

53RD TROOP SCOOP

SPRING 2012



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for 'Best Warrior' title > pg. 4**

**Homeland Response Force
validation training kicks off > pg. 7**



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53RD TROOP SCOOP

Spring 2012

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About the 53rd Troop Scoop

The *53rd Troop Scoop* is published to the web quarterly as approved by the 53rd Troop Command, New York Army National Guard, and New York State Division of Military and Naval Affairs.

Views that appear in this publication are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense, the Army or the National Guard.

Submissions

Articles and photos are welcome. Please provide articles in Microsoft Word format along with high resolution digital (jpg.) photos by e-mail to thomas.w.wheeler@us.army.mil. Submission deadlines are as follows:

Winter Edition- January 15

Spring Edition- April 15

Summer Edition- July 15

Fall Edition- October 15

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(FRONT COVER) LATHAM- Honor Guard members present Arms during ceremonies honoring the 31 New York National Guard Soldiers and one member of the New York Naval Militia who have died in combat since Sept., 11, 2001.

(BACK COVER) ORISKANY, N.Y. – Soldiers assigned to the New York State Homeland Response Force simulate chemical and biological detection procedures during a HRF validation exercise held at the New York State Preparedness Center May 14.



COMMAND CORNER



★ **Brig. Gen. Mike Swezey** ★
53rd Troop Command
"For The Soldier"

To all the members of the 53rd Troop Command thank you very much for the service and the dedication you display to your fellow Soldiers, your units, the State and the Nation.

I want to congratulate the 204th Engineer Battalion for being selected as the

Salute Magazine "Unit of the Year." Well done Lt Col. Freehart and Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Meltz ... and all the Soldiers and leaders of the 204th Engineers.

We have a number of units still deployed. The 107th MP's will probably be back from Gitmo by the time you read this and the 727th MP Detachment is still on-station in Afghanistan. The 101st Signal Bn will be joining the 727th later this summer as the "smartest Soldiers in the Command" (do you know how high the GT scores are for our Signaler's?) come down the final glide slope on their road to Afghanistan. We wish both units good luck.

Lastly, and this letter will be brief. As you get ready for summer training and summer recreation ... think Safety. Leaders at all levels must, without exception, take responsibility for the protection of our most valuable asset - our Soldiers.

It is with deep regret that we were no-

tified last week of the untimely death of Staff Sgt. Joe Selby of the 1569th Transportation Company.

Joe was a respected member of the 1569th, as well as a full-time State employee with Empire Shield. Our deepest sympathies go out to Joe's family.

How did Joe die? Riding home from work on his motorcycle. Motorcycles are extremely dangerous. If you don't own or ride one - good. If you do ride one I cannot over-emphasize enough the risk you are taking on. Please be safe.

Brig. Gen. Mike Swezey
53rd Troop Command
"For the Soldier"

AT EASE. ... Well, time is still marching on and we are marching along with it. There are a couple of items that I want to bring to your attention. Things that we need to focus on as Non Commissioned Officers.

1. The goal of NCO training and the NCOES is to prepare noncommissioned officers to lead and train Soldiers who work and fight under their supervision, and to assist their leaders to execute unit missions.

NCOES is linked to promotion to Staff Sgt., Sgt. 1st Class, Master Sgt., and Sgt. Maj. NCOES ensures NCOs have the appropriate skills and knowledge required before assuming the duties and responsibilities of the next higher grade. NCOES provide noncommissioned officers with progressive and sequential leader, technical, and tactical training relevant to duties, responsibilities, and missions they will perform in operational units after graduation.

We need our NCOs to be fully qualified in their MOS and PME. NCOs must be able to increase and sustain their combat readiness.

We need to strengthen our skills, knowledge, and abilities to train, deploy and lead Soldiers in combat as well as state active duty. We need to be self-aware, agile, competent, and confident. 2. Last month I had the opportunity to attend the National Guard Diversity Conference and I want to share a quote from General Craig R. McKinley, Chief, NGB, "Diversity and inclusion is about creating National Guard teams where everyone is included, engaged, and passionate about accomplishing the mission. It is a force multiplier in achieving combat and mission readiness. Our diversity defines who we are as an organization and makes public our valued skills and talents that further strengthen the spirit de corps of our force. We should always be grounded in the concept, that diversity and inclusion in the National Guard is not a policy or a program, but is a fact of America, and we are America."

I believe with that quote, enough is said. We are individuals with various backgrounds, skills, or trades that form a group. With this group or team, we can accomplish the mission.



Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Louis Wilson
53rd Troop Command
"For The Soldier"



NYARNG Soldiers compete for 'Best Warrior' title

Story by Eric Durr, NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs

CAMP SMITH, NY-Wednesday, May 16, was a very long day for the fourteen men and women striving to be the best Army National Guard Soldier and Non-Commissioned Officers in New England, New York and New Jersey.

The day began with an Army Physical Fitness Test, was followed by a demanding land navigation course, a lunch time visit to the United States Military Academy, M-4 weapons qualification, a "stress shoot" testing marksmanship and physical endurance, a 6 mile forced march, and then night land navigation.

"It's a busy day," said Spec. Brian Lekhmus, the New York Army National Guard's Soldier of the Year.

Lekhmus, a college student and a member of the 101st Expeditionary Signal Battalion from Salt Point, NY, was competing against six peers for the top Soldier title in the Northeast Region Best Warrior Competition.

New York's top Non-Commissioned Officer for 2012, Sgt. David Martinson, of Troy, NY, was going up against six other sergeants to see who represents the region in a national competition of top National Guard Soldiers and sergeants later this year.

"I've done other Soldier competitions but this incorporates everything," Martinson said. "The road march, and day and night land navigation, the PT test, all this stuff in the same day is kind of overwhelming and tiring at the same time."

"We really just have to muscle-up and work through the pain," Martinson, an Active Guard and Reserve Soldier, added.

The three-day event, which began at Camp Smith on May 15 and ended on May 17, included plenty of hands on Soldier tasks, and quiz-

zes on military knowledge in an oral board before command sergeants major from across the region.

The New Yorkers didn't win the competition-Massachusetts Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Vanessa Urban was the top NCO and Maine Army National Guard Spec. Clay Landry was the top enlisted Soldier-but the event was still a good experience, said Lekhmus, who was the enlisted Soldiers runner-up.

The contest has forced him to reach back to his basic training days and remember his military tasks and learn more about the Army than he ever expect to, Lekhmus said.

"There are a lot of hands on tasks I don't normally do on a drill weekend, he said.

The annual competition, which is now regularly held at Camp Smith, helps build Soldier skills across the force, said New York Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major Frank Wicks.

Each unit holds its own Best Warrior selection process before sending those Soldiers and NCOs to a statewide competition. The Soldiers who do best in each northeastern state end up pitted against each other at Camp Smith.

"It really helps build the skill sets of all the Soldiers because everyone wants to be the best," Wicks said.

"It just makes for a more professional force," Wicks added.

The regional competition allows



CAMP SMITH, NY-- New York Army National Guard Specialist Brian Lekhmus, from Salt Point, NY; and Sgt. David Martinson, from Albany, take a break while competing in the Northeast Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition being held at Camp Smith Training Site May 15-17. The competition pits top non-commissioned officers and junior enlisted Soldiers from New England, New York and New Jersey against each other to determine who will represent the region in a national competition. The Soldiers were tested on military knowledge, physical fitness, marksmanship, land navigation, and Soldier tasks. (Photo by Mr. Eric Durr, Division of Military and Naval Affairs)

Soldiers from different state Army National Guards to learn how other Guardsmen do things, Lekhmus said.

Most of the state competitions mirror the regional one, Martinson said, so all the contests are well prepared. "Everyone deserves to be here," he said.

Lekhmus, who will be mobilizing with his unit in the fall for a deployment to Afghanistan, said the skills he's honed during the competition will help him train other Soldiers in his signal battalion.

Martinson, a member of Joint Force Headquarters-New York, said the experience has made him a better non-commissioned officer.

Command Sergeants Majors from all the Northeastern states took part in the event, providing advice to their state's Soldiers and also acting as panel members during the military knowledge boards while members of New York's Joint Force Headquarters and Camp Smith Training Site Staff provided support for the event and ran the ranges.

NY Soldiers and Family appear on Colbert Report

Story and Photo by Cpt. Alvin Phillips, 138th PAD, NYARNG
NEW YORK (04/12/2012)(read-Media)-- First lady Michelle Obama joined Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert on his show April 11 with members of the New York National Guard and families of deployed Soldiers to promote her efforts to support military families across the nation.

Colbert, no stranger to military audiences, noted that our "troops are a national treasure."

"I guess there really is a first time for everything, and being on the Colbert Report and seeing the first lady is something not ordinary and very excit-

ing," said New York Army National Guard Spc. Marcus Brown, from Staten Island, N.Y., assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 69 Infantry Regiment.

The visit was in part to Mrs. Obama's two-day tour celebrating the first anniversary of Joining Forces.

Joining Forces is her initiative with Dr. Jill Biden to recognize, honor and support military families.

The show added their support with the invitation for New York National Guard Soldiers and family members of troops currently deployed to Afghanistan.

"This show tonight really gives me a peace of mind knowing that the first lady and the White House is supporting us and our families,"

said Pvt. Erik Grijalva, from Brooklyn, N.Y., also from Company A, 1-69 Infantry.

Since their inaugural launch on April 12, 2011, significant programs have been made to encourage Americans to support military families.

In one year, the White House reports that communities, businesses, schools, faith groups, non-profit or-

are some of the most highly trained, highly skilled, disciplined people that we have in our society, the best this country has to offer."

Through collaborative efforts with Joining Forces, these groups have helped thousands of veterans and military families find jobs, improved educational opportunities for military children, supported our

nation's wounded warriors and their caregivers, and honored our nation's fallen.

"It's hard to be a whiner around a veteran," Mrs. Obama said.

The Joining Forces two-day tour highlights examples of organizations and companies that have made significant commitments to support military families.

This proved to be an accomplishment that Mr. Colbert could

tout as he reminded the rest of the audience that he too was a veteran of the war in Iraq, referencing his weeklong tour of duty in which President Obama ordered General Odierno to shave his head.

He also expressed that since he was a veteran of the war, he should hire himself to host the Colbert Report.

Aside from political satire, Stephen Colbert has shown great support for the military over the years, including bringing his show to Iraq and performing at numerous USO events and even getting a military-style hair cut to show his solidarity with those in uniform, even if by presidential order.



Soldiers and Family members of the 727th Military Police Law and Order Detachment, the 369th Sustainment Brigade and 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment gather around Stephen Colbert, host of The Colbert Report after his conversation with first lady Michelle Obama, on the first anniversary promoting Joining Forces, a national initiative led by the first lady and Dr. Jill Biden that mobilizes all sectors of society to give our service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned.

ganizations and individual Americans have made substantial commitments to show military families the support that they deserve.

The first lady went on to say that "unemployment is a key issue and we are seeing it decrease, but until we get to zero, we still have a lot of work to do."

Mrs. Obama also highlighted the tremendous value that servicemen and women and military families bring to the workplace.

"Because this isn't just about benefiting these men and women, I mean these people are bringing in skills that actually improve the bottom line of companies," she said. "These

AROUND THE 53RD



(Right) Soldiers work on ground fighting techniques during the combatives portion of pre-mobilization training taking place at Camp Smith Training Area, Cortlandt Manor, NY, May 6-15, 2012. Soldiers assigned to the 138th Public Affairs Detachment, 101 Expeditionary Signal Battalion, and B 3-126 Aviation are completing training requirements in preparation for upcoming deployments. (Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Wheeler, 1378th PAD, NYARNG)

(Top Left) QUEENSBURY-- New York Army National Guard Captain Michael Manss accepts the guidon of the 1427th Transportation Company from Lt. Col. Robert Mitchell during change-of-command ceremonies at the Queensbury Readiness Center on Saturday, May 19. Manss takes over command of the company from Capt. John Klimes. (Sgt. 1st Class (retired) Arthur Coon.)

(Bottom Left) New York Army National Guard Soldiers from the 466th Area Support Medical Company and 1427th Transportation Company lead the 2011 Christmas Eve road march in Glens Falls, N.Y. More than 500 Soldiers, family members, area veterans and community members participated in the eight annual event. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Richard Goldenberg, New York Army National Guard Joint Force Headquarters)

Ramona Rivera, wife of 727th Military Police Law and Order Detachment's Luis Rivera from Poughkeepsie, N.Y., who is currently serving in Afghanistan, said she is "very excited and pleased to see the first lady so committed to helping Soldiers and their Families before deployment, during deployments and after deployments."

Maj. Jane Altacho, from Bronx, N.Y., part of New York National Guard's 369th Sustainment Brigade echoed a similar chord.

"For our Guardsmen in Afghanistan right now to know that the first lady and Stephen Colbert are working to generate support for military families will certainly have an impact on their work efforts and diligence, because family is everything and knowing that no matter what, that your family has support makes

a huge difference in a Soldier's mentality," Altacho said.

Taking a break from partisan campaign rancor, the first lady discussed how she certainly gets the better end of the deal by being able to selectively choose her platforms to support such as "military families and healthy eating."

"Such platforms are valuable to not only military members and their family members but to the country as a whole," Nelson Rivera, the Director American Legion Dutchess County and part of the studio audience, said.

"It really is neat to see how the White House and the Colbert Report invited New York National Guardsmen, family members of those in Afghanistan and veterans, because he is not used to being engaged with topics of support," said

Richard Devine, husband of 727th Military Police Law and Order Detachment Sgt. Stephanie Devine from Saylorsburg, Penn., and a huge fan of the show.

"It feels great not to be centrally located near a military base but (still) feel so connected, understood and know there are supporters out in the communities," he added.

The invitation to join the Comedy Central production left a positive impression for all of the Soldiers and family members, noted New York Army National Guard Pvt. Luis Montanez, from the Bronx, N.Y., part of Company A, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment.

"This is a special feeling, being here on the Colbert Report with the first lady, something we can definitely tell our children about," he said.

Homeland Response Force validation training kicks off

Story and Photos by Spec. J. P. Lawrence, 42nd Infantry Division Public Affairs

The Soldiers of the 1156th Engineers Company were given one simple task: move a concrete cube from Point A to Point B.

The only problem was that the concrete cube weighed two tons, and they had to move it 75 feet around obstacles while using only rollers, wood beams and pry bars.

Maybe it's not so simple.

The Soldiers are part of 1,000 National Guard Soldiers, Airmen and New York Guard volunteers at the New York State Preparedness Center as part of Homeland Response Force validation training May 15.

The FEMA II Homeland Response Force includes members of the New Jersey, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands National Guards. The organization supports civil authorities in response to CBRN or Hazardous Material incidents that requiring the evacuation, decontamination and medical triage of casualties.



ORISKANY, N.Y. – Soldiers assigned to the New York State Homeland Response Force simulate decontamination procedures during a HRF validation exercise held at the New York State Preparedness Center May 14.

Working together to move this block trains Soldiers rescue civilians from collapsed buildings. The HRF is a robust, specialized, rapid-response task force made up of National Guard Soldiers and Airmen to reinforce first responders in times of

disaster.

Moving the cube is an exercise meant to build communications skills within the Soldiers in the event they are called to save lives in the real world.

"Pretend it's your mother under

that block,” Sgt. Ivan O. Martinez, team leader of the Search and Extraction Team, says. “We gotta rescue her.”

The Soldiers dig their pry bars into the ground.

“On my command,” Martinez, a Yonkers, N.Y. resident, says, and his team inhales. “Go, go, go.”

The cube rises into the air. Soldiers place black metal cylinders in front of it and push. The cube moves down a hasty path Soldiers made out of wood beams. The cube – all two tons of it – glides on the rollers in spurts.

Watching this whole affair is Sgt. 1st Class Lee Given, a trainer with the Joint Interagency Training and Education Center.

Given recently trained another HRF team in Oregon. Components of the HRF have trained for similar missions in recent years, and aiding civil authorities, as the HRF does, is part of the National Guard’s traditional role.

The team Givens watches is composed of both Soldiers and Airmen. Master Sgt. Hector Caro, a Hartford, Conn., resident and member of the 105th Medical Group, is responsible for triage with this Search and Extraction Team.

“It’s good for us to get together and see how each other works,” says Caro, who would evaluate the wounded in a real-life disaster.

The team moves the two-ton cube through a narrow concrete tunnel, and Pfc. Neseer Carter, a resident of Glen Cove N.Y., breathes a sigh of relief as the cube completes the 75-foot course.

But the exercise is not over.

Given smiles and makes a bet. He places a wooden beam vertically on top of the cube. Lower the cube, currently on wooden support beams, to the ground, he says, and if this beam doesn’t fall, he’ll do pushups.



ORISKANY, N.Y. – Sgt. John Grace, a Long Beach, N.Y. resident and member of the 1156th Engineers Company’s Search and Extraction Team, places a roller in front of a two-ton block as it moves 75-feet past obstacles at the New York State Preparedness Center May 14. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. J.p. Lawrence, 42nd Inf. Div. PAO).

The team takes the bet.

“Everybody’s got to lift together,” said Sgt. John Grace, a Long Beach, N.Y. resident and member of the 1156th Engineer Co. “All we’re doing

down soft and gentle.”

The 1156th does these exercises a few times a year, Grace says. Once, they moved 9000 pounds. But at very last second, just as the cube comes to rest upon the ground, the wooden beam perched on top of the cube wobbles and falls to the ground.

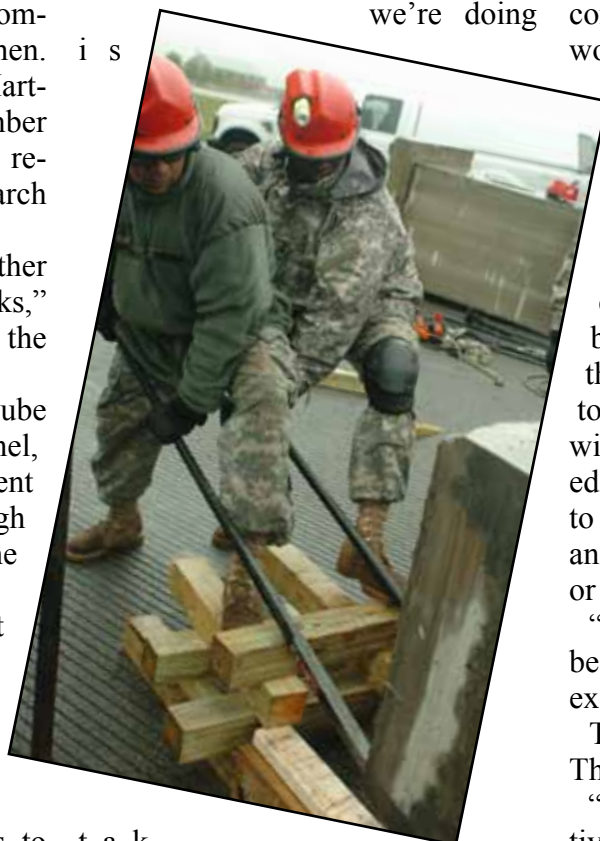
The team groans. They lost the bet. Now they have to do pushups.

Givens laughs and joins in. The cube exercise is mostly for team building and helping Soldiers think outside the box, the instructor says, but the lessons from this will help the team gain the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters or terrorist-related incidents.

“That’s our goal,” Givens says, “to be able to go into an operation and execute the mission.”

The team rises from their pushups. The training has just begun.

“You got to keep your troops motivated,” Martinez says. “You never know when you have to use the skills here in the real world.”



Binghamton Unit Recognized by Military Magazine

BINGHAMTON, NY -- Binghamton's 204th Engineer Battalion was recognized as the Unit of the Year for 2011 by Salute Magazine, a military interest publication produced six times a year by Garden City, New Jersey company Family Media.

Since 1985 Salute has been distributed free on military bases and installations. The magazine focuses on music, sports, travel and dating for military singles and families.

The magazine also features a Unit of the Month feature in which outstanding military units are recognized for their service at home and abroad.

The New York Army National Guard's 204th Engineer Battalion, which includes the 1156th Engineer Company in Kingston, the 152nd Engineer Company in Buffalo, the 827th Engineer Company in Horseheads and Walton and Headquarters and Headquarters Company and the Forward Support Company in Binghamton, was named Unit of the Month in the Oct/Nov issue.

The magazine recognized the work the battalion's Soldiers did in responding to the flooding in the



Latham, NY -- Leaders of the 204th Engineer Battalion accept the Salute Magazine Unit of the Year cup from Salute Magazine representative Johnny Underwood.

Catskills, the Adirondacks, and in Binghamton when Tropical Storms Irene and Lee hit New York in August and September 2011.

In the article announcing the selection of the 204th Engineers the magazine pointed out that the 1156th Engineer Company rescued citizens in the Catskill Mountain village Windham from rising flood waters, while the 827th Engineer Company cleared creeks that threatened to flood local roads.

Other battalion members cleared

Route 73 in the Adirondacks to reopen the Keene Valley's access to the rest of the state and then more than 300 members of the battalion responded when Binghamton was flooded.

The unit's outstanding service led to its selection as Salute Magazine Unit of the Year.

"A number of the Soldiers were impacted by the flood, but none wished to stop the important job they were doing and most had to be told to go home to take care of their

Class A accidents/Soldiers killed
as of Mar. 6, 2012

CAR	14/14
SUV/JEEP	6/6
TRUCK	2/2
MOTORCYCLE	13/12
PEDESTRIAN	1/1
OTHER*	1/1

*Includes: vans, ATVs, snowmobiles and bicycles

Three year average: **35**
Fiscal 2011: **30**

37 TOTAL DEATHS

DANGER
POV DRIVING
LOSSES

thru February 2012

ARMY SAFE IS ARMY STRONG

