan said the shy boy, who had to be coaxed to receive a present, quickly warmed up to him afterward.

"So the following day some of the (Camp Ashland) instructors came over to the auditorium where the boxes were being stored and helped to finish packing and labeling them."

Some of the items from that Nebraska donation were distributed on Feb. 17 at the tiny village of Katah Kheyli, located approximately 10 kilometers from the Kabul-based camp where the majority of the Nebraska Army Guardsmen are currently serving. Other donations came from such places as an Arkansas Methodist church and a non-profit organization called "Spirit of America."

Among the other items dis-

tributed were some of the more than 400 athletic balls donated last summer by the Knights of Columbus through the University of Nebraska-Omaha Center for Afghan Study in coordination with the Nebraska National Guard.

Morgan said that before the Soldiers could distribute the

items at the village, they first had to get permission from the Mullack - or village elder - to set up in the village and also to get an idea of how many people lived in the community and the breakdown by age and gender.

After setting up the distribution point and posting American and Afghan Army Soldiers around the area to provide security, Morgan said groups of Afghans then funneled into the distribution point.

"This was a rural village and very conservative," said Morgan, adding that boys and girls were kept segregated throughout the process. "The women weren't allowed into the distri-

bution site, so either their husbands or family members picked out things for them."

Along with toys and the athletic balls, perhaps the most popular items distributed, said Morgan, were shoes.

"We were very fortunate to have a lot of pairs of shoes," said Morgan in an e-mail home to his friends and family. "Shoes are very much in need here."

Also participating in the Feb. 17 effort from Nebraska were Command Sgt. Maj. David Hauschel and Cpl. Aaron Bush. Other Guardsmen have also been very active in the continuing effort, said Morgan, including Maj. Marty Riley, Maj. Brennan Heelan, Master Sgt. Boyd Navratil, Master Sgt. Robert Cruickshank and Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Hergott.

"All of us really enjoy the work and especially the visits with the children," said Morgan. "Almost all of the time spent on either preparing or delivering is on 'off duty' time, but all are happy to make the 'sacrifice.'"

Morgan said Afghans seem to appreciate the gifts.

"The Afghans are very grateful," said Morgan.

"Most have very little of anything - no running water, no electricity, usually no shoes or just sandals."

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today.

According to Eckles, the assistant commander of the 35th Infantry Division before retiring in 2001, he never imagined that he would one day sit on a commission conducting "the most comprehensive study of the reserve components since World War II."

"I was very humbled by the opportunity," said Eckles, who served as the full-time Nebraska Army National Guard chief of staff before taking a position with state government in 1999.

Eckles was appointed to the commission by Sen. Carl Durbin (D-Illinois) after being recommended by Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska. Retired Marine Maj. Gen. Arnold Punaro chairs the commission.

Congress formed the commis-

sion as part of the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act.

Eckles said the commission has been charged with reviewing such things as roles and missions, benefits, readiness training and equipment, requirements and organization, homeland security and homeland defense, mobilization and demobilization, and an overall funding analysis.

The commission will also examine the relationship between the active and reserve components. Guardsmen are increasingly serving overseas but are also the troops that governors rely upon to handle natural or manmade disasters.

Guardsmen from around the country, for example, converged on the Gulf Coast to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Reserve-component troops are "forward deployed" in communities all over the United States, Punaro told the American Forces Press Service, meaning they are

already in the areas where they could be needed.

Eckles said the study is probably long-overdue.

"Since World War II, we've been shaped by numerous laws and policies," he said. "But during this entire period, no formal assessment has focused on (the reserves), their organization, their structure, their roles, missions and those types of things."

According to Eckles, the commission, which first met late last year, held its first hearings in March during which 12 Congressional leaders, all of the service vice chiefs, Defense Department officials and subject matter experts from several East Coast "think tanks" testified on the current state of the reserves. Additional hearings will be held approximately every other month during the course of the one-year study.

Eckles said he expects testi-

mony to come from senior governmental and military leadership down to individual service members, their spouses, even their children.

To help reach those particular "stakeholders," Eckles said the commission sent out hundreds of letters to military organizations, family support groups and local and state governments asking for comments and concerns.

A website has also been set up, allowing people to submit questions and concerns as well as read current testimonials and the commission's work at www.cngr.gov.

Eckles said even though the panel has just begun its work, he's already sensed the magnitude of the task that lies ahead.

"It's a huge puzzle," he said. "I call it a large elephant and it's going to be hard to eat."

"That's why, as we work, we need to drill down on some very important fundamentals."

Chief among those fundamentals, he said, is the reexamination of the changing mission of the Guard and Reserves.

"The Reserve forces are structured under a Cold War Total Force package," Eckles said. "And they were looked at for all those years as strategic reserves."

"Now, the Pentagon and everybody is referring to the Guard and Reserves as an operational reserve, meaning you'd better be ready right now because we may need you. And that's precisely what has happened since 9-11," he said. "Strategies now have to change to fit this new model. The laws that govern the Reserve Components were all crafted a long time ago and dealt with the strategic reserve type of force."

A final report is due to Congress in June 2007. Eckles said the commission's goal is to provide the Congress with "camera-ready" legislative recommendations.



Eckles



On Patrol: A 189th Transportation Company Soldier mans the turret of his armored Hum-Vee guntruck during a convoy through the tiny Iraqi town of Shimely, south of Baghdad near Talil Air Base.

Photos courtesy Capt. Darin Huss



Big Red Pride: A bright red Nebraska 'N' marks the sidewalk leading to the 189th Transportation Company operations center. The sign next to it reads: "Do Not Step On That Red N Or You Owe The Huskers 25."

TRUCKERS continued from page 1.

line haul missions with Palletized Load System trucks – a huge, self-loading truck system used for hauling a wide array of containerized and non-containerized cargo – as well as providing guntruck support to convoys moving across Iraq.

At the same time, other unit members are working alongside Iraqi Soldiers assigned to the 2-4th Motor Transportation Regiment, teaching and mentoring them in how to "properly and safely run convoy operations so that they can supply their own people with basic life support and develop an inter-structural supply system that will ensure stronger and more economical government."

"The Soldiers have really stood up, taken the ball and ran with it," said Huss in an e-mail interview.

"We have Soldiers who now live on an Iraqi base with Iraqi Soldiers and work solely with the Iraqi Army," Huss said.

"They have had to overcome so much diversity – cultural, religious, language, equipment barriers and a new set of rules. But, because of their hard work and dedication and a never fail attitude, these Soldiers have single-handedly made a huge progress in the Iraqi Army (and) government sustaining operations on their own...which we know is the ultimate goal for us to come home."

In a late January interview, Huss said the unit had Soldiers stationed at Al Asad Airfield located northwest of Baghdad at Ar Ramadi; at An Numaniyah southeast of Baghdad on the Tigris River; and at Talil Air Base in southern Iraq near An Nasariyah.

No matter where they're stationed at, said Huss, the Soldiers are extremely busy.

"Most of our missions are what we refer to as 'turn and burn,'" Huss said. "They com-

plete a mission, get 24 hours off and are immediately back on the road for another week."

"Because of the aggressive (operational tempo), we have been a little concerned with our Soldiers' welfare. (We've) been watching them really close, but again our Soldiers completely surprise us. They are loving what they do and love how busy they are. They say that it makes the time go faster and 'That is why we came over here, to do a job and to make a difference.'"

"How can you argue with that?" Huss said, adding that the Soldiers stationed at Talil recently recorded more than 650,000 Combat Logistical Patrol miles in a month-and-a-half.

One of those Soldiers who have been extremely busy is Spc. Katie Klemme, a 19-year-old truck driver from Wakefield. According to Klemme, the mission is constantly changing and always challenging.

"There are no typical days in Iraq," said Klemme, a college student prior to the deployment. "They are always different."

"I have learned a lot about my job as a (truck driver) and definitely learned a lot about Iraq and the Iraqi people, their way of life and how they react to us being over here," she said.

Klemme said that despite being "very well prepared" during the unit's two-months of post-mobilization training, she was still surprised at what she found once she arrived in Iraq.

"I don't really know what I expected," she said, adding that she's seen "a lot of the stuff they don't put on TV."

"Everything changes so fast over here... you don't know what to expect from one day to the next."

For those involved in the Iraqi training program, the mission has been both a challenging and rewarding experi-

ence. "I never expected to be training the Iraqis," said 2nd Lt. Jeremy K. Smith, a Lexington, Neb., native now serving as the officer-in-charge of the nine-person MTT at Al Asad, "but when I heard that this is what the mission was, I was excited."

"I am glad I have a chance to work directly with the Iraqis and get to know their culture."

Prior to mobilizing, Smith said that he worked for Eaton Corp. in Kearney. Now, he's sharing a hut with nine other Nebraska Soldiers, living and working closely with the Iraqi Soldiers they're training. It's been a learning experience on both sides, said Smith.

"We are learning a different culture and understanding their traditions," he said. "The Iraqi people help us understand them and why they do some of the things they do."

Other Nebraska Soldiers serving as trainers echoed Smith's comments.

"I am learning a lot about the Iraqi people and that they are not all bad people," said Staff Sgt. Rod S. Planner, a 33-year-old Pierce, Neb., native who worked as a production worker at the Goodyear hose plant in Norfolk before deploying. Now he's a senior advisor for the 2nd Iraqi Army Transportation Company. "They want to be a free nation and make their choices, too."

"I didn't know what to expect, but now that I have been working with (the Iraqis) for a little over two months, it is one of the most enjoyable things I could have done," said Sgt. Tyler D. Nixon, Laurel, who worked as a lineman for Nebraska Public Power District before being called up.

"In the past two months, I have gone on convoys, talked, ate and done many other things with the Iraqi soldiers. I have



International Assistance: 2nd Lt. Jeremy Smith (center) meets with his counterparts from the Iraqi Army's 2nd Transportation Company. Smith, a native of Lexington, Neb., is currently serving as the officer-in-charge of a nine-person Military Transition Team from the 189th Transportation Company currently working with members of the Iraqi Army at Al Asad Airfield, northwest of Baghdad.

found that they are very interesting and do enjoy us being here."

Just communicating takes work said Nixon.

"We do not speak the same language, so you can not just run up to an Iraqi soldier and start a conversation," he said. "You must find an interpreter."

"We were given books to help learn phrases. So lately it has been more enjoyable because we try to figure out what they are saying and they try to figure out what we're saying without using the interpreter."

Huss said the skills the Nebraska National Guardsmen brought with them to Iraq from their civilian careers in Nebraska, has greatly helped. As a result Guardsmen from throughout the United States have earned the respect of not only the Iraqis, but also of the other branches of the American armed forces.

"The biggest thing that the Guard has brought to this mission is teamwork," said Huss. "Guard units are constantly praised for their ability to do the impossible and that has a

lot to do with the fact that the Guard is family."

Smith agreed.

"The National Guard brings many things for the mission we are doing here," said Smith. "Most (National Guardsmen) have college degrees or are in college, so they bring many different trades and skills to the field. Also, (many of these Soldiers) have grown up together, so there is a great team cohesion that makes working with them fun."

Another aspect of the unit's success has been the support the company has received from the Norfolk and Wayne communities, said Huss.

"Unlike the active component that is totally made up of individuals, we have an entire community that is backing and supporting us. (That) is very evident when it comes to the troop morale, discipline and work ethics," he said.

"No matter what we have needed to accomplish the mission, if the active component couldn't get it for us, the state of Nebraska or our Family Readiness Group has."

Retiree Memorial Chronicles

A page from the Nebraska Air National Guard history

'Lead Sled' maintenance crews' ranks shrink as years go by

■ Air Guard members who served during RF-84 era say work ethic passed down from veterans of unit

By Chief Master Sgt. Vicky Cerino
Staff Writer

Serve long enough in any organization and, sooner or later, a person will start to talk like all those old timers about the "old" days.

Like airplanes, people come and go. As one era is ushered out, a new one begins. And, as that era fades further into history, the ranks of those who actually served during that timeframe slowly become fewer and fewer.

So it goes with those Nebraska Air Guardsmen who served during the Republic RF-84F Thunderflash era.

"It dawned on me that there aren't many in the unit left who worked on the '84," said recent retiree Master Sgt. Roger Fahrenholz, one of a small group of Air Guard maintenance crew members remaining from that era.

"You talk about the old timers...(of course I'm one now.)"

The RF-84 was the fourth fighter aircraft of the Nebraska Air National Guard. Nicknamed "Lead Sled," the aircraft ushered in a new command and new mission. It reigned for about eight years before giving way to the RF-4C Phantom, which reigned for 20 years.

Now, 34 years later, a handful of the Guardsmen who worked on the RF-84 reconnaissance fighter are still serving in the Guard, but their numbers are dwindling as they retire from the unit.

Recent retiree of 38 years, Chief Master Sgt. Marvin Leners of the 155th Maintenance Squadron, served under the late Col. Fred Bailey, Jr., first commander of the Nebraska Air National Guard. Leners, a farm boy, said he was one of 14 Guardsmen who were recruited and sent off to basic training together in 1967 or 1968, including Brig. Gen. Robert Bailey and Master Sgt. Gary Foster.

Little did the Nebraskans know, but they were being recruited for the expected RF-4C buildup that would come in 1972, requiring more maintenance specialists.

Following graduation from basic training, instead of going to technical school to learn aircraft maintenance, the Guardsmen returned to Lincoln to train on the job because there weren't

Help preserve Air Guard history

The Nebraska Air National Guard Retiree Memorial located at the air base in Lincoln honors all those who have retired from, or who were eligible for, retirement when separating from the Nebraska Air Guard, including those who died while serving and those medically discharged.

Contributions to the memorial are tax-deductible.

For more information, contact any chief master sergeant or Chief Master Sgt. Dale McIntosh at dmcintosh@neb.rr.com, (402) 477-1798, or write to: NEANG Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 5164, Lincoln, NE, 68505.

enough technical school spots.

Leners said the military was a lot different back then. "Things were a lot more strict back then. You were kind of fearful of your superiors."

Fahrenholz, remembers his first sergeant, Ralph Behrens, in particular. "Our first sergeant was a real tough character. I don't know if he was as mean as he acted, but he sure acted mean."

Because a draft was in effect at the time, the Guardsmen had a real incentive to show up for drills. "You didn't mess around not showing up for drills, or they'd ship you off to active duty," Leners said.

Drills began on Saturdays around noon to accommodate those coming in from out of town, and lasted until 9 p.m. On Sundays they worked regular hours.

Formations were held each morning and at the close of each drill day — in service dress uniforms. Much of the weekend was devoted to job skill training. Ancillary training was condensed, usually Saturdays from 4 to 9 p.m., said Leners. Training movies were shown on 8 mm projectors.

"Hands-on training was big back then. Instructors were with you all the time," he said.

Leners said he'll never forget an annual training in Savanna, Ga., when one of the jets was damaged and had to be dismantled and put on a flatbed truck for transport back to Nebraska.

"The maintenance commander handed me a \$5 bill after I got back to Lincoln. To this day, I remember so much about him. It was like a gold bar to me. He was stern-talking, but he was so thankful to us," Leners said.



Photo courtesy of the Nebraska Air National Guard History Office

Lead Sled Maintenance: Nebraska Air Guard maintenance crews work on an RF-84 as the aircraft's pilot waits in 1967.

He also recalled going for a ride on the unit's C-47 cargo aircraft. A number of other young maintenance troops were invited to go for a flight during a training weekend. They flew up to Omaha and around the area, thinking it was pretty cool. Later they found out engine work had been done on the airplane. The flight was a test to see how the aircraft performed with a load.

"We were a bunch of guinea pigs and didn't know it," Leners said laughing. "We were flying around and thought we were real cool."

Quality Assurance Inspector, Master Sgt. Gary Foster, 155th Maintenance Squadron, started as engine mechanic in 1967, back when everyone went to "summer camp" together.

"Vehicles back then were scarce," Foster said, adding that it restricted members from much area sightseeing. "After you'd get off work, you'd hit the BX (base exchange), buy beer and go to your barracks (open bay barracks) and drink beer. We still had a good time together. We couldn't get into a whole lot of trouble."

Though the times were memorable, the RF-84 itself was not an aircraft beloved by pilots. "Lead Sled," was an accurate term to describe the underpowered, heavy and loud airplane, said Bailey. "The design and weight didn't seem like a technical advancement from the previous RF-86. I don't think anyone looked at it with fondness. Pilots in general want power and responsiveness, but it didn't happen."

He said from a pilot's perspective, no one was sad to see the RF-84 go.

One thing that that remained, however, was the philosophy for excellent aircraft maintenance. "I think our values are just better... integrity, ethics and val-

ues are higher in the Midwest. We've always been that way. We're so particular," Leners said. "These youngins aren't just being thrown out there. They're being well trained."

Safety also has always been paramount. "It's instilled in you from the beginning," said Chief Master Sgt. Ron Navratil. "You don't want anything to happen. You know you've got that responsibility."

Foster said that philosophy was learned from people like John Lustea. "He taught me clear back then to do the job to the best of my ability and according to the technical data and you can look yourself in the mirror," Foster said.

Bailey, who began his Air Guard career as a jet engine mechanic, said Nebraska's maintenance has always been second to none, passed down from the unit's World War II and Korean War-era maintenance crews to the younger, newly arriving Airmen. "They really understood the airplanes, and were more experienced and had continuity, which is where the Guard continues to excel," Bailey said.

Though the RF-84 itself certainly was not a frontline airplane, he said, "the people were professional and did their best. They were pretty crusty guys and here were these green, young troops learning jet engines from scratch. We had some really good teachers."

Bailey said he remembers his first summer camp up at Alpena, Mich., when he was called out one evening to change an igniter plug.

"It was kind of an eye-opener for an 18-year-old kid. I was out there pretty much by myself working on an airplane. It shows the confidence they had in us," Bailey said.

Defense Department says Court decision allowing recruiter access to campuses fair

WASHINGTON (AFPS) — The Supreme Court's March 6 ruling that military recruiters must have equal access to meet with students on college and university campuses is a matter of fairness, a Defense Department official said March 7.

The court's decision upholds a law that eliminates federal funding for colleges and universities that ban military recruiters from conducting their business on campus.

Plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the Defense Department said the Solomon Amendment — which says military recruiters must have equal access to students as that enjoyed by corporate recruiters and other organizations — was

unconstitutional and violated the right of free speech.

"DoD is not asking for any special treatment, and it isn't trying to suppress free speech in any way," Lt. Col. Ellen Krenke, a Defense Department spokeswoman, told American Forces Press Service.

"We simply want to be able to compete on an even playing field for the best and brightest that our nation's universities have to offer."

About 2,500 law students are interviewed by DoD recruiters each year, Krenke said, of which about 400 become military lawyers. Krenke said the Supreme Court's decision won't affect military recruiting on most college and university campuses because most were already com-

plying with the Solomon Amendment. Only three schools have had their federal funding denied because of noncompliance with the Solomon law, she said.

Before the late New York Rep. Gerald Solomon introduced his legislation in Congress in 1994, a total of 12 colleges and law schools had banned military recruiters from their campuses, while others announced they might do the same.

The crux of the plaintiffs' case against DoD centered on the argument that the military discriminates against homosexual service members' free speech rights because of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy adopted military-wide in 1994.

Former artillery battalion planning September Field Artillery reunion

The 168th Field Artillery Battalion is planning for its second reunion at North Platte, Neb., Sept. 22-23.

The 168th Field Artillery was organized in May 1959 with headquarters in Ogallala and other units in Sidney and Alliance. Later the battalion was split: 1st Battalion, 168th Field Artillery, was headquartered in Scotts-bluff with units in Gering, Alliance and Chadron, while the 2nd Battalion, 168th Field Artillery, was headquartered in North Platte with units in Broken Bow, Lexington, Sidney and Ogallala.

The 2nd Field Artillery Battalion was deactivated May 1968.

The 1-168th Field Artillery Battalion was deactivated September 1996 at Fort Robinson,

Neb.

The reunion committee is planning activities for Friday, Sept. 22 and Saturday, Sept. 23. Past members of both battalions are invited to participate in the reunion.

Are you a past member of the 168th Field Artillery or do you know somebody who is? Please contact the 168th Reunion Committee at: 168th Reunion Committee, c/o Don Miller, ARNG Armory, 1700 North Jeffers, North Platte, NE 69101, or e-mail him at: donald.e.miller1@us.army.mil or phone (402) 309-7987 or (308) 535-8007.

The alternate point of contact is Gordon Reifschneider, e-mail Gr2966@msn.com or phone (308) 534-5597.

For additional and updated reunion information, visit www.168thfieldartillery.org.

Recruiting new Airmen

■ Recruiter says enlisting new Air Guardsmen often means anticipating friends, family members' concerns

By Tech. Sgt. David Brumley
Staff Writer

Challenges and recruiting have always gone hand-in-hand throughout the years.

However, in today's modern high-tempo, leaner force environment, it is much tougher to convince a young person that the military is still a great opportunity.

The 155th Air Refueling Wing recruiting team has successfully taken on this challenge to ensure they still bring the best America has to offer to support the Air National Guard mission. By maintaining a low pressure approach, Air Guard recruiters have created an atmosphere where each potential new member feels they are making the right choice when they are sworn in.

"We run an unofficial no 'push' policy. Basically we turn the recruiting mantra on its head," said Master Sgt. Stuart Stofferahn, 155th ARW production recruiter.

Keeping their approach to recruiting simple and taking their time has continued to show success in finding the right people for the Nebraska Air Guard. "We tell everyone who comes in here about the Air National Guard and what's it's about. We then tell them to go back and think it over," said Stofferahn. "Basically our job is to advise. We are here to help you get from point A to Point B."

Stofferahn said the approach is driven by a desire to ensure they get only members who are truly motivated to join the Air Guard. "I tell folks who come in for the first time I don't want

"No matter how old the applicant is we always ask them do you have support from friends and family to join the Air National Guard."

— Tech. Sgt. Stuart Stofferahn
Nebraska Air Guard recruiter

your phone number," he said. Stofferahn instead lets the prospective recruit leave with his card and contact him when they are really ready to join.

"If they call back you know they are serious about joining. It's also a great way to work smarter not harder."

This approach has also led many recruits to refer their friends to the Air Guard. "They (the recruits) are more apt to tell others that there's no pressure to join and the opportunities that exist," he said.

The team also keeps its recruiting area close to the base to maximize time and effort.

"We primarily recruit within 75-100 miles of the Lincoln area, because it's not that feasible for us to travel outside that range. Also, trying to bring kids in from someplace like North Platte, it's just not going to happen unless they are going to go to school here" said Stofferahn.

Even in keeping the area in which they recruit small, Air Guard recruiters say they still must ensure they do everything they can to maximize their time. Creating centers of influence is one way they've been able to meet with numerous potential recruits all at one time.

"We decided instead of hitting high school after high school and spending time setting up and wasting time over lunch, I

sent out invitations to over 350 high schools in the state and invited all interested people whether they're counselors, students, whoever, to spend the day enjoying some great shows from our different squadrons on base," Stofferahn said.

Still, recruiting can be difficult. Stofferahn said the ever-changing world has brought about many challenges to the Air Guard, including more deployments and a higher tempo.

"The concern most often talked about is deployments," he said. "Before we'll talk about anything else we'll talk about deployments," said Stofferahn.

Even with these heavy demands on modern day Airmen, the recruiting team has still been successful in keeping the 155th ARW's assigned end strength at over 100 percent, most recently recruiting approximately 90 new Airmen in 2005, said Tech. Sgt. Alden Harriman, Nebraska Air Guard recruiting office supervisor.

The war in Iraq and continuing operations in Afghanistan don't seem to be causing a tempering of interest, either, said Stofferahn.

"(Even) with the war in Iraq and in Afghanistan we have not seen any change," said Stofferahn. That's partially due to the fact, said Stofferahn, that Nebraska Air Guard recruiters are constantly looking for ways to stay ahead of the problem by anticipating the concerns of friends and family members.

"No matter how old the applicant is, we always ask them do you have support from friends and family to join the



Photo by Capt. Kevin Hynes

Explaining The Air Guard's Benefits: Master Sgt. Stuart Stofferahn shows a 'customer' a pamphlet outlining many of the Nebraska Air National Guard benefits. As a production recruiter for the Nebraska Air Guard, Stofferahn is responsible for 'selling' the Air Guard to potential recruits interested in military service.

Air National Guard," he said.

If the new recruit hasn't spoken with anyone, Stofferahn said he always insists that the potential recruit talk it over with friends and family before taking the next steps to join the unit.

"It's a huge step and it's not what it used to be. At some point they are going to be deployed," he said.

Stofferahn said he also encourages potential unit members to look at other military

options before joining the Nebraska Air Guard.

"There are a lot of people who come in here and they're concerned about which to join Air Guard or Army Guard," said Stofferahn. "In fact we ask them, 'Have you had the chance to visit with the Army Guard?' It's standard policy that we tell them they need to check out what the other services offer, because we don't offer what the Army offers and they don't offer what we offer."

Soldier first to earn cash for recruiting friend

By Spc. Riley Huskey
Staff Writer

In an age when money talks more than ever, the Nebraska Army Guard has signed on board with the new Guard Recruiting Assistance Program (GRAP), putting money in the pockets of Soldiers for enlisting new recruits.

GRAP was designed for the traditional part-time Soldier and acts as an independent business, generating money through recruitment.

The program offers \$2,000 to any Soldier who actively recruits another Soldier. After initial talks, paperwork and a referral to a recruitment office, Soldiers receive \$1,000 for recruits signing and swearing-in, and an additional \$1,000 when the recruit completes basic training.

The first Nebraska Army Guard recruiter to take advantage of GRAP was Staff Sgt. Megan Bowers, a recruiter with the State Recruiting and Retention Office. She oversaw the process as Pvt. Andrew Tarr, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the 1-167th Cavalry, signed up his friend, Pvt. Katie Ayers, who enlisted as a truck driver in the 600th Transportation Company.

"This program is pretty awe-



Photo by David Nore

Now That's A Big Check: Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke (center) presents a ceremonial check for \$2,000 to Pvt. Andrew Tarr (left) for helping recruiters enlist his friend, Pvt. Katie Ayers, into the Nebraska Army National Guard.

some," Bowers said. "It excites me to see kids getting the money too. I think this opportunity to make a little cash and enlist another recruit reconfirms that the decision Soldiers originally made was a good one."

Tarr was the first Soldier to collect on GRAP's cash bonus, receiving his first \$1,000 on April 1. "I was pretty excited to have signed one of my own friends up," Tarr said. "The money excites me for sure, but I

will also help to develop 'lifers' and point out future recruiters."

Tarr confirmed Bowers' conclusion. "I've always liked the Guard — I joined when I was in high school — and I just look at this money and program as another benefit for being a Soldier," Tarr said.

"This program is a pretty good incentive for Soldiers like me, and overall, takes a more active approach for recruiting and retention."

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Courage Under Fire

Photos from a video provided by 1st Lt. Charles Gilkey

Under Fire: (Main photo) Former U.S. Army sergeant Ron Hart (center profile) takes cover behind a disabled truck with a machinegun as Spc. Jennifer Beck begins maneuvering her truck (far right) out of an ambush kill zone, March 20, 2005, near Salmon Pak, Iraq. Beck had just completed helping rescue wounded Pfc. Richard DeLancey (in truck with her) and Sgt. Terrance Ricketts (located alongside of center truck out of sight) when this video was shot. (Small photos above) A video captures a guntruck moving into action as well as Hart and Beck as they rescued DeLancey and Ricketts.

Battle of Bismark, One Year Later

Nebraskans kept cool during heat of ambush

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Ricky DeLancey was in trouble.

Seated in the right seat of a disabled M-915 truck, DeLancey and his co-driver, Sgt. Terence Ricketts from Omaha, had just been violently stunned by a mortar that struck their truck's hood just inches from DeLancey's windshield, peppering his face with glass and pieces of jagged metal.

Suddenly, a bullet smacked into DeLancey's Kevlar helmet, causing pain to sear into his brain as the bullet skimmed along his scalp before exiting out the rear of his helmet.

Momentarily blinded as blood flowed down into his eyes, the young private first class struggled to clear his mind from the nearly simultaneous double-concussion.

Wiping the blood away, DeLancey looked over to Ricketts who was now lying prostrate on the floor of the truck, pinned beneath a portion of the cab's metal console detached by the concussion of the mortar. A split-second later, a second bullet smacked into

the back of DeLancey's helmet, stunning him yet again.

"I've been shot," DeLancey screamed to his co-driver who was also suffering from a serious bullet wound in the leg. DeLancey could hardly believe the words as they left his lips.

Glancing through the left windows of the truck, DeLancey suddenly realized he and Ricketts were in even bigger trouble than they'd thought.

Caught in an armored truck that had had its tires shot out as it attempted to push through a mud-filled median near a tough Baghdad suburb called Salmon Pak, DeLancey watched as teams of insurgents began to leapfrog toward him and several other equally disabled civilian-driven "White Trucks" in front of him.

DeLancey, the fun-loving, laid-off factory worker from Columbus, and Ricketts, the weight-lifting, heavy-metal rocker, were about to be overrun by insurgents who had caught the 1075th Transportation Company convoy in a bloody ambush barely 10 minutes earlier.

The two Soldiers suddenly felt very lonely and scared.

Second of a three-part Special Report

They were a long way from home and, at that moment, they realized their lives were hanging precariously from a very thin thread.

Looking at Ricketts, DeLancey spoke three words that very easily could have been his last.

"We're going to die," said DeLancey.

Looking back, Ricketts said through near crippling pain, "I know."

Background

It's safe to say that the members of the 1075th Transportation Company from Columbus and York, Neb., who made up Convoy 678N never expected to find themselves locked in a desperate battle, the largest since the Fallujah fight several months earlier, when they left their Kuwaiti base on March 19, 2005.

Instead, they'd hoped for a relatively routine five-day supply mission to and from Camp Anaconda, located north of

Baghdad near Balad, an always dangerous journey.

The convoy, however, had been anything but easy.

An "Iraqi Express" mission, meaning that the convoy's truck trailers were filled with priority supplies and replacement parts for American and Coalition forces operating in northern and central Iraq, the convoy had been seemingly jinxed from the start.

First, one of the convoy's armored "green trucks" had become disabled near the Iraqi border town of Safwan when it struck a metal spike that sliced open its oil pan.

Then, after pulling the disabled truck and trailer to an evening way-station at Scania – essentially big truck stop surrounded by walls and machineguns – the convoy's commander, Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Uhl, was told the base did not have the parts he needed to fix the broken truck.

Faced with the dilemma of having to decide whether to leave the broken truck and its valuable trailer at Scania until it could be fixed or hauling both to Anaconda, Uhl decided to improvise.

He ordered the disabled truck's crew to stay at Scania with their vehicle, which freed the convoy's maintenance bobtail – a trailer-less truck system – for any future maintenance issues his convoy might meet.

Uhl then decided to haul the broken truck's trailer behind his own bobtail the rest of the way to Anaconda. That decision was not without its problems, though. While it would allow him to successfully deliver all of the convoy's important cargo, it would also severely limit his mobility should something bad happen.

At first, the March 20, 2005, journey from Scania to Anaconda proceeded beautifully.

However, about midway through the trip along an alternate supply route called Bismark, the convoy was suddenly ambushed near a tough, dusty town called Salmon Pak by an enemy insurgent force numbering 40-50.

As the insurgents poured fire into the 33-vehicle convoy – a collection of armored Hum-Vee guntrucks, armored M-915 truck trailers called "green
See AMBUSH on 13.



Photo courtesy of the 1075th Transportation Company

Charred Remains: Spc. Jacob Graff examines the burnt remains of Truck 204 several weeks following the Battle of Bismark. When Graff and his co-driver, Spc. John Harris, were wounded in the ambush and medically evacuated from the battlefield, military policemen opted to burn the heavily damaged truck rather than leaving it on the side of the road.

AMBUSH continued from page 12.

trucks" and unarmored white trucks driven by civilian drivers from Pakistan, India, Turkey and other countries – the orderly convoy suddenly became jumbled in a massive traffic jam.

Moments later, Uhl found himself cutoff from the battle several miles down the road.

Uhl and his driver, Spc. Timothy Bos from Columbus, Neb., had successfully negotiated their way through the hail of gunfire, mortars and an improvised explosive device just as the company's operating procedures had dictated. The rest of the convoy's drivers, however, were still caught in the deadly kill zone behind a mass of jumbled white trucks caused when the civilian drivers fled their trucks as bullets and rocket-propelled grenades sliced into the unarmored vehicles.

Those same civilian drivers, many of whom could not speak English, were now huddling in the relative safety of nearby ditches and behind the wheels of their trucks.

After fighting for nearly 10 minutes, several Soldiers and civilian drivers were seriously wounded. However, because of the traffic jam and subsequent confusion, only Spc. John Harris of Columbus, Neb., and Spc. Jacob Graff of Ainsworth, both wounded, were able to escape.

The rest were trapped and in danger of being overrun in one of the largest ambushes of the Iraq War.

Commander Without A Convoy

Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Uhl couldn't believe this was happening to him and his Soldiers.

A police officer from Columbus in civilian life, Uhl and the rest of Convoy 678N, so-called because it was the 678th American convoy sent north into Iraq from Kuwait by the 1075th Transportation Company's parent battalion, had trained long and hard at the Greenleaf Training Site in Nebraska and at Fort Riley, Kan., for just such a possibility.

There, instructors had constantly beat into the Nebraska Soldiers' heads the cardinal rule of dealing with an ambush: Don't stop and fight. Get the heck out of dodge.

The Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers had never prepared for the presence of civilian drivers in their convoy, though. Because of that, Uhl said he and other unit convoy commanders had no idea how the civilian drivers would react in a combat situation like the one unfolding now.

"The problem is, the (third country nationals) don't practice it," said Uhl about the training the Soldiers received in dealing with an ambush. "And it's hard to explain to them what to do."

Uhl said in retrospect, it was easy to understand why the civilian drivers reacted the way they did when the bullets started flying.

Driving unarmored trucks that allowed rounds to pass easily through the their truck's unarmored flesh, the drivers simply followed human nature and took cover instead of continuing through the firestorm to the safety that lay outside of the kill zone.

"The white trucks stopped where we stopped," he said. "But when we went, they didn't follow. They jumped out of their trucks and went for shelter in the ditch."

"Their trucks basically blocked the road," added Uhl.

Now, sitting on the side of the four-lane road approximately two miles outside of the kill zone, the sounds of battle filling his radio and the air outside, Uhl – the quiet convoy commander who constantly took pains to keep his Soldiers safe – struggled over what to do next.

"Our tactics say that once you're out of the kill zone, you don't go back," said Uhl. "You keep going and establish a rally point. That's what we're supposed to do."

That had been training though. This was real.

And those were his folks back there,

Soldiers who were counting on him to make the right decisions to get them out of this mess.

Uhl said as he and his driver sat on the road listening to the battle and waiting for the rest of their comrades to come up, they were confronted with what seemed like an unwinnable situation.

"I was trying to decide what I should do," he said. "I have this trailer on the back of my truck, so it's not easy to turn around and go back. It's not easy to maneuver."

"Bos was driving. He's a really good driver, but there were other vehicles out there too. And I'm trying to...I'm watching and hoping that trucks are going to start coming. And they're not coming and they're not coming. And I hear Ricketts say that they're hit."

"He's in the green truck right behind me, so I know that he's stopped there and that everyone is behind him," said Uhl. "And there's so much traffic on the radio, mostly Ricketts, that I couldn't get on the radio to say anything. So, we stopped and we're not getting shot at at that point, but I'm hoping that somebody is going to give me some information... something has to be done."

Uhl said he suddenly realized that, contrary to his standing orders, he had to do something. Looking at his driver, Uhl said: "We have to go back."

Hearing the order, Bos quickly maneuvered the huge truck around and then began accelerating back toward the smoky battlefield. Uhl said he was filled with doubt as he and Bos drove back toward the smoke of the kill zone.

"I didn't say this, but at that point we were the only ones clear," he said, "and there was nothing that we could do out where we were at. So, I told them on the radio that we're coming back."

"You don't know... I'm thinking, well... there's lanes going this way and lanes going that way and this median... when we get back there and stop to help them, we're not going to be able turn around and go back."

"So, we're in a tough spot here."

Murky Battlefield

Back in the kill zone, things were quickly reaching a critical point.

As Spc. Jacob Graff and Spc. John Harris – both now wounded – maneuvered their truck around the traffic jam and out of the deadly ambush, they passed by several newly arrived armored Hum-Vees that were now firing into the enemy insurgent position from the southbound lane of the four-lane highway.

It's this point, said 2nd Lt. Charles Gilkey, a plans officer with the 1075th Transportation Company later charged with writing the official after action report on the ambush, that the battlefield becomes somewhat murky.

The Hum-Vees, said Gilkey, belonged to two units that had been supporting a southbound logistics convoy heading down the road from Camp Anaconda. That convoy was also hit at approximately the same time that it passed by northbound Convoy 678N.

One of the lead trucks of that convoy was quickly disabled in the fusillade. However, unlike the Nebraska convoy, the majority of the southbound group made it through the ambush without stopping and continued south to their consolidation point.

As the shooting continued from a field, orchard and several buildings bordering Route Bismark to the west, two of the southbound's escorts manned by Soldiers from Battery B, 1-623rd Field Artillery Battalion, quickly pulled their armored Hum-Vees to the right-hand shoulder and began engaging the insurgents.

Moments later, Kentucky Army National Guard military policemen assigned to the 617th Military Police Company – callsign "Raven 42" – also arrived on scene. The Kentuckians had been trailing approximately a mile behind the southbound convoy in case "something" happened.

Now, as the insurgents pumped heavy fire into the stranded Nebraska convoy and field artillerymen, the three mili-

tary police crews of Raven 42 quickly threaded their armored Hum-Vees into position along the southbound lane near an access road that ran between a two-story house and a grove of trees being used as cover by the Iraqi insurgents.

According to Gilkey, confusion still continues over exactly who was where during the critical moments of the fight. That same confusion carried over into the three separate unit accounts of the battle made weeks later.

"You have three different units there at the same time," said Gilkey. "I'm not sure that the field artillery and the MP guys even knew we were there. Apparently they didn't."

"The first time they wrote their narrative, they didn't know who we were, what part we took," he said. "When we sent them our narrative and said, 'Hey this is what we're showing,' then they countered and rewrote it...but their information is off. They've got us having one or two too many wounded in actions. They have us in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Over the weeks and months that followed, the Nebraska and Kentucky units finally loosely agreed upon the chain of events that happened insofar as they dealt with each other. Still, a number of questions and contradictions remain.

To the best of the units' knowledge, after pulling to a halt in the south bound lane, the leader of the Kentucky MPs, Staff Sgt. Timothy Nein, noticed that a group of 10-15 Iraqi insurgents had moved across a sandy field to a position about 10 meters from the road.

Firing their mounted .50 caliber machineguns and Mk-19 grenade launchers, Nein ordered his MPs to move past the field artillerymen and through the concentrated enemy fire onto the access road.

As the three Hum-Vees made the turn, the trail vehicle was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, temporarily knocking the vehicle's gunner, Spc. Casey Cooper, unconscious.

"The heat and the concussion knocked me," Cooper would later tell reporters at his base in Iraq. "I could feel it hit me in the chest and face, and that was about it. I blacked out after that."

Fortunately, the RPG had done minimal damage to the vehicle.

Continuing on, two of the three Hum-Vees pulled to a stop at a 33-degree angle facing the insurgents, who were located in the trees and a nearby field near an irrigation ditch that ran parallel to the main highway.

Jumping out of their vehicles, the MPs quickly began firing into the nearby trees and sandy berms where they mistakenly believed the main mass of the Iraqi insurgents were located.

The vehicle commanders and drivers of the Raven 42B and C quickly formed a firing line along a berm facing the tree line, while the commander, driver and medic of the first Hum-Vee (Raven 42A) dismounted their vehicle and moved to what they believed to be the non-contact side of their vehicle and began firing into the irrigation ditch.

Within seconds, however, the Soldiers realized that they hadn't turned the flank of the Iraqi insurgents, but rather had driven up into the center of the enemy positions.

Instead of firing from a position of strength, the MPs were surrounded.

After exiting their vehicles, the Kentucky Soldiers began to be struck by bullets fired from both the front and rear of their positions.

According to the 617th's after action report, the first to be wounded was Spc. Bryan Mack, the driver of the Raven 42A, who was shot in the arm while firing an M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) into the ditch.

Spc. Jason Mike, platoon medic, quickly pulled Mack to a covered position half-way under the Hum-Vee, conducted a quick examination, and then continued firing at the insurgents with Mack's M-4 rifle.

Moments later, Sgt. Joseph Rivera, a Hum-Vee commander, was also hit by a bullet that struck him in the lower back

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Convoy 678, Phase II

Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Uhl
Isolated from battle, begins to reenter ambush until told to stay put by Bloebaum.



Spc. Tim Bos
Helps set up casualty collection point.

Pfc. Ricky DeLancey
Wounded, crawls on burning truck hood and holds off enemy.



Sgt. Terence Ricketts
Wounded, forced to wait for help as trucks pull out.

Sgt. Anthony Bloebaum
Assistant convoy commander, tells Uhl to stay put.



Spc. Jennifer Beck
Under fire, pulls wounded Ricketts from truck.

Spc. John Harris
Wounded, treated and evacuated from battlefield.



Spc. Jacob Graff
Wounded, refuses aid, helps stop traffic.

Spc. Kelly Kinzer
Misunderstands message, continues out of ambush.



Spc. Paul Rullo
Misunderstands message, continues out of ambush.

Spc. Thomas Heesacker
Waits to leave ambush area.



Spc. Michael Sharples
Waits to leave ambush area.

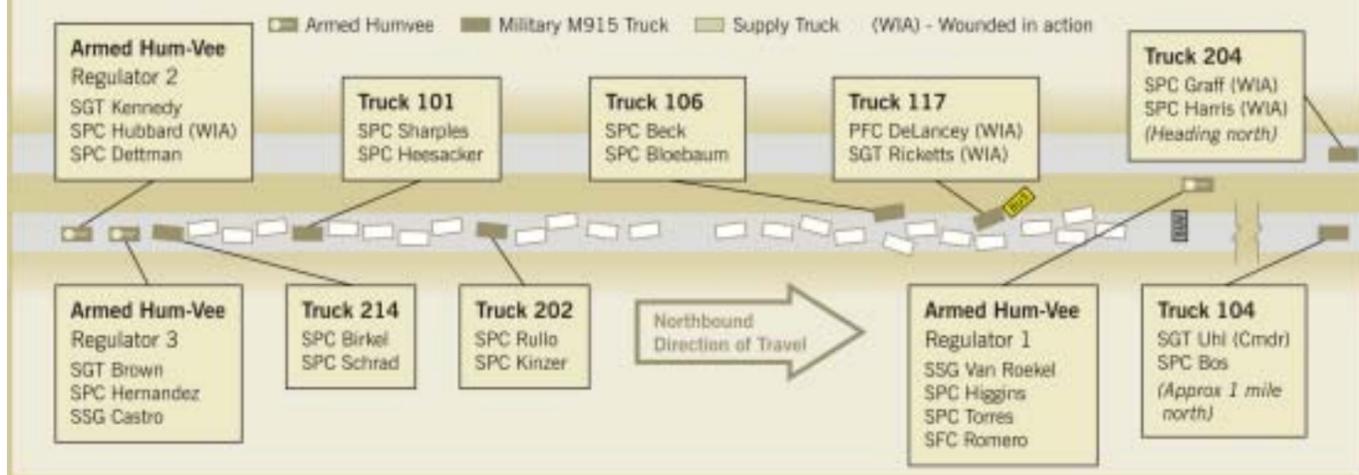
Spc. Joshua Birkel
Waits to leave ambush area.



Spc. Jay Schrad
Waits to leave ambush area.

Convoy 678N

About midway through the March 20, 2005, ambush near Salmon Pak, Iraq, the once-orderly line of vehicles making up Convoy 678N was now a cluttered mass of vehicles stuck behind a bottleneck traffic jam.



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and exited out his stomach.

Again, Mike pulled his fellow Soldier back to the relative safety of the Hum-Vee and began treating the wound. As he examined Rivera's injuries, Mack said he quickly realized that both Rivera and Mike had been struck from behind.

The Soldiers were taking fire from the rear.

A few seconds later, a third member of the Hum-Vee was struck. This time it was Spc. William Haynes, who was manning a .50 caliber machine-gun from turret of his vehicle. Haynes was struck by a bullet that smashed through his hand, forcing him backward.

After hearing Haynes' shout for help, Mike quickly began peppering the both irrigation ditch and positions to his rear with the SAW, laying down a thick layer of suppressive fire until Haynes was able to regain his senses and pop back up into the turret. Seeing the gunner back in action, Mike radioed another Raven element for assistance.

Fight Of Their Lives

Back in Convoy 678N, the Nebraska Soldiers and their escorts were also battling for survival.

After Spc. Ryan Hubbard, the driver of the Nebraska convoy's middle guntruck was seriously wounded and an onboard fire extinguisher struck, filling the vehicle with thick white "smoke" as the extinguisher vented through the bullet hole, Sgt. Jon Kennedy, the vehicle commander, ordered Hubbard to drive to the rear of the convoy and the final, third guntruck to take his place.

The Soldiers in that third guntruck, however, had troubles of their own. Operated by Soldiers from the 518th Guntruck Company (Provisional), an ad-hoc unit created from several different National Guard and active Army units, the rear guntruck had already been struck heavily by the surging gunfire, which had flattened three of the vehicle's tires.

Worried that their vehicle was about to become inoperable, Sgt. Alex Hernandez, driver of the guntruck "Regulator 3," pleaded: "We've got to get out of here."

Instead of retreating, however, Sgt. Rondell Brown, commander, ordered Hernandez to move forward along the relatively protected right side of the convoy. Finally finding a gap between the semi-trucks that allowed them to pass through the convoy and muddy median, Brown ordered Hernandez to move up onto the southbound lane. There, the crew of Regulator 3 saw the Kentucky MPs stopped on the access lane, fighting the insurgents.

As they rushed to pull alongside the Kentuckians, the 518th Soldiers saw an injured American Soldier lying on the ground.

According to the 518th after action

review, the Kentucky MPs were positioned in such a way that withdrawal was impossible.

After stopping next to the Kentuckians, Hernandez and Brown quickly exited the vehicle and dragged the injured Kentucky Soldier to a Kentucky Hum-Vee. There, Brown began to treat the Soldier's wound while Hernandez ran back to his vehicle and radioed for medical help.

Informed that a medical evacuation helicopter was already on its way, Hernandez ran back to the berm where the Kentuckians had dismounted and took up a position with his SAW alongside of the Kentucky Soldiers.

Soon, he was joined by Staff Sgt. Aaron Castro, the third member of Regulator 3 who had been manning his vehicle's turret-mounted machinegun. Two field artillery "Stallion" crews, who had also rushed down the access road to give help, arrived shortly after.

According to Gilkey and Uhl, the Kentucky Soldiers apparently never fully realized that they'd been joined by the 518th and the two field artillery "Stallion" guntruck crews. Its an omission, said Uhl, that would continue to be a sore point for the members of Convoy 678N.

"It bothers me that there's absolutely no mention of us being there in (the Kentucky) accounts of it," said Uhl months later. "And I can understand it to a certain point because they didn't stop and ask people, 'What unit are you from?' when it was going on. But I would've thought that somebody would've pieced together to say that there were other units involved. The 518th Guntruck Company, they did a lot."

In fact, all of the after action reviews seem to disagree on exactly how many Hum-Vee crews were involved in the access road battle. Because of that confusion, one can only take the AARs at face value. By counting each Hum-Vee crew that claims to have been involved in the fight, a total of six crews (five plus the injured crew) fought the insurgents from the surrounded position.

More Confusion

Convoy 678N's lead guntruck was also busy at the same time. In the initial moments of the ambush, Staff Sgt. David Van Roekel, commander of the guntruck escorts, ordered his gunner, Spc. Jairo Torres, to begin giving covering fire to allow the rest of the convoy to pass by unmolested as the Hum-Vee move up into the southbound lane.

Almost incidentally, Torres had been videotaping the convoy at the start of the ambush. As the camera continued to roll as it dangled from his arm, the turret gunner began spraying the insurgent positions with his machinegun.

Now, after nearly 10 minutes of constant firing, Torres was nearing the end of his ammunition.

"We've got to get out of here," yelled Spc. Barb Higgins, vehicle's driver. Sgt. 1st Class Seferino Romero, a Soldier

who had rode along with the convoy to learn how to be a security commander, aged. Romero ordered the vehicle to move forward. What he forgot to do, however, was to inform Higgins how far.

Within a few moments, the Hum-Vee was flying down the road, passing Uhl and Bos who had stopped on the side of the road, continuing toward what the 518th Soldiers thought was the casualty collection and convoy consolidation point.

Finally, after driving for several minutes but not seeing Uhl's truck in front of him, the Romero ordered Higgins to pull to the edge of the road. There, caught on tape, the sergeant seemed to struggle over what to do as he sat on the side of an empty highway.

"That was (Romero's) first time ever to go out on a convoy," Uhl said later while watching the tape. "He sure picked a tough one to start out on."

"You can tell he knows what to do, but he's also getting contradictory information," Uhl added. "It's the same thing I was faced with. I'm here where I'm supposed to be, but no one else is here. Do I go back and find my guys even though I've been ordered not to? Or do I wait and hope that they come up to me like they're supposed to?"

After several long moments during which Romero seemed to agonize over his decision, the sergeant ordered his driver to turn around and head south.

'The Convoys Coming Out'

As the MPs and guntruck crews fought insurgents along the access road, Soldiers within the Nebraska convoy were finally beginning to seize the initiative.

According to convoy's assistant commander, Sgt. Anthony Bloebaum, an electrician from Blair who had now assumed battlefield command of the convoy, the first minutes of the ambush had been incredibly hectic and frustrating as he and other members of the convoy struggled over what to do.

"At that time, I'm just thinking about 'Can we get all of these trucks out of our way?'" Bloebaum recalled months later. "In order for us to get the rest of the convoy to move, they needed a green (truck) to lead them. Otherwise, they don't know where they're going."

Complicating his thinking, said Bloebaum, was the fact that when Ricketts came onto the convoy radio network to let the rest of the Soldiers know that he'd been hit, Bloebaum and his driver - Spc. Jennifer Beck of Clarks, Neb. - mistakenly thought it was Beck's fiancé, Spc. Tim Bos of Columbus.

"We're all listening and it happened so fast," said Bloebaum. "Beck was kind of freaking out a little bit."

Within a few moments Bloebaum and Beck realized that the person on the radio was Ricketts instead of Bos. From her position behind Ricketts and DeLancey's disabled truck, Beck said she could see that the two Nebraskans

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in front of her were completely exposed and in desperate trouble. She said she even saw the mortar round that struck the hood of Truck #117.

"All of a sudden you just see this round come in straight on the hood," she said. "There was just this huge humongous pile of smoke just up in the air."

"I tried getting a hold of Ricketts and DeLancey on the radio and there was absolutely no communication back...and that sucked big time," said Beck, her voice still cracking as she remembered the emotions she felt months earlier. "All you wanted to do was to hear one of their voices to say, 'Yeah, I'm hurt but I'm able to communicate... still able to talk'...something."

"And when you didn't hear anything, you thought they were...my gut dropped. I had tears in my eyes," she said. "Bloebaum looks at me and says 'It's okay. They'll be fine. Don't worry about it. Let's just get out of here.'"

Beck said that as she struggled to contain her emotions, Bloebaum continued to calmly work through the problem, looking for a solution.

Bloebaum quickly began typing on his movement tracking system, a laptop computer-like communication system mounted in his truck.

That system, which was tied into a global position antenna mounted atop Bloebaum's truck, allowed him to communicate with other similarly-equipped vehicles as well as send text messages to bases and supporting forces in the area.

"Bloebaum got onto the MTS and started getting a hold of the (medical evacuation) helicopter. He started sending grid coordinates to whoever he could to come and help us," Beck said.

Beck and Bloebaum then released the air from their seats to give them the maximum protection behind the vehicle's armor. As they did, Bloebaum began to compose a plan.

"We've got to get these whites out of our way," Bloebaum told Beck, referring to the white trucks boxing them in. "We've got to get the ones behind us backed up. That way, we can back up and go around the rest of the whites to Ricketts and DeLancey."

At about the same time, said Beck, Spc. Jacob Graff of Ainsworth came over the radio, asking if there was a way to drive around the traffic jam.

"(Graff) said that he was going to work his way up," said Beck. "When that happened, it was just like a sigh of relief."

As Graff and Spc. John Harris of Columbus moved around the traffic jam and into primary zone of fire, said Beck, it allowed the trucks behind her to also begin to back up and move out.

According to Bloebaum, they were also helped by the fact the civilian drivers directly behind him weren't from non-English-speaking countries, but rather Department of Defense contractors from America.

As Beck hung out the door to signal to the trucks behind her, the DoD drivers understood.

"We got lucky," Bloebaum said. "They understood what we wanted when we started backing up."

Bloebaum said the first DoD driver quickly shifted his truck into reverse and then, as soon as he had room to turn, quickly drove around him, heading north out of the kill zone. Soon several others followed.

"That gave us room to back up and (go) around the trucks in front of us," said Bloebaum.

At about that same instant, Bloebaum received the call from Uhl telling him and the rest of Convoy 678N that he was coming back into the kill zone.

Surprised, Beck said she and Bloebaum quickly realized that if Uhl and Bos reentered the ambush site it would be suicide.

Bloebaum said he told Beck to radio back to Uhl to tell him to stop.

"I told her to get on the radio and tell him to turn around and set up a (casualty collection point.)" said Bloebaum.

"If he came back here, there wasn't going to be anyone to stop all the trucks or keep them moving. It's just going to make things worse."

Reaching for the radio, Beck relayed Bloebaum's order: "Don't come back. The convoy's coming out."

Treating The Wounded

Uhl said Beck's first words to him seemed almost comical.

"She said, 'Can we come out where you're at?' Uhl said. 'And I was like (laughing) yeah... that's what I've been telling you to do.'"

"I was surprised to hear her say that," he added. "So I said, 'Yes. Yes. Get out here.'"

Uhl then ordered Bos to turn their truck around and return back to the original spot he'd chosen to for the consolidation point.

As they began to turn around, however, a damaged green truck came rumbling down the highway and pulled up alongside of Uhl and Bos. Inside were Harris and Graff, both wounded, Harris critically.

Uhl said that as Graff and Harris' truck pulled up to him, he could see that they'd been through a terrible fight.

"There was fluid spraying out of (their truck)," said Uhl. "It had parts underneath that were spraying."

Looking at the wounded Soldiers, Uhl said he quickly realized that continuing back down the road was impossible. The Soldiers needed help now.

Graff said he remembers little about the drive once the two exited the kill zone. His mind, he said, was simply focused on getting Harris help as quickly as possible.

"Training took over," he said. "After I got hit, I don't remember anything until we pulled up next to Sergeant Uhl on the right-hand side of the road."

Graff immediately jumped out of the truck and began yelling that Harris was hurt. Jumping from his own truck, Uhl rushed to the passenger's side of the damaged truck. What he saw when he got there, said Uhl, was shocking.

"Harris is in the cab and he's got blood all over the side of his face. And..." said Uhl, barely containing his voice from the emotion he felt that day six months later, "he looks at me as I asked how he was...and he didn't say anything. He was just gritting his teeth and rolled his eyes kind of right back."

"You could tell he was in a lot of pain. You tell that it was pretty serious."

Uhl said he tossed his combat medical bag to Bos, who helped pull Harris from the truck and then leaned him against a truck tire. As Bos began rendering first aid, Uhl rushed back to his truck and called for a medical evacuation helicopter.

A few minutes later, as other white trucks began pulling up to Uhl's position, the crew of the first guntruck also pulled up. With the gunner still taping with his video camera, the guntruck driver and commander began to also provide additional first aid to Harris.

Months later, while watching the 518th Guntruck Company's video with Harris, Uhl told the younger Soldier how scared he was that day.

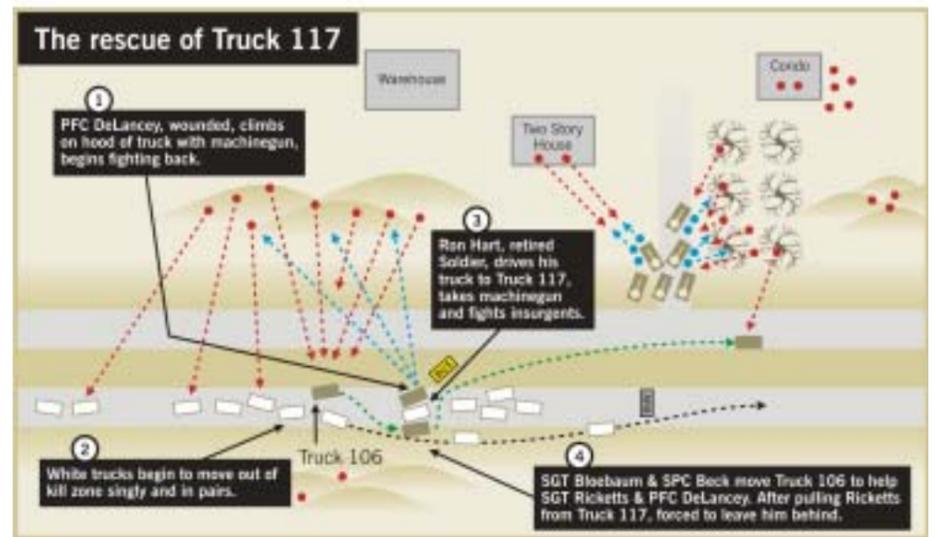
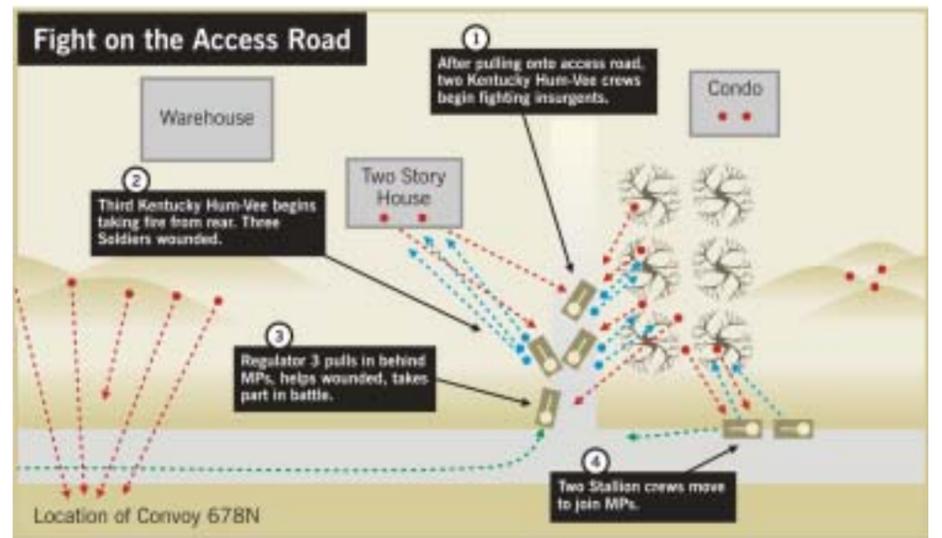
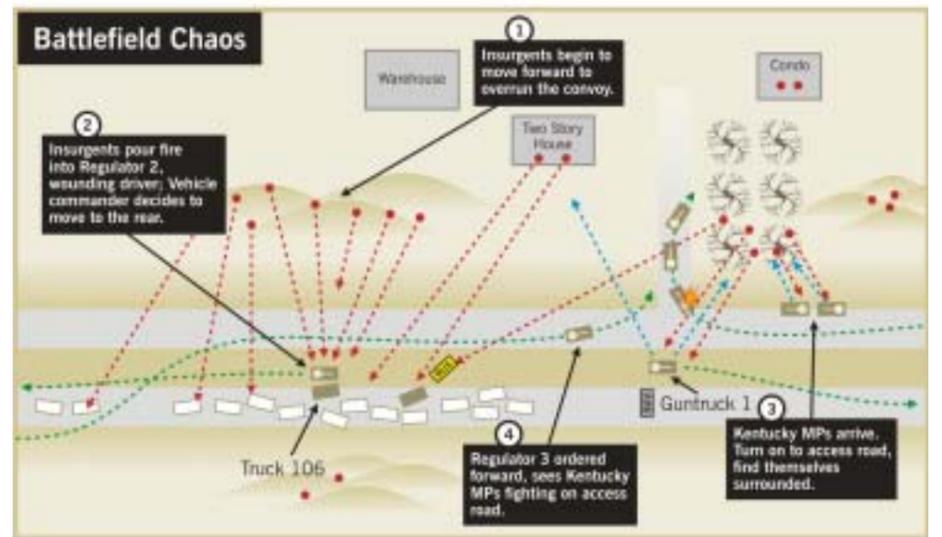
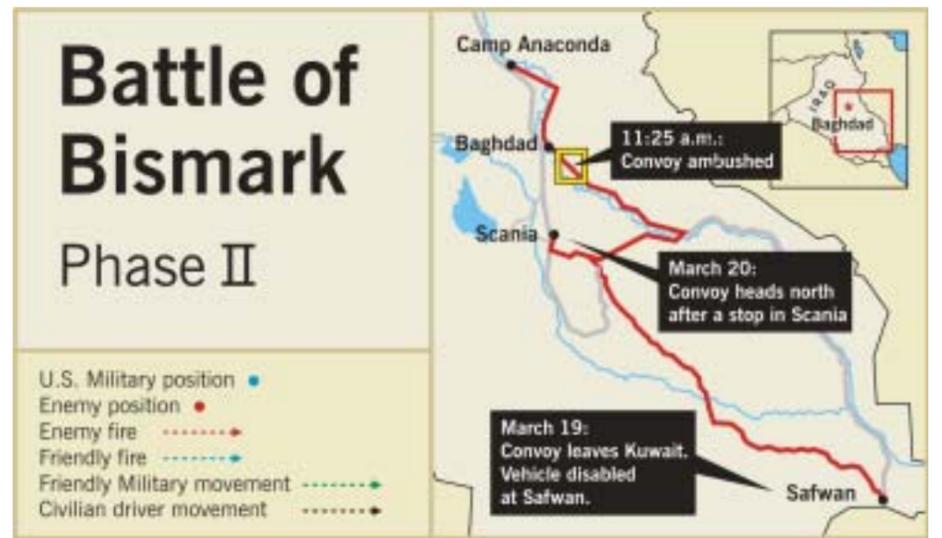
"When you pulled up, I thought I was going to lose you," said Uhl. "I was really worried. I wasn't sure that you were going to make it."

Watching the video, Harris said it felt strange to see himself covered with blood, holding his head as he leaned against the tire.

"It's weird," he said. "It's like watching a movie about somebody else. It's like an out-of-body experience. It's hard to believe that's me sitting there."

While his truck mate received treatment, Graff continued working, refusing several orders to have his wound looked at.

Later, Graff said he wanted to make sure that Harris and the other drivers had received treatment before allowing the medics to look at his "minor"



wound.

"They wanted to work on me right away, but I said 'No, I want you to work on those guys,'" Graff said. "They're worse than me."

Graff then walked to the far side of the road and flagged down a convoy of Heavy Equipment Transport Trucks (HETTs) that was heading south down Bismark toward the kill zone.

"I ran over there and started waving at them to stop," he said. "When they stopped, I yelled that we needed medics and combat lifesavers."

As the newly arrived Soldiers rushed to provide aid to Harris and other civilian drivers, Graff continued providing security around the casualty collection point, his mind still trying to unscramble all that had just happened to him.

He still had a job to do and he

planned on doing it.

Courage Under Fire

Back in the convoy, DeLancey shook his head again to clear the cobwebs caused by the second bullet.

Looking out his now shattered windshield, he was shocked to see a team of insurgents quickly making their way toward his and other disabled vehicles from the sandy berms that bordered the road.

The insurgents were now just meters away from overrunning the convoy.

Looking down at Ricketts who lay on the floor of the truck beneath a large piece of metal, doubt suddenly disappeared. DeLancey knew what he needed to do.

"F*** it," the Columbus Soldier said. Pulling his boot up parallel with the

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damaged windshield, DeLancey kicked outward, clearing the broken glass away, and then crawled out onto the smoking hood with his machinegun, took aim at the approaching insurgents, and began blasting away.

In the post-action reports, DeLancey was credited with killing between two and six insurgents and forcing the rest to take cover in the surrounding berms, pinning them down and keeping them from overrunning the disabled trucks.

According to Ricketts, DeLancey's actions helped stem the tide of the ambush.

"I want to make this clear," said Ricketts after being evacuated to Nebraska about a month after the battle, "Ricky probably saved our lives."

Soldier Once More

Behind DeLancey and Ricketts, white civilian trucks were finally making their way out of kill zone, driving forward singularly or in pairs.

According to Bloebaum, the battle that was now raging along the access road between the MPs, guntruck crews and insurgents seemed to cause the fire slamming into his and other vehicles to slacken, giving the truck drivers the opening they needed to escape.

Not all of the civilian trucks moving forward were interested in escaping, however. One truck, driven by a retired U.S. Army sergeant named Ron Hart who was now working as a contract Department of Defense driver in Iraq, was more interested in helping the two stranded Soldiers in front of him.

Stopping at an angle along on the protected, right-hand side of Ricketts and DeLancey's truck, Hart jumped out of his white truck and ran to the passenger door of Truck #117. Reaching the door, he saw DeLancey lying on the hood of the truck, continuing to fire into the insurgents' positions.

DeLancey said that as soon as Hart arrived, he slipped off the truck to tell the retired Army sergeant-turned civilian truck driver what had happened. Looking at DeLancey and Ricketts, Hart told DeLancey to hand him his machinegun.

Lying down behind the front tire of Truck #117, the Hart turned into a Soldier once again. He began pumping rounds into the berms, targeting individual insurgents as they raised their heads to look for an opening.

To The Rescue

Bloebaum and Beck now saw their chance.

Sitting in the first armored green truck behind DeLancey and Ricketts, Beck had just completed reversing her truck when they saw Hart pull up along side of Truck #117 and begin helping DeLancey off of the truck. Seeing a gap open up, Bloebaum told Beck to move forward along side of Hart's truck.

As they crept forward at approximately 15 miles-per-hour, Beck said a wounded foreign-speaking civilian driver jumped up onto the truck next to her door.

"I open the door and he just crawls in behind me and kind of cuddles with the MTS because there was no place to go," she said.



Photo courtesy of Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Uhl

Aftermath: Soldiers from a separate convoy lend a hand and help patch up a third country national driver who was wounded during the ambush of Convoy 678N on March 20, 2005, near Salmon Pak, Iraq. Watching the Soldiers work is Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Uhl (center background), who is standing in the door of his truck where he stopped to set up a casualty collection point after briefly deciding to reenter the ambush kill zone in an attempt to lead his Soldiers to safety.

Finally reaching the disabled truck, Beck jumped out of her driver's seat and quickly moved around the front of Hart's truck to where DeLancey was lying. Seeing Beck, DeLancey struggled to his feet and walked to her while Hart continued to pump machinegun fire into the enemy positions.

"I don't even remember what he said," said Beck. "It was more or less like 'Get us out of here. Just get us out of here. Ricketts is in the truck. You've got to get him out.'"

"So, all I did was yell out... 'Go get in my truck. Bloebaum's there. He'll help you,'" Beck recalled.

Bloebaum had also planned to exit the truck to help out, however, after looking at the civilian driver's wound and typing another message, he said he opened and saw DeLancey moving quickly toward him.

"As soon as I opened the door, Ricky jumped in," said Bloebaum. "So I never did make it out."

Bloebaum said he immediately began assessing and treating DeLancey's wounds. What he saw didn't look good.

"Shrapnel had hit his face, so blood was running down his face," he said. "And he was just horrified."

Along with providing medical care, Bloebaum also continued working on the MTS, letting Uhl know what his situation was, coordinating his position with approaching medevac helicopters and other units rushing to the stranded convoy's aid.

"I gave them the exact grid coordinates where we were at," said Bloebaum.

While Bloebaum worked back in the truck, Beck was confronted with a difficult situation when she reached Ricketts in Truck #117. Peering inside of the damaged truck, Beck said what she saw will stay with her for the rest of her life.

"All I remember is that Ricketts looked at me like he was so surprised that someone was there. He didn't expect to see another person. He just

"It's by far the worst feeling to get him out of there, but you can't take him because there's no place to put him. And it sucked leaving him there."

— Spc. Jennifer Beck on the decision to leave Sgt. Terrance Ricketts behind after rescuing him from a burning truck

raised his head off the passenger's seat and was looking at me," said Beck.

"I'm stuck," said Ricketts. "I said I didn't care. You're getting out of there," said Beck.

As Beck struggled to pull Ricketts free from the metal console that had pinned him to the floor, Beck said she quickly became aggravated.

"I'm cussing at him and he's saying 'I can't move,'" she said, adding that the harder she worked the more he seemed to lodge under the metal.

Looking back at Ricketts, Beck yelled: "We're not leaving you here. If you're not doing it for yourself, you're doing it for me. You're not staying here."

"Finally he said, 'Okay, but my legs are stuck...my right leg is stuck and I'm shot in my left leg,'" Beck said.

Beck then told Ricketts that because of his injured left leg, he had to push off with his right, no matter how much it hurt.

Then, counting to three, Beck strained with all her strength, finally pulling the much heavier Soldier out from under the metal. Now, however, Beck had a different problem. She couldn't hold Ricketts up.

"I asked Ron Hart to come over because he was going to fall to the ground...I wasn't able to hold him up. He's a big guy," Beck said.

Beck said Hart quickly grabbed Ricketts' legs and to-

gether, the two lowered the injured Soldier to the ground.

What none of the three knew was that a British driver located directly behind Truck #117 was videotaping the moment, capturing Beck as she and Hart lowered Ricketts to the ground. Later, after watching the videotape, Ricketts said it felt surreal seeing himself in that condition.

"It's really a disturbing video," said Ricketts. "It's weird to watch yourself."

After lowering Ricketts to the ground, Beck and Hart half-dragged Ricketts around the front of Hart's truck to the driver's door of Beck's truck. As they lifted Ricketts up to the truck, Beck suddenly realized that again she had a problem. Her truck's cab of the truck was filled with Bloebaum, DeLancey, the wounded civilian driver and the radio gear.

There wasn't enough room for Ricketts.

"There was no way to get him in," said Beck. "We had the (third country national) behind the MTS... DeLancey's feet were lying on Bloebaum and his head is like right next to my lap...there (was) absolutely no place to put (Ricketts.)"

"It's by far the worst feeling to get him out of there, but you can't take him because there's no place to put him," she added. "And it sucked leaving him there."

Turning to Ricketts, Beck told him the news. There was no room. He'd have to wait for the next green truck in line to pick him up.

"At the time, it was the only way," she said. "We had to get moving because everyone else was behind us."

For his part, Ricketts said he understood the reasons behind the decision. "(They already had) four people shoved into that cab," said Ricketts. "So I had to... this was the worst part of the video... I was trying to crawl into the truck and she said, 'We don't have any room for you.' So I had to crawl back down on the ground and crawl under a trailer."

Bloebaum, too, felt the oppressive weight of the decision as he looked over at Ricketts.

"That was the hardest decision of my life," said Bloebaum.

The decision seemed sound, though, he said. They had established radio contact with Soldiers manning trucks behind them and were now coordinating to have them pick Ricketts up. Plus, Hart said he would remain with Ricketts to provide cover until he was rescued.

Still, doubts persisted.

"That's the first rule... never leave a fallen Soldier behind," he said. "(But) I knew that he was going to be alright... I knew that somebody was going to pick him up."

Left Behind

As Beck accelerated her truck forward around the front of Truck #117 and through the mud of the median, she radioed back to the green truck behind her, manned by two 1075th Transportation Company Soldiers: Spc. Kelly Kinzer of Columbus and Spc. Paul Rullo of Schuyler.

Telling the two Soldiers that she'd just retrieved DeLancey and was now proceeding north, she told them to stop and pick up Ricketts who was lying beneath Hart's trailer.

Somehow, however, that message became garbled. Instead of hearing that they needed to pick up Ricketts, the two Soldiers driving Truck #202 understood her to say that she'd picked up both Ricketts and DeLancey and that the way was now clear for them to proceed north.

Uhl, too, said he misunderstood what Beck had said. "It sounded like 'We've got Ricketts and DeLancey. We're coming out.'"

Moments later, caught on the video tape, other trucks began following Beck out of the killzone. What the video doesn't capture however, is that Kinzer and Rullo also followed forward, through the kill zone and out of the ambush.

Suddenly, Ricketts and Hart, who continued to suppress the insurgents with DeLancey's machinegun, were by themselves. They were alone, seemingly forgotten as truck after truck began to pass them by.

Ricketts said it was weird to watch the trucks drive past him and Hart.

"That was one of the worst things for me to see because I was lying on the ground and there were trucks that were leaving, going around us," Ricketts said. "And I couldn't stop any of them."

As Ricketts began to feel forgotten, he said a strange sense of ease suddenly came over him.

"I didn't want to stop any of them, necessarily," he said. "I didn't feel safe where I was, but it was better than being in a burning cab. And I thought, 'You guys aren't supposed to stop anyways.'"

"I would've felt terrible if somebody had stopped to try and save me and got killed doing it, because I was already wounded," he added.

What Ricketts didn't know, however, was that two fellow Nebraska Soldiers were about to risk everything just to do that.

Coming in the June Prairie Soldier, **Part III "Forgotten"**

Soldiers honored during ceremony

By Capt. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The Nebraska Army National Guard's newest heroes were honored at the State Capitol, Feb. 22.

Seventeen Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers were presented with medals earned during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during the past year during the ceremony held at the Warner Legislative Chamber attended by state governmental and military leaders.

Medals presented included four Bronze Star Medals with Valor Device, 12 Purple Hearts and four Army Commendation Medals with Valor device.

"I am proud to say that the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers we honor today truly embody the time honored traditions of 'Duty, Honor and Country' and it is a high personal honor to serve as their commander-in-chief," said Gov. Dave Heineman during the hour-long ceremony.

"I thank each of these heroes here today," added Heineman. "And I also want to express my deepest appreciation to the families of these Soldiers for the sacrifices they have made. Nebraska is grateful for all the people who keep our families safe. And we will not soon forget the many sacrifices that each of you has made."

The February ceremony marked the first time that the Nebraska National Guard has honored a group of Army Guard Soldiers who had earned one of the three medals during a calendar year since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom. Guard officials say they hope to make the ceremony an annual event.

Honored during the ceremony were:

Bronze Star with Valor device

♦ **Spc. Jennifer D. Beck, Clarks, Neb.** Beck, a truck driver with the 1075th Transportation Company was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor device for exceptional heroism and gallantry during an insurgent enemy ambush. While under attack she extracted a wounded Soldier trapped inside a damaged vehicle, moved the Soldier to safety and returned to her vehicle while under direct and indirect enemy fire and led the convoy out of the kill zone.

♦ **Spc. Joshua H. Birkel, Columbus, Neb.** Birkel, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was

awarded the Bronze Star with Valor device for exceptional heroism and leadership during an insurgent enemy ambush, saving the lives of his comrades while in direct contact with the enemy.

♦ **Spc. Richard W. DeLancey, Columbus, Neb.** DeLancey, a truck driver with the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor device for exceptional valor and gallantry during an insurgent enemy ambush, saving the life of his incapacitated co-driver. Although wounded himself, he defended his position, located the enemy and rapidly fired his squad automatic weapon to suppress and kill the enemy.

♦ **Spc. Michael R. Sharples, Wayne, Neb.** Sharples, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor device for heroism and leadership during an insurgent enemy ambush. He showed total disregard for his own safety to save the lives of his comrades while in direct contact with the enemy.

Purple Heart

♦ **Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Preister, Stromburg, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Sgt. Terence P. Ricketts, Omaha, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Sgt. Matthew J. Rouse, Omaha, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Sgt. Chad A. Schroetlin, Lincoln, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. Richard W. DeLancey, Columbus, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. Justin R. Diggins, Omaha, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. Jacob D. Graff, Ainsworth, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for



Photos by David Nore

Commander-in-Chief: Spc. Fenton E. Phan, York, Neb., a member of the 173rd Chemical Company, has his Purple Heart pinned on his uniform by Gov. Dave Heineman, for wounds Phan received in action during a mortar attack on his camp.

wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. John D. Harris, Columbus, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. Kelsey R. Lamb, Elmwood, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. Fenton E. Phan, York, Neb.**, a member of the 173rd Chemical Company, was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during a mortar attack on his camp.

♦ **Spc. Michael R. Sharples, Wayne, Neb.**, a member of the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action during an insurgent enemy ambush.

♦ **Spc. Rachelle A. Spors, Minden, Neb.** a member of the 313th Medical Company, was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action while moving forward to render aid.

Army Commendation Medal with Valor device

♦ **Sgt. Eric Nesiba, Kearney, Neb.** Nesiba, a combat medic with the 313th Medical Company, was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor device for meritorious achievement after he displayed decisive professionalism under extreme conditions in the care and treatment of battlefield casualties.

♦ **Spc. Jacob D. Graff, Ainsworth, Neb.** Graff, a truck

driver with the 1075th Trans. Co., was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor device for exceptional heroism and gallantry during an insurgent enemy ambush. Although both he and his co-driver were wounded, he drove his vehicle through a hail of gunfire. After evacuating his co-driver at the medical collection point he refused medical treatment for his wounds and established frontal security for the casualty collection point.

♦ **Spc. Donald Harrer III, Bellevue, Neb.** Harrer, a combat medic with the 313th Med. Co., was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor device for meritorious achievement when he displayed clear thinking, decisiveness and professionalism under extreme conditions in the care and treatment of battlefield casualties.

♦ **Spc. Nathan J. Reitz, Gering, Neb.** Reitz, a combat medic with the 313th Med. Co. was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor device for heroism and courage under fire. While under extreme pressure he helped save the lives of his fellow Soldiers.

Lempke said the fact that so many of the Soldiers honored during the ceremony came from units that were traditionally marked as "Combat Support" underlines the importance of the missions Nebraska Army Guardsmen are involved in during Operation Iraqi Freedom and the dangers they face every day.

"The conflict in Iraq has no frontlines, no safe areas, no place

for rest and relaxation, and no time for letting your guard down for even a moment," said Lempke. "Every American Soldier in that country is vulnerable to attack at any time and anywhere from improvised explosive devices, ambushes, mortars or rocket propelled grenades."

"Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers are participating in all types of military operations," said Lempke, adding that missions have ranges from transportation and supply operations and medical support to maintenance and direct combat.

Lempke said all of the more than 2,400 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who have deployed overseas since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have contributed to the state's legacy of providing "well-trained, focused and dedicated Soldiers who are eager to improve conditions there and to help their fellow Soldiers."

Along with the medal presentation, each of the honored Soldiers was presented with a copy of a legislative resolution passed by the Nebraska Unicameral honoring the Soldiers and their families.

Additionally, the Nebraska Army National Guard's three fallen Soldiers were also honored during the ceremony. Along with the unveiling of the three portraits Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess, Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson and Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Fischer, a memorial was read by Chaplain (Maj.) David Smith, entitled "Some Gave All."

New training program designed to take stress out of Officer Candidate School

By Spc. Sheila Swantek
Staff Writer

Officials at Camp Ashland's Officer Candidate School tried a new approach to help Guardsmen prepare for the rigors of the year-long commissioning program, Feb. 11-12.

Prior to the start of this year's traditional course, prospective candidates were required to attend a Pre-Officer Candidate School weekend.

"It's important that the Soldiers have a good understanding of what's expected of them

during OCS," said 1st Lt. Lamartine Station, commander of Lincoln's 105th Personnel Service Detachment and officer-in-charge of the Pre-OCS weekend.

"Our goal is to show them what to expect from OCS so that they will be confident and competent when they start the following weekend," said Station.

What led to the pre-OCS weekend?

"We want to control the drop-out rate as much as we can," said Station. "After reviewing the files and reading the letters

previous candidates wrote, we found that the Soldiers felt overwhelmed with the amount of hours required of them outside of the OCS weekend."

"When you don't have the time to commit, you tend to fall behind and then Soldiers eventually felt that OCS was not for them," said Station.

Station said that OCS officials also acquired data from Washington State showing that 95 percent of OCS drop outs occur during Phase 0, the first four months, and the other 5 percent occurred in the first two weeks of Phase 1. After compil-

ing their data, Station said OCS officials designed the pre-OCS class to help future candidates prepare themselves for the course.

Station said the training included such topics as drill and ceremony, physical training, troop leading procedures, proper wear of the uniform, and Army value training.

"I feel this class will freshen Soldiers up on their skills, in turn setting them up for success in the OCS Program," said Station. "But more importantly, (it) gives them the motivation and confidence to drive through

the difficult times, giving them the strength to endure."

Other recent OCS graduates also signed up to aid in the effort.

"I want to help other people get acquainted with the area and environment they are going to be in," said 2nd Lt. David Lawburgh, a platoon leader with Crete's 134th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Surveillance).

"This will give them some good information and that will make the shock of day one a lot less stressful and hopefully eliminate some of the drop outs."



Mission of Mercy

Photos courtesy of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance)

Comforting Touch: Pfc. Kate Czerwinski, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), comforts a young girl during a medical assistance visit north of Kirkuk, Iraq, in 2005. The Lincoln-based Nebraska Army National Guard medical company recently returned from a year-long deployment to Iraq, during which unit Soldiers were called upon to save lives on an almost daily basis.

Army Guard medics spend year saving lives throughout warzone

By **Sgt. Katie Loseke**

Associate Editor

In most combat environments hands are one of the most deadly weapons available.

Hands are used to pull the trigger of a weapon, and in some cases to fend off the enemy in close fighting situations.

But for one unit, hands became a tool for saving lives and administering aid to those in need. Medics from Lincoln's 313th Medical Company, Nebraska Army National Guard, found out just how valuable their hands are and how far they can reach during a year-long deployment in Iraq.

"We are a small unit that left an extremely large footprint," said Capt. Craig Strong, commander of the Lincoln-based company which returned to Nebraska on Nov. 1, 2005. "We were responsible for over 60 percent of the geographical area of Iraq in running ground ambulance support."

According to 1st Sgt. Mark Carlson, company first sergeant, the unit made good on its reputation of working efficiently when they provided corps-level ground evacuation support while serving with the 36th Medical Evacuation Battalion, 44th Medical Command, and XVII Airborne Corps.

Carlson said the area covered by the 313th medics encompassed all of northern and western Iraq and the 10 major American forward operating bases established there.

Carlson said the unit received nothing but praise for how its medics performed while serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Soldiers even managed to set new standards on the amount of miles supported by medics during combat logistic patrols.

Members of the 313th Medical Company

By The Numbers

313th Medical Company

- ♦Responsible for providing medical support to 60 percent of geographical area of Iraq.
- ♦Logged more than 398,000 miles across Iraq while supporting 1,022 combat logistical patrols;
 - ♦Evacuated 2,159 patients;
- ♦Treated 3,196 U.S. Soldiers and Iraqi civilians;
- ♦Responded to 165 serious incidents.

logged more than 398,000 miles across Iraq in the 307 days while supporting 1,022 combat logistical patrols.

While supporting those patrols, members of the 313th Med. Co. evacuated 2,159 patients and treated 3,196 U.S. Soldiers and Iraqi civilians.

The unit was constantly on-call, working quickly to respond to 165 serious incidents while in Iraq. The medics also treated injuries in 80 Improvised Explosive Devices attacks, 22 small arms fire attacks, 17 complex attacks (IED & SAF) and 13 vehicle accidents.

"Our Soldiers did exceptionally well. They were extremely mobile and adjusted to change," said Carlson. "Many of them received individual honors and awards that were well deserved."

Strong said probably the single, biggest reason the unit was so successful was due to the fact the Soldiers worked extremely hard at home during drill weekends and at Fort Riley during its mobilization training for their missions.

See **MEDICS** on 19.



Lonely Desert Highway: Spc. Seana Terry, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), treats and prepares a patient for an aerial medical evacuation after the Soldier was injured during an improvised explosive device attack on a convoy traveling along a main supply route in Iraq. Members of the Lincoln-based 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) responded to 165 serious incidents during their year-long mission to Iraq, including 80 IED attacks on American, Coalition and Iraqi forces operating in Iraq.



Tender Care: Staff Sgt. Steven Barnes, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), treats an injured Iraqi boy at Forward Operating Base Razor near Samarra, Iraq.



Fiery Support: Sgt. Nevada Amack and Spc. Shannon Biltoft, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), pose for a photo at the site of an improvised explosive device attack while on convoy escort duty in Iraq.

Photos courtesy of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance)

MEDICS

continued from page 18.

"We have been very proactive and creative in training on both the medical side and the Soldier side in acquiring the skills needed to be aggressive," said Strong.

Strong added that the unit spent at least seven out of the 12 months leading into the deployment out in the field training.

"Being prepared for the deployment took a lot of the stress and the challenge out of transitioning from a weekend Guardsmen to active duty in the combat zone," said Strong.

"Hopefully our Soldiers felt that they were as well-prepared as we did."

The Soldiers did indeed agree with Strong. "I felt like we were very prepared," said Pfc. Jessica Benkusky, a combat medic with the 313th Medical Company. "I received enough training to be able to take control of any situation I came up against."

According to Benkusky, the unit not only prepared the Soldiers for the medical aspect of the deployment, but also for the living conditions they would face while serving at often remote locations in Iraq.

"I was told to expect the worse, but when we got there it ended up being better than I thought," said Benkusky.

Benkusky said what the Sol-



Making A New Friend: Spc. Jennifer Telecky, 313th Medical Company, poses with a young Iraqi girl during a trip to distribute humanitarian supplies and toys to two Iraqi schools in June 2005.

diers didn't know before they got to Iraq, they learned quickly.

Sgt. Chris Linneman, a unit combat medic, echoed Benkusky, saying the Soldiers learned quickly on the go.

"Some of the situations we came up against we didn't expect or were not trained to do. But we adapted quickly to the environment and the other units we were supporting," Linneman said.

Linneman said most of the Soldiers often studied on their

own and helped each other to make sure they were efficient at their jobs.

"It was a lot of getting down into the trenches and working hard. I think we surpassed a lot of people's expectations of the 313th," said Linneman.

Strong said even prior to the deployment he was highly confident that the unit had strong capabilities. That's why he wasn't surprised at how fast the Soldiers acclimated to working in the often frustrating, always difficult Iraqi environment.



Making A Friend: Sgt. Heath Blackwell, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), hands a soccer ball to a young Iraqi boy.



On Duty: Sgt. Amanda Watkins, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), escorts a patient into a treatment facility. Watkins spent part of her year-long mobilization to Iraq operating as a flight medic for a helicopter ambulance unit.

"This is the first time most of our medics have treated a trauma in a combat zone," said Strong.

"No amount of training can prepare you fully for the real-life experience."

Strong said that by the end of the deployment his medics were teaching new medics coming into Iraq and others in the combat zone hard-earned techniques and procedures they had learned to be successful.

Strong added that the unit represented the Nebraska National Guard well.

"I couldn't have asked for a better, solid group of young American Soldiers. It's like asking a dad how he feels after watching his son win the basketball championship."

Medic turns disciplinary project into positive experience for fellow Soldiers

By Spc. Lynn Weiland
Staff Writer

For one 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) Soldier, his deployment to Iraq in 2004 wasn't only about serving his country, but was also about helping and motivating fellow comrades.

Spc. Jake Robinson, combat medic, served his fellow comrades by assisting the leaders in maintaining high morale within the troops.

"While we were over (in Iraq), we played a lot of cards and there was a lot of joking around, but the one thing that seemed to be a huge hit was the horseshoe pit," he said.

The horseshoe pit was located at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Endurance in Iraq, but it didn't exist prior to Robinson's arrival. He said the pit's construction was the result of an undisclosed disciplinary action his company took upon him.

"They decided to turn a negative into a positive thing," he said. "This pit became something that would not only improve my morale, but also the morale of those around me as well."

For members of the 313th who were 30 miles south of Mosul at FOB Endurance, having a horseshoe pit located right outside of their huts made a positive impact on them.

"(The horseshoe pit) helped



Photo by Spc. Lynn Weiland

Having Fun: Spc. Jake Robinson reacts to his cards during a game with friends from his unit.

build camaraderie through competition. It was pretty much the best horseshoe pit ever," said Sgt. Dave Huffman, a fellow member of the 313th Med. Co.

Robinson purchased a kit that contained the stakes, horseshoes and the schematics of the game. He then designed and built the actual pit. When he created the design he took throwing errors and sand seepage in to account, thus he added backstops and running boards.

After the constructing the pit, the only thing left to do was filling the pits with sand and this became somewhat of an obstacle.

"You would think that Iraq would have plenty of sand; however it was all really rocky dirt," Robinson said. "We had to actually go searching around for sand to fill the pits with."

Once the sand was in place

and everything was complete, the games began. "We put on small tournaments. You could tell that everyone was having a good time by the smiles on their faces. You could just tell that this game became a way or a chance to get away from what was actually going on over there," Robinson said.

After a month Robinson was moved to a different FOB, but he left the horseshoe pit and equipment intact.

"Once I arrived at the other FOB I definitely missed the game, but at the same time I knew that other Soldiers were still enjoying it. I had a good time while it lasted," Robinson said

Soldier's death helped refocus medical unit, Guardsmen say

By Pfc. Cornel Stemley
Staff Writer

When Sgt. 1st Class Tricia Jameson of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) was killed by a roadside bomb on July 14 in western Iraq while rushing to the aid of wounded Marines, she'd been in Iraq less than a month.

Far too short a time to have gotten to know many members of her unit, which she had joined as a replacement medic.

Still, according to members of the 313th Med. Co., Jameson left a lasting legacy.

"She was committed and dedicated to her job. She went beyond her call of duty by staying late when needed," said Sgt. Amanda Watkins a combat medic with the 313th Med. Co. "I admire that."

Following Jameson's death in the roadside blast, which also severely injured a second unit medic, Spc. Rachel Spors who was evacuated to Germany and later to the United States where she continues her recuperative therapy, the unit held two memorial services to honor their fallen comrade. One was held at Camp Speicher and another was held at Al Asad Airfield.

Several months later, the 44th Medical Command renamed its Combat Medical Center at Camp Anaconda near Balad, Iraq, in Jameson's honor.

The unit also reviewed its tactics to help better defend against insurgent improvised explosive device attacks, while Soldiers began wearing arm bracelets in honor of Jameson.

Still, the work had to go on.



Photos courtesy of Capt. Craig Strong

At Work: In this last-known photograph, Tricia Jameson works on a medical record at the 313th Medical Company command post at Camp Speicher, Iraq, in June or early July.



Honoring A Fallen Friend: Capt. Robert Miller, 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), looks at the late Staff Sgt. Tricia Jameson's dogtags during a memorial service held in Iraq.

"Medics must continue the mission even after losing a Soldier," said 1st Sgt. Mark Carlson. "We did just that after the loss of Sergeant First Class Jameson. We moved Soldiers into gun trucks on convoys, upgraded the armor of ambulances, and (studied) after action reviews."

Jameson's memory, said Capt. Craig Strong, commander of the unit, was never far from the unit's mind during the remaining time it served in Iraq.

"Even the Soldiers who had not yet met Sergeant Jameson

were affected," said Strong, who spoke at both memorial services. "It causes you to reflect on your own mortality."

Strong said he was concerned following Jameson's death over how the unit would react.

Would they become more apprehensive? Would they circle the wagons?

In order to help his Soldiers deal with the

rollercoaster of emotions they were feeling immediately after the death, Strong delivered a eulogy he entitled "Medics Forward." In it, he spoke of how Jameson and other medics are charged with one of the most difficult and admirable missions in the military: saving the lives of fellow Soldiers.

"Memorial services serve two purposes," he said later. "One is to honor the fallen Soldier. The other is to charge the unit with carrying on."

"Sergeant Jameson would've wanted us to carry on," he added.

Following the ceremonies, Strong said he noticed a change in the unit's demeanor. Instead of becoming tentative, the Soldiers became even more determined to make a difference.

"It almost reinvigorated the mission to the point of underscoring why they were there," Strong said. "To honor Sergeant Jameson was to continue forward... to get out there and continue doing what Sergeant Jameson had attempted to do... to try and save others."

Note: Capt. Kevin Hynes contributed to this article.

Quick-thinking medics save Soldier's life with battlefield procedure

By Sgt. Jeffrey Kassal
Staff Writer

Last June, Sgt. Matthew Spalding, Lincoln, and Spc. Nathan Reitz, Scottsbluff, defined heroism when they saved a critically wounded Soldier's life during a gruesome and chaotic situation in Iraq.

During a mission near Al Asad Airfield in central Iraq, the two 313th Medical

Company (Ground Ambulance) medics were occupying an ambulance when an improvised explosive device detonated in the front of their convoy.

The explosion disabled the lead Hum-Vee and damaged five other trailing vehicles.

Located approximately 100 meters behind the blast, the Nebraska Army Guardsmen immediately headed toward the smoking Hum-Vee and saw Soldiers scrambling away from it.

Spalding jumped out of the ambulance and ran to the sweltering vehicle where he noticed a moving body in the back seat. He pulled the Soldier out of the melting vehicle and moved him out of harm's way.

However, the Soldier needed a lot more help than that.

The Soldier had a piece of shrapnel lodged in his neck from one side to the other.

According to Reitz, Spalding took charge of the situation.

"(Spalding) was very calm and let me know what needed to be done. After he calmed me down, things just fell into place," said Reitz.

The two medics tried everything they could to stop the bleeding and clear the wounded

Soldier's airway, but had no success.

The Soldier began to turn blue, lost consciousness and then began to seize.

Their last option was to perform a tracheotomy, which is an incision into the neck to make an artificial opening for breathing. Although neither Guardsman had ever attempted the procedure before, they performed it to perfection.

After completing the tracheotomy, the Soldier's pulse began to rise almost immediately.

After loading the wounded Soldier onto a medical evacuation helicopter, the two Guardsmen continued on their way. Later, they got news that the wounded Soldier would survive.

"Since then, I have heard that the Soldier is home with his family and has made a full recovery," said Spalding.



Reitz



Spalding

RECOVERING continued from page 1.

The 23 year-old Spors said nothing will bring back Jameson or change the events of July 14, 2005, for the better. Still, she is going to try to take away a lesson from the incident.

That lesson is an appreciation for life.

"I thank God everyday that I'm alive. I now realize that anything can happen at any time," said Spors.

Spors said during the eight months she was stationed in Iraq she constantly kept an eye out for suspicious items. She was well aware of the dangers she faced everyday after treating various injuries from IEDs and even hitting an IED herself once before. Still, she felt ambivalent. Nothing could happen to her.

"It was all so unreal," said Spors. "It was like things were in fast forward and I couldn't stop what was happening."

Spors said she and Jameson were preparing to leave Trebil, Jordan, with a truck convoy headed toward Korean Village, Iraq, when they heard that some Marines had been injured a few miles away. Spors said they left the gate and headed immediately for the accident to administer aid to the casualties when the M-997 Field Ambulance she was traveling in struck another IED.

"We were suddenly hit and all I saw was red," said Spors.

Spors said when she snapped back after being stunned momentarily she checked Jameson and realized that her friend was gone.

Spors said she then tried to open the door of her vehicle, but was unable to

move.

"I could see fire in the back of the truck and all around the outside of the vehicle. I knew I had to get out, so I started to scream for help," said Spors.

Spors said she was pulled from the burning vehicle a few moments later. She added that the Soldiers who rescued her had to lift off the roof of the vehicle to recover Jameson.

After Spors' wounds were dressed, she was flown to Korean Village and then Al Asad, Iraq, where she underwent the first of three surgeries. From there she was flown to Baghdad, Camp Anaconda, Germany and finally to Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Spors suffered a punctured lung, broken scapula, broken rib, cracked rib, broken vertebrae and burns on her arm.

"I'm lucky to be alive," said Spors. "Everyday I think about how things could have ended up differently."

Spors said she tried to keep a positive attitude during the whole ordeal, which she believes is one of the reasons she has been able to recover so fast.

"I pushed myself hard the entire time I was doing physical therapy. Sometimes too hard, but I didn't want to waste any time. I had seen how precious life really is," said Spors.

Spors still carries that attitude with her today, along with a matchbox car sized piece of shrapnel the doctors pulled out of her lung.

Spors said she keeps the reminder in her car so it is with her while she is traveling. She said she wants to eventually put it in a shadow box with some other items from the deployment as a

reminder of all she's been through.

Spors said she doesn't really need the shrapnel to remember what happened.

"It will always be burned into my mind. All I have to do is move my arm a certain way and I feel it," said Spors.

Spors said although the doctors said it could take up to 18 months for her muscles to repair, she's not bothered.

"It could be a lot worse. Whenever I start thinking things are bad I stop myself," said Spors. "They could be worse. I try to confront my feelings about the wreck so they are less scary. That makes it easier to move on."

Spors said moving on and getting back into the routine of civilian life took some time at first, but now she is almost fully adjusted. She said she is planning to finish her student teaching in the fall. She had been halfway through a semester of student teaching in Houston, Texas, when she was called up to go overseas.

"I am excited to finish school and hopefully get a teaching job somewhere," said Spors. She has also re-enlisted in the Army National Guard for one more year. She added she is going to take the military one year at a time.

Spors said she loves her unit, but is a little apprehensive about being deployed again in the near future. She said that although she has been back home for over six months she still has moments where she feels like she is in Iraq.

"Sometimes I'll be driving down the road and hear a noise. It takes me back to what happened. I'll never forget it, but that is what life is about - unforgettable experiences - whether they are good or bad."

Medical company commander honored for work during deployment

By Sgt. Jeffrey Kassal
Staff Writer

The commander of the 313th Medical Company, Capt. Craig W. Strong, has been named the recipient of 2005 Medical Service Corps Award of Excellence for his work in leading his unit through its one-year deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In earning the award, Strong was one of 80 U.S. Army Medical Service Corps officers nominated.

Strong won the Army National Guard component award. He was also the highest ranked officer across all components.

Strong was nominated for the award by his battalion commander in Iraq, Lt. Col. Robert D. Mitchell, 36th Medical Evacuation Battalion commander. Mitchell cited several outstanding accomplishments: "While tasked under the 36th Medical Evacuation Battalion, Task Force 44th MEDCOM, during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Capt. Strong led his soldiers in a Jordanian Convoy Support Mission, covering over 500 miles."



Strong

Helping Hands

Bonds forged in combat, now help Soldiers transition back to lives left behind

By Sgt. Katie Loseke

Associate Editor

For many Soldiers adjusting to the long days and even longer nights away from family and friends during a deployment is tough.

Danger lurks behind every corner and reassurance from face-to-face contact with loved ones is impossible.

Often, the transition to the combat zone is difficult, but for some members of Lincoln's 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), returning home from the deployment was just as challenging.

"I really struggled when I got home. I had to deal with different kinds of stress that I hadn't encountered for over a year," said Spc. Jillian Kinzer, a combat medic with the 313th Med. Co. "I was ecstatic to see my family, but then I began missing the family I had built over there."

Members of the 313th Med. Co. set foot on local soil on Nov. 1 after 307 days of continuous operations in Iraq where they provided medical support to various units, hospitals, detention centers and convoy missions. According to Kinzer the friends she now calls family are the ones who got her through the ordeal. They're also the ones helping her to transition back to civilian life.

"They saw what I saw, experienced what I experienced. They are the only ones who can understand what it was like," said Kinzer.

Kinzer said her family has been very supportive, but will never be able to fully grasp the life-changing affects of a deployment... well, most of her family anyway.

Kinzer's younger sister, Spc. Kelley Kinzer, a truck driver with the 1075th Transportation Company, is also a member of the Guard who has served in Iraq. The two sisters were deployed a few months apart and served overseas at approximately the same time.

Kinzer said she was able to see her sister twice, merely by accident, after finding out they were both running the same convoy mission.

"It was great to see her, even if it was just for 20 minutes," said Kinzer, a 2001 graduate of



Photo by Sgt. Katie Loseke

Combat Veterans: Spc. Jillian Kinzer (left) and Spc. Jamee Clasen work together to pack their personal gear into a duffel bag during a show-down inspection held March 4 in Lincoln, the first drill of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) since demobilizing from a year-long tour in Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Kinzer and Clasen have been helping each other adjust to civilian life after the experiences of serving overseas in a war zone.

Lakeview High School in Columbus, Neb. "It was hard knowing we were both there, but not together."

Kinzer said the deployment changed her in a number of ways. She said she was able to find out a lot about herself while isolated from her family back in the states, and even more about the fragility of life.

"It changed my perspective on things. I see the world through different eyes now. And I definitely don't take life for granted," said the 22-year-old.

Kinzer said her newfound appreciation for life comes from witnessing and helping out in situations that are hard to imagine.

For example, she said, seeing and treating patients with extensive traumas was hard to get used to when she worked in the 332nd Air Force Theatre Hospital. Kinzer said it was those traumas however, that prepared her for what she would experience on the convoys.

"I gave aid to people who were injured in fire fights, vehicle rollovers and improvised explosive devices (IED), along

with treating everyday colds," said Kinzer.

She said that everyday she would load her medical bag, climb into her vehicle and head out on the roads, not knowing what to expect.

"You never know what might happen, but you have to work through it," said Kinzer.

Kinzer said that was her mentality on Aug. 25, 2005, a day, she said, she'll never forget. It was the day of a deadly accident and also her sister's birthday.

Kinzer said she was following a convoy traveling to Camp Speicher, located just north of Tikrit, when a M-915A2 truck rolled off the road two vehicles in front of her. Kinzer said she immediately grabbed her medical bag and ran to the vehicle.

On her way she noticed that the passenger had been ejected during the accident and was lying dead in the ditch.

Kinzer turned her attention back to the truck and ran to help the driver. When she reached into the vehicle she saw that the driver was dead also.

"After that I just went into auto mode. My body was taking

care of things, but my mind wasn't keeping up," said Kinzer.

Kinzer said once her faculties came back, she took control of the scene. "There was fuel leaking everywhere and I knew we had to get people out of there in case the truck would blow," said Kinzer.

Kinzer said as soon as another convoy came up behind them, her convoy continued on with its mission. Kinzer said she cleaned up the scene and placed the two Soldiers into body bags.

"It was different than the other times I had worked with casualties. I kept thinking about my sister out on the road and praying that she was safe for her birthday," said Kinzer.

Kinzer added that this was just one of many life-changing days she had while in Iraq. "I really began to see how delicate life is," she said. "That's not something that people who haven't been in these kinds of situations can understand."

Kinzer said it was her overseas friends who got her through those tough days. Friends, she added, who were experiencing the same things.

One especially close friend of

Kinzer's who has helped her make the transition back to college student from combat Soldier is Spc. Jamee Clasen, a combat medic with the 313th Med. Co. Clasen and Kinzer became friends while serving overseas and are both attending the University of Nebraska at Omaha this semester.

Clasen and Kinzer both saw and helped out in situations Clasen said she never thought she would be part of.

"I saw a friend of mine get blown up by an IED right in front of me. He was killed instantly," said Clasen. "That's an image you never forget."

Clasen said although she saw good, bad, and very bad while overseas, she decided she wasn't going to let the memories take over her life and keep her from doing things when she got back home.

"I just jumped feet first back into my sorority, job and school," said Clasen. "I realized early on that I needed to get involved right away or I would keep dwelling in my memories of Iraq."

Clasen said when she saw that Kinzer was having trouble adjusting, she again instilled the bond that Soldiers have while overseas and took her under her wing.

"I got her involved in a sorority and some other school groups so she could meet other girls her age," said Clasen. "The hardest part about returning from a deployment is not seeing the friends you saw everyday over there. I knew she was just missing the camaraderie."

Kinzer said her involvement in the organizations saved her from the loneliness she had been feeling since she got home.

"It's funny. I missed my family while I was over there, but when I got home I missed my new family, the people I spent everyday and night with," said Kinzer. "I never realized the bond we had was so strong."

Kinzer and Clasen both agreed that it is the bond of friendship they shared with other Soldiers that got them through the deployment and is now getting them through the transition back to civilian life.

"I'm just taking it one day at a time. Each day is great and (I) don't take any of them for granted," said Kinzer.

Freedom Salute ceremony serves as bookend for medics' deployment

By Spc. Lynn Weiland
Staff Writer

Soldiers of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) were recognized as defenders of freedom, March 5, in Lincoln, during a Freedom Salute Ceremony.

"Today, we reflect, celebrate and remember," said Maj. Gen. Roger P. Lempke, Nebraska adjutant general, during the ceremony.

Lempke said the ceremony was an opportunity to recognize the Soldiers, their families and friends, and members or organizations of the community for their service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Freedom Salute campaign, one of the largest Army National Guard recognitions, is designed to recognize Soldiers, families, community

organizations and employers, for their contributions to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Similar ceremonies are also held for veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle.

"Today's ceremony isn't an individual awards ceremony or our welcome home," said Capt. Craig Strong, commander of the 313th Med. Co. "The ceremony as a whole is specifically focused on all 313th Soldiers and is designed to recognize their accomplishments as defenders of freedom."

To commemorate their service to the United States, each Soldier was presented with an encased U.S. flag; a sequentially numbered; limited edition National Guard coin; Defender of Freedom lapel insignia; and a certificate of appreciation signed by the director and com-



Photo by Spc. Lynn Weiland

Freedom Salute: Capt. Craig Strong (right) presents Spc. Jessica Hoelting with her Freedom Salute Medal, March 5. Hoelting was named the Army Times Soldier of the Year while serving in Iraq.

mand sergeant major of the Army National Guard. Family members and employers were also given items of recognition for their service.

"One of our goals for this ceremony is to recognize those who contributed and suffered

here at home while we were away," Strong said.

Two 'Center of Influence' awards were presented: a unique award was given to one Soldier and commemorative rings were presented to select Soldiers. The Unit Outstanding Individual award was given to Bridgett Miller, leader of the 313th's Family Readiness Group, while the "We Care Foundation" was recognized as the Outstanding Community Organization.

A special recognition was also made to Spc. Robert Pilcher, a member of the 313th Med. Co. who named national State Games Athlete of the Year. Additionally, nine Soldiers received a special certificate and a commemorative ring in recognition of their mobilizations for both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Noble Eagle. Receiv-

ing those awards were Sgt. 1st Class Melvin Baumfalk, Sgt. Eric Nesiba, Sgt. Adam Quedensley, Sgt. Nicole Loos, Sgt. Heath Blackwell, Spc. Nick Davids, Spc. Terry Young, Spc. Rachel Kryzminski and Spc. Kecia Spoffard.

"This is the end of your tour, but this is not the end of your involvement with the Nebraska National Guard," Lempke said. "Whether you choose to continue to serve or you choose to leave to go on to other endeavors, the Guard will always be here, to serve you and your families."

Strong said that the Freedom Salute brings closure for the families as well as the Soldiers of the 313th. "To me, this is the book-end to our deployment. Our send-off ceremony was one book-end... and this is the other."



Guard Family NEWS You Can Use

Many programs available to help military families cope with deployment stresses

By Maj. Drey Ihm
Family Program Office

The Army National Guard deployment cycle support plan requires the Family Program Office to provide the administration and oversight of the specific tasks in regard to Family Readiness and Support, to be accomplished during all phases of the deployment cycle.

The intent is to provide "the right tools and training," and follow-on support to facilitate Soldier and family readiness beyond current operations.

A key element of the successful reintegration of families centers on proper preparation, to include spouse and family education.

The Nebraska Joint Forces Headquarters Family Program is a key factor in supporting the families of all military services beyond just our own Army and Air National Guard members as they face a steep increase in military activity, involvement in the Global War on Terror, Homeland Defense, and several major military operations.

The Family Assistance Centers (FAC), family readiness assistant (FRA), youth coordinator, State Family Program director, and the Family Program assistant are the primary resource in providing family readiness support to commanders, Soldiers, Airmen, Corpsmen and families.

Volunteers and the Family Readiness Network are the heart of this program, and the unit level Family Readiness Group volunteers provide vitality to the program.

Here are some of the programs and resources available to all service members and their families:

♦One of our greatest challenges in meeting the needs of Guard families is their wide geographic dispersion. A Guard Family website with information relevant to all stages of deployment has also been launched and can be accessed on www.guardfamily.org.

Each family assistance center office compiles and sends out a "News You Can Use" bulletin weekly to all Family readiness groups within their region containing announcements regarding

benefit updates, news releases and web resources.

To facilitate communication among National Guard children, a special Youth website was launched with current information and can be accessed on www.guardfamilyyouth.org.

This is a National Guard Bureau website. We are currently establishing a state level youth website that will address specific issues and information specific to Nebraska's youth.

♦Guard Family Team Building (GFTB) provides progressive and sequential training and materials for family member volunteers to train other family members. It can be accessed on the www.gftb.org website. Emphasis is placed on family member awareness of the military and on increased self-reliance so families can better help themselves and each other.

Current training modules available are: Conflict Management and Resolution, Deployment and Reunion, Effective Leadership Skills, Family Finances, Impact of the Mission on Family Life, Introduction to Guard Family Action Plan, Introduction to the National Guard, Resources around You, and Stress Management and Well Being.

♦Operation READY materials are used as the base training resource for Reunion and Reintegration for service members and their family members, training on changes in relationships and communication with children and can be accessed on the www.goacs.org or www.MyArmyLifeToo.com websites.

While Operation READY materials are a great resource, always ensure any training that is needed is provided by the Nebraska Family Program Office. We will ensure to provide the latest specific information that pertains to the Nebraska National Guard, its members and their families.

♦A new requirement that service members and family members be provided training on reunion and marriage enrichment. This training has been defined as Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), which is part of the Building Strong & Ready Families initiative. Contact the Family Program Office for more information

regarding PREP.

♦High operational tempo and family separations cause members and their families to be forced to deal with situations that bring about a great deal of anxiety and stress. While many are prepared for these challenges, others are not.

The good news is that people can develop coping skills quickly and easily.

The first technique for getting through stressful times is to simply talk it out. Don't bottle it up. If not able to talk with a partner or spouse, it's okay to confide your feelings to a trusted level-headed friend.

If you feel you need more professional advice, you can get tips from a consultant who is likely to understand your situation and provide you with positive steps to help you and your family cope.

The other side of the coin is listening. To talk it out requires a good listener. Unfortunately, many of us are poor listeners - not because we are unskilled, indifferent or uncaring, but because we care so much, we want to ease the stress and solve the problem.

If you are the listener, allow the person to vent, talk, yell or cry. Don't try to solve the problem.

Sometimes just knowing that someone cares about our hurt feelings, worries or difficult decisions can go a long way to helping us deal with a stressful situation.

Good communication is the key to dealing with stress in our lives. As someone once said: "A joy shared is doubled; a sorrow shared is halved."

Find someone to share your concerns - it will help you through the difficult times. Turn stress coins into gold.

For more information on dealing with the stresses contact www.military-onesource.com (user i.d.: military password: onesource) or call 1-800-342-9647.

For more information about these programs, contact the Nebraska Army National Guard Family Program Office, 1234 Military Road, Lincoln, NE 68508, 1-402-309-7331 or 1-800-432-6778, or drey.ihm@ne.ngb.army.mil.

Education Notebook

■Online training available for all Army personnel at no cost to individuals or units

By Chief Warrant Officer Robyn Huskey
State Education Officer

Welcome to Army e-Learning where training is available for all Army personnel anywhere at anytime, 24/7.

With the Army e-Learning program individuals can access over 2,600 distance learning courses including: business skills, interpersonal skills, computer professional and computer user skills, environmental, safety and health courses, 29 foreign languages, and covers over 80 information technology vendor certification exams.

Army e-Learning offers personal mentoring for most IT certifications, in addition to promotion points and college credits. Also included is temporary access to over 8,000 online books to assess their value to the workforce. All of this is at no cost to individuals or their units.

To access Army e-Learning, members of the Army workforce may register via the Army Knowledge Online (AKO) under the My Education channel. Click on the Army e-Learning Portal Page and follow the list to register or login.

Student registration has been automated with the Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS). ATRRS verifies student eligibility for the program and also posts successfully completed courses to the student's official ATRRS training record. It also produces certificates.

The library of courseware is continually updated. Specific recommendations for GS-2210 are now available as are several custom courseware mappings for the School of Information Technology and many other organizations.

To use the system, users must have an AKO address to register. For assistance with AKO, access the AKO web site FAQs/Help, or call 1-877-256-8737 (DSN 654-4357).

For assistance with any difficulty in ATRRS, please logon to <http://www.atrrs.army.mil/help> or call 703-695-2060 (DSN 225-2060).

For assistance and questions on the Army e-Learning program, please contact the Army at cbt.help@secbmail.belvoir.army.mil or call 703-806-4907 (DSN 656-4907).

Nebraska picked to host summer camp for military children

Public Affairs Office

The National Military Family Association announced March 2 that the Nebraska Air and Army National Guard Family Programs and YMCA Camp Kitaki have been chosen to host *Operation Purple Summer Camp* in 2006.

NMFA developed the free summer camp program, sponsored this year by the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and TriWest Healthcare Alliance, in response to the need for increased support for military children, especially those whose parents are, or will be, deployed.

The National Guard will join a select list of dedicated teams

to host more than 2,500 deserving children at 26 locations in 22 states.

"NMFA is excited to announce the Nebraska National Guard as a participant in this very worthwhile program," said Tanna Schmidli, NMFA Chairman of the Board/CEO. "We look forward to working together to indeed, make a difference in these children's lives"

The National Guard is working in partnership with YMCA Camp Kitaki, Army Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Navy Reserve, Offutt AFB, and others to bring this camp to the state. The camp will be held at YMCA Camp Kitaki located just outside of Louisville, Neb.

Applications will only be

available online. Registration begins March 15 and ends May 1.

Each camp is "purple" meaning it is open to children of any member of the uniformed services including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and United States Public Health Service plus the National Guard and Reserve.

Camp Kitaki is a YMCA resident camp that serves children ages 9-17 with progressive camping experiences based on their prior experience and areas of interest. Camp Kitaki serves more than 2,500 children each year, incorporating the core values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility into programs developed to help

strengthen children's spirits, minds and bodies. Camp Kitaki also provides special needs camping opportunities for children with cardiology conditions, asthma, arthritis, learning disabilities or A.D.D., impaired hearing, and cystic fibrosis.

The NMFA *Operation Purple* website www.operation-purple.org has more information about the camp and camp registration. Applications will only be available online.

"TriWest recognizes that as military parents deploy in our nation's defense, their children face an array of challenges," said TriWest President and CEO David J. McIntyre Jr. "As an extension of our mission to support the well-being of America's

military family, we are proud to support NMFA's *Operation Purple Summer Camp*."

For more information about Operation: Purple Camp Nebraska, please contact:

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Successful leaders expect positive results

Maj. Gen. Roger P. Lempke
Adjutant General

Laws of Leadership, retired

LEMPKE ON LEADERSHIP

were not computer savvy

Brig. Gen. William Cohen describes this leadership trait as expecting positive results. Of all the eight credos of leadership he discusses, this one may be the most difficult.

For reasons I certainly don't know, we are often obsessed by the negative. It's apparent every day. Fear that a project just beginning won't work; suspicion that a new employee won't work out as hoped; awaiting bad news about the budget—these are examples of what often consumes our thoughts.

And this sort of thinking becomes contagious. It can wreck an otherwise promising undertaking.

Several years ago in my civilian job I directed an effort to convert our company's manufacturing operations to a paperless process. We spent significant time and effort researching software applications and narrowing down the many proposals to one we believed best fit the company.

Then the task was to get a capital project (money) approved by corporate headquarters. The leaders we dealt with

and were clearly uncomfortable dealing with the subject of paperless operations. But it was a good project so they had no reason to turn it down.

Finally, with obvious frustration, the corporate leader blurted out: "I'm going to approve the project but I think it going to fail!"

"But I think it's going to fail." And most certainly it did.

The comment shook my faith in senior leadership. Despite the positive outlook I tried to portray, it shook up everyone else on the project team.

But on the positive side it can be said that we met corporate leadership's expectations—they expected us to fail and we did.

Expecting positive results can try one's patience. Saying it and believing it is one thing. Living through the tough times to achieve success is the challenge a leader faces.

From a distance Omaha Beach looked to be a disaster. If the Americans could not secure this beach front in the middle of the invasion force assaulting the

Normandy beaches on June 6, 1994, then the entire effort to defeat Nazi Germany would fail.

The field commanders had at best anecdotal information and views from destroyers too many miles at sea away from the action.

It's times like this when leader puts faith in the plan and people.

Thank goodness the Allied leaders did on that historic day.

A leader must learn to truly expect positive results. The test comes during the tough times. Do you hang in and trust your people to do the right thing or cut your losses?

For Coach Bill Callahan the smart move might have been to hedge the situation with the Nebraska offense. Maybe continue to run the option while slowing bringing in more of the "West Coast" offense.

He could have mitigated criticism by trying to run the ball more even though being openly committed to the new style of offense. But he expected more and eventually got it.

It wasn't easy and it didn't happen overnight, but by expecting positive results he is now in position to take the Huskers to another level.

Since almost everyone in Nebraska is a Big Red football fan you can relate to the tribulations of changing to a new offensive system over the last two years.

It certainly has not been pretty. And like most others fans, my patience began to wear thin rather early in the process.

But the NU coaches hung in despite overbearing pressure from the media and fans. Then, almost suddenly, the offense emerged during a November game against Kansas State. Passes were completed to wide open receivers, frustrating the opponent's defense to the point of despair. Wide running lanes opened up for our running backs because defensive linemen and linebackers were so intent on stopping the pass.

All the things we had been promised were coming true.

Two years is a long time to learn an important aspect of leadership, but the coaching staff displayed an unfailing commitment to the style of offense they brought to Nebraska.

In his book on the Eight Universal

Protecting homes, families, neighborhoods important in today's new environment

The world has changed dramatically in recent years.

Many people can remember the days when they left their homes unlocked and hid house keys under door mats.

Now, there is a new outlook regarding security.

More and more people are taking security more seriously due to recent criminal and terrorist incidents. This new outlook has led people to make sure they have locked their doors and have only given a house key to a trusted neighbor.

It is also important in today's security environment for neighbors to look out for one another. Personnel should report any suspicious activity that takes place in the neighborhood.

How many times late at night have you seen someone who doesn't live in your neighborhood trying to look into a neighbor's home?

How many times have you seen something odd in the neighborhood and said to yourself, "That doesn't look right?"

Do not be afraid to call local law enforcement if you see someone around a neighbor's home if the situation deems it necessary.

Many people also remember the days of their youth when they could "roam" local communities and feel safe.

The potential for criminal activity affecting children has increased since these bygone days. It is now necessary for parents to watch their children more closely and make sure they have been instructed what to do in the case of an emergency.

While particular attention is being paid to the security of military and government facilities, some people may overlook the new idea of simple security measures for their own residences and neighborhoods.

Below are a few simple suggestions for improving the security of homes and neighborhoods:

Home Security:

- Lock all entrances at night, including the garage. Keep the house locked, even if you are at home;

- Ensure interior windows are locked at bedtime or when not at home;

- Consider installing a bolt and peep-

Protecting Yourself

By Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder
Air Guard Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection Office

hole on all exterior doors for added security;

- At night, keep drapes and curtains closed;

- Make sure outside lights work and consider timers for both exterior and interior lights;

- Restrict the possession of house keys. Change locks if keys are lost or stolen and when moving into a previously occupied residence;

- Be alert to public works crews and other utilities requesting access to your residence. Check their identities before allowing them inside home or contact the parent company to verify employee status before allowing entry;

- Never leave children alone or unattended, and know where they are at all times;

- Instruct children on how to call for help.

Be A Good Neighbor:

- Be alert for suspicious activity at neighbors' residences. Make note of suspicious individuals and record details of their activity. Contact local authorities and make your neighbors aware of the activity;

- Watch for unfamiliar vehicles cruising or parked frequently in your neighborhood, particularly if one or more occupants remain in the vehicle for extended periods of time;

- Write down license numbers, make, model and color of suspicious vehicles. Note descriptions of occupants and take a photograph if it can be done discreetly;

- Treat with suspicion any inquiries from strangers concerning the whereabouts of family members or neighbors;

- Report all suspicious activity to local law enforcement as appropriate.

For more information, please contact the following: Capt. Ryan Earleywine, Nebraska Army National Guard, (402) 309-7406; or Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder, Nebraska Air National Guard antiterrorism noncommissioned officer, (402) 309-1565.

New changes to warrant officer school should help fill shortages

Chief's Business

By Chief Warrant Officer Steve Weber
Command Chief Warrant Officer

I recently attended the National Conference of Command Chief Warrant Officers in Nashville, Tenn.

General briefings included the many changes being made at the national level that will impact the process on becoming a Nebraska Army National Guard warrant officer.

The most significant change is with training at the Warrant Officer Career Center at Fort Rucker, Ala.

Training is now focused on educating, not just physical fitness training with special drills designed to put stress on the student. Candidates are immediately treated as future warrant officers.

A short list of course offerings include: leadership, military history, ethics in the military, Warrior Task Battle Drills and a five-day field leadership exercise designed to give students the skills necessary for deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom.

Students are required to execute an operations order at "Forward Operating Base Freedom" — an urban operations village with six situational training lanes. These training lanes are filmed for after action review feedback and include blue non-combatants and red opposing forces who shoot back with laser fire.

Other changes include a one-day staff ride to the Andersonville Civil War confederate prison camp where 10,000 Union prisoners died is planned along with a community service project.

A second significant change to the warrant officer education process will take effect in January 2007 and will give Warrant Officer Candidates the option to attend a WOC school at state National Guard Regional Training Institutes (RTI).

The program is intended to be much like the current state Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. Phase one of the new program will include three months of drill weekend training to complete distance learning courses. The second phase involves five months of instruction similar to that taught at Fort Rucker. Phase three concludes with a two-week annual training period in the month of September at Camp Atterbury, Ind.

This option will definitely benefit Soldiers who can't get away from their civilian employment for an extended period of time.

When implemented, state command chiefs expect this option to be a very viable alternative to spending more than a month at Fort Rucker. The state RTI WOC program will then hopefully pro-

vide the number of students necessary to meet future requirements to sustain the Warrant Officer Corps nationally.

Current national warrant officer manning reports for the Army National Guard indicate 5,000 slots must be filled in the next four years. Nebraska's manning reports indicate we must fill 50 slots in the next four years. I am confident these new training opportunities combined with our recruiting and retention efforts will make us successful in filling our ranks with great Soldiers.

One of Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke's priorities for 2006 is to "Retain our Core." How do we apply that to the Nebraska Warrant Corps? My best advice is to make sure you thank a warrant officer for their service.

If you know of a warrant officer who is contemplating leaving the Guard please ask them to stay. Sometimes being asked to stay and be a member of the best organization in the country is all it takes.

Oh by the way, I'm sure you will agree with me that Nebraska Warrant Officers have been standing tall and bearing a heavy burden as they support commanders in deployments to OEF/OIF, and support commanders here at home. While we have done an excellent job this far, we need to remember to continue this excellence.

On another note please join me in congratulating our newest warrant officer, Matt Vanderpol, who is a recent graduate of WOCS at Fort Rucker, Ala. and is currently assigned in the Data Processing section of the U.S. Property and Fiscal Office, Joint Forces Headquarters-Nebraska.

Congratulations also to Chief Warrant Officer Cory Languis, assigned to the 267th Ordnance Company. Languis was the first warrant officer ever nominated by Nebraska to compete nationally for the General Douglas MacArthur Junior Leadership Award.

This award recognizes junior officers in the grades of second lieutenant to captain and warrant officer one to chief warrant officer two for outstanding leadership qualities. Although Languis was not selected as the national winner, we are very proud of Cory's outstanding leadership and his service to our state and nation.

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Legion of Merit
Col. William S. Rein

Purple Heart

Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Preister

Meritorious Service Medal

Col. Roma J. Amundson
Lt. Col. Michael L. Deger
Maj. Drey L. Ihm
Maj. Gary A. Ropers
Maj. Eric J. Teegerstrom
Capt. Craig W. Strong
2nd Lt. Ben G. Vance
Chief Warrant Officer Clyde L. Childers
Chief Warrant Officer Steven C. Loftis
Chief Warrant Officer Steven L. Weber
Chief Warrant Officer William Ross
Sgt. Maj. Quintin Teegerstrom
Sgt. 1st Class Dennis James
Sgt. 1st Class Michael L. Lederer
Sgt. 1st Class Guadalupe Lopez IV
Sgt. 1st Class Robert L. McCroy
Sgt. 1st Class Eugene D. Rains
Sgt. 1st Class Allen R. Sedlak
Staff Sgt. Richard B. Harms
Staff Sgt. Maritza J. Pearl

Joint Service Commendation Medal

Maj. Robert J. Kadavy

Army Commendation Medal

Lt. Col. John Byers
Lt. Col. James E. Murphy
Maj. Kevin L. Bricker
Maj. Donald Kneifl
Maj. James Oliver
Capt. Marc D. Anderson
Capt. Paul A. Borzekofski
1st Lt. Danial C. Edmonston
1st Lt. Kyle R. Matoush
1st Lt. Nicholas G. Nyman
1st Lt. Raymond P. Phillips
Chief Warrant Officer Teresa Domeier
Command Sgt. Maj. Eli A. Valenzuela
Master Sgt. Curtis Talbot
Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Johansen
Sgt. 1st Class David E. Lovercheck
Sgt. 1st Class Douglas V. Manly
Sgt. 1st Class John H. Wills
Staff Sgt. Joel J. Hestermann (for Valor)
Staff Sgt. Timothy Hicks
Staff Sgt. Lauren J. McConnell (for Valor)
Staff Sgt. Robrenna M. Redl
Sgt. Wayne R. Cornell (for Valor)
Sgt. Steven J. Steinike
Sgt. Sion T. Odom (for Valor)
Sgt. Jeremy White
Spc. Mitchell Adkins
Spc. Adam L. Dack (for Valor)
Spc. Kevin Hunter
Spc. Mujahid Y. Kuwa
Spc. David L. Munoz (for Valor)

Army Achievement Medal

Maj. Michael P. Akins

Maj. Michael W. Blatt
1st Lt. James B. Eves
1st Lt. Shane L. Schwarz
1st Sgt. Terry J. Johnson
Master Sgt. Genine M. Hovick
Master Sgt. Joseph Sokolik
Master Sgt. Richard C. Tomjack
Sgt. 1st Class Eric S. Clyne
Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Pearson
Sgt. 1st Class Carl J. Ulm
Staff Sgt. Thomas Jelinek
Staff Sgt. Jennifer J. Kramer
Staff Sgt. Jessie D. Matlock
Staff Sgt. Douglas L. Reeves
Staff Sgt. Kenneth M. Stenka
Sgt. Robert L. Combs
Sgt. Terry L. Graham
Sgt. Adam L. Homan
Sgt. Jeffrey P. Switzer
Spc. Yolanda M. Hardesty
Spc. James Jensen
Spc. William L. Johannsen
Spc. Adam J. Kosch
Spc. Robert M. Mahood
Spc. Kip Slaymaker
Spc. Justin W. Stoll
Spc. Jared L. Wolf
Pfc. Travis J. Engler
Pfc. Fredrick Lucius
Pfc. Fenton E. Phan
Pfc. Jesse J. Richards

Armed Forces Service Medal

Maj. Robert J. Kadavy

Nebraska National Guard

Legion of Merit

Sgt. 1st Class Bonnie J. Bessler

Nebraska National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Steven C. Hurst

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal

Chief Warrant Officer Cory D. Languis
Sgt. Maj. John J. Payer
Master Sgt. Wayne R. Kerns Jr.
Sgt. 1st Class Eric S. Clyne
Sgt. 1st Class Jennifer Fotinos
Staff Sgt. Jay F. Bottorff
Staff Sgt. Gena L. Norton
Staff Sgt. Todd O'Keefe
Sgt. Antrina D. Berks
Sgt. Daniel P. Leach
Sgt. Sarah M. Pannill
Spc. Brison G. Kuhn
Spc. Mark A. Noziska
Spc. James F. Roark

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal

Capt. Bryan P. Betty
Capt. Dale Burrage
1st Sgt. Renold Castaneda
Master Sgt. Joyce Moore
Sgt. 1st Class Bernard P. Andrijeski

Sgt. 1st Class William C. Cary
Sgt. 1st Class Colin Jones
Sgt. 1st Class Kimberly Moore
Sgt. 1st Class John Murphy
Staff Sgt. Patrick C. Bruning
Staff Sgt. William A. Bushhousen
Staff Sgt. Kyle D. Diefenbaugh
Staff Sgt. Ryan J. Johnson
Staff Sgt. David M. Nanfite
Staff Sgt. Robrenna Redl
Staff Sgt. Rachel M. Stafford
Staff Sgt. Adren W. Uhlig
Staff Sgt. Alan J. Wineinger
Sgt. Jared M. Burget
Sgt. Brandon S. Burton
Sgt. Brison G. Kuhn
Sgt. Nathan J. Reicks
Sgt. Dustin E. Schlote
Sgt. Tyler R. Strecker
Sgt. Carlos Van Nurden
Sgt. Joshua T. Vapenik
Spc. Lyle W. Chamberlin
Spc. Jacob C. Dettman
Spc. August J. Henrichs
Spc. Casey A. Loomis
Spc. Crystal G. Richey
Spc. Michael L. Noyes Jr.
Spc. Mark A. Noziska
Spc. Duane L. Owen Jr.
Spc. Carrie C. Pmajzl
Spc. James F. Roark
Spc. Andrew P. Rodriguez
Spc. Matthew M. Wolff
Pfc. Abraham B. Garcia
Pfc. James A. Teel

Nebraska National Guard

Recruiting Achievement Medal

Sgt. 1st Class Gene A. Hendricks

Combat Action Badge

Capt. Glenn E. Wattier
Master Sgt. Linda Tarango-Griess (Posthumous)
Sgt. 1st Class Douglas V. Manly
Staff Sgt. Randy J. Baker
Staff Sgt. Lee M. Bates
Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Fischer (Posthumous)
Staff Sgt. Dennis R. Frey

Staff Sgt. Eugene E. Fuehrer
Staff Sgt. Douglas L. Griess
Staff Sgt. Joseph A. Liske
Staff Sgt. Tracy L. Nyberg
Staff Sgt. Jeremy J. Preister
Staff Sgt. Eric D. Rademacher
Staff Sgt. Jeffrey L. Rundell
Staff Sgt. Bryan R. Traub
Staff Sgt. Jeffrey M. Uhl
Sgt. Anthony J. Bloebaum
Sgt. Robert A. Cleary
Sgt. Robert P. Davis
Sgt. Sara A. Dvorak
Sgt. Richard S. Graves
Sgt. Clinton L. Haddix
Sgt. Jeffrey L. Moore
Sgt. Chadd R. Ohlman
Sgt. Shannon D. Pickinpaugh
Sgt. Terence P. Ricketts
Sgt. Marty L. Timberlake
Sgt. Daniel J. Walford
Spc. Kelly S. Anderson
Spc. Jennifer D. Beck
Spc. Jonathan J. Berry
Spc. Joshua H. Birkel
Spc. Jeremy S. Borrell
Spc. Timothy J. Bos
Spc. Zachary L. Bruening
Spc. Timothy J. Erwin
Spc. Cody A. Graff
Spc. Jacob D. Graff
Spc. John D. Harris
Spc. John G. Jurgensmeier
Spc. Kelly L. Kinzer
Spc. Derek D. Machacek
Spc. Harvey J. Martinez
Spc. Brian L. Mueller
Spc. David L. Munoz
Spc. Tyler L. Peters
Spc. Vally J. Robinson-McDonald
Spc. Brandon L. Scheidemann
Spc. Michael R. Sharples
Spc. Peter J. Smith
Spc. Michael J. Stineman
Spc. Shane A. Thompson
Pfc. Richard W. Delancey
Pvt. Nathaniel L. Chitwood

Staff Sgt. Dickie L. Stadler Jr.

Air National Guard

Chief Master Sgt. Randall L. Hansen
Chief Master Sgt. Marvin F. Leners
Senior Master Sgt. John D. Frost
Master Sgt. David D. Anderson
Master Sgt. Dennis E. Kentfield
Master Sgt. Gregory L. Zegers
Tech. Sgt. Brad L. Edmonds Sr.

Air National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal
Lt. Col. Thomas R. Dalton II

Air Medal

Maj. James L. Dalton
Maj. Matt P. Etzelmiller
Capt. Benjamin M. West

1st Lt. Paul W. Erickson
1st Lt. Michael H. Piening
Senior Master Sgt. Steven E. Minnick
Tech. Sgt. Bradley R. Musick

Aerial Achievement Medal

Airman 1st Class Kelley A. Reese

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel

David L. Smith

Major

Stephen M. Marvin

Captain

David P. Benak
David K. Cooper

Chief Warrant Officer Five

Thomas A. Dahlgren

Chief Warrant Officer Three

John P. Ayers
Keith E. Osterhoudt

Warrant Officer One

Torrey J. Baker
Rebecca A. Betts
Julianne M. Kenkel
Bradley D. Kuhn
Matthew L. Vanderpol
Todd A. Wagner

Master Sergeant

David F. Davids

Sergeant First Class

Samuel A. Malone
Alan J. Wineinger

Staff Sergeant

John Inthavong
John E. Ternus

Sergeant

Dustin T. Buchanan
Benjamin D. Jochum
William H. Manley IV
Tate J. Petersen
Casey A. Popp
Casey J. Reynoldson
Curtis H. Sedlacek
Jennifer J. Voegtlin
Jeremie E. Wunderlich

Specialist

Jaimy D. Albrecht
Melissa A. Bickford
Brenda B. Erickson
Jason C. Lanni

Army National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel

Joshua A. Lauck
Jeremy E. Martin
Mitchell E. McConnell
Christopher J. Paulsen
Edward L. Pigg
Tyler T. Schik
Heather N. Springer
Jeremie D. Steinbach
Alex W. Thompson
Timothy D. Verbeek
Ivan L. Wolfe III

Private First Class

Jennifer L. Berens
Kelly B. Dodds
Ryan P. Doerr
Jordan R. Fosbinder
Matthew A. Green
Cody L. Howell
Brian J. Kirby
Megan W. Kummer
Tyffani D. Lerma
Brody C. McLean
Kyle M. Morton
Justin A. Novak
Sean M. O'Malley
Rianna L. Person
Kathleen J. Potter
Jessie C. Qualley
Justin M. Reavis
Christopher L. Renner
Casey N. Sorensen
Zachary J. Sperling
James J. Sykes
Seth W. Thompson
Shane C. Thompson
Michael D. Victor
Jared M. Wiggins

Private Two

Jamie L. Gutierrez
Benjamin S. Mattox
Darcey D. Slingsby

Air National Guard

Chief Master Sergeant

Terry J. Knapp

Master Sergeant

Angelique R. Eddy
Leroy C. Lewis III
Jane E. Rhodes

Shorttakes



Photo by David Nore

Nebraska Army National Guard pioneer honored during annual Women's History Month luncheon

Maj. Georgia Kroese (center) was honored as the first Nebraska Army National Guard woman to lead a unit through a war-time deployment during the March 22 Nebraska National Guard Women's History luncheon held at the National Guard air base dining facility. Kroese received the special recognition from Maj. Gen Roger Lempke for serving as the commander of the 105th Personnel Detachment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Kroese, the first woman to ever lead a Nebraska Army National Guard unit through a war-time deployment, served for approximately one year in Kuwait and Jordan.

Also receiving recognition was luncheon guest speaker, Dr. Joann Schaefer, chief medical officer of the Nebraska Health and Human Services system.

Schaefer talked about women's health issues and stress prevention, including the recognition of good and bad stress in everyday life. She also spoke about the effects of obesity in the state's general population.

Omaha battalion welcomes new commander

By Spc. Sheila Swantek

Staff Writer

The 867th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) welcomed a new commander to the head of its organization during a change of command ceremony held March 12 at the new North Omaha Readiness Center.

Lt. Col. Michael Navrkal of Omaha assumed command of the unit from Lt. Col. Steven Hurst of Lincoln.

Prior to assuming command of the Omaha battalion, Navrkal was commander of Scottsbluff's 168th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply.) While serving in that role he had several opportunities to work with the Soldiers of the 867th.

"They are a great group of Soldiers," said Navrkal of the 867th. "I appreciate the time that I spent with them because I got to know how they work."

"The command climate will be the same, but with a different culture," said Navrkal, "The people may be different, but that doesn't change the mission."

Navrkal was born in Nebraska City, Neb., and is a graduate of Nebraska City's Lourdes Central High School and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he received a bachelor of Science degree in



Photo by Spc. Sheila Swantek

New Responsibilities: Lt. Col. Michael Navrkal (right) accepts the colors of the 867th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) from Col. Roma Amundson, commander of the 92nd Troop Command.

Business Administration.

Navrkal began his military career when he enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1979. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in June 1981 after graduating from the federal Officer Candidate School program.

Navrkal has served in a variety of leadership positions including platoon leader, company commander, battalion personnel, operations and executive officer. He has also served as a logistics staff officer at National Guard Bureau. Navrkal and his wife Jeanie reside in Omaha.

Hurst was born in Omaha, Neb., and grew up in Glenwood, Iowa. He received a bachelor of

Science degree in Math and Science Education from Kearney State College in Kearney, Neb., in 1991.

Hurst enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1978 and served three years on active duty. He was discharged in 1982 and enlisted in the Iowa Army National Guard where he served for less than a year before returning to the Marine Corps for two more years of active duty.

Following that tour of duty, he transferred to the Nebraska Army National Guard. Hurst attended Officer Candidate School at Camp Ashland, Neb., and received his commission in 1989.

Since then, Hurst has served in a variety of leadership positions including platoon leader, training officer, company commander, and state supply management officer.

Hurst also deployment with the 35th Infantry Division to Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of Stabilization Force 13.

Hurst is now serving as commander of the state Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

He and his wife Joyce have 3 children, Tera, Ryan, and Lucas. They reside in Lincoln, Neb.

Senior Air Guard officers swap jobs

By Tech. Sgt. David Brumley
Editor

The 155th Air Refueling Wing underwent a major leadership change during the March drill.

The wing changed its vice commander and operations group commander during an afternoon ceremony, March 4.

Col. Jon Fago, took over as vice commander from Col. Robert Athan. Fago is moving over from 155th Operations Group, where he was the commander since January 2004.

In an emotional speech held at the 155th Operations Group conference center, Fago thanked members of the unit for their dedication and work during his tenure.

"There's not a better unit to be deployed with," said Fago. Fago is a 1979 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy. After attending pilot training at Reese Air Force Base, Texas, and initial KC-135A training at Castle AFB, Calif., he served as a KC-135 pilot at Ellsworth AFB, S.D., for five years. In 1985 he transitioned to KC-10s at Barksdale AFB, La.

In 1988 Fago joined the Air Force Reserve and was assigned to the 78th Air Refueling Squadron at Barksdale AFB, La. He joined the Nebraska Air Guard in 1994 as a KC-135R pilot.

In the Nebraska Air National Guard, Fago served as an aircraft commander, instructor pilot, standardization/evaluator pilot, assistant flight commander, flight commander and operations of-



Fago



Athan

ficer in the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron.

In July 1996, Fago assumed duties as the chief of training in the 155th Operations Support Flight.

As the operations officer and acting squadron commander, he was instrumental in the unit's conversion to the PACER CRAG conversion and directing the increased operations following 9/11. In May 2001, Fago assumed command of the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron.

As Athan handed the reigns of the 155th vice commander position to Fago he at the same time accepted the reigns as the new commander of the 155th Operations Group. A teary-eyed Athan thanked his family for being present during his transition into his new leadership position.

In thanking his wife Athan said: "Without our spouses, we would fail."

Athan also issued a challenge to the members of the 155th. "I want you to look at the opportunities in the unit. If you will, we will succeed. If you don't, we will fail," said Athan.

In his speech during the change of command ceremony Col. Steven Adams, 155th Air Refueling Wing Commander, said both commanders have accomplished major goals during their latest positions and he looks for more in the future.

"I believe this will give both of you a great opportunity to learn some new skill sets," Adams said.

Adams also gave them praise for doing a great job in their current positions and felt they were going to do great in their new assignments.

Athan enlisted in the Nebraska Air Guard as an avionics sensor system specialist.

He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1979 through the Air National Guard Academy of Military Science and then completed undergraduate navigation training at Mather AFB, Calif., in 1980. He then attended RF-4C training at the 16th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, Shaw AFB, S.C.

While a traditional Guardsman, Athan worked as a production director for Designer Graphics. After graduating from the Air Guard Fighter Weapons School he served as an operational testing and evaluation officer on the Navigation Weapons Delivery System program for the RF-4C Phantom at Eglin AFB, Fla. He accepted a full-time position with the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance Group in 1989.

Athan has served as the vice commander of the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing since May 2004.



Photo by David Nore

Air Guard director speaks in Lincoln during luncheon

Lt. Gen. Daniel James III holds up a framed certificate making him an admiral in the "Great Navy of Nebraska" following his speech during the annual Nebraska Military Department's African American History Luncheon, held Feb. 15 in Lincoln. James spoke about the current operational tempo of the National Guard and the role of diversity in the force. He also spoke about the role of the original Tuskegee Airmen, including Lincoln's retired Lt. Col. Paul Adams, who flew with James' father and also knew James' mother. "They were part of history," James said about Adams and his wife. "A wonderful chapter in our nation's history."

Maintenance Group commander steps down from position held since 1995

By 2nd Lt. Camara Minks
Staff Writer

The 155th Air Refueling Wing has a new maintenance group commander.

Lt. Col. Keith Schell assumed command of the Air Guard's 155th Maintenance Group from Col. Ronald Malousek during a ceremony held April 2.

Before the reigns were handed over, Malousek took the opportunity to express his gratitude to those who supported him during the course of his 38-year Air Guard career.

"There's not enough time in the day to thank all of you that have supported the maintenance effort over the years," said Malousek. "I'd like to personally thank all the men and women that made it happen, each and everyone of them for their outstanding work and dedication."

Malousek stated that the maintenance squadron was a "first class organization with first class professionals."

Malousek enlisted in the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1968, rising to the rank of master sergeant while serving as an avionics maintenance specialist. He was commissioned in 1981 and served as officer-in-charge of organizational maintenance, field maintenance and avionics maintenance.

In 1993 Malousek became the chief of supply for the 155th Logistics Squadron in addition to becoming assistant United States Fiscal Property Officer for the wing.

Malousek assumed command of the 155th Maintenance Group in 1995. Malousek's career in the Nebraska Air National Guard extends over 38 years of service and includes numerous deployments, exercises, and contingencies sup-



Photo by Master Sgt. Alan Brown

New Maintenance Boss: Col. Steve Adams (left) presents the flag of the 155th Maintenance Group to Lt. Col. Keith Schell (center) as outgoing commander, Col. Ronald Malousek (far right), watches. Malousek had served as commander of the Nebraska Air Guard maintenance group since 1995.

porting many aircraft flown at the Nebraska Air National Guard.

An obviously choked up Malousek also thanked his wife and family for their support during his many years of service. "You really made it really easy, especially my wife DeeDee, a first class person and strong supporter of my Guard career. I couldn't have done it without you."

Malousek will be deploying overseas as an Expeditionary Maintenance Group Commander and will retire upon his return home sometime around the end of August.

After taking the group flag in a symbolic change of command, Schell gave his thanks to Adams for giving him the opportunity to lead the group.

He then addressed the 268 members of the Maintenance Group. "I know you do an outstanding job," he said, supporting his statement by cited unit's outstanding safety record and accident-free flying hours the maintenance group has accomplished.

Schell said the unit's Midwestern work ethic is one reason that the maintenance group has created such a successful history.

"For the future, I want to make sure we instill these values on our new Airmen."

Schell enlisted in the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1981 and was assigned to the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance Group as a photo processing interpreter. Schell was commissioned in 1986 through the Academy of Military Science at McGhee Tyson Air National

Guard Base in Knoxville, Tenn., and then entered pilot training for the RF-4C aircraft. After graduating from training, Schell was assigned as an aircraft commander and then intelligence officer for the 173rd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron (TRS).

Schell was temporarily assigned to Torrejon Air Force Base, Spain, and subsequently Choo Won Air Base, South Korea.

While at those bases he instructed both Spanish and South Korean RF-4C pilots.

In June of 1994 Schell converted to the KC-135R and served with the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron as a flying training officer, deputy chief of current operations, evaluator pilot, chief of standardization and evaluation, and as the squadron director of operations.

Schell is moving from the wing executive officer position where he was a community relations planner and assistant to the 155th Air Refueling Wing commander since the autumn 2005.



Photo courtesy of Spc. Damon Schlenker

New Responsibilities: Col. Roma Amundson (right) presents the colors of the 168th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) to Maj. Darin Krueger in January.

New commander takes helm of Scottsbluff-based battalion

By Sgt. Jeffrey Kassal
Staff Writer

The Scottsbluff-based 168th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) exchanged commanders in January.

Maj. Darin M. Krueger accepted the flag of command from Lt. Col. Michael D. Navrkal, outgoing commander. Navrkal had held command of the 168th Quartermaster Bn. since January 2004 and is now serving as the new commander of the 867th Quartermaster Battalion (Petroleum Supply) based in Omaha.

Krueger, 40, is a native of Lincoln. He graduated from Platte Valley High School in 1983 and received a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Union College and a master's degree in Social Work from Our Lady of the Lake, Texas.

Krueger enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1986.

Following his commission-

ing, he was assigned to the 2-134th Infantry from 1986-1988, serving as the battalion motor officer, and battalion support platoon leader.

He served in the Texas Army National Guard from 1986-1995, in executive officer and company commander roles, before returning to the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1995.

Krueger became a full time National Guardsman in 1996, serving as a maintenance officer, supply officer, battalion executive officer, and most recently, operations officer.

"I am excited about this opportunity to command the 168th Quartermaster Battalion. The units in the battalion have met many challenges over the past few years and have done an outstanding job in each event. I served with this battalion in the past and know they have some of the most dedicated Soldiers in the Nebraska Army National Guard," Krueger said of his new command responsibility.

Street Talk

"How has your life been changed by your one-year mission to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom?"



Pfc. Jessica Benkosky

313th Medical Company
(Ground Ambulance)

"I have learned that Americans have it really well to other cultures. It makes me appreciate the little things, like driving and going to college."



Spc. Michael Marx

313th Medical Company
(Ground Ambulance)

"(It) helped me understand the importance of life."



Sgt. Amber Strong

313th Medical Company
(Ground Ambulance)

"I have learned that your life can turn around in a matter of seconds and to not take things for granted. I now see more things that my daughter does as funny and excellent."



Spc. Terry Seana

313th Medical Company
(Ground Ambulance)

"(I am) no longer taking things or granted. I am living for myself and not others."



Spc. Laura Yeramysheva

313th Medical Company
(Ground Ambulance)

"My perspective on life has definitely changed. I look at things differently and appreciate the little things a lot more."



Sgt. Joseph L. Howard

313th Medical Company
(Ground Ambulance)

"A deep appreciation for the freedoms all Americans enjoy. Day-to-day worries and stressful events seem insignificant when compared to our time in Iraq."

Why I stayed in the Guard

Well I finally retired as the chief of staff with close to 34 years of service and now I have time to reflect on my career.

The one question that seems the most perplexing is why I stayed so long. After all, there wasn't a strong tradition of military service in my family. The only family member to serve was my Uncle Eddie Rein who served as an officer in Company I, 134th Infantry in Scottsbluff, Neb.

I joined the Guard as a result of being drafted and my only goal was to complete my initial obligation and revert to a full-time civilian. I served 15 years as a traditional, part-time Soldier with a great civilian job as an engineer. I had every right in those 15 years to terminate my service and still fulfill my initial goal.

So what was it about the Guard that enticed me to stay and become a full-time Guardsman?

Initially I had little concern for what the military and the Guard was all about. Topics like federal and state mission, duty, Citizen Soldier did not register with me; service was only a means to an end.

Then as I progressed through basic training I began to see and feel things that I could relate to. Basic training showed me an organization that valued discipline, organization, and demanded 100 percent of my effort in everything I did and yes, it was fun.

Basic training provided me a new and challenging environment that I could never get

Another Voice

Brigadier General (Neb.)

William 'Steve' Rein



the needs of the organization and community above their own.

That duty taught me about selfless service. It made me realize that I belonged to an organization

with purpose. I liked being a member of that organization.

The following year I went to Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Nebraska Army National Guard. During my tenure as an officer I continued to find more of what I liked about my chosen profession.

Now mission, duty, service, Citizen Soldier have meaning. I belong to an institution that lives by values: duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. The fellow Soldiers of my profession live by an ethos that is best described by duty to country. We took an oath to defend and protect the Constitution of the United States and its way of life against all enemies foreign and domestic.

The Guard is united in a common cause and is a family committed to Nation and State. I like belonging to this type of organization.

The Soldiers Creed best describes what I like about the Guard... "I am an American Soldier. I am a warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States and live the Army Values." Commitment to Nation and State is what kept me in the Guard for over 30 years.

I will always be proud of my service and association with the dedicated Soldiers and Airmen of the National Guard.

from rural Nebraska. I was a college graduate, married and had just started a new job before the draft "caught" me. I knew it all.

Boy was I wrong. Basic introduced me to a new level of responsibility. It taught me about diversity and it challenged me physically and mentally in ways I could not have imagined. It took me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to perform.

As I met each challenge I gained a new level of confidence in myself. I realized that I could do more and that I should expect more out of myself.

I left basic training knowing I had mastered the beast. I liked that feeling and I carried that air of confidence back to my civilian job.

The defining event in the start of my "career" was my first activation for state active duty. As a young private first class, I was called out to rescue motorists stranded on I-80 in an untimely spring blizzard in 1974. People would have died that day if the Guard had not been ready and able to perform its state mission.

I was a member of the Guard, serving people in a time of need. I liked that and I was proud to say I was a Soldier in the Nebraska National Guard.

But I was not alone. Many Soldiers in the unit were called out. All came willingly and put

I sent my son to war today

By Nan Fallon

Special for the *Prairie Soldier*

I sent my son to war today; his best friend was at his side,

They used to play this game as kids, but in their game no one died.

With tears of fear and tears of pride I hugged him just one more time

Don't worry mom I'm a soldier now and I will be just fine.

We've trained hard and we've trained long, to keep you safe at night

It's my job; it's what I do, whether it is wrong or right.

You taught me well, to be a man, a year really isn't that long

Now YOU be tough, and YOU be brave, and YOU mom must be strong.

One million moms have felt this way, wives and brothers and kin

Defend your country is an honorable job, to take another life a sin.

Fields of glory and fields of honor are not just in those high school days

The battlefields of life and war is when it is time for all of us to pray.

Good bye my son I will see you soon, be careful and be smart

I've never been more proud of you, I love you son, with every beat of all my heart.

Note: Nan Fallon is the mother of Pfc. Jeff Fallon, assigned to Fremont's Troop B, 1-167th Cavalry. A 2001 graduate of Elkhorn High School, Fallon deployed for a one-year mission to Iraq on March 16 as a member of Task Force Saber. His mother wrote this poem to mark the occasion.

Army Guardsmen earn upset at championships

By Lt. Col. Dan Lonowski
Staff Writer

The Nebraska National Guard pulled off an upset when its shooting team traveled to Fort Benning, Ga. March 7 and won the All-Army Marksmanship Championships.

Led by team captain, Lt. Col. Thomas Brewer, the four-man team rose to the top of the military ranks, defeating 42 teams from the active Army, Army Reserves, and Army National Guard during the week-long competition. The team competed in the Combat Rifle competition, the Combat Pistol competition, the Sniper Team competition and Individual Sniper competition.

The team consisted of Brewer and four shooters, Master Sgt. Ronald Harter, Sgt. 1st Class William Cary, Staff Sgt. Bradley Huston and Sgt. William McClure.

The Nebraska team placed first in the Rifle competition, third in the Combat Pistol Shoot and all four of the squad placed in the top ten as individuals. Weapons used for the competition included the M-16A2, the M-9 pistol, and the M-24 sniper rifle.

Despite only one practice as a team, the Soldiers came together quickly to form a cohesive unit, said Cary, a personnel sergeant for the 209th Regimental Training Institute at Camp Ashland, Neb.

"We gelled well from the very first day," Cary said.

"We worked well as a team and we all got along great."

Cary said the team members were very professional and were a "great group of Soldiers" to shoot with.

Cary shot as a team member for rifle and pistol competitions and shot individually in the long range rifle match. Cary, along with Brewer and Harter, are the veterans on the team while Huston and McClure joined the team this year.

According to Brewer, he handpicked the elite team based on the recent Adjutant General Combat Marksmanship



Photo courtesy of Lt. Col. Thomas Brewer

Winning Form: Master Sgt. Ron Harter takes aim with his pistol during the All-Army Marksmanship Championships held March 7 at Fort Benning, Ga. Nebraska won the overall title, defeating 42 military teams enroute to claiming the championship trophy.

Match scores.

"We have a great tradition of shooters in Nebraska," Brewer said. "But this is the first time the Infantry trophy has been won away from the active duty."

Cary agreed with Brewer's assessment regarding the team's performance.

"We all had a feeling that we were going to do well," said Cary. "We had an expert coach and shooter. We knew that (having Brewer) would be an advan-

tage."

"We all are very competitive and we knew at every stage in the competition that we were all in the hunt to win," said Cary.

Cary said the pistol portion of the competition proved to be the most challenging for the team, made up mostly of rifle shooters.

According to Brewer, the competitors in the pistol shoot had to run two miles wearing battle gear while firing their M-9 pistols at targets.

"We all just went into that portion hoping to just hold on to the lead that we had," Cary said. "And we were able to hold the lead."

Brewer said the team could have performed better with more practice, but he was proud of the team's efforts.

"This shows that we truly are an Army of One with the Guard being equal to the Active component," Brewer said.

"I am very excited and I think that it is going to propel the Nebraska National Guard Marksmanship Program back to its former glory," said Cary referring to the 1990s when the Nebraska National Guard had several championship teams.

Cary said shooting has always come pretty easy to him and he started to get serious with it about five or six years ago competitively.

"It was a good feeling to go down there and know we beat the 'stacked' teams by putting together us four," said Cary.

■Nebraska recruiter earns trip to pit row for successfully enlisting new Soldiers

High Speed Reward

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

Topnotch NASCAR drivers Jimmie Johnson, Kyle Busch, Jeff Gordon or Gregg Biffle aren't names that Staff Sgt. Mat Baker has in his mind when he successfully recruits future Army Guard Soldiers in the Northeast Nebraska area.

Not being a NASCAR fan, Baker also never thought he would wind up in the pit area for the UAW-Daimler Chrysler 400, a major Nextel race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, March 12.

That all changed dramatically for the O'Neill resident after he recently completed seven enlistments for the Nebraska Army National Guard and qualified for the Las Vegas Challenge, sponsored by National Guard Bureau. Baker was one of 50 Army National Guard recruiters from across the United States asked to attend the race.

According to Nebraska's senior recruiting officials, the fact that Baker did so well in one of the state's lesser populated areas to qualify for the trip, serves as a challenge to the rest of the state's recruiting force.

"If you can do this in O'Neill, Neb., you can do it anywhere" said Master Sgt. Ted Guenther, Baker's boss.

According to Baker, watching the Las Vegas race from the pits was an incredible experience. "I wasn't a NASCAR fan before the race, but after listening to the drivers like Biffle, Gordon and Johnson communicate with pit crews on the car and track conditions while actually racing, I haven't missed watching a race," Baker said.

"They did qualifying on Friday, a Busch race on Saturday and the big Nextel NASCAR race on Sunday" said



Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Ted Guenther

Pit Row View: Staff Sgt. Mat Baker, a Nebraska Army National Guard recruiter, stands in pit row at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway near the National Guard #16 car. Baker, one of 50 Guard recruiters invited to watch the race from pit row, holds a football he had signed by Greg Biffle, driver of the National Guard-sponsored car. Baker planned on presenting the signed football to the coach of the Atkinson High School football team in appreciation of the support the school has given to the Nebraska Army National Guard. 20-25 Atkinson students have joined the Guard in the past three years.

Baker.

The race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway — 267 laps around a track just 1.5 miles in length — was won by Jimmie Johnson with an average speed of 133.360 miles per hour with 22 lead changes in a time of 3:02:42 according to official NASCAR results.

Gregg Biffle, who drives the National Guard-sponsored #16 Ford, finished 7th at Vegas after being favored to win by many fans. Biffle became the first driver to win championships in both the Craftsman Truck and Busch series before moving full-time to the Nextel Cup in 2003. Last year he finished second in the chase for the Nextel Cup.

No driver has won a championship in each of NASCAR's top three series, and Biffle is one of only 15 drivers to have won a race in each of the three racing series. Roush Racing is the team of mechanics and engineers that make the #16 National Guard car perform at one the highest performance levels on the track. They have won five of the eight Las Vegas races according to Speed TV.

Baker said he was especially impressed by the race spectators.

"NASCAR fans have to be the most courteous fans outside of Husker fans that I have ever seen," he said. "It's kind of a redneck crowd (like me), but they also are more respectful and down to earth than most."

Baker and the other recruiters also had a chance to speak with Biffle prior to the race.

"Gregg Biffle is a nice guy...well-spoken," said Baker. "I suppose what you would expect from a fella that was sitting in front of a whole lot of people who are a large part of his sponsorship, but he was very informative. He pointed out where the problems were with his car in previous races. It was a quick visit, around 30 minutes to one-hour, because it was before the driver-pit meeting so they were a little pressed for time. I was really impressed with him and his crew."

Baker also got to experience a little bit of what life is like for racers.

"Like any NASCAR driver, there was a complete setup of semi-truck and trail-

ers. One was set up as a living quarters," he said. "I met his father...a very nice and down-to-earth guy."

"We have several Soldiers that travel with him as well. You couldn't have had a better time," Baker said, adding that he had Biffle sign a football that he plans to give to the coach of the Atkinson High School Football team. "Atkinson is a high school where we have had extraordinary success over the past few years as far as recruiting, with 20-25 students enlisting over the past three years."

Although he wasn't a NASCAR fan before he left for Las Vegas, Baker said he's now hooked. "It was a great experience...I had to be almost talked into going," he said. "Master Sergeant Guenther kind of pushed me into it. He said I needed to go represent the state of Nebraska and I let him push me."

"I would recommend it to anybody, the fans are great," he added. "It was really a tremendous honor for me to be down there and be able to represent the Guard and all these Soldiers who are making sacrifices overseas."



Practice Makes Perfect: Members of Officer Candidate Class 49 practice their Level I combative skills during a drill weekend class at Camp Ashland, Neb.

Camp Ashland begins teaching combative skills to officer candidates

Fighting Face-to-Face

By Sgt. Katie Loseke
Associate Editor

The Army's physical training program no longer consists of running, and doing push-ups and sit-ups.

Now, physical fitness has been adjusted to more fully prepare Soldiers for urban battlefields they may face in Iraq and other countries.

The new training is called "Combatives," and the 209th Regional Training Institute at Camp Ashland has made it a part of the Officer Candidate School's curriculum, starting with OCS Class 49.

"This new technique teaches aggressiveness and a willingness to engage the enemy in close quarters, which is something that is not really taught, but is much needed with today's warfare," said Maj. Shane Martin, a Teach Assess Counsel (TAC) officer at Camp Ashland.

Martin said combative training is a great system of teaching the "Warrior Ethos," especially in the tough situations that Soldiers are finding themselves in overseas.

Martin began working with Staff Sgt. Shawn Kusek, the senior medical sergeant for the RTI and the only other Nebraskan Guardsman who is trained in combatives, to begin a program with the OCS class.

Kusek and Martin began the training in September and continue to do a three-hour block of instruction with the class every month during drill.

"The battlefield has changed so much. You no longer shoot from a distance, but get up close and personal with the enemy," said Kusek. "As a Soldier you

need to be prepared to handle that situation in the best possible way."

Kusek said he believes the best way to handle that type of situation is with combatives.

"It's not gender-specific, or size-specific, so anyone can do it. Plus, if your weapon malfunctions you need to know how to subdue someone with hand-to-hand combat."

Kusek said the training instills confidence and helps Soldiers prepare for what they may face overseas. "Most people have never been in a fight in their lives. It's a gut check when you realize you have to go against someone face-to-face."

"You shouldn't experience that gut check for the first time overseas," said Kusek.

To alleviate those first time jitters, the OCS candidates have been given classroom demonstrations, opportunities to go at each other in good old fashioned partner sparring matches.

According to Kusek, there are four levels to the combatives, which are outlined in Army training regulations.

The OCS class is being taught level one. Kusek said this allows the class to excel and be confident while learning the moves.

Level one focuses on dominant body positions, how to close the distance with the enemy, how to end a fight, moves that will bring the enemy to the ground and how to choke someone into unconsciousness. Kusek said these basic moves are all a Soldier needs to protect themselves in a close face-to-face fight.

He added that combatives training is the only thing that will fully prepare someone for a deployment.

"You can train and train, but



Photos by Sgt. Katie Loseke

Learning The Finer Arts Of A Face-To-Face Battle: (from left) Staff Sgt. Shawn Kusek, senior medical sergeant for the 209th Regional Training Institute, demonstrates a striking technique as Officer Candidate Jeffrey Kuklis deflects his blows with a protective pad.



Grappling: (From left) Officer Candidate Josh Kohout and Officer Candidate Jeffrey Frazey lock horns during combative training class at Camp Ashland, Neb., as they attempt to takedown each other.

until you get face to face with someone, you never know how you will react," said Kusek.

Kusek said the Department of the Army has encouraged combative training for years and now has taken steps to make the training mandatory for all units. He added that the training is also a lot of fun.

"It is not only awesome PT, but is great for competition. There is the sense of primal energy you get when you put yourself up against someone else," said Kusek.

Kusek and Martin both stress the importance of the combative training for all members of the military.

"We don't always know who the enemy is anymore," said Martin.

"With combatives you learn how to subdue the enemy without using lethal force. This allows you time to determine the correct course of action without acting rashly."

For more information, contact Kusek at (402) 309-7668 or e-mail him at: shawn.kusek@ne.ngb.army.mil.



Lockdown: Staff Sgt. Shawn Kusek (top) pins Maj. Shane Martin, a Teach, Assess and Counsel officer at Camp Ashland, in a headlock during a training demonstration for members of Officer Candidate Class 49.