



# @ease

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN NATIONAL GUARD  
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## on the cover

Staff Sgt. Ryan Bleskey with the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team expresses relief upon removing his rucksack at the completion of the 12-mile road march, part of the Wisconsin National Guard Best Warrior Competition held at Fort McCoy, Apr. 13. See the complete story on Page 20

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# From the Adjutant General

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, and Gov. Scott Walker at the site of a storm-damaged farm in Dodgeville, Wis., July 1. Wisconsin Emergency Management photo by Lori Getter

**A**fter 13 years on a wartime footing, the winds of change are blowing for our nation. The president recently announced a plan that would bring all U.S. forces home from Afghanistan by the end of 2016. The 32,000 American troops currently operating there will be reduced to 9,800 by the end of this year.

Our combat mission in Afghanistan may be changing, but the fundamental core missions of the National Guard

remain the same. We are our nation's first military responders in emergencies and natural disasters and the primary combat reserve force for the United States Army and the United States Air Force.

Over the past 13 years, our National Guard has become an operational reserve and we've been proud to serve side-by-side with the Army and Air Force, and the federal reserve in this war on terror. While this conflict is

on a path to conclude, there are still threats to our nation, and we must remain vigilant as it is highly unlikely that our nation will respond to future threats without accessing the National Guard early in the crisis. Never in our nation's history, has the National Guard been this relevant to national defense and homeland security. The Army and Air Force have provided great leadership and invested in systems that allow assured access to the modern

minuteman in ways once thought impossible. It will be a great day when combat operations cease in Afghanistan, but our missions endure — first military responder and primary combat reserve. We remain "Always Ready, Always There."





Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, the deputy adjutant general for Army, addresses deploying Soldiers, their families and friends during a formal sendoff ceremony for the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Battery A, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery Regiment, April 2 in Milwaukee. Below right, Gov. Scott Walker presents Battery A commander Capt. Aaron Ammerman with a state flag during the ceremony. Wisconsin National Guard photos by Vaughn R. Larson

# 'We will continue the long tradition of excellence'

**Vaughn R. Larson  
and Capt. Joe Trovato**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

A second Wisconsin Army National Guard high mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) battery is conducting a fire support mission in Afghanistan.

"An artillery battery being selected to perform an artillery mission overseas — does it get any better than that, Alpha Battery?" Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's senior noncommissioned officer, asked members of the Sussex-based Battery A, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery Regiment, during an [April 2 sendoff ceremony](#) held at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee.

The mission is notable because, in the global war on terror, National Guard field artillery units have rarely been assigned field artillery missions. In fact, the first National Guard field artillery battery to do so was Battery A's [sister unit](#) from Plymouth.

"The training over the past year has been intense, challenging and fun — but most importantly, it has prepared us for the mission ahead," said Capt. Aaron Ammerman, Battery A commander. "I have no doubt that these gentlemen are ready for the next leg of the journey, and we'll raise the standards by which others will be measured. We will continue the long tradition of excellence the state of Wisconsin has built.

"I stand here today immensely proud to

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# Wisconsin National Guard sends second artillery unit to Afghanistan

**Continued from Page 4**

command such an outstanding group of capable, knowledgeable and dedicated individuals,” he continued. “Together we have accomplished great things, and we are just hitting our stride.”

Battery A has been training since August on core skills such as weapons, vehicles and combat lifesaving, along with language and anti-terrorism courses. The unit has also honed its artillery skills during three live-fire training events.

“The morale of this unit is pretty high,” said 1st Sgt. Jason Grundel. “Most people are pretty excited for the mission because it is a field artillery mission.”

That morale was not lost on the Wisconsin National Guard’s senior leadership.

“Alpha Battery — the last few weeks have been tough on you, but you’re ready,” said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general. “If you weren’t ready, we wouldn’t send you. I see that pride in your eyes and the confidence you have in each other.”

Gov. Scott Walker agreed.

“You are well-prepared,” Walker said. “You are the best of the best of the state. You are well-trained. You are going to do well and we look forward to seeing you back home.”

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, the deputy adjutant general for Army, noted that it wasn’t that long ago when Battery B was deploying to conduct the same mission in Afghanistan.

“At that time they commented that when the Army turns to an Army Guard organization to do a true shooting mission overseas, they turn to Wisconsin because we’ve got the best field artillery in the nation,” Anderson said. “So guess what? They turned [to us] twice and came right back to Alpha Battery.”

Anderson, a field artillery officer himself, expressed confidence in Battery A, and related comments he’s received about the Wisconsin National Guard’s

reputation overseas.

“When we send Wisconsin Soldiers, we send the very best,” he said.

Wisconsin National Guard leaders thanked family members and employers for supporting their Soldiers during the mobilization and upcoming deployment. Dunbar pledged his support to the families and the family readiness group volunteers.

“We’ll do everything we can to support

your families while you’re gone so you can just focus on being a Soldier and get home safe,” Dunbar said.

“One of the cornerstones to a successful deployment is constant, unwavering support from the home front, and the peace of mind that brings the Soldier,” Ammerman said.

Another key to success is unit cohesiveness — in other words, working

well together, particularly in a stressful environment.

“Watching the battery grow over the past several months has been one of the most amazing experiences I’ve ever been witness to,” Ammerman said. “The last few weeks especially have been a significant catalyst in developing this unit into one of

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# Battery A prepared for Afghanistan mission

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the most cohesive and tightest units I've ever been part of. The days recently at Fort McCoy were long and stressful at times, but we had Katy Perry sing-alongs in the range tower and daily magic shows to provide comic relief.

"The troops bonded well," Ammerman continued, "and I can whole-heartedly say we are a family. The experiences we've shared thus far have begun to build the stories and relationships that will endure a lifetime."

Grundel, who has previous deployment experience, said he has been offering sage advice to the 50-plus Soldiers in his battery who will deploy for the first time.

"One of the things I like to say is be fluid, because flexible is too rigid," Grundel said. "Changes are always going to happen, and you have to keep flowing."

Much of the training Battery A conducted at Fort McCoy was revisited at [Fort Bliss](#), Texas.

"We got down here and kind of just blew [the training] out of the water," said Pfc. Andrew Lindemann, a student at Carroll University and Waukesha native.

"I can't wait to shoot rockets downrange," said Pfc. Jesse Ard. "I'm in an ammo section, so I've got a really important job."

"I wasn't able to go with B Battery," Ard said. "That would have been really cool to be the first National Guard unit to do it, but it's just as special doing it with A Battery, and I'm just as lucky."

While on pass, Ard, of Necedah, got engaged to his girlfriend.

Ard and others in the unit expressed their confidence in the unit and its preparedness for such an important mission.

Lindemann said it has been fun to watch Battery A come together as a team over the course of the last few months.

"After two months of us being together



**Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson speaks with Soldiers from A Battery, 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery, May 14 at Fort Bliss, Texas. Anderson and other Wisconsin Army National**

**Guard senior leaders visited the unit as they prepared to deploy to Afghanistan. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Capt. Joe Trovato**

— a month up at Fort McCoy and a month down here — it's really been fun to see how cohesive we have become," he said. "You drill once a month and for a couple weeks in the summer and you get to know the guys, but we've really come to know each other a lot more now that we're living all together for two months."

"I know that I'd be able to go up to any of these guys and that they'd have my back in anything," Lindemann said.

Thanks to the experiences Battery B brought back from Afghanistan last year, Battery A has had some of the best training possible for its mission, many of the Soldiers said.

"I think this unit has received some of the best training of anyone that has done this mission on either active duty or National Guard," said Staff Sgt. Joshua Walsh, of Manitowoc. "We had Soldiers that just got back less than a year ago

training us, and they had nobody to train them. So we got the best training you could possibly have to do this mission."

The Soldiers of Battery A know they are getting a realistic depiction of what they will face when they arrive in Afghanistan.

"It's a very young group, but I think everyone is professional and is ready to go on and carry on, do this mission and come home to our families," Walsh said. 📷

[Additional photos](#)



Soldiers from the 829th Engineer Company with two crossed hammers the unit constructed in front of its barracks at Fort Bliss, Texas, May 13. The 829th completed its pre-mobilization training and is currently on mission in Afghanistan. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Capt. Joe Trovato

## Training brings unit together in time to take things apart in Afghanistan

**Capt. Joe Trovato**  
Wisconsin National Guard

Wisconsin Army National Guard senior leaders visited the 829th Engineer Company at Fort Bliss, Texas, before the Chippewa Falls-based unit deployed to Afghanistan.

Leadership found the 829th confident and ready to deploy.

"I feel really well-prepared," said Spc. Cody Harlan, an electrician with the 829th Engineer Company who is currently studying biology at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. "The cumulative training exercises were pretty realistic, and our platoon — and I know the other platoons — we've all had hiccups, but you have to train to a standard."

"Failing is good because it's better to fail here where it's simulated than it is downrange," he added. "So I think everybody in the chain of command has done a good job of filling in the gaps and getting everyone on the same page."

Sgt. 1st Class Eric Chojnacki, a platoon sergeant in the 829th, agreed.

"Mistakes are acceptable here, because that's how you learn," he said. "That's what we tell them every day. You're here for training. You're going to make mistakes, and that's how we adjust."

Chojnacki is deploying alongside his wife, Staff Sgt. Mandy Chojnacki. The couple lives in Amherst Junction.

The 829th has been focused largely on its engineer mission, counter-improvised explosive device training and conducting vehicle and weapons training, as it prepares to deploy. The unit completed its cumulative training exercise at Fort Bliss where it experienced a simulated training event that mirrored the day-to-day operations it will encounter in Afghanistan.

Based in Chippewa Falls with detachments in Ashland and Richland Center, the 829th is a vertical construction company. But rather than erecting buildings in Afghanistan, the unit will de-construct facilities on forward operating bases in Afghanistan as part of the responsible drawdown of U.S. forces operating in the country. The unit's mission will be to reclaim as much material as possible to save U.S. taxpayer money and prevent those materials from falling into enemy hands.

Many of the Soldiers noted how the unit has come together as a team since it began training at Fort McCoy in March.

"It's a huge improvement over the first few days of annual training there," Sgt. Kenneth Wendell said of the unit's camaraderie. "Huge improvement. We're doing a lot of teamwork. People have gotten to know each other. Friendships and everything. It's been pretty cool watching it all."

Wendell is a team leader in the 829th from Appleton. 1st Sgt. Brian Kelly, of La Crosse, had a similar observation.

"We all just became a family," he said. "There's no way not to. We live together 24/7 and train together."

Kelly, the unit's senior enlisted Soldier, said he's been amazed at the hard work and dedication the unit has shown during its train-up. As a result, he said, morale within the unit is high.

"These guys have been busting their butts from the time we got here to now," Kelly said.

- [Complete story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)





# COLD COMFORT: Wisconsin Guard supports Alaskan Vigilant Guard

**Capt. Brian Faltinson**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

A group of Wisconsin National Guard members deployed to Alaska March 26-April 2 to hone their disaster response skills during a national emergency response exercise. The 28-member contingent of Soldiers and Airmen integrated with the Alaska National Guard and elements from 11 other states in Exercise Vigilant Guard-Alaska 2014.

VG-AK14 was a regional, tactically focused exercise that consisted of multiple interagency field-training exercises that focused on the response and recovery from a major earthquake and tsunami.

VG-AK14 was conducted to ensure that the state of Alaska and the nation are prepared and ready to respond to major catastrophic events.

"The scenario was based on the 1964 Alaska Earthquake, which was the largest earthquake in North American history," said Maj. Eric Leckel, an operations officer on the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff. "Such an event today would cause assets to deploy from throughout United States to assist Alaska."

The Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff includes both Army and Air National Guard personnel. It plans and coordinates efforts by military forces engaged in state and federal emergency response

operations within Wisconsin. Training key elements of the Wisconsin National Guard for emergency operations is one of the Joint Staff's primary tasks.

"In early March 2013, Wisconsin received an invitation from Alaska to participate in the Vigilant Guard Exercise. The Wisconsin National Guard leadership determined this was a great opportunity to hone our domestic operations response skills," Leckel said. "Planners on the joint staff matched four key areas with Alaska National Guard requirements for the exercise, and team members were selected for their specific skills or duties they would perform."

The four teams focused on

communications, operations, personnel reception and integration, and public affairs.

The Volk Field-based 128th Air Control Squadron sent its Joint Incident Site Communications Capability (JISCC) team to Valdez, Alaska, to assist a local emergency operations center maintain communications that were damaged as part of an earthquake scenario.

"Our role as a JISCC team is to provide communication and networking support from one organization to another — either local, state, federal or military, including FEMA," said Staff Sgt. Ryan Scott, a JISCC operator with the 128th Air Control

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# Wisconsin National Guard supports Alaskan disaster response exercise

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Squadron. “During a natural disaster we link one type of communication with another.”

The second team integrated with the Alaska National Guard joint operations center to manage within the scenario the military portion of the state’s disaster response.

“We mainly worked nine to twelve hour shifts providing coverage for the Alaska National Guard JOC in what areas they needed,” said Master Sgt. Wendy Kleist, a knowledge operations manager on the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff. “We had an officer working on communications plans and two people working in a planning group handling requests for military support from local communities.”

The section also included a knowledge management team that maintained digital communications platforms and websites needed within a smoothly functioning joint operations center.

“The knowledge management team managed the website that housed a mission tracker, request tracker and briefing slides amongst other critical information,” Kleist said. “This included its content, permissions and layout. We continually modified and improved the site and its components. The KM Team also assisted in the JOC with troubleshooting the various information systems.”

Receiving and integrating personnel from other states and services seamlessly into a large-scale emergency response is a critical task for the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Staff. Known formally as Joint Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (JRSOI), this complex process is difficult to practice outside of major exercises such as VG-AK14 and was the priority of the third element of the Wisconsin National Guard’s mission to Alaska.

“We were able to confirm parts of our own JRSOI plan as well as identify

shortfalls within our current plan that will require future improvements,” said Maj. Jason Staab, a Joint Staff logistics officer. “Observing the exercise reemphasized the need to utilize the expertise from both services, Army and Air.”

“We developed the JRSOI team with members from administrative, operations, and logistics,” Leckel added. “This will allow participants to return from the exercise and integrate the lessons learned into the Wisconsin’s JRSOI plan.”

Six public affairs soldiers augmented the Alaska National Guard’s effort to cover VG-AK14’s wide range of events and share those with the public.

“Our role was to provide coverage of the various training exercises and produce real-world stories,” said Staff Sgt. Megan Lueck, a member of the 112th Mobile

Public Affairs Detachment.

The Wisconsin Soldiers joined public affairs Soldiers from Alaska, Minnesota and North Dakota to publish stories, photos, interviews and video clips.


“Our focus was to work together as a ‘hybrid’ team of one print and one broadcast journalist to ensure we obtained the coverage needed to produce an article with photos and a video package explaining the training exercise that was covered and how it related to the importance of the VG-AK14 mission,” Lueck explained.

The exercise provided the 112th MPAD an opportunity to train several of its junior soldiers who recently returned from their initial public affairs training courses.

“The exercise provided essential experience and guidance, especially for

our newer Soldiers, on how to interact with service members from other National Guard units as well as other branches,” Lueck said. “This ability to effectively communicate with others is crucial when trying to get the interviews and photos needed for a story.”

The team returned to Wisconsin the evening of April 2, on a KC-135 Stratotanker operated by the Milwaukee-based 128th Air Refueling Wing, better prepared to assist the citizens of Wisconsin during an emergency.

“I am always impressed by the ‘can-do’ attitude of the Soldiers and Airmen of the Wisconsin National Guard,” Leckel said. “Every time the team encountered a challenge they developed a solution, while always keeping a positive attitude.” 

[Related story](#)



**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing*

VOLK FIELD — Six units from four states combined their emergency management skills during a field training exercise at Volk Field, April 2-6.

The 115th Fighter Wing, 127th Fighter Wing, 133rd Air Wing, 148th Fighter Wing, 183rd Fighter Wing and 934th Air Wing started planning for this year's field training exercise in November 2013.

"We started planning early to ensure we could all train together this year," said Senior Master Sgt. Kelvin McCuskey, 148th Fighter Wing installation emergency manager. "The last time we were able to train together was in 2012."

The emergency management leaders from each unit used conference calls, Defense Connect Online and email to secure training dates and plan the week's training exercises.

"Volk is an ideal site for our training," McCuskey said. "We can stay here and get all of our required training accomplished without the distractions of being at our home unit."

The training encompassed all hazard responses including radiation, chemical and biological situations.

The 28 Airmen who attended the event practiced plotting hazard zones on a map manually and with a computer, trained on tactical communications systems using satellites to communicate with other bases across the country, and each day of the exercise one group of Airmen participated in up to three mission simulations during

the field training exercises.

Master Sgt. Rebecca Tongen, 133rd Air Wing installation emergency manager, developed the field training exercise and made sure it included real-world attributes.

Two firefighters from the 133rd Air Wing acted as the incident commanders during the exercises, firefighters from Volk Field took vitals of the Airmen before and after they entered the hazardous exercise areas, and a power production Airman from the 133rd Air Wing ensured all power sources were working properly for the emergency management teams.

"This training allows us to work with people we wouldn't normally work with," said Senior Airman Sara Passint, 133rd Air Wing emergency management. "Our job is challenging and everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, so we can learn a lot from each other."

Passint was one of the first Airmen to enter the field exercise in her full chemical gear. She, along with two additional Airmen, secured samples from the exercise scene and safely transported them to a testing site during the field exercise.


"It's definitely not an easy job," she said. "We carry a lot of equipment and there are lots of steps and processes to go over during every situation."

Even though it is hard work, Passint contends it is worth it.

"Trainings like this prepare us for all different hazards," she said. "They prepare us for the unknown."

The results from the training will be documented and the status of resources and training system updates will be sent up to the National Guard Bureau for review.

According to McCuskey, training similar to this must be completed on a yearly basis.

"By training together, we save the government money, and have a chance to network and learn from each other," he said. "It's an ideal situation." 

[Story online](#)



# Prepared for the worst

**Staff Sgt. Ryan Roth**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

The Wisconsin National Guard was part of an emergency preparedness exercise May 2-3 with the city of Portage, Columbia County Emergency Management and Divine Savior Hospital, testing their disaster response capabilities.

"The National Guard has two key roles — we are our nation's primary combat reserve, and our nation's first military responders," said Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general. "We are highly trained with command and control structures to bring a unit together to assist the incident commander and first responders in times of crisis. Everyone is here working together."

The exercise scenario began with a natural gas leak at a Portage plastics plant, leading to an explosion. A phosgene gas cloud is released, the structure collapses and there are missing employees. Emergency management response plans begin.

"Not only is this the largest [chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive enhanced response force package] exercise we have ever conducted in the Wisconsin National Guard, to the best of our knowledge, this is the largest CERFP exercise linking with local civilian agencies that has ever been conducted in the United States," said Lt. Col. Scott Southworth, 641st Troop Command Battalion commander.

About 500 people participated in the exercise with about 250 of them from the Wisconsin National Guard. The Airmen and Soldiers engaged in chemical decontamination, search and extraction, medical support to a local hospital along with assisting local police department, fire department, emergency medical personnel, and transportation of injured to local hospital.

"This is an excellent opportunity for us to combine the chemical, decontamination, medical and engineering assets together in a real world environment that is safe and also allows us to link up with the civilian agencies that we are supporting," Southworth said.

"Although only a scenario, the hands-on experience and relationships established with local authorities are priceless," said Brig. Gen. John McCoy, deputy adjutant general for civil support.

"Even if we didn't do today's exercise, the preplanning and the faces we have put together with names and conversations have been invaluable," said Portage Mayor Bill Tierney. 📷

[Story online](#)



**Above, Wisconsin Air National Guard Airmen provide mass medical care during an emergency preparedness exercise.**

**Left, Wisconsin Army National Guard members perform mass decontamination of simulated casualties during an emergency preparedness exercise May 3 in Portage. Columbia County Emergency Management, Divine Savior Hospital and the Wisconsin National Guard teamed up to practice the coordination and implementation of their disaster response capabilities.**

**[Click on this photo to see a related video](#)**

115th Fighter Wing photos by Staff Sgt. Ryan Roth



Members of the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing Fire and Rescue Station work to extinguish flames in a mock fuselage during a full-scale exercise June 3 at the Dane County Regional Airport. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman



## Wisconsin Air Guard supports regional airport disaster exercise

**Vaughn R. Larson**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

The Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing Fire Emergency Services worked alongside their civilian colleagues from neighboring fire departments during a full-scale exercise June 3 at the Dane County Regional Airport in Madison.

The training scenario could easily be categorized as "worst-case scenario." A despondent ex-boyfriend armed with a handgun and a vest bomb apprehends

his ex-girlfriend — an employee at the Dane County Regional Airport — and forces his way onto a commercial airplane, demanding to fly to Mexico. The pilots convince the hijacker that a mechanical failure is preventing takeoff. Negotiations break down with the hijacker, who detonates his vest bomb — causing fire and considerable damage to the plane, as well as killing several passengers and severely wounding the rest.

The 115th Fighter Wing Fire Emergency Services, already located at Truax Field — the airfield used by the

Dane County Regional Airport — are the first to respond. They encounter a burning fuselage, and dozens of bodies strewn across the pavement.

Timothy Butcher, director of operations and public safety for Dane County Regional Airport, said the full-scale exercise was in line with the 115th Fighter Wing Fire Emergency Services' expectations.

"This exercise escalated what they see on a day-to-day basis, but it's well within their capabilities," Butcher said. "They are our first responders for anything

that happens at the airport. I would put our guys up against any airport fire department anywhere."

"We were pretty involved and active the entire day of the exercise," said Master Sgt. Gary Peck, fire chief for the 115th Fighter Wing Fire Emergency Services. "We were involved in command and control with a unified command system with local law enforcement, and then responded to the rescue and fire suppression operations, and also performed emergency medical

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# Air Guard supports airport disaster drill

## Continued from Page 12

services and triage.”

A KC-135 Stratotanker from the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee played a role in the exercise as the commercial aircraft commandeered by the hijacker. However, the burning aircraft was played by a stunt-double — an Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting fuselage, which provided firefighters with a realistic cabin fire environment as well as external flame banks to provide firefighters the chance to hone their extinguishing skills. The fuselage generated plenty of smoke as well as a soundtrack that seemed to blend human screams with twisting metal.

“Yeah, it was great,” said one member of the 115th Fighter Wing Fire Emergency Services who asked not to be identified, as the exercise called for participants to refer questions to the public information officer. “Good training, just like an actual aircraft.”

Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center provided the mannequins as well as mock body parts for the exercise.

Dozens of volunteers portrayed injured aircraft passengers in various stages of distress. Realistic moulage was applied by Glitter to Gore LLC on the drill floor at Joint Force Headquarters, adjacent to Truax Field and near the location of the exercise. Volunteers also had cards indicating the severity of their injury. Some were able to walk to a medical triage site, while others needed to be carried on backboards and litters.

Besides the realistic injury makeup, volunteers provided some convincing acting as firefighters rendered assistance.

“I’m okay, I’m okay,” one woman insisted in a wavering voice as two firefighters prepared to maneuver her onto a backboard. “Check my brother — he’s not talking to me. Please, please — help my brother, please.”

Planning for this event began 12 months ago. The goal of the exercise, conducted every three years, is to provide an opportunity for emergency response organizations to respond to a mock emergency, perform in a realistic environment and operate with other organizations on a scale they ordinarily would not experience outside of a real event. Local fire departments from Madison, Sun Prairie and Maple Bluff participated in the exercise.

“Another goal of the exercise is to provide a sufficient amount of familiarization to the responding city, county and township fire departments — that they understand the differences between structural and aircraft firefighting,” Peck said. 📷

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)



**Members of the 115th Fighter Wing Fire and Rescue Station evacuate mock casualties, above, and mock fatalities, left, from the scene of a mock plane explosion during a full-scale exercise June 3 at the Dane County Regional Airport. The exercise gave area first responders an opportunity to work alongside their Guard counterparts. 115th Fighter Wing photos by Master Sgt. Paul Gorman**





A group of Airmen in chemical suits running through a field. The suits are olive green and cover the entire body, including the head with a clear face shield. They are running towards the camera in a grassy field under a blue sky with scattered clouds. In the background, more Airmen in similar suits are visible, some standing and some moving. The overall scene suggests a training exercise or a simulated emergency response.

# the 976A TEAM

**Airmen test their chemical suits during a 976A Patient Decontamination certification at the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison May 22. The 976A team is made up of people from different areas of the base, so that base personnel affected by a chemical situation don't have to wait for the firefighters and security forces units to be available. If an actual emergency occurred, the firefighters and security forces Airmen would be required elsewhere. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

MADISON — Though they hope to never have to use these skills, Airmen from the 115th Fighter Wing recently completed certification that allows them to decontaminate, triage, stabilize and prepare to transport up to 100 people in the event of chemical, biological or radiological contamination on base.

The team certification is part of a national requirement to have counter-contaminant programs in place at all active and reserve component Air Force bases. The threat of contamination could result from an intentional attack, major accident, natural disaster, hazardous material spill

or an inadvertent industrial accident.

The 976A Patient Decontamination certification came after a week of class time. The group was put to the test on their final day of training and proved to their instructor they could set up a complete decontamination area in less than 20 minutes.

"It's a one-time certification and then it's up to them to accomplish their yearly training requirements," said Alex Ibarra, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear training specialist. "I certify them as a train-the-trainer, so anyone of them could train another Airman."

In a real incident, 100 percent decontamination might not be possible, but the goal is to reduce patient contamination to the point where they are not a hazard to

themselves, other patients or personnel.

By keeping at least 12 people on the team at all times, they can accomplish their mission.

"Our goal is to save lives through decon by priority of order," Ibarra said. "We make sure they are clean through the process and then ensure they are able to be transported — as a clean patient — to definitive care."

The 976A team is made up of people from different areas of the base, so that base personnel affected by a chemical situation don't have to wait for the firefighters and security forces units to be available. If an actual emergency occurred, the firefighters and security forces

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## Airmen train to respond in event of base contamination

Continued from Page 14

Airmen would be required elsewhere.

"Each group and squadron on base sacrificed some of their personnel to be able to come in and help us out with this package," said Chief Master Sgt. Brian L. Steffen, 976A team manager. "This is another tool the commander has in an emergency event where he can actually use our resources to help save or protect resources and people here on the base."

After only two rehearsals the group was

put to the test. They put up the tent and decontamination water sprayers, set out garbage cans, and were operational in 19 minutes, 40 seconds. If they hadn't beaten the 20 minute time standard, they would have had to continue testing.

"I thought it went really well," Steffen said. "I'm very proud of everyone who was here. They showed a lot of urgency and were still safe when doing it. A job well done to all the members."

[Story online](#)



Above, Airmen carry a tent over to the grass during a 976A Patient Decontamination certification May 22 at the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison. Once built, the tent provides space for decontamination during chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear emergencies on base.



At left, Airmen watch their instructor during a 976A Patient Decontamination certification at the 115th Fighter Wing May 22. The 976A team is made up of people from different areas of the base, so that base personnel affected by a chemical situation don't have to wait for the firefighters and security forces units to be available. If an actual emergency occurred, the firefighters and security forces Airmen would be required elsewhere. 115th Fighter Wing photos by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti





# This is only a TEST

**Staff Sgt. Ed Schmitt, a survey team chief with the Wisconsin National Guard's 54th Civil Support Team, measures the radioactivity of a suspicious object as Capt. Jeremiah Hellenbrand, survey team leader, observes as part of an unannounced training exercise May 20 in Madison.**  
Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs  
photo by Vaughn R. Larson

**Vaughn R. Larson**  
*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

Even though the 4 a.m. phone call was part of an unannounced training exercise, the Wisconsin National Guard's [54th Civil Support Team](#) (CST) responded as if the threat was real.

Maj. Joe Davison, 54th CST deputy commander, said the full-time, 22-person team conducts monthly unit-level exercises to remain proficient at the specialized skills

required to respond to chemical, biological, radiologic or nuclear threats.

"Today is a little bit unique because we have external evaluators from U.S. Army North that do mandatory external evaluations of all civil support teams across the country," Davison explained. "They're here acting as our incident commander and also observer controllers of each functional area to make sure we're proficient in all skills."

The scenario facing the 54th CST on a warm and muggy Tuesday afternoon in Madison began with an

envelope containing a suspicious white powder discovered in a building near the Dane County Regional Airport. The envelope's return address led the team to a vacant building several blocks away, where they discovered mock barrels of chemicals, a mock clandestine chemical laboratory and an object emitting mock radiation.

"You could call this a spot-check," said Lt. Col. Bruce Alzner, an evaluator with the U.S. Army North Civil

**Continued on Page 17**

**Capt. Jeremiah Hellenbrand, left, a survey team leader with the 54th Civil Support Team, undergoes a mock decontamination.** Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Vaughn R. Larson [Click on this photo to see a related video](#)

## 'Spot check' tests Wisconsin Guard WMD response team's skills

**Continued from Page 16**

Support Readiness Group. "We try to give them one a year."

The exercise called on the skills of every team member. While some donned large — and warm — protective suits to inspect suspected hazardous materials, others provided vital communications, medical assistance, chemical analysis and decontamination.

"We like to be self-sufficient," Davison said. "We want to enhance the capability the incident commander has, and make sure that as much as possible we're self-sustaining and able to assist him in the situation he has."

Alzner said his group evaluates teams on 12 collective tasks covering every functional area of a civil support team.


"From the command cell down to decontamination, medical, laboratory, communications, the folks who put the suits on and go downrange and collect samples and take the detection equipment — these collective tasks cover what everybody on the team does," Alzner said. "Whether it's training lane or evaluation, we always look at those

12 tasks. All the teams in the U.S. get evaluated to the same standard. The only difference is when we do a training lane like this, the commander can ask us to emphasize certain areas — we call those 'commander's training objectives.'"

Davison said his favorite part of the exercise was simply getting the team together and training as a unit.

"Often we have different sections doing training on their own to make sure our equipment is being maintained and their internal standard operating procedures are being conducted," Davison said. "But really, as a team here, we get away from the office and we get to operate together."

"Most of the missions that we do involve all of our team members," Davison continued. "That's what I like to see, that all of our team members are getting involved and contributing to make sure the mission is accomplished."

"It's going real well," Alzner said as the 54th CST approached the three-quarter mark of a training exercise that had already lasted more than 10 hours. "Optempo-wise, they've made real good progress." 

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)



# Wisconsin National Guard, WEM demonstrate communications strength

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

OSHKOSH — Members of the Wisconsin National Guard and Wisconsin Emergency Management tested their mobile communications skills during the State Interoperable Mobile Communications (SIMCOM) Exercise May 15 in Oshkosh. This was the first time the annual exercise was held in Northeast Wisconsin.

The SIMCOM tested mobile emergency communications platforms from federal, state, local, tribal, military, volunteer, and private organizations. The goal is to develop relationships and understand the capabilities of other agencies before they are needed in a real emergency.

“The ability to communicate in a crisis is critical,” said Tod Pritchard, a public information officer with WEM. “SIMCOM helps Wisconsin Emergency Management and other agencies test their ability to share voice and data information in situations where phone and Internet services are down and communities are cut off from the world outside the disaster.”

The Winnebago Emergency Management, Wisconsin Emergency Management and Wisconsin National Guard Joint Operations Center planned the event.

“The planning began last fall,” said Linda Kollman, Winnebago County emergency management director. “We’ve been meeting on and off for the last six months.”

The planning was not too much of a challenge because the event is held annually, Kollman said. The only big change was the location. Changing the location allows all the participants to verify their equipment works in different areas of the state.

“It’s a good idea to be prepared,” she said. “I think working out communication issues before a disaster occurs is very

beneficial to everyone.”

More than 100 agencies were in attendance, using 34 communications platforms. The agencies worked together to ensure proper communication is achieved should a natural disaster occur.


“We network with other entities so we understand their capabilities and they understand ours,” said Senior Master Sgt. Richard Wizner, 115th Fighter Wing installation emergency manager. “It’s

much nicer to meet and greet people here than it would be at the scene of an actual emergency.”

Throughout the day, each agency was given various scenarios to practice. This allowed all participants to verify their communication tools were working properly, and if they were not in proper working order, they now have time to fix the problems before an emergency situation — like a tornado or flooding —

arises.

The National Guard participants were a key player during this exercise, but Wizner pointed out a common misconception.

“Everyone thinks the military will be large and in-charge but as a matter-of-fact we work for [the local authorities],” he said. “All incidents start at the local level and end at the local level. We’re called when we are needed.” 

[Story online](#)

# Weather Day at Miller Park is a STEP above for elementary students

**Kelly Bradley**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

As 8,000 screaming fans filed into Miller Park on a Wednesday morning, they could see the Milwaukee Brewers Famous Racing Sausages on the field, smell the fresh green grass and hear the music pulsing through the stadium. But these were no ordinary fans — they were all students and teachers from southeastern Wisconsin attending Weather Day at Miller Park.

Weather Day provides students an opportunity to learn about seasons, precipitation, climates and storms in a fun environment. Participants are divided into two teams, and questions were asked on the jumbo screen, along with videos and demonstrations on the field. The event was sponsored by the Milwaukee Brewers and WTMJ-TV, whose meteorologists were the hosts.

"This is pretty cool," said student Annie Bartosz from Hartland. "My team has been getting a lot right!"

Wisconsin Emergency Management introduced the STEP Program at this year's Weather Day, which stands for Student Tools for Emergency Planning. STEP is designed to teach students how to prepare for various emergencies including tornadoes, flooding and storms and encourages them to share information with their families and to develop their own family emergency plan.

The STEP program has held events at 150 schools across the state this year.

"The STEP program is the basic building block to emergency preparedness when you get kids involved," said Lt. Col. Max Brosig, operations officer for the Wisconsin National Guard's Domestic Operations, who also attended Weather Day. "Many people asked why I was here in uniform, and I explain how the Guard partners with Wisconsin Emergency Management and STEP."

After the Weather Day presentation was over, students and teachers were able to attend the Brewers' Science Fair, which had exhibits from Discovery World,

The Milwaukee Public Museum and the Mitchell Park Domes. Wisconsin Emergency Management set up a booth with games, giveaways and information about preparedness kits.

"Weather Day with the Milwaukee Brewers is a great event to teach kids about the importance of being prepared for any disaster or emergency," said Wisconsin Emergency Management Administrator Brian Satula. "The STEP program provides students with the tools and knowledge they need to know what to do and where to go in an emergency situation to help keep them safe."

[Story online](#)



Tod Pritchard of Wisconsin Emergency Management answers a question during Weather Day at Miller Park. Wisconsin Emergency Management, part of the state Department of Military Affairs, interacted with hundreds of children on Weather Day, a program designed to educate youth about weather hazards and how to be prepared in the event of a weather emergency. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photos by Kelly Bradley





# Wisconsin's Best Warrior quest ends in Minnesota

**Vaughn R. Larson**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

CAMP RIPLEY, Minn. — Despite a determined effort, neither of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's two

Soldiers advanced beyond the Region IV Best Warrior Competition to the National Guard Bureau's competition this year.

"I gave it 100 percent," said Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Zabinski from Holmen, Wisconsin, a member of the Recruiting

and Retention Battalion's Detachment 3, Company A. "It's kind of a tough ride home."

"I know I could have done better in a few events, and that's probably what knocked me out of winning, but that's

the whole point of the competition," added Spc. Zachary Warnke of Oshkosh, a member of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's Headquarters Company,

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**Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Zabinski, with the Wisconsin National Guard's Detachment 3, Company A, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, completes the 12-mile road march event of the Region IV Best Warrior Competition at Camp Ripley, Minn., May 15. Minnesota National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Paul Santikko**



**Spc. Zachary Warnke, of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Zabinski, of the Recruiting and Retention Battalion.**  
12th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photograph by Pfc. Christopher Enderle

## Contestants: Best Warrior crown is attainable

**Pfc. Christopher Enderle**  
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

FORT MCCOY – After battling rainy conditions, the Wisconsin Army National Guard wrapped up its three-day Best Warrior Competition April 13.

Spc. Zachary Warnke, of Oshkosh, a member of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, won State Soldier of the Year, and Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Zabinski, of Holmen, a member of the Recruiting and Retention Battalion, won State Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

“The competition not only is a great way to see what you can do as a Soldier,” explained Zabinski, “but it also makes you a better Soldier for your unit. You learn so much about yourself and the Army before, during and after the competition is over.”

This year’s competition included a stress-fire range, physical fitness test, an M4 and M9 weapons qualification, a call-for-fire exercise, day and night land navigation, a written test, warrior tasks, an appearance board and finally concluded with a 12-mile road march Sunday morning.

While the weather was constantly changing between sunshine, rain, sleet,

hail and lightning, all the competitors pushed through, showing state leadership their warrior skills and tenacity.

Sgt. 1st Class Stan Grandt, a member of the Recruiting and Retention Battalion, shared his thoughts on the competition at the award ceremony.

“At one point you didn’t think you could complete basic training, but you did. So why not open more doors of opportunity now that you have the chance again?”

Chaplain’s assistant Sgt. Steven Jopek of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team explained that above all else you just have to believe in yourself when preparing for the competition.

“You just have to prepare and understand the Army,” stated Jopek. “The upper hand lies in confidence — just have faith in yourself.”

Spc. Lancaster, who represented the 132nd Army Band and the 64th Troop Command, said the Best Warrior competition is important for the careers of Soldiers as it shows leaders what they are made of and provides them the opportunity to stand out above the rest.

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional Photos](#)



**Spc. Zachary Warnke, a combat medic with the Wisconsin National Guard’s Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, completes the shoot house event for the Region IV Best Warrior Competition at Camp Ripley, Minn., May 15.** Minnesota National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Paul Santikko

## Wisconsin Guard members compete against region’s best

Continued from Page 20

2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment. “The competition was so close that if you slip anywhere, that deficiency is going to be exploited. I still feel good about my results. I feel I did the best I could. Hopefully I did Wisconsin and my NCOs proud.”

Warnke was named the alternate Soldier of the Year — a second-place finish overall.

Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields, the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s senior enlisted advisor, said this year’s regional Best Warrior Competition — hosted by the Minnesota Army National Guard — featured the strongest field of competitors he’s seen to date.

“Everyone was well prepared,” Shields said. “They were tremendous competitors.”

In recent years the Wisconsin Army National Guard has sent one, if not two, Soldiers to compete at the National Guard Bureau event. This year that honor belongs solely to Minnesota, which sends Sgt. Corbin Routier and Staff Sgt. Michael Walker to contend for the titles of Best Soldier and Best Noncommissioned Officer, respectively, in the National Guard.

The regional competition featured the top Soldier and Noncommissioned



“It’s not over — we’re preparing for next year.”

— **Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields**

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# Soldier builds his own legacy through Best Warrior

**Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck**

*112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

Most people strive to make a name for themselves and show they are an individual — not just like anyone you would see walking down the street. This can sometimes be a challenging concept to overcome, especially when you come from a military family.

For Wisconsin Army National Guard Sgt. Steven Jopek, having an older brother and father who served in the National Guard has been a motivation, as well as an obstacle for him in his military career.

“In an obstacle way, I am Ryan Jopek’s little brother — I’ll never be Sgt. Steven Jopek,” he said.

Jopek’s older brother, Ryan, was killed in action in Iraq while serving with the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in 2006.

On the other hand, Jopek’s military background served as a motivator to compete in this year’s Best Warrior Competition and advance to the state level held April 10-13 at Fort McCoy.

“The biggest motivation is just to prove that I can do it,” said Jopek. “I’m also out to make my dad proud and my mom proud and my family because we have been a military family for a while.”

Jopek currently serves as the squadron chaplain’s assistant with the Wisconsin Army Guard’s Headquarters Troop, 105th Cavalry. He is one of only 15 chaplain’s assistants in the state.

“I’m here, not only to represent my unit but also challenge myself, show that I can do the things that others can do,” said Jopek. “It’s a good chance for me to give us some representation out here.”

**Sgt. Steven Jopek, of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, plots his first point on the night land navigation course during the 2014 Best Warrior Competition at Fort McCoy April 11.** 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment photograph by Spc. Kimberly S. Chouinard [Click on this photo to watch a related video](#)

Jopek was first introduced to the military when he was about four years old. His father had him march cadence and conduct physical fitness training.

“It was always interesting, you would come home and there was always Army stuff everywhere,” explained Jopek. “You just learned to like it. I had lots of Army t-shirts.”

Jopek’s father, Brian, served in the National Guard for 21 years and retired in 2011.

Jopek also noted how growing up wasn’t like a traditional active duty family. Having his dad in the National Guard wasn’t any different until he deployed to Iraq in 2004, he said.

“It wasn’t anything significantly different until I was 12 when he deployed,” said Jopek. “It was obviously different because he was gone for a long time.”


Not long after his father deployed to Iraq with the Wisconsin National Guard,

Ryan soon followed. Jopek was around 14 years old during his brother’s deployment.

“Ever since my brother went to Iraq, that is when I decided I wanted to be a chaplain’s assistant,” said Jopek. “That is what I wanted to do at that age; it just got fortified when Ryan passed away.”

“When he came back from Iraq on leave, he had seen a lot,” Jopek continued. “I want to be able to minister to the people that will be going over there, and hopefully one day I will be able to go with them.”

Three years after joining the Wisconsin National Guard, he uses his military lineage as inspiration to establish that he is the “new” Sgt. Jopek currently serving in the Guard. The Best Warrior Competition is just one example of the effort he is making to show his value as a Soldier.

“It’s motivating because I know [Ryan] would love to be here,” said Jopek. “I know my dad would love to do it.” 

• [Story online](#)

# Tough competition at Regional Best Warrior

**Continued from Page 21**

Officer from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

“Overall, I couldn’t be prouder of the effort — and the continued effort even though they were likely behind in the points standings going into the last day,” Shields said of Warnke and Zabinski. “They just continued to roll on.”

All three praised how the Regional Best Warrior event was set up and operated. More than 150 Soldiers took part in planning the competition for more than a year, and at least 60 Soldiers were on site to ensure the competition ran smoothly from one event to the next.

Soldiers reported to Camp Ripley, Minnesota May 12, but the competition began in earnest the next morning. The course sometimes demanded 16-hour days to accomplish such tasks as physical fitness, weapons proficiency, day and night land navigation, a confidence course, appearance board, a “shoot house” — acquiring and shooting targets in a house-like structure with blind corners — and a ruck march.

“I’m pretty drained,” Warnke admitted during the ride back to Wisconsin. “It was a long week. I’ve got some blisters, muscles are pretty sore. I’m a little wiped out, but I’ll take the weekend off and get back to it on Monday.”

Zabinski said he was trying to regain some of the weight he shed during the grueling competition.

“The ruck march — I was cruising, going really well. I just ran out of food,” Zabinski said. “I was so hungry, I had to eat so much food. I was getting the ‘grey vision’ as I was running, but I was still able to finish it up. It was still a good road march. I’ve never experienced that where I basically drove my body into the ground.”

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# Remaining composed, upbeat key to completing Best Warrior competition

**Spc. Kimberly Chouinard**

*112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

Four mentally and physically grueling days proved to be a challenge for Spc. Micah Lancaster, but through it all he came out with a smile on his face.

The 2014 Best Warrior Competition was held April 10-13 at Fort McCoy — a place, according to popular legend, that boasts its own weather patterns. Competitors had to deal with temperatures between 26 and 56 degrees, with rain and hail making for chilly mornings, continuing throughout the day into night land navigation courses. With varying conditions between the weather, rough terrain and uncertainty of schedule changes, the events Soldiers were put through were difficult, to say the least.

The Best Warrior Competition consisted of a road march, physical fitness test, stress fire, Army knowledge formal board, essays and many other Army warrior skills to test the endurance of each Soldier and ultimately find the Best Warrior in the Wisconsin National Guard.

Being in the National Guard for only two years, Lancaster's passion is playing the French horn. A member of the 132nd Army Band, the 24-year-old persevered through all the events with optimism even after being injured at one of them.

Lancaster managed to cut his thumb while shooting the M9.

"I was standing there shooting and suddenly I felt that my hand was wet and sticky, and the M9 felt kind of weird in my hand, but I had to keep shooting," he said. "When I stopped shooting, I looked and there was blood all over my hand."

Even the range safety officer asked if he needed to stop.

"But I said, 'no I have to finish. Please let me finish,'" he said.

The competition proved to be an exercise in resilience and overcoming failure.

**Click on this photo to watch a related video**

"The call-for-fire didn't really go well for me, and it's a little frustrating because I came up here specifically for call-for-fire to practice," said Lancaster. "It was a little demoralizing."

Every competitor has a sponsor who dedicates their time to training alongside their Soldier for the competition — being with them every step of the way.

"The most important thing I believe I can help my Soldier with is for him to remain calm and composed," said Lancaster's sponsor, Staff Sgt. Jackson Moeller, a senior instrumentalist with the 132nd Army Band. "There are so many different events at these competitions that if you do poorly at one you can't live in the past. You have to go on and do your best and get your mind straight for the next event."

Lancaster agreed.

"I got kind of down about the call for fire," Lancaster said. "But as soon as it was over there was kind of a nonverbal agreement between all of us that we just

weren't going to talk about it. We are just going to move onto the next things and just focus on the next thing."

With a multitude of events stacked one after another, there is little time to dwell on the past, which lets Soldiers learn more than they ever knew about themselves.

"I have learned I can really just push myself physically. Like today, on the land navigation course, I was running on the roads and I learned I can push myself to a breaking point," said Lancaster.

The 12-mile road march is the final event the Best Warrior competitors must complete.

"In previous competitions, going 10 miles is no joke with 35 pounds on your back," said Lancaster. "Both times I got to that 7.5 mile mark and I was like, 'ok I am going to run the rest of the way and I am not going to let myself stop,' and my brain is like, 'you can't do it,' but it's just amazing what the body can do if you make it." 📸

- [Complete story online](#)
- [Additional Photos](#)

## Regional contest unveils technical innovations

**Continued from Page 22**

Shields said unmanned aerial vehicles and tracking devices carried by each Soldier allowed the senior leaders to see where their competitors were on the course at all times.

"What that allowed us to do as leaders is to really assess critical tasks where our Soldiers need to concentrate on," Shields said. He already is planning to focus on this year's weak areas — M-4 qualification, night land navigation and crew-served weapons — in preparing for the upcoming Best Warrior competitions, and wants that focus to begin at the company-level competitions.

"We made a correction on the stress shoot this year, which paid dividends — we did very well on that," Shields said. "We moved our ruck march up to 12 miles to mirror what happens at the regional and national level. That paid dividends — we were second in the NCO ruck march."

Zabinski said he learned a great deal from the competition.

"Attention to detail is huge," he said. "Even as an E-7 you're still learning stuff. So many of our skills are perishable."

"There was a lot of studying, a lot of physical training for this," Zabinski continued. "It's kind of good to be done, too, and get back to life, get back to the recruiter mission, spend more time with my wife. I've been studying with my wife every night — it will be good to do non-Army types of activities."

Warnke said he looks forward to returning to his unit and returning to combat medic duties.

But the Best Warrior trail continues for Shields.

"It's not over — we're preparing for next year," Shields said, "and we expect to be right back in there and heading to nationals." 📸

- [Story online](#)
- [Related story](#)
- [Related photos](#)



# Wisconsin Army Rangers LEAD THE WAY

“Ladies and gentlemen, in second place, Team 32 — Capt. Robert Killian, 5th Battalion, 19th Special Forces Group, Colorado Army National Guard, and 1st Lt. Nicholas Plocar, 127th Infantry, Wisconsin Army National Guard.”

And with those words from Col. Kyle Lear, commander of the Ranger Training Brigade, the Army National Guard secured its highest finish in the annual Best Ranger Competition.

Of the 50 teams to start the competition April 13 at Fort Benning, Ga., four belonged to the National Guard, and two teams included Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers. Besides Team 32, Team 34 included 1st Lt. Jose Moreno of the Rhode Island Army National Guard and Staff Sgt. William Kocken, also of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry.

Team 34 finished 19th out of the 26 teams to complete the competition. The other two National Guard teams — 35 and 33 — finished in 17th and 11th place, respectively.

“Less than 1 percent of our Soldiers are Ranger qualified,” Lear said to open the awards ceremony following the grueling three-day event. “The 26 teams you will see lined up tonight represent the absolute best of that one percent.”

This was the third consecutive best Ranger Competition for Plocar, and the experience showed. Team 32 led the competition from the opening event, surrendering the lead only after the Spot Drop event on day three. Plocar and Killian — who were teammates in 2012 — finished strong in the competition's

final event, taking the lead in the Buddy Run about one minute into the run and building a considerable lead en route to their first-place finish. But that was not enough to reclaim the lead from the team of second lieutenants from the 25th Infantry Division.

“It's a bittersweet feeling,” Plocar acknowledged. “We did so well over the first two days in so many events. To come up short on one event is tough. But it's still a good result, and good for the National Guard.”

According to the Best Ranger Competition website, the “average” competitor is 28 years old, 5-foot 10-inches, 165 pounds, Airborne Ranger qualified, a decathlon-caliber athlete, and ranges in age from specialist to major. Just over one in four have competed in the event before.

This was the first Best Ranger Competition for Kocken, who just earned his Ranger tab last year.

“1st Lt. Plocar and I work out together,” Kocken said. “He suggested I ask battalion to see if I could take the Best Ranger assessment.”

That assessment gauges Soldiers' physical fitness and skill competence, and serves as an audition of sorts to determine who can compete.

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**1st Lt. Nicholas Plocar of the Wisconsin Army National Guard navigates a balance beam obstacle over Victory Pond, Fort Benning, Ga., April 11. These Army Ranger competitors are competing to be the Best Ranger during the 31st annual Best Ranger Competition. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Austin Berner**



# 'Our Soldiers are top of the line'

Continued from Page 24

"One way to find out how good you are is to go up against the best guys on the planet," Kocken said.

Events each competitor must conquer over the course of 60 hours include a foot march of at least 20 miles while wearing a 60-pound rucksack; a grenade course; the Darby Queen obstacle course; rope climb and rappelling; spot jump; a helocast and swim; a water confidence test slide for life and rope drop; and military skills such as marksmanship, land navigation and communication.

Kocken had mixed feelings over his team's overall finish.

"After Day One we were in second place," he said. "We went into day land navigation and got a little flustered — we ended up getting disqualified from that event, and it was too hard to make up the points. Make one or two small mistakes and it really hurts you."

Plocar noted that few National Guard Soldiers get the opportunity to conduct spot jumps as part of their regular training.

"We were in the top five, top 10 in every event but one," he said. "But it wasn't enough to get first place."

Kocken said the National Guard made a statement at this year's competition.

**Staff Sgt. William Kocken, Wisconsin Army National Guard, runs between obstacles while competing at the 31st Annual David E. Grange Jr. Best Ranger Competition, Fort Benning, Ga., April 11. The three-day competition consists of various challenging events, placing two-man teams in physically and mentally strenuous situations, ultimately testing their prowess. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Daniel P. Shook**

"A few years ago the National Guard wasn't making it past the second day [of the Best Ranger Competition]," Kocken said. "Now we've got four teams in the top 20 — that says a lot about how far the Guard has come."

Plocar agreed.

"Our Soldiers are top of the line," he said. "They can do the job as good as any Soldier in the Army."

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army, shared that sentiment.

"We are unbelievably proud of both 1st Lt. Plocar and Staff Sgt. Kocken in the manner that they represented not only themselves but the Wisconsin Army National Guard as a whole," Anderson said. "This competition is the premier event for Rangers, and to have two Soldiers not only compete in all events but finish so strong is a tremendous reflection of their dedication as Soldiers."

Plocar said that not fulfilling his goal of winning the Best Ranger Competition has kept drawing him back. Kocken, noting the three-month time commitment required to train up and participate in the competition, suggested that this might be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him.

"I would love to go back," he said, "but I need to train with my squad, too."

Plocar and Kocken thanked the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry for supporting them over the past three months, as well as the National Guard and their families.

"Without their support ... none of this would have been possible," Plocar said. "It's a very special three days that not a lot of people get to see."

"It's a great experience," Kocken added. "But we covered at least 43 miles on Day One — I'm still finding blisters all over."

[Story online](#)



# Sexual assault has no place here

**Vaughn R. Larson**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

The Wisconsin National Guard chose the first day of Sexual Assault Awareness Month to formally introduce Falcon, a certified service dog trained to interact with physical and sexual trauma victims. Falcon has been assigned to the Wisconsin National Guard's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) team.

But where Falcon is a friendly and welcoming canine, senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders are taking a more aggressive approach regarding sexual assault within their ranks.

"It ought to be fairly simple for an organization like ours, that puts core values at the center of everything that we do," said Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, adjutant general of Wisconsin. "There's just no place in our organization for sexual assault. It really is that simple."

Dunbar and his senior leaders for the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard made a point of presenting that message to every member of the organization last year. In addition, Gov. Scott Walker signed an amendment to the Wisconsin Code of Military Justice that aligns it more closely with the federal Uniform Code of Military Justice concerning sexual assaults.

"We are, quite simply, deadly serious about sexual assault not being accepted in the Wisconsin National Guard," Dunbar said. "You can trust leadership. I will not look the other way — my leadership will not look the other way, and I trust you will not look the other way."

"We do have a great organization," he continued. "Whatever problems we have in the organization are narrow, and when we find them we will root them out and we will take appropriate action. And you can

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## State military code updates sexual assault definitions

The Wisconsin National Guard continues to take the fight against sexual assault of its military members seriously.

Gov. Scott Walker signed Assembly Bill 641 on April 8, which updates the Wisconsin Code of Military Justice (WCMJ) concerning how sexual assault is defined. The limiting offenses of "rape" and "carnal knowledge" are replaced by the more expansive punitive article "sexual assault."

The updated code also addresses sexual assault of a child, computer pornography and stalking.

Wisconsin is the first state in the nation to amend its state code specifically to provide an enhanced Article 120, Sexual Assault Punitive Article.

"It holds perpetrators accountable and protects victims in our ranks," said Col. Julio Barron, the Wisconsin National Guard's legislative liaison. "It also aligns closely with the [federal] Uniform Code of Military Justice."

Barron said the updated WCMJ is a component — along with [Special Victims Counsel](#), sexual assault victim advocates, the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response team and Sexual Assault Response Coordinator — in the Wisconsin National Guard's initiative to counter sexual assault.

Last fall the Wisconsin National Guard was the first state in the nation to implement the special victims counsel program, which provides a

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**Falcon (in the foreground), a post-traumatic stress service dog assigned to the Wisconsin National Guard Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) office, was part of an event recognizing Sexual Assault Awareness Month at the Department of Military Affairs in Madison. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson**



Speakers at a Sexual Assault Awareness Month presentation at the Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs in Madison included (left to right) Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general; Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields,

Wisconsin Army National Guard; Command Chief Master Sgt. Gregory Cullen, Wisconsin Air National Guard; and Staff Sgt. James Austin, a sexual assault victim advocate. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Vaughn R. Larson

## Sexual assault incompatible with Wisconsin National Guard values, leaders say

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take that to the bank.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields, the top noncommissioned officer in the Wisconsin Army National Guard, challenged noncommissioned officers to set and maintain the standard.

“Our mission is to focus on creating a professional culture where sexual assault is not tolerated at any level, and victims should feel free to come forward,” Shields said. “We decide and we allow things to happen, and we can prevent those things from happening as well. We are the gatekeepers of our organization.”

Command Chief Master Sgt. Gregory Cullen, the top noncommissioned officer in the Wisconsin Air National Guard, said the Air Force teaches its Airmen to look out for each other both on and off duty.

“Not even an hour ago I dropped off my son at the Dane County Airport — he’s going off to basic training today,” Cullen said. “He’s going to be part of our organization. I would not have let him, as a parent, join an organization that I did not believe in, that I did not have

trust in.”

Capt. Robert Brania, the Wisconsin National Guard’s sexual assault response coordinator (SARC), explained how his deputy coordinator, 2nd Lt. Amber Garfoot, began exploring animal-assisted therapy techniques and came in contact with the Madison-based Custom Canines Service Dog Academy. That organization, at no cost to the Wisconsin National Guard, offered a fully certified service dog for the purposes of outreach and education.

“Aside from the tangible benefits he offers during interaction with victims and survivors, his mere presence creates an avenue for service members to interact with our office in a more informal manner,” Brania explained, “creating the opportunity for meaningful discussions about the program that might not otherwise have occurred.”

Nicole Meadowcroft, president of Custom Canines, is visually impaired and uses a service dog as her guide dog on a daily basis.

“Needless to say, the dogs change lives in so many ways,” she said. “We are so thrilled we are able to collaborate with the Wisconsin National Guard and provide this dog for this incredible service that Falcon is

providing.”

Perhaps the most moving portion of the presentation came when Staff Sgt. James Austin, a sexual assault victim advocate in the Wisconsin Army National Guard, recited a poem he was inspired to write during advocacy training. The poem was written as a letter from a sexual assault victim to her assailant. The poem begins as the Soldier describes her early days in the military:

*But then you came along. Army of the weak infiltrated Army of the strong — a sheep in wolf’s clothing, a coward of a man. I trusted you, I had your back, but you dishonored me with your hands. I thought you were my battle buddy — better yet, my friend — but you stand below the values and the ethos for which the Army stands.*

*You see, I remember that night, I remember the pain. I remember lying there, trying to wash away the feelings out in the rain. I remember wishing you would have killed me that night. But instead I die every day, over and over and over again.*

The poem ends with the Soldier gaining coping skills

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**Gov. Scott Walker signs legislation updating the Wisconsin Military Code of Justice with regards to sexual assault April 8 at the state capitol. The updated code eliminates the legally archaic terms “rape” and “carnal knowledge,” expands the actions which can be classified as sexual assault, and addresses the sexual assault of a child, computer pornography and stalking. Walker is surrounded by Wisconsin National Guard officials and state Sen. Jerry Petrowski, a bill sponsor.** Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

## Updated military code provides additional sexual assault protection

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licensed attorney qualified in military law to help victims who file unrestricted reports of sexual assault navigate the investigation and military justice processes. Because special victims counsel are dedicated and obligated to advocate for the victim’s best interests, victims may be empowered to complete the investigation and prosecution of the alleged assailant.

Two senior judge advocates — one for Army and one for Air — have been appointed as special victim counsel. Wisconsin National Guard members who are sexually assaulted by another service member are eligible for

special victim counsel service.

“It’s a full-court press attack on sexual assault in the Wisconsin National Guard,” Barron explained. “We’re talking maximum effort.”

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, said there is no place for sexual assault in the Wisconsin National Guard.

“I want to thank the governor and the legislature for their leadership on this important issue,” he said. “Changing the Wisconsin Code of Military Justice helps us provide every protection possible for our Airmen and Soldiers.” 🐾

[Story online](#)



**2nd Lt. Amber Garfoot with Falcon**

## Wisconsin Guard combats sexual assault

Continued from Page 27

and confirmation from her victim advocate, and finally being able to face the crime committed against her.

In the past year, the Wisconsin National Guard has tripled its complement of sexual assault victim advocates, as well as appointed two judge advocate officers to serve as [special victims counsel](#), and dedicated four trained sexual assault investigators — more than any other state.

“We — the Soldiers, Airmen, employees, families and veterans of the Wisconsin National Guard — have the power to send a clear message,” Brania said. “We all stand with survivors and are committed to lead the nation in addressing this issue.” 🐾

[Story online](#)



**Command Chief Warrant Officer John Freeman signs the Wisconsin National Guard Joint Diversity Strategic Plan during a May 20 ceremony. Also pictured are, left to right: Capt. Peter Owen, equal employment manager; Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army; Brig. Gen. John McCoy, deputy**

**adjutant general for civil assistance; state Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields; Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general; Brig. Gen. Gary Ebben, deputy adjutant general for Air; and Command Chief Master Sgt. Greg Cullen. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Vaughn R. Larson**

# Wisconsin National Guard enacts updated diversity plan

**Vaughn R. Larson**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

MADISON — With seven collective strokes of a pen, the Wisconsin National Guard's Diversity Strategic Plan took effect during a May 20 ceremony in Witmer Hall at the state Department of Military Affairs.

"We're extremely excited," said Capt. Peter Owen, the Wisconsin National Guard's equal employment manager. "The concepts in this plan, you'll find, are not limited to diversity you can see. You'll find out that it's about leadership — it's about capitalizing on what you have as an organization to make the organization stronger."

The goals of the diversity strategic plan call for improving mission readiness and mission operations, developing a team of exceptional personnel drawn from — and representative of — the communities in which they serve, and building strategic engagement and community outreach. The plan includes evaluations and assessments to eliminate barriers that adversely affect recruiting, hiring, development and retention.

Brig. Gen. Gary Ebben, deputy adjutant general for Air, noted that updating the Wisconsin National Guard's

diversity strategic plan began about 18 months ago.

"This is really the culmination of that whole process," Ebben said. "It takes a while to do that. I would say it was more than just nibbling around the edges — it's a fairly significant redo of this particular plan."

Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, who was an original member of the National Guard Bureau's joint diversity advisory council, observed that Wisconsin was among the national leaders in codifying and incorporating diversity practices into daily operations.

"Not only in how we look and where we come from," Anderson explained, "but the diversity of thought, the diversity of ideas, the diversity of experiences, and understanding how those different traits really bind an organization together and make it stronger."

Anderson said the Wisconsin National Guard's plan was revised, not because the original document was flawed, but to reflect the improvements within the organization.

"Wisconsin's got a great name when it comes to diversity," Anderson said. "They understand [at the national level] what we're doing. We have a number of best practices here in the state that are being modeled at

the national level."

According to the Wisconsin National Guard's Diversity Strategic Plan, not only is diversity the right philosophy, it's the organizational policy. It reflects the need to understand and respond to changing demographics, and it is a key component in fostering safe and productive work environments.

"Achieving a truly inclusive environment requires the personal commitment and support of each member of the [Wisconsin National Guard]," the document states. "While the Joint Diversity Strategic Plan provides the roadmap to ensure success, we need your support in this effort to help make certain the [Wisconsin National Guard] is the organization we envision it to be."

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, remarked that anyone who joins the Wisconsin National Guard has the opportunity to one day become the adjutant general, or the command sergeant major, or the command chief master sergeant.

"It's just a fact," Dunbar said. "There are no barriers. The opportunity is there for everybody in the organization."

[Story online](#)





# STARBASE Wisconsin back on track

Vaughn R. Larson

Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs

After an unintended break due to sequestration, the Wisconsin Air National Guard's [STARBASE Wisconsin](#) program has resumed operations in Milwaukee.

STARBASE — Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration — is like a booster class in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) for elementary students. Located in Building 301 in the Army Reserve Center at 5130 West Silver Spring Drive, STARBASE Wisconsin draws students from area Milwaukee Public School system classrooms.

According to Col. John Puttre, Wisconsin Air National Guard director of staff, once it became clear that a federal budget would not be approved by Oct. 1 of last year, the plug was reluctantly pulled on STARBASE. The STARBASE staff are state “project” employees — meaning they are hired for a specific job for a specific duration — but the state receives federal funds from the Department of Defense to pay them.

“We had to close the doors a little early, so we did that,” Puttre said. “Packaged everything up, boxed everything up in case the program didn’t come back, and then we waited.

“It really set our program back to square one, which is where we are now,” he continued. “We had four instructors putting through about 1,500 students, maybe a little more than that per year.”

When funding resumed, most of the original STARBASE Wisconsin staff had found other jobs. Dr. Charisse Sekyi (pronounced SAYchee), STARBASE Wisconsin director, returned and has been joined by two new instructors.

Sekyi anticipates that the program — which started again in late February — will work with approximately 250 students from 11 classes before the school year ends.

**Jermale Euwing, a 5th Grade student at Milwaukee’s St. Marcus Lutheran School, works on a project as part of the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s STARBASE program April 30, 2012. Euwing was among the first Wisconsin class to graduate from the program, which aims to expand the knowledge and interests of 5th-grade students in math and science.** Wisconsin National Guard file photo

make up for lost time,” Sekyi said.

While the number of students able to participate in the program may be reduced for now, the expectations have not.

“STARBASE remains focused on exposing children in MPS to engaging STEM activities to inspire a curiosity and love of science,” Sekyi said, noting that reading and math often crowd out science lessons as elementary teachers often have limited experience teaching science — particularly in schools and districts where achievement is lower.

“Elementary science curricula isn’t particularly hands-on or engaging,” Sekyi explained, “and schools don’t tend to have the funds to purchase the kinds of things we make available to kids at STARBASE.”


Puttre said the Department of Defense recognized years ago that they would be outsourcing more and more national defense products and requirements if the United States did not produce more of its own engineers, mathematicians and scientists in the coming years. That concern prompted the funding for STARBASE programs across the nation.

“The STARBASE program itself is one of the first steps in the education path for these kids,” Puttre said. “This is the first time they’re introduced to any of the STEM program categories where we actually do hands-on experiments.”

Some of the lessons in STARBASE Wisconsin’s five-week, 25-hour course include robotics programming, Newton’s laws of motion, molecules, mapping and navigation with GPS, physics experiments, and 3-D computer-aided design software.

In addition, guest speakers from the 128th Air Refueling Wing, the Milwaukee Police Department bomb squad and a university professor who used to be a research scientist explain how STEM skills help them in their jobs.

“So they see it’s not that hard to learn a STEM career because you break it down into the smaller segments,” Puttre said. “The students learn that science, technology, engineering and math can be fun, and they learn there are good careers out there and we need that for our nation to be able to compete.”

STARBASE Wisconsin is one of approximately 70 such programs nationwide. The program began as a collaborative venture between the Michigan Air National Guard and an elementary school teacher, and is now a Defense Department-funded initiative. The program is free to participating elementary schools. 

[Story online](#)

# Relationship brewing between business leaders, 115th Fighter Wing

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

MADISON — Members of the Leinenkugel brewing family visited the 115th Fighter Wing May 3.

During the Saturday morning commander's call with 115th Fighter Wing leadership, Dick and CJ Leinenkugel, Leinenkugel's business development manager and product merchant, provided valuable insight on how their military experiences have helped them become successful businessmen.

"I run the risk of being around the Air Force and talking about the Marine Corps, but my experiences as a Marine helped me get to where I am today," Dick said.

Dick and CJ — who is Dick's nephew — both shared stories from their Marine Corps days. They spoke about the leadership responsibilities they were given at the start of their military careers, the places they were able to see during their enlistments, and the valuable lessons they took away with them.

CJ even joked about the fact the Marine Corps prepared him for everything except becoming a parent. As the father of a 7-month-old baby girl, he's now been tested to his limit.

"In all seriousness though, the military teaches young people to be responsible for not only the equipment and money they are in charge of, but for the uniform and for our country," CJ said. "Honor, courage and commitment are attributes I can carry with me the rest of my life."

"The leadership lesson I'd like to share with you is recognizing your people, but I already witnessed that you do that here," Dick said. "Everyone needs to know what their people plan is. Focus on the things



your people need from you."

Dick continued to discuss the importance of having the support of their employees, and how that support and continued dedication has allowed them to become successful.

During the family's base tour, they gained insight on some things they could improve on as well. Following a briefing with Maj. John T. Sacia, a 115th Fighter Wing pilot, they learned about the processes pilots go through before and after they fly their missions. The key idea he picked up was the fact that pilots at the 115th Fighter Wing spend hours on their after-action reports.

"That's something we don't spend near enough time on," Dick said. "We're going to bring that concept back with us."

[Story online](#)



**Above, Tech. Sgt. Andrew D. Brickl, 115th gunshop supervisor, teaches the Leinenkugel family about the F-16 Fighting Falcon gun systems during a May 3 base visit to the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison. At left, CJ Leinenkugel speaks with Senior Master Sgt. Steve Veers, 115th Fighter Wing propulsion element superintendent. The Leinenkugel family visited the base to share insight on how their military background helped them become a successful Wisconsin-based company. 115th Fighter Wing photos by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**



# Remembering a fallen hero

**Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

Almost five years ago, near midnight, on Oct. 1, 2009, Sgt. Ryan Adams and his fellow Soldiers were conducting a convoy mission in Logar Province, Afghanistan. As they pushed on, through the blackness of night, two unidentified men were spotted on a hill near the route where the convoy was headed. As they monitored the bystanders, one of them lit up a cigarette. Immediately after that, the lead vehicle was hit with a rocket propelled grenade.

The cigarette was probably the signal that let the Taliban know that the convoy was in position, said Sgt. 1st Class Lyle Scott Spurgeon. Now medically retired, Spurgeon was a platoon sergeant with the 951st Engineer Company (Sapper) in Rhinelander. Spurgeon was the convoy commander at the time of the attack.

Adams' vehicle was third in line in the convoy. Spurgeon recalled Adams' vehicle being struck by a second rocket propelled grenade. Adams died tragically in the attack from wounds suffered in the explosion.

"I knew it was bad," Spurgeon said as he recalled Adams' vehicle rolling off of the road engulfed in flames.

Spurgeon's vehicle was struck with a third rocket propelled grenade, which wounded him and knocked him out. His story became more fleeting, with vivid remnants of memories which he recalled from the attack.

On May 17, 2014, on a windy afternoon, crowds gathered in the street near the National Guard armory in Rhinelander for a ceremony to honor a fallen hero. Sgt. Adams' family, leadership from the 951st and some distinguished guests spoke of Adams' life and the ultimate sacrifice he gave for his country and for freedom.

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**A shadow box dedicated to Sgt. Ryan Adams that serves as a remembrance of his service and sacrifice for fellow Soldiers.**

Wisconsin National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard



# Community remembers fallen Wisconsin Guard hero

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The ceremony dedicated the street, which leads up to the Rhinelander armory, with a fitting name change from Military Road to Adams Way.

"It's nice to see that somebody cares for what Ryan died for," Spurgeon said. He was close with Adams and was chosen to be the one to officially unveil the new street sign.

"Ryan was a pretty special guy," Spurgeon said.

There were many heartfelt remarks about Adams' life. His candor, charm and his sense of humor are just some of the things that those who knew him best said that they will miss the most.

"He was a great Soldier, and I am proud, honored and thankful to have served with him," said 1st Sgt. Gregory Fulton, now the first sergeant of the 273rd Sapper Company in Medford.

Fulton deployed with the 951st as the company's first sergeant during the time that Adams was killed.

"It is my hope that all future Soldiers assigned to this armory — who travel down this road or go down this path — will do so in a manner that reflects Adams' way," Fulton said.

Army Maj. Brian Barth commanded the 951st as a captain on their mission to Afghanistan. He could not be present during the ceremony, as he is currently deployed to the Middle East. Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, read aloud a letter from Maj. Barth.

Barth wrote: "If people wonder why Americans volunteer for military service, deploy forward and carry out missions with complete conviction, it is because of ceremonies like today to honor Ryan."

Dunbar spoke highly of the Soldiers of the 951st and of Sgt. Adams.

"The American flag stands for freedom all around this world," Dunbar said. "But it would stand for nothing without the courage of men like Ryan Adams."



**Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, speaks to the 951st Engineer Company in Rhinelander May 17 during a street renaming ceremony. The city of Rhinelander renamed the street in front of the National Guard armory Adams Way in honor of Sgt. Ryan Adams.** Wisconsin National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard

"He is to be celebrated," Dunbar said.

Retired Army Maj. Gen. E. Larry Harrington was also present at the ceremony. Harrington was the commander of Task Force Storm in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The 951st was under the direction of Harrington's leadership during the time that Adams was killed. He flew up from Mississippi to attend the ceremony.

"The actions of Sgt. Adams speak more eloquently than I ever could at this podium," Harrington said.

The renaming of the street was an idea that had been brought up to the city council of Rhinelander by the local American Veterans Post 724, and the Oneida County Veterans Service Officer, Tammy Walters.

It's a small community, Walters said. "Everybody felt like they lost someone when they lost Ryan."

Walters lives next door to Peter and Jalane Adams, and she said that the community still can't get over his loss.

"People miss him — they love him," Walters said.

"The community support has always been fantastic," said Jalane Adams, Sgt. Adams' mother who spoke at the ceremony. Jalane and her husband Peter Adams moved to Rhinelander when Ryan was in 2nd grade. "With all of this, I couldn't imagine living anywhere else," Jalane said with regards to the community and the support that her and her family had received.

"Ryan paid the ultimate sacrifice of his country by giving his life fighting for freedoms we hold dear and yet often take for granted," Rhinelander Mayor Dick Johns said.

In a city council meeting held on April 7, a unanimous vote was approved in honor of Sgt. Adams.

"On behalf of a thankful city of Rhinelander, we gladly rename this street," Johns said. "Let us remember, each time we travel down this street, the high cost of our freedom."

Ray Zastrow, a retired Army captain from Rhinelander, spearheaded the renaming of the road along with fellow volunteers from Post 724. Zastrow offered the invocation and closing prayer during the ceremony.

The local AMVETS Post 724 also presented both Peter and Jalane Adams with replicas of the street sign for Adams Way. 1st Sgt. Dan Keck, a retired first sergeant from the 951st, presented the family with the signs along with kind words.

"He was a great Soldier — but more importantly, he was a great friend to anyone who knew him," Keck said.

Adams was in Keck's platoon when he first enlisted in the Army in 2001.

"As the years passed, I watched him mature into a great soldier," he said.

The sign for Military Road will stay in place for one year. After that time it will be removed and Adams Way will be the official street marker, Zastrow said.

[Story online](#)



# Serving in the Guard is in the blood for Denson family

**Capt. Joe Trovato**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs  
Office*

When Pvt. Rylie Denson graduated from Poynette High School this spring, she took the next step toward her future in the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

Denson enlisted as a flight operations specialist in the Madison-based 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, Feb. 25, and she will report to basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in August.

When she returns to her unit from training, she will begin writing the next chapter in a three-generation line of Densons to serve in the 147th. Her father, Maj. Doug Denson, currently serves as the battalion's executive officer, and her grandfather, retired Brig. Gen. Kerry Denson, was the original commander who stood up the unit at its founding in 1985. Brig. Gen. Denson went on to become the director of aviation for the Wisconsin Army National Guard and eventually the assistant adjutant general for the state's Army National Guard.

The elder Densons have long lineages in the military with multiple combat deployments. Brig. Gen. Denson was originally drafted in 1965 and later served two combat tours in Vietnam as a decorated helicopter pilot. He was shot down three times.

Maj. Denson deployed with the 147th to Iraq in 2003 and again in 2010-11. The father and son have a combined 60 years of military service, much of it with the 147th. Maj. Denson's brother, Patrick, a master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, is retiring after 25 years of service there, and now Rylie will soon begin her tenure and build her own military legacy.

That's just what she aims to do. While she is well aware of her family's storied history of service within the military and the Wisconsin Army National Guard, she has no plans to get by on her family's name alone — not that her father would let her.



"She's got to make her own person, and she's got to do what she believes," Maj. Denson said. "Hopefully, the values and the upbringing I've instilled in her make her a better Soldier, but I want her to be her own person and grow as a Soldier without my influence within the battalion. I think that's important to the Soldiers around her too to know that she is just like anybody else regardless of myself or who her grandfather used to be within the state."

There will be no favoritism for his daughter, he said — just as there was no favoritism when he enlisted into the unit his father once commanded. He also said he never tried to influence Rylie into



(Above, left to right) Maj. Doug Denson, the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, Rylie Denson, Autumn Peck, and retired Brig. Gen. Kerry Denson after Rylie's enlistment into the Wisconsin Army National Guard Feb. 25. Rylie Denson became the third generation of Densons to serve in the unit when she enlisted. Her grandfather, retired Brig. Gen. Kerry Denson, was the unit's first commander.

Left, Pvt. Denson stands in formation during while at drill with her Recruit Sustainment Program unit. Submitted photos

**Continued on Page 35**



# Pvt. Denson to continue family tradition

## Continued from Page 34

joining the National Guard.

"I was extremely careful, as was done when I was her age, that this was 100 percent her choice," he said. "This was her doing, and there really was no influence from me. I think this is a really big decision, and it's a personal decision that a person has got to make on their own, and that's what she's done."

Having visited her father's unit since she was a small child, the National Guard was part of Rylie's blood, and she ultimately couldn't imagine life without it.

"Definitely a big part of it is college [benefits]," she said of her reasons for joining. "But the deeper part of it is that I just realized that as I grow up and I'm not with my dad anymore or my grandpa I'm never going to have that connection anymore. I just feel like that is something I'd be missing a lot."

Ultimately, the 147th felt like family to her.

"My whole life I feel like I grew up at my dad's unit," she said.

"It just kind of felt like home in a way — the National Guard and the Army."

Rylie grew up hearing her grandfather's war stories from Vietnam and watching her father deploy and lead Soldiers, and she knew she wanted to be a part of that legacy. She hopes to follow in her family's footsteps. She has had good examples to follow.

"I'm most proud of their sense of leadership and modesty," she said of her father and grandfather.

"I just see so many people that are leaders and very arrogant about it, and my family just has never been like that," she added. "They're always there to help everyone out. And they do such great things, but they're very humble about it, and I just really appreciate it."

Rylie's best friend, Autumn Peck, also a senior at Poynette High School, wanted to join the military as well, so Maj. Denson offered to bring the two girls in on a drill weekend to tour the facility and talk to some of the unit's Soldiers about their experiences in the Guard.

The girls were both inspired listening to some of the female Soldiers talk about their time in Iraq, and both Autumn and Rylie decided they wanted to join the unit together.

On Feb. 25, Maj. Denson read his daughter the oath of enlistment, with her grandfather present.

"I'm unbelievably proud," Maj. Denson said. "My dad actually swore me into the military [in 1993]. It's kind of cool to be able to pass on the tradition to swear her in."

The major has no doubts that his daughter will excel in the military. She ran cross country and track, played



basketball, and was active in many organizations at Poynette High School.

"She's a well-rounded individual, and she has the right morals," he said.

Brig. Gen Denson said he never encouraged his sons or Rylie to join the military, but he's proud of all of them for serving.

"I used to sign my signature block when I was commander, 'Excellence by example.' And I'm bragging here, but my boys went in because they liked what I did," the retired brigadier general said. "They liked what they



**Above, a younger Kerry Denson next to his helicopter during a deployment to Vietnam. At left, Rylie Denson receives the Oath of Enlistment from her father, Maj. Doug Denson, executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment, during a Feb. 25 swearing-in ceremony in Milwaukee. Submitted photos**

saw in the military — the culture, the values, the sense of mission accomplishment. They liked that, and so did Rylie. Since she was a baby, she's been around the military. She liked what she saw, because she made that decision on her own with really no encouragement from us."

Rylie will leave for basic training in August and return from advanced individual training at Fort Rucker, Alabama in December. She plans to attend the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and study international business and Spanish when she returns.

[Story online](#)



# Leading the way in safety



**Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Clarke III, Air National Guard director, and Maj. Gen. Kurt F. Neubauer, U.S. Air Force Chief of Safety and Air Force Safety Center commander, speak to general officers from around the nation during the 2014 Air National**

**Guard Executive Safety Summit at Volk Field Air National Guard Base May 13. The summit taught leaders about a variety of topics including social media, budget, fitness and readiness.** Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

VOLK FIELD — The large room was filled with rank. Airmen from around the country ranging from chief master sergeant through lieutenant general were in attendance at the 2014 Air National Guard Executive Safety Summit, held May 11-14 at Volk Field Air National Guard Base.

The safety summit's theme this year was, "Leaders: Don't Let Your Guard Down." The summit gave leadership nationwide a chance to come together to learn about the good things that have happened in the Air National Guard, the lessons they should take back with them to ensure young Airmen are given the guidance and leadership they need, and the preventative steps leadership can take to decrease the number of mishaps

that occur each year.

"When we talk about safety being a commander's program or a leader's program, it's really about presence," said Maj. Gen. Kurt F. Neubauer, U.S. Air Force Chief of Safety and Air Force Safety Center commander. "And it's presence from a standpoint of what you say, and its presence, I think, from a standpoint of what you do and how you interact with your Airmen."


Interaction with Airmen was a theme that was discussed numerous times throughout the summit. Even during one of the breakout sessions Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Clarke III, Air National Guard director, touched on the topic again.

"It's about the belief in yourself," Clarke said. "It's about the belief in others around you. And what that does for you, is it raises the tide for everything. If you can get that understanding amongst the people that there

is opportunity out there and they see it happening, and then they see the people who are moving up, and they are telling others about things like core values and what it means to develop yourself personally and professionally, it brings the whole organization up. That's what I care about personally."

In addition to focusing on what steps they should take to ensure Airmen are at the top of their priority list, the leadership group also discussed topics like social media, budget, fitness, and readiness.

"I'm really proud of where we've come in the Air National Guard," Clarke said. "We've had an opportunity to do so many things to make the process better."

Representatives left the summit May 14, prepared to take their summit-inspired readiness information back to their home states. 

[Story online](#)

# 'Grandfather of Wisconsin Air Guard' recalls formative years

**Vaughn R. Larson**

*Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs*

MILWAUKEE — For Ken Sweet, 92, the beginning of the Wisconsin Air National Guard can be traced to lofty dreams in a low time.

"I graduated from high school in June 1940, and there was a Depression like you couldn't imagine," Sweet told a gathering of Soldiers and Airmen at a recent Wisconsin National Guard senior leadership conference at the Lincoln War Memorial on Milwaukee's lakefront. Having heard stories about World War I's trench warfare from his father, Sweet determined to avoid infantry service and, despite wearing eyeglasses most of his life, aimed for an assignment having something to do with Army aviation.

"The recruiter told me I could go to Hawaii or I could go home," Sweet recalled with a laugh. "Where do I sign?"

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# Wisconsin Air Guard founder's career began at Pearl Harbor

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Sweet was assigned to Wheeler Air Field as a mechanic, in the central part of Oahu. He fondly described the pre-war routine of garrison life, and the antics of pilots not only from Wheeler but from Ford Island — a spit of land facing the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard — who would “buzz” each other's locations as part of their training flights. Marine Corps pilots had developed a practice of flying single-file along a mountain range that pointed in the direction of Honolulu.

Sweet found himself pulling guard duty on Dec. 6, 1941, which entailed two four-hour shifts and two eight-hour breaks in a 24-hour period. Consequently, he was awake the morning of Dec. 7.

“That morning, Japanese planes were flying along that mountain range — they were headed for Pearl,” Sweet told a rapt audience. “Airplanes were circling around, going up and down and it looked like they were just off the street — of course, those were torpedo bombers and they were at Pearl. We heard the Navy warming up their guns.”

He described seeing a rack swing away from the bottom of one of the airplanes, and two bombs falling out.

“I witnessed the first two bombs striking American soil in World War II,” he said.

The Japanese attacks that fateful morning came in two waves, with three groups in each wave. One group in each wave rained bombs on the navy's attack vessels, while the other two groups bombed and

strafed aircraft and barracks at Ford Island, Wheeler Field, Hickam Field and Barber's Point, Kaneohe. One of those bombs hit the barracks near the hangar where Sweet had been pulling guard duty; another explosion propelled him through the door of the hangar.

What followed was a mad dash for survival, with Sweet taking cover behind a tree where he watched Japanese aircraft strafe the roads and nearby dwellings.

“That's when I got really scared, and I'll admit this today,” he said.

Between waves, Sweet and others ran to the hangar to rescue the airplanes that weren't burning, and also to remove .50-caliber ammunition from the burning building. When the second wave of Japanese aircraft attacked, Sweet took cover underneath an officer's house.

“One of the big mistakes the Japanese made, on the other side of the hill at Pearl were hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel,” Sweet said. “If they would have hit those tanks, that would have disrupted the Navy fuel system for a long, long time.”

According to historical documents, a third wave attack on the fuel depot and torpedo storage area could have delayed serious U.S. operations in the Pacific by up to two years. However, the risk of greater battle losses to Japanese aircraft, the question of sufficient fuel to support a third assault as well as the return home, and changing weather led the Japanese to decide against a third attack.

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Department of Defense file photo

W-HD-12-7-41-R

Ken Sweet, a retired colonel fondly regarded as the grandfather of the Wisconsin Air National Guard, spoke about his experiences during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at the Wisconsin National Guard's senior leader conference Feb. 28 at the Lincoln War Memorial in Milwaukee. Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Vaughn R. Larson







**P-51D Mustangs warm up on the flight line of the 128th Fighter Group in Milwaukee. The Mustang was flown from 1947-49, and again from 1952-53. 128th Air Refueling Wing file photo**

## 'Grandfather of Wisconsin Air National Guard' recalls getting new unit off the ground

**Continued from Page 38**

Many of the Army's airplanes at Wheeler were destroyed, but 12 pilots were able to launch P-36 Hawk and P-40 Warhawk aircraft and engage Japanese Zeros.

Sweet remained at Hawaii until 1945, when his unit loaded 85 P-51 Mustangs onto a converted aircraft carrier and shipped out for Iwo Jima. His unit took part in a raid on Tokyo in April of 1945.

Some time after the war, Sweet saw a notice in the newspaper seeking volunteers to form an Air National Guard unit in Milwaukee. In October of 1946 he and 15 other volunteers showed up for the first meeting.

"Of those 16, I'm the only one [still] alive," he said. "That makes me the grandfather of the [Wisconsin] Air Guard.

"Of those 16, we started recruiting — everybody we met we'd twist their arms," Sweet continued. "Most of the young men were right out of World War II, and it was

fairly easy."

From January through June 1947 Sweet and his fellow volunteers met every Wednesday night for two hours.

"This was no pay, but it meant getting the Guard going again," he explained.

By June 1947 they had organized enough people to receive federal recognition, and Sweet was hired as a federal technician for the new organization. The first Wisconsin Air National Guard units in Milwaukee included the 128th Fighter Group; the 126th Utility Flight, Weather Station; the 128th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron; and Detachment A, 228th Service Group.

The early days of the Air National Guard in Wisconsin involved ingenuity, making do and educating the existing support chain in the Wisconsin National Guard. One example, Sweet said, entailed ordering new spark plugs for six P-51 Mustangs in storage.

"It takes 24 per airplane, so we

requested 144 spark plugs," Sweet said. "USPFO [the U.S. Purchase and Finance Office at Camp Williams] said that was too many spark plugs, so they cancelled the order and only ordered 44."

Another example was when unit members passed the hat to purchase hydraulic fluid for those six Mustangs. They found an Army surplus vendor selling hydraulic fluid for \$15 a barrel, so they bought two. They then sold one for \$30 and went back to buy another two barrels.

Eventually the Wisconsin Air National Guard amassed 22 P-51s, and another Air Guard unit — the 176th Fighter Squadron — was organized in Madison. In the summer of 1949 the Madison unit logged 900 hours of flight training during annual training. Not to be outdone, the Milwaukee unit logged 1,200 hours in the following two weeks with 22 airplanes.


"We wore them out, but we were going to beat them," Sweet recalled.

In 1950 the Wisconsin Air National Guard saw its first mobilization, a

21-month tour in support of the Korean Conflict. The 128th Fighter Group pilots were shipped to Korea, but Sweet and other enlisted members were kept at Truax Field — at that time an active duty Air Force base — under the jurisdiction of the Air Defense Command.

Sweet made the leap from master sergeant to warrant officer, which changed some interpersonal dynamics in the 128th.

"The biggest problem I had when I became a warrant officer was the enlisted folks I had associated with had some problems respecting the rank," he explained. "We got that sorted out real quick."

At age 36 and facing separation from the military, Sweet took another aptitude test to become a captain, and continued his career. He would retire as a colonel in the Wisconsin Air National Guard — the deputy commander for maintenance with the 128th — and in September 1986 was inducted into the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Honor. 

[Story online](#)



# Volk Field hosts national Air Guard recruiter training seminar

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

VOLK FIELD — Recruiters from across the nation joined together for training at Volk Field Air National Guard Base, April 27-May 2.

The training provided more than 600 recruiters a chance to learn the latest principles from National Guard Bureau instructors, network with each other, and gain important marketing knowledge to ensure Americans are aware of the opportunities available in the Air National Guard.

“The training allows them to focus on the core reason they got into recruiting — to change lives and save lives,” said Maj. Rondal Perry, Air National Guard advertising and marketing chief.

According to Perry, recruiter training similar to this began in the early 1970s. At that time all recruiters — approximately 200 from across the country — would meet annually. That continued until two years ago when budget cuts prevented the group from meeting.

“This week’s training is a continuation of that training legacy that started years ago,” Perry said.

The planning, which started last year, focused on getting the most training accomplished in the least expensive way. They concentrated on the return on investment and the return on the tax-payer investment to uncover the best solution — Volk Field Air National Guard Base.

Senior Master Sgt. Zachary Brewer, Wisconsin Joint Force Headquarters recruiting retention superintendent, helped facilitate the site visits prior to the event and sat in on several classes throughout the week.

“It’s one thing to be introduced to a new topic or information via email,” he said. “It’s so much better to be in person, receiving hands on guidance from NGB.”

Keeping everyone close was another priority.

Throughout the week the groups filled

more than 15 rooms for training, used a hangar for their large meetings, and were able to stay on base in government housing.


“They are happy to be together,” Brewer said. “They are social people and have an ability to reenergize each other.”

By switching from presentations to hands-on workshops, and dividing the

recruiters into groups of people with the same experience levels, the National Guard Bureau instructors were able to provide recruiters with necessary training in the most effective way possible.

“This is a recertification course,” Perry said. “If they weren’t able to come here and receive the training they need, they would no longer be certified.”

Recruiters trained using books, quizzes, tests and knowledge they received from their instructors.

According to Perry, being together allowed the recruiters to get into the right mindset, so they could take the information they learned back with them to their home states. 

[Story online](#)

# Rising leaders take flight

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

VOLK FIELD — A group of Wisconsin Air National Guardsmen graduated April 24 from the inaugural State Enlisted Development Program at Volk Field Air National Guard Base.

Command Chief Master Sgt. Gregory A. Cullen, the Wisconsin Air National Guard's senior enlisted leader, said the program development began after he received an inquiry from Chief Master Sgt. Chad Gibson, 128th Air Refueling Wing human resource advisor, about combining the Wisconsin unit development programs.

"Prior the State Enlisted Development Course, each unit had their own program," Cullen said. "It was our goal to develop a curriculum they could all use."

The working group that came together during the planning portion of the program included subject matter experts and senior non-commissioned officers who volunteered to share their knowledge. Once the curriculum was developed, teachers were selected at each unit to run the courses.

For phase one of the program, Airmen were required to complete eight out of 12 classes during their unit training assembly weekends. Once they met that initial requirement, they qualified for phase two.

"It definitely took a lot of time out of our schedules," said Staff Sgt. Amanda Dickenson, 115th Fighter Wing command post controller. "The support we received from our supervisor allowed three out of the nine of us to meet the requirements necessary to attend this three-day event."

The phase two, three-day event included classes on customs and courtesies, drill and ceremonies, feedback workshops, profession of arms, open ranks and writing exercises. The classes were the final conclusion of coursework Airmen in attendance began in May 2013.

**Command Chief Master Sgt. Gregory A. Cullen, the Wisconsin Air National Guard's senior enlisted advisor, inspects Airmen who attended the second phase of the inaugural State Enlisted Development Program at Volk Field April 23. Twenty-one Airmen from across the state graduated the following day. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**

The course allowed Airmen from different Wisconsin units a chance to learn from each other and meet people they wouldn't have normally spoken with.

"We don't always get to see many faces from around the base," Dickenson said. "It was a great way to get out and network. The instructors provided us with knowledge necessary to become strong and effective Air National Guard leaders."

The 21 attendees graduated immediately following their completion of phase 2. The graduates' family members were invited to attend a short ceremony that included an overview of the program, a speech by Brig. Gen. Gary L. Ebben, assistant adjutant general for Air, and the awards distribution.

"It's been a true team effort," Cullen said. "These Airmen are an asset to the Wisconsin Air National Guard. I couldn't be more proud right now — not only of the students but the teachers, too."

The next classes are scheduled to begin during the May unit training assembly.

[Story online](#)



**Five Wisconsin Air National Guard Airmen practice sitting on a board the final day of the State Enlisted Development Program at Volk Field April 24. After 12 months of training during unit training assemblies, the group was put to the test with various scenarios they will encounter as Air National Guard leaders. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**



# Leading from the front

**Vaughn R. Larson**

*Wisconsin National Guard Public Affairs*

Brig. Gen. Ken Koon knows a thing or two about having National Guard units ready to deploy.

The Wisconsin Army National Guard's assistant adjutant general for readiness and training recently accepted an additional assignment with the same mission but a larger scope — First Army Division West's deputy commanding general of operations.

"It's actually very similar to what I do for the Wisconsin Army National Guard," Koon explained.


Koon is the second Wisconsin Army National Guard general officer to serve in that capacity. Retired Brig. Gen. Dominic Cariello, the former land forces component commander for the Wisconsin Army National Guard, held the very same post in 2010. Koon may be the last to fill that dual-hat role as the Army transitions away from its wartime footing.

In his dual-hat role, Koon will be an advisor for reserve component units training at mobilization stations, and also a liaison between the reserve units and their active-duty trainers — though the gap between components has closed considerably.

"When it gets down to muddy boots, you really can't tell the difference between the active component and the reserve component," Koon said. "We need each other to get the mission done."

He noted that the active and reserve components have worked together for years, and that the emphasis is returning to pre-mobilization training as operations in Afghanistan are winding down.

Koon's obligations with the Wisconsin Army National Guard and with First Army Division West occupy, on average, 13 days per month. He said he feels blessed to have another opportunity to work with and serve Soldiers by ensuring that deploying reserve component units arrive ready for mobilization training, and that the mobilization station trainers provide what the outgoing units need.

"It's a great part-time job," he said. 

[Story online](#)



**Brig. Gen. Ken Koon, 1st Army Division West deputy commanding general of operations, tours Task Force Stallion's training facilities at McGregor Base Camp, Fort Bliss, Texas. Lt. Col. Bruce Terry, commander of Task Force Stallion, and Capt. Joseph Winkelman, team officer in charge, brief Koon on the training. Koon, also the assistant adjutant general for readiness and training with the Wisconsin Army National Guard, spoke at a Memorial Day ceremony in DeForest (top right). U.S. Army photos by Capt. John A. Brimley**



# Wisconsin Military Academy launches Raven training

**Capt. Joy Staab**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

The Wisconsin National Guard's 426th Regional Training Institute (RTI) conducted the first Raven Initial Operators Training Course at the Wisconsin Military Academy located at Fort McCoy March 26-April 4.

Twenty Wisconsin Soldiers attended the 10-day course, which consisted of academic classes, evaluations, hands-on flying and flight evaluations.

The RQ-11 Raven Small Unmanned Aircraft System (SUAS) is a hand-launched, unmanned aircraft used to

provide reconnaissance, surveillance, target acquisition and force protection during combat operations. It takes two Soldiers to operate the system, which is capable of 90 minutes of flight time with an operation range of approximately six miles at low altitudes.


"The Raven is a complex system that requires training to operate it properly and safely," explained Lt. Col. Scott Bush, the aviation branch chief for operations training and standards for the Aviation Directorate at Joint Force Headquarters.

The SUAS consists of three aircraft, a ground control station, camera, controller and a laptop to monitor feed.

The course was taught by Raven Master Trainers from the Wisconsin based 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and assets from the Georgia National Guard.

"The NCOs that ran the course did an outstanding job," added Bush. "It was a very professional course and each individual who attended the course was held to a very high standard."

Wisconsin is one of only a few states to offer this specialized training, which is projected to take place three times per year.

Soldiers only operate the Raven in designated training airspace at Fort McCoy and Volk Field. 



# Challenge Academy cadets turn their lives around

**Pfc. Christopher Enderle**  
112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The 32nd class of the Wisconsin National Guard's Challenge Academy celebrated their graduation at Mauston High School June 12.

The graduating class is the largest in Challenge Academy history, with 120 cadets receiving their diplomas. The class initially started out with 176 cadets in January.

"For most kids, this is their last chance," explained Keith Krueger, deputy director of the Challenge Academy program. "It's amazing to see how much they grow when they're here, but it's up to them how far they go. They need to find it within themselves to change."

He explained that the Challenge Academy, based at Fort McCoy, is designed to help troubled youth who may not be doing well with their life choices. The goal is to get them back on track for success. They're given leadership opportunities, classes, military discipline and ultimately earn the equivalent of a high-school diploma.

"It turned my life around and gave me an appreciation for things I used to take for granted," said Matthew Kuss, one of the honor graduate cadets at the academy.

His friend and distinguished honor graduate, Skyler Luger, added that, "You learn to actually want the satisfaction of achieving something. You don't want to cheat anymore. You really want to earn it."

Among the many senior leaders from the Wisconsin Guard that attended the graduation ceremony was retired Col. Carl Olson, who over the years has become one of the Challenge Academy's biggest supporters. Olson was also the keynote speaker at the graduation ceremony. He's written two books, and frequents events

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# Challenge Academy marks largest graduating class

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around Wisconsin as a motivational speaker.

"Everyone has done their job, but now we all have to pull together to move on through," he told the graduating class, using a series of rope magic tricks to demonstrate that no matter how long something seems, it will all even out in the end.

Including those who were graduating and their families, cadets who previously graduated joined in the celebration as well.

"After I got out, I started to go back to my old ways at first," said Tyrone Parker, a previous graduate of the Challenge Academy now serving with the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

"This place gave me the strength though to bounce back and change, so long as I took the initiative," he said.

Olson left the cadets with a motivating message. "I, and everyone else in this room, are now going to give you the world. Go, and show us what you can do with it."

The Challenge Academy program combines a rigorous physical training regimen with community service and military and academic discipline. As graduates, each alumnus will continue to maintain contact with a mentor during the 12-month post-residential phase. More than 2,800 Wisconsin teenagers have completed the program since its inception.

The Wisconsin National Guard Challenge Academy is for Wisconsin residents only, takes place at Fort McCoy, and is for anyone between the ages of 16-18. The next class starts July 24 and runs through December. For more information, contact Challenge Academy Admissions at (608) 269-4605.

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)



**Above, a cadet embraces his mother after the Wisconsin National Guard Challenge Academy graduation at Mauston High School June 12. At 120 graduates, the Class 32 is the largest in Wisconsin Challenge Academy history.**



**At left, Cadet Sheldon James waits for further orders while performing drill and ceremony during the Wisconsin National Guard Challenge Academy graduation at Mauston High School June 12.**

112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment  
photos by Pfc.  
Christopher Enderle





**Members of the Wisconsin National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, including brigade commander Col. George Rand, post the colors during the re-dedication of a statue of Gen. Douglas MacArthur June 7 in Milwaukee. At left, Wisconsin National Guard members unveil a statue of Gen. Douglas MacArthur June 7 in Milwaukee. The statue was moved from MacArthur Square in downtown Milwaukee to a more prominent location in Veterans Park on Milwaukee's lakefront. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Capt. Joe Trovato**

## Red Arrow part of MacArthur salute

**Capt. Joe Trovato**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

During the Second World War, Soldiers from the National Guard's 32nd Division landed in Australia to begin a combat campaign that took them from the jungles of New Guinea and the Philippines to Japan.

The Red Arrow ultimately logged more days in combat than any other American division in the war while it served under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

Seventy years later, descendants of the 32nd Division — Red Arrow Soldiers of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team — were on hand to rededicate a statue of

MacArthur in Milwaukee.

Milwaukee County moved the 9-foot-6-inch bronze statue from its previous location in MacArthur Square near the Milwaukee County Courthouse to a more prominent location in Veterans Park on Milwaukee's lakefront. Members of the 32nd, senior military leaders and dignitaries of foreign nations were on hand to formally re-dedicate the statue at its new location June 7.

The rededication ceremony was the culminating event in a week of events and ceremonies organized in honor of MacArthur, who attended Milwaukee's West Division High School. A subsequent ceremony in the shadow of the newly

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unveiled statue welcomed approximately 80 new Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers as well as dozens of their brethren from the active Army, Navy, and Coast Guard into the military.

MacArthur Memorial Week also marked the 35th anniversary of the statue's original 1979 unveiling and the 80th anniversary of MacArthur's entrance into the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

A color guard from the Red Arrow posted the colors, while other 32nd Infantry Brigade Soldiers led by Command Sgt. Maj. Rafael Conde pulled the veil from the statue overlooking Lake Michigan.

The Soldiers placed wreaths representing the United States, Australia, the Philippines, South Korea and Japan in honor of MacArthur's enduring legacy in those countries.

Following the rededication, newly minted service members from the Army, Wisconsin Army National Guard, Navy and Coast Guard participated in the "Our Community Salutes" event, to honor newly sworn-in service members from the area.

"We thank all of you for choosing this as your life's work," Congresswoman Gwen Moore, from Wisconsin's 4th Congressional District, said to the assembled new recruits and their families. "I know that God has given you talents and abilities that you could use in a lot of ways that would enhance you personally, but you have decided to use those same skill sets to protect the values and freedoms that have made this nation what it is."

Moore thanked the new service members for their willingness to serve at such critical points in their lives.

"At your age, you could have a lot of other things on your minds – a new car, girlfriends or boyfriends, college, what you might do for the summer – but you are uniquely tasked by your own consciousness to ask what you could do for your country and your community, and clearly that is not the case for all young people of your age," she said.

Retired Gen. Robert W. Cone, a Wisconsin native who retired from the Army in May after serving as the commander of the Army's training and doctrine command expressed his thanks to the new recruits and expressed the need for all services to work together.

"We draw on the National Guard," Cone said of his experience leading joint commands while on active duty. "They are our brothers in arms, and we turn to them all the time and active component and vice versa. When I served in Afghanistan, I commanded National Guard brigades. So we are part of a team. So take a good

look at who's on the left of you and the right of you, and remember that you will see them again defending our nation, and we are a team."

Only 23 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 even qualify for military service, Cone, a former U.S. Army recruiting commander said.

Less than one percent will heed the call to serve.

"You have raised that right hand, and you will be part of a military that will protect and defend our Constitution and our fellow citizens," Cone said.


"People talk sometimes today disparagingly about today's generation of Soldiers or today's generation of young people," he said. "Well, let me tell you something. For the last 13 years, off and on, I have served in combat with your generation.

"And I will tell you something. You are part of a new generation – America's new next greatest generation. I have seen Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen in some of the darkest places on the face of this earth..."

The retired general told of wounded service members

he's met asking to get back in the fight and return to their units, or others who continued to hold the lines in bleak moments.

"That is the stock you come from," Cone said. "That is the record your generation has established in combat these last 13 years, and I am confident that each and every one of you will continue that tradition of excellence already established by your generation."

Each new service member received a certificate of appreciation. The Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers received theirs from Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin's adjutant general and commander of the Wisconsin National Guard, while Cone presented them to the active Army Soldiers. Vice Admiral Dirk Debbink presented the certificates to the new Sailors, while U.S. Coast Guard Commander Erik Leuenberger presented them to the new Coast Guard recruits. They were joined by retired Maj. Gen. Paul Lima, the civilian aide to the secretary of the Army for Wisconsin. 

- [Story online](#)
- [Additional photos](#)



# Wisconsin Air Guard officer mentors students taking part in Senate youth program

**Staff Sgt. Darron Salzer**  
*National Guard Bureau*

ARLINGTON, Va. — Service members, including Air Force Maj. Jason Park, chief of safety with the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing, from across the different military branches of service recently had the opportunity to participate in the U.S. Senate Youth Program in the District of Columbia.

The USSYP is a weeklong educational experience for exemplary high school seniors and juniors who are interested in one day pursuing careers in public service.

"These kids are not your average high school kids," said Park. "The hope is that these elite students, who are already interested in working for the federal government, will be even more interested through the opportunity they get to meet and talk with senior members of the government and military."

Park said it was impressive to see the well roundedness of the students — or delegates, as they are referred to in the program.

"Seeing them interacting with senators from their states and other high-ranking individuals in government was a neat experience," he said. "When they go home at night, they are reading up on the current events that are taking place both around the world and within the U.S. and the level of knowledge that they have was so impressive."

Park said during the week he would brief his group of delegates daily on the upcoming schedule of events for the day and ensure they had everything they would need. While he chaperoned them throughout each day, he would also answer any questions they may have had, as well as foster dialogue between them and senior-ranking government officials he and his delegates encountered.

"One of the best experiences was the visit to the Supreme Court where the delegates were able to spend some time with Justice Antonin Scalia," he said. "They had some great questions for him and he



**Maj. Jason Park, chief of safety with the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 128th Air Refueling Wing, stands outside the U.S. Capitol building with the group of students he escorted throughout Washington, D.C., during their weeklong visit as part of the U.S. Senate Youth Program.** Photo by Jakub Mosur, United States Senate Youth Program

was able to give them some great insight from his many years of service on the Supreme Court."

The delegates were also afforded the opportunity to meet President Barack Obama a day after his meeting with the leader of Ukraine, which allowed the delegates a deeper insight into events currently unfolding, Park said.

Additionally, Park said the delegates were given the opportunity to meet with senior military members as well.

"We also met with the vice chief of the National Guard, (Air Force Lt.) Gen. Joseph Lengyel, which was exciting for me as a member of the Air National Guard," Park said. "He was able to talk to the kids about the opportunity they could have one day serving their nation in politics and at the same time as a member of the military in the National Guard."

Park said he found out about the opportunity to be a military mentor in the program through his unit's public affairs

office.

"Through an application process, the program selects one National Guard member each year to participate in the program," he said. "Additionally, members are selected from the other services as well, where they apply through their respective branches."

Park encouraged other Guard members to apply to be a mentor in the future.

"You are exposed to so many senior officials in a private setting and are given the chance to ask questions — it's just not an opportunity that the average person can say they had," he said.

"It's definitely a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to share these experiences with these incredible students from around the U.S.," Park said, "and I am thankful that I was given the opportunity and I would recommend other members of the Guard to apply as well in the future."

[Story online](#)

## Recruiters unveil new Wisconsin Guard app

The Wisconsin Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion officially joined the mobile application world as it launched its new mobile app May 2.

The new app puts recruiting and retention at the fingertips of Wisconsin Army National Guard Soldiers and those interested in becoming one. The public will be able to connect to the Guard from any mobile phone or tablet with the simple tap of a button. They will be able to explore career opportunities, peruse news, find local events, and even talk to a career specialist using the app.

"This is a great way to find a lot of useful information in one place that can be accessed from any location at any time. It's important for our Recruiting and Retention Battalion to stay connected with other Guard members, Guard families, and potential recruits," Wisconsin Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion commander Lt. Col. Rochell Maier said. "We live in a technology-driven world where the Millennials use apps for the majority of everything they do. This will be a great app not only for individuals interested in finding out more information about the Wisconsin Army National Guard but for all our current Soldiers as well."

To download the app, search WI GUARD in your mobile device's app store. The app is free and is available on Android, Apple and Windows devices. Or you can download it from your mobile device here.



[Story online](#)

# New commander takes charge of Red Arrow brigade

**Sgt. Alexandria Hughes**

*32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team*

The 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team welcomed new commander Col. Mike Rand during a change-of-command ceremony conducted June 12 at the Wisconsin Military Academy at Fort McCoy. Rand and outgoing commander Col. Tim Lawson shared words of encouragement and thanks, while speaking of furthering the storied legacy of the 32nd Brigade.

Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, shared those sentiments.

“What a great day for the Wisconsin Army National Guard and especially for the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team,” Dunbar said during his opening remarks.

Dunbar went on to speak about the rich history of the 32nd and how both the outgoing and incoming commander played roles in helping the 32nd Brigade fulfill its responsibility to “be ready when this nation calls.”

Lawson was selected to become the next commander of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade in Colorado, and called his departure from Wisconsin and the 32nd “bittersweet.”

“I will never forget the past two years as commander of the 32nd Brigade,” Lawson told the Soldiers of the Red Arrow during the ceremony. “I have been truly given a special treasure to have had the opportunity to command you all.”

In his new assignment, Lawson will command the only brigade in the Army designated to protect the United States against the threat of a limited strategic ballistic missile attack.

Command Sgt. Maj. Rafael Conde, the Red Arrow’s command sergeant major, said, “Col. Tim Lawson is one to the most honorable commanders, men. Loyal. He really lives the Army values. Integrity. He takes care of his people, and he also pushed us to become better than we thought we’d be. He will be sorely missed



**New commander Col. Mike Rand passes the brigade colors to Command Sgt. Major Rafael Conde, command sergeant major of the 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, as a part**

**of the change of command ceremony conducted at the Wisconsin Military Academy at Fort McCoy June 12. 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team photo by Sgt. Alexandria Hughes**

in the 32nd Brigade and by the state.”

Lawson closed with the 32nd’s motto, “Forward,” ushering in new leadership in Rand.

“I am truly blessed and honored to serve as its next commander,” Rand said about the Red Arrow.

Rand, who previously served as the brigade’s deputy commander and in a variety of other command and staff assignments within the 32nd, reminded

those present of the legacy of the unit and reassured the Soldiers of the 32nd of their future with the Red Arrow Brigade.

“We will continue to train, maintain, and equip our Soldiers and units,” he said. “We will continue to be ready if called upon. Everything that we do must be built upon our readiness. I will work hard to maintain the great tradition of the 32nd ‘Red Arrow’ Brigade.”

Conde had high praise for his new

commander.

“Col. Mike Rand, I’ve known him for 20-plus years,” Conde said. “He’s a troops’ commander. He’s a good, solid commander and he’ll do well with the 32nd Brigade.”

“It has been my pleasure to have worked with Col. Tim Lawson,” Conde continued, “and I look forward to new endeavors with Col. Rand.”

[Story online](#)



# Meritorious Service

## 426th RTI gains new senior enlisted leader

**Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

The [426th Regiment Regional Training Institute](#) (RTI) welcomed its new commandant during a Change of Responsibility ceremony June 7 at the Wisconsin Military Academy (WMA) at Fort McCoy.

Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Easterday, the outgoing command sergeant major of the 426th, was commended for his achievements during his tenure at the RTI.

"He is going to be a big loss to the organization, but like all great leaders he has built a great bench of people behind him that will continue to fill the ranks," said Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, the top officer in the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

Easterday passed the noncommissioned officer sword off to his successor, Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph W. Moehrke, signifying the responsibility and authority from the outgoing to the incoming command sergeant major.

Easterday oversaw the training of more than 1,000 Soldiers during his time as commandant of the RTI, to include more than 700 officer candidates and 200 noncommissioned officers.

"Many of those officers are now in the field-grade level and the impact that they are having on the rest of the organization is one of the neatest impacts that I can think of," Easterday said in an interview before the ceremony.

"I will miss the great camaraderie, the great friends and I will miss the work," Easterday said. "There is no greater feeling than serving Soldiers, taking care of their needs and making sure that they are trained and ready to go."

Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph W. Moehrke of Lake Mills assumed the responsibility of carrying on an



extraordinary heritage of excellence.

"I have absolute confidence in his capabilities, skills and competence," Anderson said. "I am confident that he will continue to build upon the legacy that Command Sgt. Maj. Easterday started."

Moehrke holds a bachelor's degree in Management and Communications from Concordia University and is a graduate of the United States Army's Sergeant's Major Academy.

"The command sergeant major is the commandant of this academy, the epitome of its leadership, and is charged with developing that in our students," Col. Gregory J. Hirsch, commander of the 426th Regiment RTI, said during the ceremony. "Command Sgt. Maj. Easterday has had a long and distinguished career in the Wisconsin National Guard and has made significant contributions to the regiment."

"He has made a lot of improvements to not just our RTI, but improvements that National Guard Bureau has taken and implemented in other RTIs," Hirsch said of Easterday after the ceremony. "His oversight and leadership ensured that the regiment was rated an 'Institute


The non-commissioned officer's sword was passed from outgoing Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Easterday to the incoming Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Moehrke in a change of responsibility ceremony at the Wisconsin Military Academy on June 7. Wisconsin National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard

of Excellence' in 2012, a rating that very few RTIs can claim. His stewardship and dedication will be missed."

Easterday was presented with a statue of an eagle draped with the U.S. flag that served as a thank you from all of the 2nd Battalion Soldiers for Easterday's leadership and mentoring while serving as the RTI command sergeant major.

Easterday was also awarded the Legion of Merit for his service to the Wisconsin Army National Guard and his genuine concern for Soldiers during his career.

Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Shields, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's top senior enlisted advisor, was present at the ceremony and praised Easterday's performance and the quality of students the 426th produces.

"I feel very confident that the right selection has been made," Shields said of Moehrke. Shields served with Moehrke during a deployment to Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2005. "He brings a wealth of experience to this organization. He will carry on the tradition of Command Sgt. Maj. Easterday and advance the whole organization." 

[Story online](#)



Brig. Gen. Gary L. Ebben, Wisconsin's assistant adjutant general for Air, and Master Sgt. Joshua Johnson, a budget analyst with the 115th Fighter Wing, after Johnson's Purple Heart ceremony May 3 at the 115th Fighter Wing in Madison. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti

## Airman counts blessings, receives Purple Heart

**Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti**  
*115th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

MADISON — It was standing room only. All eyes were on the man in the front. He stood tall and proud at attention — hands cupped into a tight fist, arms straight and tight against his sides.

The master sergeant had incredible military bearing. Even as he received the Purple Heart, he remained calm and collected. The only glimpse of pride he showed was after he received the medal, as he looked up at the crowd of people who were there to support him.

"To look out and see everyone there, and to have my wife and family there to see it, how can you not feel proud?" asked Master Sgt. Joshua Johnson, 115th Fighter

**Continued on Page 52**

## New command master sergeant for 128th ARW

**Airman Morgan Lipinski**  
128th Air Refueling Wing

Chief Master Sgt. Connie M. Bacik became the new command chief master sergeant of the 128th Air Refueling Wing during a May 18 ceremony.



Bacik has been a member of the Wisconsin Air National Guard since 1990. She has worked as an information management specialist, a production recruiter, the Wisconsin Air National Guard

Recruiting and Retention superintendent, and Force Support Squadron superintendent for the 128th ARW.

Bacik's role as command chief master sergeant of the 128th ARW will be to represent the enlisted members here. She will also advise commanders on matters that affect the enlisted core and the overall mission.

Bacik replaces Chief Master Sgt. Joseph A. Parlato, who served as the command chief master sergeant of the 128th ARW since 2008.

## 115th Fighter Wing Airman receives Purple Heart

Continued from Page 51

Wing budget analyst. "Seeing the faces of those you respect clapping back at you is a humbling experience."

Wisconsin's assistant adjutant general for Air, Brig. Gen. Gary L. Ebben, was in attendance to present the medal to Johnson.

"The Purple Heart is a very unique medal," Ebben said. "It is one thing to say you'll go into harm's way, it's another to go into harm's way."

Johnson began his military career as an Army infantryman. Going into harm's way was a part of his everyday life during deployments.

"When you're there, you feel like you're on an island," Johnson said. "You see the guy to the left and the guy to the right. You're there to fight the war."

While overseas, Johnson survived numerous improvised explosive device explosions. The one that eventually lead him to receive the Purple Heart award occurred on Nov. 8, 2005 during a deployment to Baghdad as a member of Company B, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment.

"The Purple Heart isn't the medal those overseas want to receive," he said. "If you receive that medal, you've been injured."

Johnson could have died that day.

The vehicle he was in drove over an IED. When it exploded he was jarred from his gunner's seat and knocked unconscious. He does not remember how long he was unconscious, but he thinks it was at least a few minutes.

Later on, his battle buddies found shards of metal embedded in a cooler. That cooler happened to be sitting on the left side of Johnson's head prior to the explosion. Had that cooler not been there then, Johnson likely would not be here today.

Those shards of metal now lay on his desk as a constant reminder that it does not matter what job those in the military are doing — what matters is the fact that they raised their right arms. They volunteered to go into harm's way for the freedom of others.

Even those who have never been overseas deserve to be thanked for their service, Johnson said. It does not matter if they are in finance or public affairs or services. Each and every career field has a purpose in the total force structure, and each is needed to accomplish the missions assigned.

"I want to say thank you to those who are here for doing what you do, so those who are over there can do what they do," Johnson said.

[Story online](#)



**The 2014 Wisconsin Marathon Team. (Front row, from left): 1st Lt. Nicholas Plocar, Master Sgt. Melanie Peters, Staff Sgt. Jason Kirch, Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck, and retired Air Force Master Sgt. Mike Ziegel. (Back row; L to R): Airman 1st Class John Leuck, Capt. John Jordens, Spc. Brady Anderson, Maj. Michael Western and Airman 1st Class Robert Miles. Submitted photo**

## Wisconsin Guard marathoners set state record

Despite an extremely cold winter endured by 10 Wisconsin Army and Air Guard members during their train-up for the 2014 Lincoln National Guard Marathon, the team set a state record in making this year's All Guard Marathon Team, May 4.

After running a challenging 26.2 miles in Nebraska's 37th Lincoln Marathon, seven members of the Wisconsin Marathon Team finished with times fast enough to earn a place on the team. This is the most representatives Wisconsin has had make the team since the All Guard Team program began in 1984.

"It's awesome to have that many people representing," said Air Force Maj. Michael Western of the 128th Air

Control Squadron, the Wisconsin team coordinator.

That level of participation reflects well upon the Wisconsin National Guard, he said.

The Wisconsin team competed against 42 other states and territories and acquitted itself well, placing second overall.

Out of 184 Army and Air Guard members running in the race, only the top 40 men and 15 women qualify to make the All Guard Marathon Team. They will represent the Guard at a national level in a series of marathon competitions throughout the year.

"The goal of the Marathon Team is

Continued on Page 52



## Schmitt named Army's top CBRN NCO in 2014

**Pfc. Christopher Enderle**  
112th Mobile Public Affairs  
Detachment

Staff Sgt. Edward Schmitt, of Lake Mills, with the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 54th Civil Support Team, was named the Army's best Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear noncommissioned officer for 2014. The title spans all components of the Army, including active, National Guard, and Reserve.

The competitors were evaluated based on their merits and leadership skills both within and outside the Army. Soldiers were nominated by their first sergeants and commanders, and a board reviewed each competitor's packet during judging at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in April.

"We nominated Sgt. Schmitt because he is the ideal NCO," said Sgt. 1st Class Matt Tracy of the 54th CST. "He is smart, dedicated to the mission and his Soldiers, and physically is above and beyond. Whatever your definition of an NCO would be, he fits that."

Schmitt has entered numerous competitions throughout the years, including the Army National Guard's Best Warrior competition where he took 3rd place in 2013, and an Ironman Triathlon where he placed within the top twenty percent.

Tracy explained that in order to win the competition, Soldiers need to not only know their CBRN tasks, but also must master the new threats and responses that continue threatening today's world.

"He is one of the most dedicated soldiers I've known," said Capt. Jeremiah Hellenbrand of the 54th CST. "He's a great leader who is always watching out for his troops, setting up missions for not only his team, but for



**Staff Sgt. Edward Schmitt, a survey team chief with the Wisconsin National Guard's 54th Civil Support Team, examines a mock suspicious chemical compound during an unannounced training exercise May 20 in Madison.** Wisconsin Department of Military Affairs photo by Vaughn R. Larson

others as well."

When asked what it takes to prepare for the competition, Schmitt explained that Soldiers have to push themselves to stand out.

"Try to get on top of any CBRN training that you can, get on the Commandant List, and anything else you can do to make yourself stand out," said Schmitt. "You're going up against every other CBRN Soldier in the U.S. Army." 📷

[Story online](#)

## Wisconsin Guard marathon team sets state record

Continued from Page 51

recruiting and retention, morale, fitness and basically *esprit de corps* of drawing everybody together," said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hagen, National Guard Bureau Marathon coordinator.

Hagen added how the All Guard Marathon Team program sparks interest in people to join the National Guard and motivates those already in the military.

Western agreed.

"It's a really neat program and I think it only takes your first time to come to Lincoln to catch the fever," said Western. "You get the 'I think I can do better next year' type thing."

Western was the top Wisconsin finisher with a time of 2:54:05. Army Capt. Seth Kaste, with the 54th Civil Support Team, finished close behind with a time of 2:55:46. Right on his heels was Army 1st Lt. Nicholas Plocar, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, finishing in 2:56:36.

Plocar is no stranger to grueling events, as he was half of a team that placed second in last month's Best Ranger competition.

Western, Plocar and Kaste's finishing times, when averaged, earned second place in the team awards for the National Guard. This marked the third consecutive year the Wisconsin team has achieved second place.

Air Force Master Sgt. Melanie Peters, of the 115th Fighter Wing, was the first Wisconsin female to finish with a time of 3:44:30. Peters was one of two women on the Wisconsin team.

Army Spc. Brady Anderson, with 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, completed his first year on the team with a 3:00:15 time. Army Staff Sgt. Jason Kirch, with the

229th Engineering Company, finished with a 3:02:47, and Air Force Airman 1st Class Robert Miles, with the 115th Fighter Wing, finished with a 3:06:23.

The seven Wisconsin members to make the team were: Western, Plocar, Kaste, Peters, Anderson, Kirch and Miles.

Even though the thought of running just over 26 miles in uncertain weather can be overwhelming, many on the Wisconsin team keep coming back year after year.

"I really like the camaraderie, the networking with different folks that show up to the race [as well as] the competition," Western said.

Army Staff Sgt. Megan Leuck, with the 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, ran her first marathon and finished with a time of 4:14:48. Army Capt. John Jordens of 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry finished with a time of 3:19:44 and Air Force Airman 1st Class John Leuck, with the 115th Fighter Wing, also completed his first year on the team and finished close behind with a 3:20:42.

While the remaining three individuals didn't make the All Guard Team, they put forth a valiant effort and will have something to shoot for if they decide to join the Wisconsin team next year.

"Now that I've had a taste of what it's all about, I am more excited to come back next year," John Leuck said.

For any Army or Air Guard member interested in joining the Wisconsin Guard Marathon team, contact Maj. Michael Western at [michaeljwestern@gmail.com](mailto:michaeljwestern@gmail.com) or 319-610-7900.

"It's a great opportunity, it's a great race and it's a good weekend overall," Western said. 📷

[Story online](#)



**1ST PLACE, 2013 NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU DIGITAL PUBLICATION**

# Wisconsin Army National Guard Hall of Honor celebrates three new inductees

**Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard**  
*Wisconsin National Guard*

Retired Col. Michael Fonger of Cottage Grove, retired Col. Michael Williams of Fort Atkinson, and 1st Sgt. Gregory Fulton of Arbor Vitae were inducted into the Wisconsin Army National Guard Hall of Honor during a May 3 ceremony in Madison.

The adjutants general have selected 54 recipients for the Hall of Honor since Aug. 30, 2000. The award is one of the most prestigious that a Wisconsin National Guard member can receive.

The Hall of Honor is designed to encourage esprit de corps, in remembrance of a Wisconsin National Guard heritage that spans more than 175 years. The purpose of this honor ensures proper recognition to individuals whom have made lasting and exceptional contributions to the Wisconsin Army National Guard.

"We view this as the highest honor that we can bestow," said Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general. He spoke of the Wisconsin National Guard's involvement in numerous conflicts throughout history.

"This is the heritage that we share in the Army National Guard," Dunbar said. "In this organization, with such a rich history, it is an exceptionally big deal when your peers vote you for this honor."

Fulton had previously received the Silver Star for his actions in close combat, while deployed to Afghanistan as first sergeant of the 951st Engineer Company, in 2008.

"The key to my story is the people around me," Fulton said in a heart-felt speech given during the ceremony. Fulton was the first Wisconsin National Guard Soldier to receive the Silver Star since World War II.

"My story has been one of fortune. I'm fortunate to have a good family who are very supportive," Fulton said.

Prior to the ceremony, Fulton said that one of the keys to his success was following the principles of military



**Brig. Gen. Mark Anderson, deputy adjutant general for Army, and Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, flank Wisconsin Army National Guard Hall of Honor inductees retired Col. Michael Fonger of Cottage Grove, 1st Sgt. Gregory Fulton of Arbor Vitae, and retired Col. Michael Williams of Fort Atkinson, after the May 3 induction ceremony in Madison.** Wisconsin National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Ard

doctrine. Fulton continues his enlistment as the first sergeant of the 273rd Engineer Company in Medford.

Fonger enlisted in the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 1963 and graduated from the Wisconsin Military Academy in 1965. He volunteered for active duty in the Vietnam War where he served as a construction engineer, communication officer and company commander with the 169th Engineer Battalion.

"I was hired to come down here and run recruiting back when the strength of the Guard was at 66 percent, and we got it up to about 98 percent strength during the time I was the head of recruiting," Fonger said before the ceremony. "I mentored a lot of people," he added, referring to the six years he spent as chairman of the National Guard Bureau's Recruiting and Retention Advisory Committee. He joked about tough love and the audience erupted when he asked them to raise their hand if he had ever chewed them out.

"I'm pretty proud that I was picked to do this," Fonger said. Recruiting and retention strategies that he developed and

implemented were a great success in the Wisconsin Army National Guard are still being used today nationwide.

Williams led the 264th Engineer Group to unit strength of more than 100 percent due to innovative policies and programs which he implemented during his time as commander there. His leadership also helped to define Wisconsin's state partnership with Nicaragua in support of Task Force Chontales, a humanitarian assistance mission there.

"There is a saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child,' but it takes an entire National Guard community to raise a colonel," Williams said. He introduced his two grandchildren and his mother who were present at the ceremony.

"The family is the foundation," he said. Before the ceremony Williams noted that many people supported what he described as a long and illustrious career.

"I could never have gotten to this point without being surrounded by a loving family and many supportive members of the National Guard," Williams said.

[Story online](#)

# Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame inductee honored

**Airman Basic Morgan R. Lipinski**  
*128th Air Refueling Wing*

Retired Chief Master Sgt. Thomas Ludka was inducted into the Wisconsin Air National Guard Hall of Fame during the 34th annual 128th Air Refueling Wing Civic Dinner Dance May 15.

Ludka began his military career in 1971 by enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps. After six years of serving, he enlisted into the 128th ARW where he served for 23 years.

Throughout his time serving in the military, Ludka continuously demonstrated superior performance and dedication in both his military and civilian life.

Some of Ludka's accomplishments include locating and marking the graves of 32 Civil War veterans, recovering the names of 124 souls who were buried at an abandoned cemetery in Milwaukee County, and serving as the Waukesha County Veterans Service Officer where he assisted thousands of service men and women in receiving the proper benefits.

Also during the Civic Dinner Dance, the Honorary Citizen of the Year award was presented to Richard Paradowski for his outstanding influence in the St. Francis community.

The Civic Dinner Dance celebrates the military and civilian personnel that have had a vital impact in making the 128th Air Refueling Wing one of the best refueling wings in the nation.

Several distinguished guests attended the event including Major Gen. Donald Dunbar, Brig. Gen. Gary Ebben, Col. Daniel Yenchesky, and Command Chief Master Sgt. Greg Cullen.

"To be a member of the armed forces is an honor and a privilege," Ludka said. "It's an honor because the inculcated virtues of sacrifice, honor, discipline, and service are regarded as paramount for all of our military personnel to accomplish their missions."



# Veterans, Families, Retirees

## Accelerated trucking course can benefit state veterans

A new [program](#) launched in April can help Wisconsin residents — including veterans and service members — receive commercial driver's licenses and guaranteed placement in the trucking industry.

The new training program will channel up to 300 new students into a four-week training course. Upon earning their commercial driver's license (CDL), students will be placed in one of three participating trucking firms — Schneider National of Green Bay, Roehl Transport of Marshfield, and WEL of De Pere. The newly placed students will become a permanent hire after completing the standard introductory stage.

Applicants must pass eligibility screening to be accepted in the accelerated course, which is currently offered at Fox Valley Technical College and will be offered at Waukesha County Technical College this summer. Related instruction is available at Chippewa Valley Technical College and Milwaukee Area Technical College.

State legislation signed into law two years ago already waives fees for occupational and professional licenses for qualified veterans.

"We're doing everything we can to support our veterans," Gov. Scott Walker said during a brief April 4 ceremony at Waukesha County Technical College.

Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, noted that this program is the latest effort in a campaign to reduce unemployment among service members and veterans in Wisconsin.


"In order to successfully defend your country, you need a couple of important things — great men and women, which we surely have, and employer support," Dunbar said. "I think [veterans and service members] offer skills that simply don't exist anywhere else."

The new CDL training program is a



**Maj. Gen. Don Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general, speaks about the skills veterans and service members can bring to the truck driving industry during an April 4 ceremony at Waukesha County Technical College announcing a new program to accelerate the process of earning commercial driver's licenses. Gov. Scott Walker, right, also spoke at the ceremony. Veterans are among the prioritized individuals who can apply for this course.** Wisconsin National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Joe Trovato

collaborative effort between the three trucking firms, trucking industry leaders, the state departments of Workforce Development, Transportation and Veterans Affairs, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and the Wisconsin Technical College System.

Industry projections suggest that the need for qualified semi-truck drivers — who on average earn approximately 15 percent above the median wage in Wisconsin — will grow by 21 percent between 2010 and 2020. 


[Story online](#)

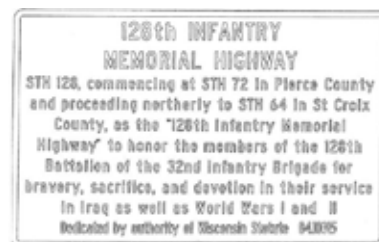
## Retiree Activities Office continues to serve

The Retiree Activities Office (RAO) is located in the Office of The Adjutant General at 2400 Wright Street, Room 160, Madison, Wis., 53704. The office is open Tuesdays and Thursdays, 7:30-11:30 a.m., except on holidays.

Our phone number is (608) 242-3115, our toll free number is 1-800-335-5147, ext 3115; DSN number is 724-3115. If you call at a time when the


office is closed, please leave a message on our voice mail. Please be sure to leave your name and phone number. Our e-mail address is: [widma.retiree@wisconsin.gov](mailto:widma.retiree@wisconsin.gov)

The RAO mission is to act as an interface between the active duty and retired communities, keep retirees and widows of retirees (all ranks and services) informed on matters related to their military status, provide appropriate information and services as necessary including TRICARE, Military ID Cards, Survivor Benefits, Death Reporting and more. The RAO also maintains a list of toll-free phone numbers, Web sites and e-mail addresses for additional information. 



## 128th Infantry Memorial Highway progresses

AMVETS (American Veterans) announced the completion of phase one of the 128th Infantry Memorial Highway in St Croix County. The Department of Transportation will be completing and placing the Memorial marker in Glenwood

City. An early July placement is tentatively scheduled. Phase two is planned at a later date which will include a flag pole, light, and the names of 128th Infantry Soldiers killed in combat in Iraq, as well as WWI and WWII. 

# Parting shot

Gary Andersen, Wisconsin Badgers football head coach, and some of his coaching staff visited the Truax Field Fire and Emergency Services team June 11. He spoke about the trust and teamwork strategies he uses on the football team, and correlated those with the strategies of the fire and emergency medical team at the 115th Fighter Wing. 115th Fighter Wing photo by Senior Airman Andrea F. Liechti

