

GRIZZLY

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The Bomb Squad

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Banquet held in Santa Clara**
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Leadership Corner

Integrating diversity into operations

Major General David S. Baldwin



Achieving the California National Guard's goals requires maximizing the contributions of each Soldier and Airman. A 22,000-person force will reach only a fraction of its potential if the influence and brain power is restricted to a few officers and NCOs.

California's extraordinary diversity gives us uncommon strength, replete with different learning styles, creative abilities, experiences, cultural competencies, skills and perspectives. That wealth of talent, however, can only be tapped if leaders are open to – and actively seek – contributions from all members in our ranks. In addition to directly benefitting the organization in an immediate sense, seeking these inputs will provide junior members with experience and confidence that can form the foundation for careers that reach great heights.

The Guard's most unique attribute is that it is a community-based force, which brings with it the various talents this state has to offer. A supply sergeant on the weekend may be a professor Monday through Friday,

Our mission provides many opportunities for service overseas and with members of different cultures.

- Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin
The Adjutant General

whose skills could easily go overlooked in a military setting.

Maximizing the benefits of our diversity is not a pro-

gram to be instituted on paper; it is a mindset every service member must carry with them throughout the performance of their duties. Utilizing the complementary perspectives within your team is key to innovation, and our force will never be stagnant.

Our mission provides many opportunities for service overseas and with members of different cultures. With our focus on diversity entrenched in our ethos at home, we will set the example in international settings for incorporating the diverse contributions of our members and partners toward mission success.

It is every leader's responsibility to create an atmosphere that shows opportunity is available in this organization for those who are willing to work hard and be a part of something greater than themselves. If we mentor and develop our top-quality members, and they witness our merit-based approach, retention will take care of itself and our force will only grow stronger.

Mentor-mentee relationships enhance readiness

Command Sergeant Major William Clark Jr.



For most of you, the military concept of coach, teacher, guide, advisor and role model began almost immediately upon indoctrination during basic training. We were yelled at while attempting to respond to a flurry of rapid commands that were hard to understand, let alone, to follow. However, even after a few weeks, we as young Soldiers and Airmen transitioned from a state of shock to a state of implicit trust with these same instructors.

Perhaps no mentorship experience resonates more with young service members in achieving that trust than when they hear their drill instructor speak to them calmly and methodically when at the firing position just before basic rifle marksmanship (BRM) qualification. In terms of impact, this was not how a Basic Soldier or Airmen first identified with their instructors when they got off the bus. Yet, it illustrates a spectrum of mentoring communication we all became dependent on when faced with new challenges.

Mentor-mentee interaction is changing and evolving. Where once there was near exclusive attention on mentoring similar to that needed on the range during BRM, now exists a growing element on personal focus. At work or at home, during relationship challenges, or mission schedule changes, it all matters.

The effects of change are wide-ranging and can be disruptive in our personal and professional lives. Fortunately, we know these stresses can be mitigated before mission and safety risks become apparent.

So why the change toward mentoring? In part, all of the services, to a large extent, now understand that mentees have a tendency to reach out for mentoring support typically when one their situational needs is in doubt, aka, Maslow's hierarchy (look it up). When most young service members

seek counsel, they usually will turn to those who will not have a direct impact on their financial well-being or reputation within their organization. Some mentee's gravitate to mentors who inspire confidence and competency through charismatic behavior.

The path to mentoring is a little more complex than what a service member experiences during basic marksmanship. For Soldier career development, use of the Army Career Tracker (ACT) is the preferred method to communicate training, education and learning objectives for use toward leadership goals. One area that is particularly important is the Individual Development Plan (IDP). Through IDP, Soldiers can literally chart their course through any number of career maps specific to their MOS. Soldiers can then compare their experiences, completed certifications and skill competencies against those detailed within their selected career map.

The mentor connection a Soldier can experience through IDP occurs when the self-assessment on the career map is finished; the findings can be shared with the mentor. The expectation at this point is for mentors who have already experienced development to offer feedback and advice.

A recent change to Airmen mentoring and feedback occurred back in June 2014 when the Air Force implemented the Airman Comprehensive Assessment (ACA). The ACA continued the mission-focused assessments that had been achieved through the prior feedback forms with one not too subtle twist. The ACA compelled supervisors to ask not just professional-minded questions, but personal ones as well. Under the section "Knowing Your Airmen," supervisors ask Airmen questions like, "How do you think you are performing in the unit?" And, "How can your unit help you perform better?" These questions are used to aid the

mentees in initiating a self-assessment while asking for assistance in areas where help may not just be important, but a priority.

Mentors should work with their mentee and determine what kind of support will be most useful, such as general career advice, personal encouragement, and so on. As we encourage mentorship, it strengthens our enlisted core and improves overall communication. The win-win here is that not only the mentee benefits, the mentor also can benefit. From mentoring your younger troops, you get a glimpse of staff issues you might not otherwise hear about. It could be the piece that inspires you to be a better boss, a better leader.

Mentees should also know that effort, attention to detail, positive communication and individual leadership are personal traits that are hard for mentors to ignore. When these personality characteristics are coupled with an understanding of the institutional values of the Army or the Air Force, most mentors and leaders will strive to find roles suited for their mentee's increased responsibility and professional growth.

There are social and professional challenges all around us while we perform our missions or while at home with our friends and our families. Yet, any and all of our challenges can be overcome by continuing to improve mentor-mentee bonds. When you consider the depth of personal, professional, and family-centric responsibilities we all have, it should be expected that self-doubt and confusion will occur from time to time. The mentor-mentee channel of communication improves our ability to navigate through the difficult phases of our careers while allowing us to learn more from one another. Be it as coach, teacher, guide, advisor or role model, a mentor's positive influence ensures personal growth and makes our organizations and families stronger.

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Articles:

- ★ Articles range from 350 to 2,000 words. All articles should be accompanied by multiple high-resolution images.
- ★ Include first names, last names and military ranks. Always verify spelling.
- ★ Spell out acronyms, abbreviations and full unit designations on first reference.
- ★ Only submit articles that have been approved by your unit's public affairs officer.

Photographs:

- ★ Highest resolution possible: MB files, not KB.
- ★ No retouched photos, no special effects.
- ★ Include the photographer's name and rank, and a caption: what is happening in the photo, who is pictured and the date and location.

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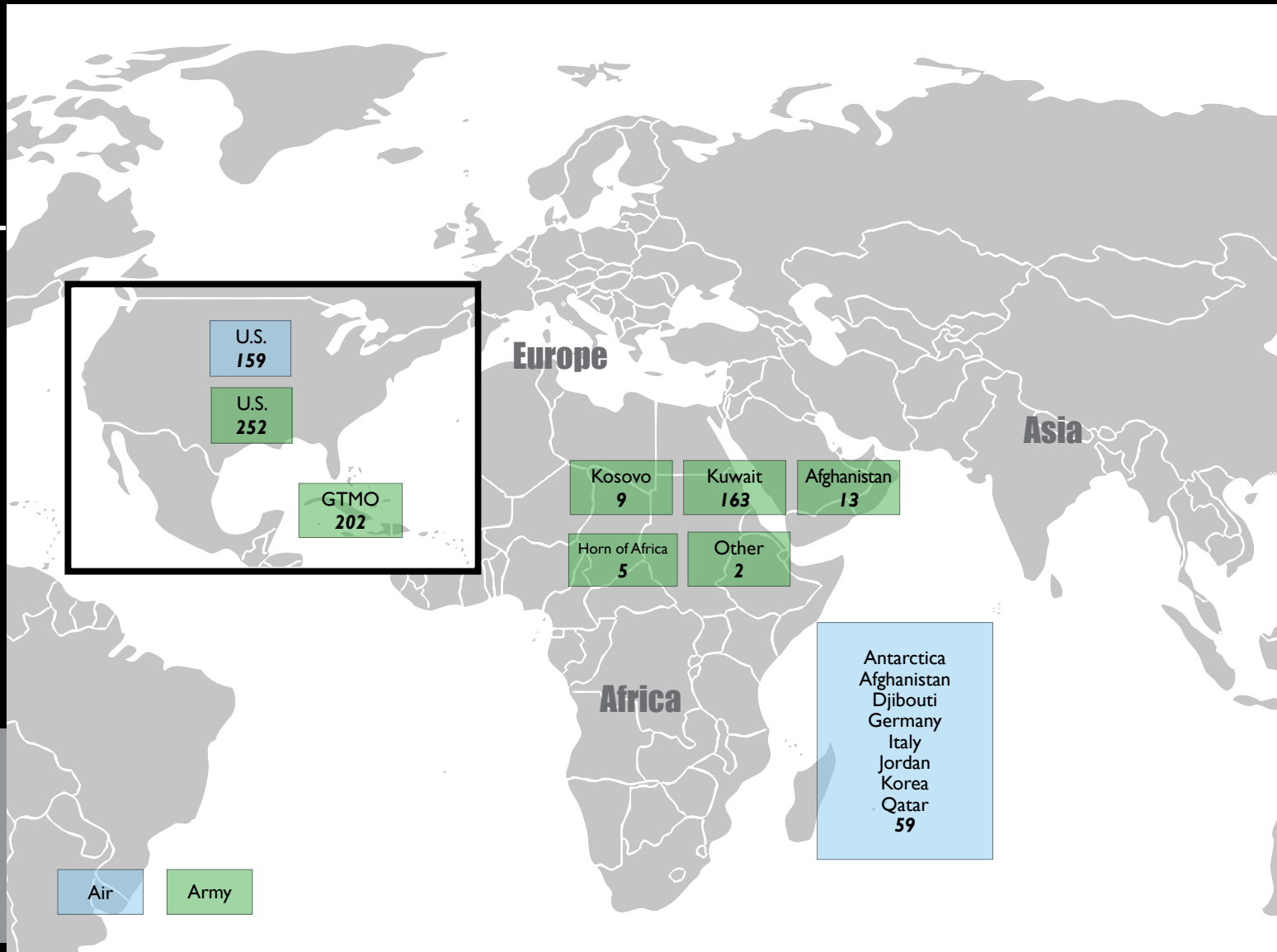
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Cover photo by
Andy McMillan

Soldiers from the California Army National Guard's 217th Explosive Ordinance Disposal Company practice their trade during annual training at Camp Roberts in 2014.

Staff Sgt. Harold Lee Adams suits up in an EOD 9 bomb suit at Camp Roberts, California.
Photos by Andy McMillan

CALIFORNIA'S BOMB SQUAD

It's the job of the 217th EOD Company to defuse dangerous situations

By **PAUL PADGETT**
GX Magazine

The helmet hangs like a cinder block; its cloudy visor frames the desert in front of me into an ugly oval. I'm wearing a 70-pound explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) 9 bomb suit and helmet, which feels more like a gorilla suit with beer goggles. The air trapped in my helmet is stale and thin, and I wonder what'll happen if I pass out.

I'm in that brown section of middle California consisting of hard rock hills and gravel that stretches for miles. It's 90 degrees, and the batteries running the suit's air-conditioning system ran out of juice earlier in the day. At least that's what they tell me. The Soldiers pushing me onward are here for their annual training with the California Army National Guard's 217th EOD Company. More than anything, they want me to understand what it's like to wear a bomb suit — a mandatory element of what they do.

They say the only way to "get" the suit is to climb inside. They're right. What I thought would be a simple "try it on and let's see how clumsy you are" moment quickly turns into a run-through of one of their basic EOD training lanes complete with push-ups and picking up dimes out of the sand, simple tasks made stupidly difficult when you're wrapped in inches of foam, plastic and Kevlar. A 100-pound Humvee tire is at my feet, and I'm two revolutions away from flipping it to the halfway point. It's a strenuous exercise meant to test Soldiers' strength and endurance. Drenched in sweat and with a new fear of enclosed spaces, I'm starting to get the picture of what the suit is really like. And now I want out.

The Soldiers of the 217th don't get that choice. They can't stop. If they do, bombs go off and people die. There are a lot of

ways to describe the men and women who practice the art of EOD; movies like "The Hurt Locker" have done a lot to introduce the image of the exclusive bomb squads that are in the Guard and Active Army: The Soldiers are confident, crazy mavericks. But two days on the ground and 10 minutes in the suit create a fuller, more complex picture. EOD requires impossible determination in the face of overwhelming emotional and physical stress.

Annual training with the 217th under the command of Capt. Frank Pangelinan is a portal into this high-wire world. The unit is recently home from a deployment to Kosovo where it eliminated unexploded ordnance left over from the war with Serbia. Its mission combined all the reasons EOD units exist: dense civilian populations, unknown munitions, unknown ages, unknown volatility and unknown dangers.

Now back home, these Soldiers train for similar threats: improvised explosive devices (IEDs), leftover munitions forgotten in past conflicts, suspicious wires disappearing in the sand beside a road. They face a never-ending evolution of threats. As 1st Lt. Michael Hodge tells me ominously: "You have your fuel, and you have your oxidizer, and then you can make an explosive from nearly anything." Ever-evolving terrorism keeps the members of the 217th in a constant state of alert. No bomb threat or leftover munitions call is ever the same. You can't control or predict what's coming next. You can only train for the unexpected. And that's just what the 217th does.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

It's 0900 when the scenario begins. The call comes in that a young boy is sitting in a town hall holding an IED. All he was told by the men who forced him to hold the IED is that if he moves, he'll die. The call comes from the boy's father, frantic,

slim on details, connected to coherence by a thread.

This is training, so the father-and-son duo are played by EOD techs acting the part. The IED is a nondescript metal box; its insides are wired to fake C-4 with hidden trigger points that the actor-son must keep depressed under his palms. If he doesn't, a metallic buzzer will go off, indicating mission failure. Of course, none of the Soldiers on the arriving EOD team knows this. All they get is a dark room, a yelling father, a vague story and a few minutes to make a decision.

Staff Sgt. Harold Lee Adams is a tall, muscular, former active duty Ranger who is now shutting down bombs with the 217th. His team parks outside the improvised town hall, and he calmly walks to the back of the Humvee as the actor-father yells at him to enter the building and free his son. The yelling is intermittent, but you can only imagine the levels of hell raised by a real-life father in a similar situation. Adams reassures the father while readying his gear to enter the building.

This could be any mission anywhere. And this is about the standard amount of information EOD techs can expect before entering the unknown. The threat may or may not be real, may or may not be highly lethal, may or may not be a decoy to draw the techs into a trap. Every device, every environment, every interaction with an angry local or a scared relative is new, different and strange, and it's rare that any two EOD operators will make the exact same choices. Most missions will have less information than Soldiers need, and all have the potential of putting the Soldiers and others at risk.

"We're problem solvers," Adams says. "It could be an ordnance, an IED or any explosive hazard; it's a problem you have to solve. However you can make the area

explosive-free, you just have to solve the problem by any means necessary."

Given the strategic importance of the town hall and the crowded surrounding area, this particular scenario is rated as a Category A incident. These scenarios focus on a grave and immediate threat and therefore require immediate action, regardless of personal risk. In the EOD world, time is a commodity always in short supply, but most events dictate a great deal of patience. With the prevalence of decoys and double-crosses, and the lack of adequate intelligence, techs are trained to proceed slowly. The Category A scenario changes this: The Soldiers must get face-to-face with the device and eliminate the threat.

This is EOD at its most fundamental: brains versus bombs. The bomb disposal robots and bomb suits stay on the Humvee. Adams enters the container complex representing the town hall, protected only by body armor and a badge on his chest representing a year's worth of training.

In the EOD community, this badge is known as the "Crab." It recognizes the most specialized bomb technicians, who are trained to deal with the construction, deployment, disarmament and disposal of high-explosive munitions, as well as other types of ordnance, such as nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, IEDs and improvised nuclear devices. Eleven states in the Guard have EOD units. While civil support teams (CST) like the Cal Guard's 9th CST and 95th CST are trained to handle the aftermath that occurs when these devices detonate, the EOD Crab is the training needed to make sure that aftermath never happens.

EARNING THE CRAB

It takes 11 months and has a discouragingly low pass rate, but EOD school is the crucible where the EOD brain is built. The media focus on the exciting optics of bomb robots



LEFT: Staff Sgt. Harold Lee Adams wears an EOD 9 bomb suit at Camp Roberts. RIGHT: Spc. Manuel Ruiz readies an X-ray machine to scan an IED during annual training. Photos by Andy McMillan

and suits, but for all the coverage, that's only a small part of the coursework. EOD training, as you start to realize in the field, is intensely academic. Given that you may be defusing devices as radically different as fertilizer bombs and nuclear warheads, training is about pushing as much information into Soldiers' brains as quickly as they can absorb it.

Army EOD training begins with two months at Fort Lee, Virginia, but the main thrust is nine months at the Naval School EOD at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. Spc. Manuel Ruiz is a young tech with an easy smile that seems out of place in this world of stress, and he relates a common story about the pace of training. "You can get 40 pages of information one day, and the very next day you have to spit it out and make sure it's right," he says. "If you don't pass the test, you're out." It's math, physics, chemistry, electrical engineering and advanced circuitry all united in a testing field that begins with the premise that each mistake is catastrophic.

But more than anything else, it's still stress, pure and simple. Soldiers who can hold up to 11 months of waking up early to study

and staying late to practice, of being tested on something they just learned yesterday in an environment that does not tolerate slip-ups, will probably do well in the field with the real thing. It boils down to this: Stress is the great divider, day in and day out, and if you can't conquer the demon in the classroom, you won't conquer it on the battlefield. Again, one mistake is one too many.

The badge, whose nickname stems from the laurels and lightning bolts that resemble crab legs encircling a bomb, holds the distinction as the only occupational badge awarded to all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. This level of unity in training — Army units training on an Air Force base with Navy teachers—only serves to strengthen the unique camaraderie that bonds EOD techs together across the different services. "You know if you see a Marine, an Airman or a Sailor and they have the EOD badge, you know that it's someone you can trust to do what's right and get you home safe," Adams says.

Earning the badge is a defining moment, but it's not the end. "You're always learning," Ruiz says. "Even after you get that Crab on your chest, you have to keep on

going."

DEALING WITH MURPHY

Back in the container complex, Adams fiddles with the X-ray machine, but the rattle he heard when he lifted it onto its stand does not bode well. He had found the actor-son holding the IED on his lap in the dark basement room of the improvised town hall. The actor-son had no details to provide, but his death grip on the box seemed to indicate that there might be pressure triggers built into the box's sides.

Adams needs a look inside, and every EOD truck has an X-ray machine to provide this insight. Ruiz is crouched behind a wall manning the computer and has just attempted to fire the X-ray for the fifth time. For the fifth time, he's gotten a blank screen. The X-ray machine is broken.

To hear techs talk, you'd be convinced there is an extra man on every team. You'd also be convinced he's a real SOB. The eponymous namesake of Murphy's law is invoked casually, but he inevitably appears on every mission. If Murphy has shown up, anything that can go wrong already has.

Which brings us to the character of EOD techs. The potential for technological failure — bots breaking down, X-ray machines flashing blank screens — is not a question of if, but when. Machines will malfunction, complications will arise, plans will crumble, 100 annoying difficulties will pester. Murphy happens. You can't get mad when he shows up; you just find a new way to solve the problem.

If there is a rationale behind the perception of EOD techs being crazy, it isn't just because they often walk up to high explosives. It's more likely because of the requisite calmness and steadiness with which they endure adversity. It's almost unsettling. Adams needs to see inside this IED. He needs an X-ray. Otherwise, he's nearly blind. But the machine won't work, and getting mad won't fix it. So he finds another way.

With millions of dollars of equipment on the truck, Adams fishes two pieces of plastic out of his pocket: his Department of Veterans Affairs ID and a library card. With painstaking patience, he slowly slides one card between the actor-son's palms and the metal box, find-

ing the depressed pressure trigger he thinks is preventing the explosive from detonating. The actor-son removes his hand, no buzzer sounds, everyone is still alive. Taping the VA card in place against the side of the box, Adams repeats the process with the second hand, winding the box and his library card firmly with more duct tape.

The box is now just a box, temporarily inert but still dangerous. The actor-son heads for protection, leaving the IED on his vacated metal folding chair. Adams brings in Ruiz to game-plan a water shot — basically a shotgun shell loaded with water — that will force water into the device, disrupting the electronics without compressing the explosive material inside.

That's when the duct tape starts to come off. The buzzer rings, indicating detonation. The simulated IED explodes with Adams and Ruiz mere feet away. Mission failure.

This is the brutal reality of EOD, where life and death may depend on the stickiness of tape. Or a shift in weight. Or a flashlight falling on a light sensor wired to detonate. Or a million other tiny things that could happen on even the most standard mission, if there is such a thing.

What Adams does next, though, is what really sets EOD apart. He does not hang his head in defeat or curse the tape. He doesn't even seem angry. He pushes on. The scenario could have been considered a bust, but he continues. He silences the buzzer, sets up the water shot, backs off to a safe distance and explodes water into the IED, disrupting the electronics and blowing up his VA card in the process.

And this is what I learned time and again with the 217th. EOD is not the world of Hollywood, of kicking in doors, fumbling with wires and pliers as a countdown clock ticks to zero. This is not even the world of bots and bomb suits, although I saw my fair share of both. EOD is endurance. It is the long walk of calm nerves, controlled breathing and enduring the heat and heaviness of the suit longer than your body says you can, all the while problem-solving with everything at your disposal.

This article originally appeared in Vol 11, Issue 5 of GX Magazine.



Staff Sgt. Harold Lee Adams, right, works around pressure sensitive triggers on a simulated IED during annual training at Camp Roberts. Photo by Andy McMillan

Adapt and overcome

40th Brigade Support Battalion Soldiers learn invaluable skills at Iowa's Sustainment Training Center

By **SPC. MATTHEW DIXON**
79th Infantry Brigade Combat Team

For Annual Training this year, Soldiers from the 40th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) had a reprieve from the stifling heat and blinding dust of Camp Roberts and Fort Irwin, California, and instead braved the bitter cold and wet snowy grounds of Camp Dodge, Iowa.

The BSB's four companies spent two weeks at the Sustainment Training Center (STC) at Camp Dodge, working and learning in pharmacies, on flight lines and in classrooms.

From Nov. 8-21, they had at their disposal state-of-the-art equipment and 269 of the National Guard's most knowledgeable trainers.

One of the most important assets the STC offers is the new Global Combat Support System, a tactical logistics and financial system that tracks supplies, spare parts and organizational equipment. The STC was one of the first instal-

lations to receive this new system, which will replace the outdated Standard Army Retail Supply System by the end of 2015.

"When I took command a year and a half ago, I challenged this battalion to think outside the box when it came to building [military occupational specialty] proficiency," said Lt. Col. Caroline Morales, 40th BSB commander. "Giving our Soldiers access to this new technology is invaluable to reaching that goal."

Hands-on training coupled with classroom instruction informed and prepared Soldiers to adapt and overcome. Some key instruction included chemical testing, adding chemicals for purification and cold-weather operations for the 40th BSB's water purification specialists.

"It was a great experience," said Spc. Timothy Norris, a water purification specialist from Alpha Company. "The training we received left me feeling very confident that we all understood the lessons and could perform the tasks we



ABOVE AND BOTTOM LEFT: Soldiers with the California Army National Guard's 40th Brigade Support Battalion (BSB), 79th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, work to increase their proficiency in a wide range of military skills during the BSB's annual training Nov. 8-21 at the Sustainment Training Center on Camp Dodge, Iowa. Photos by 1st Lt. Victoria House

were trained for."

Pfc. Robbie Ann Clough, a fueler with Alpha Company, said her favorite annual training experience was "hot" refueling a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter with the engine running, but added that the cold temperatures were especially brutal since fuelers cannot wear too much cold weather gear because of the dangers of static electricity around gasoline.

For some of the section sergeants and other noncommissioned officers of the 40th BSB, annual training was a chance to see what the junior personnel could do when faced with real world situations and obstacles.

"This was a huge stepping stone for my Soldiers, for all of us," said Sgt. Fernando Martinez, a track vehicle repairer from Bravo Company, 40th BSB. "I've seen them make decisions, follow instructions and use their skills to complete the mission as a team. After this training I can honestly say I am very confident in my team's ability to do their jobs."

Seeing the job through from phase one until completion was a theme stressed to the student Soldiers repeatedly, and the instructors left no stone unturned when it came to ensuring the Soldiers retained knowledge.

"The staff at the Sustainment Training Center really knew their stuff," said Staff Sgt. Daniel Danahy, an ammunition specialist with Bravo Company. "It was great to have the opportunity to exploit the resources we had while we were here."



Who is 1-160th's 'Top Gun'?

Infantry squads compete for battalion bragging rights

By **CAPT. CEDRIC WILLIAMS**
1st Battalion, 160th Infantry Regiment

Competition is an excellent way to foster unit cohesion and engage in relevant training. Over the course of the next seven months leading up to annual training, the California Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 160th Infantry Regiment, will conduct consolidated weapons squad training that focuses on tactical and technical proficiency — all encapsulated in competition.

The intense competition began at the Inglewood, California-based battalion's training assembly Nov. 13-16 at Camp Pendleton, California, with individual tasks that included assembling and disassembling the M240B machine gun, clearing the weapon and performing a functions check, and completing a comprehensive quiz about the weapon system.

The unit also conducted crew drills that incorporated

the entire squad. The gun crews competed against each other to determine which was the "Top Gun." The tasks included putting the gun into action on a tripod, troubleshooting a stoppage and taking the gun system out of action.

The competitive training proved to be excellent motivation and the environment fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and achievement. The healthy competition was greatly appreciated by those who participated and it will continue to be incorporated into future training efforts as the battalion prepares for a culminating live-fire exercise at Fort Hunter Liggett, California, during annual training in 2015.

The job of an infantry platoon is to seek, engage and destroy the enemy. It was obvious from the 1-160th Infantry Battalion's training in November that its Soldiers have a desire to learn and perfect their craft in a creative and engaging environment.



Soldiers with 1st Battalion, 160th Infantry Regiment, assemble and disassemble M240B machine guns at Camp Pendleton, California, in November. Photo by Capt. Cedric Williams

49th MP Brigade honors fallen with Memorial Park

A ceremony in Fairfield dedicates the Sgt. 1st Class Isaac Lawson Memorial Park to eight 49th MP Brigade Soldiers who gave the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq or Afghanistan

By **CAPT. WILL MARTIN**
California Military Department Public Affairs

It's been nearly a decade since a roadside bomb killed Sgt. 1st Class Isaac Lawson near Baghdad. Still, his name is often heard among the Soldiers of the 49th Military Police Brigade, the unit with whom he deployed to Iraq in 2005.

On Dec. 6, hundreds of those Soldiers, past and present, gathered outside the brigade headquarters in Fairfield, California, for a ceremony that would ensure Lawson's legacy remains.

The unit dedicated the Sgt. 1st Class Isaac Lawson Memorial Park in honor of Lawson and the seven other brigade Soldiers who have died during post-9/11 deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Lined with trees and plaques bearing personalized dedications, the park is the culmination of a three-year partnership between Solano County 4-H volunteers and the Soldiers of the brigade. 4-H members — both young and old — worked tirelessly to raise funds for the park, while Soldiers from across the brigade designed, built and landscaped the site.

"Solano County 4-H members secured community donations ... to bring this park to fruition," said Valerie Williams, 4-H project coordinator. "[And it was the] National Guardsmen who rolled up their sleeves and lived up to their motto, 'Always ready, always there.'"

The park, like the armory near which it stands, bears the name of an accomplished and decorated military police noncommissioned officer (NCO). Lawson, whose awards include the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, enlisted in the active duty Army in 1990. He remained on active duty until separating to pursue a civilian career in 2001, deploying to the Middle East in support of Operation Desert Storm during his enlistment.

Lawson's separation from the military, however, proved short-lived, as he joined the California Army National Guard in November 2002, little more than one year after the infamous attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Lawson, according to his peers, excelled as a guardsman and an NCO. A standout track athlete at Elk Grove High School near Sacramento, he maintained a high standard of fitness throughout his life, setting a standard for the younger Soldiers in his unit, many 15 or more years his junior.

"Isaac approached me once after hearing me counsel a young Soldier who was performing way below par," said Maj. Jonathan Shiroma, who deployed to Iraq with Lawson as the brigade's public affairs officer. "Being who he was, Isaac told me he would take this Soldier under his wing and mentor him by coaching him on ways to develop as a noncommissioned officer. ... 'Too easy,' was how Isaac summed it up. I knew this young man would be in good hands."

Only a few years after joining the Guard, Lawson joined the brigade headquarters on its first Operation Iraqi Freedom deployment in 2005. There, he supported the brigade's training of Iraqi law enforcement personnel as an administrative supervisor.

But never one to ride a desk, Lawson regularly traveled outside the confines of Camp Victory, where the unit was headquartered. On June 5, 2006, Lawson was in a convoy returning to Camp Victory after visiting Iraqi police stations when his vehicle struck the fatal roadside bomb.

"Sergeant First Class Lawson was outside the wire on patrol almost every day of the deployment," said Brigade Commander Col. Peter Cross. "Because I spoke with him often, I can say that he risked his life every day to make Iraq a better country."



A member of the California Army National Guard's 49th Military Police Brigade stands near the newly completed Sgt. 1st Class Isaac Lawson Memorial Park outside the brigade's Fairfield, California, headquarters on Dec. 6, the day the park was dedicated. Built through a partnership with the Solano County 4-H club, the park honors eight Soldiers who gave their lives in Iraq or Afghanistan. Photo by Capt. Will Martin

Now, more than eight years since his death, Lawson's wife, Suzettee, reflected on the park and its contribution the legacy of her late husband.

"It's very impressive," she said, looking over the brick walkway and sprawling lawns surrounding the Soldier's Cross at the center of the memorial. "It's helped us a lot to keep in touch with everybody [from the brigade]."

Cross further emphasized the importance of the site.

"He believed strongly in what he was doing, and he was enormously competent," Cross said during the Dec. 6 ceremony. "Our goal is to make sure his name, as well as those of all the brigade's fallen comrades, does not fade with the passage of time."



ABOVE LEFT: Past and present members of the California Army National Guard's 49th Military Police Brigade dedicate the Sgt. 1st Class Isaac Lawson Memorial Park on Dec. 6 at the brigade's headquarters in Fairfield, California. The park recognizes the sacrifice of eight Soldiers who perished in Iraq or Afghanistan. Photo by Capt. Will Martin TOP RIGHT: 4-H volunteers pose Dec. 6 at the memorial park they helped create through fundraising. Photo by 49th MP Brigade ABOVE RIGHT: Soldiers work to build the park in October. Photo by 49th MP Brigade



Keener helps 163rd Airmen bounce back

By **STAFF SGT. MICHAEL QUIBOLOY**
163rd Reconnaissance Wing

An Airman descends the steps of a massive C-17 Globemaster with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder and a thin layer of dust trailing off his MultiCam uniform. When his feet hit the ground, it's the first time in half a year that he's set foot on American soil. His heart races with excitement as he approaches the terminal, knowing he is moments away from reuniting with his wife and young daughter.

When they finally embrace, it's a moment he dreamed of many nights overseas as mortars rained down and the sounds of gunfire rattled off in the distance. Now he can hardly believe the moment is real. At last he takes a deep breath and says, "I'm home."

That's the story we all know. It's the one we see on the news. Though the sights are familiar, they never get old: a surprise homecoming at a child's school, shouts of joy as a returning father is first seen descending an airport escalator, a long hug between a mother and her uniformed son. These moments are the silver linings to the great sacrifices made by our brothers and sisters in arms. But that story is not complete.

Many Airmen serve diligently in combat areas and appear to return safely, but the difficult truth is that they are often wounded mentally or spiritually. When the magic and novelty of a happy return fade away, what remains may be a person struggling to get back the peace of mind they held prior to the trauma of war.

The ability to bounce back is what 1st Lt. (CA) Rachel Keener describes as the root of resilience, and it's a process she hopes to shed light on for members of the California Air National Guard. Keener, the new behavioral health officer for the CNG's 163rd Reconnaissance Wing and a new member of the California State Military Reserve, brings years of experience and schooling to the Air Force resiliency program.

Keener earned her doctorate researching post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic growth at the Fuller Gradu-



First Lieutenant (CA) Rachel Keener counsels an Airman at March Air Reserve Base, home of the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing. A new member of the California State Military Reserve, Keener is also the wing's new behavioral health officer. Photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Quiboloy

ate School of Psychology, and she holds a master of arts degree in theology from Fuller Seminary. She also spent time at the Jerry L. Pettis Memorial Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Loma Linda, California, where she worked two trauma rotations and a rotation in addictions and dual diagnosis.

"[Veterans] have been in the life of the military and they've learned what they can expect," Keener said. "Then when they come into civilian life, things don't seem to work the way they should, which can be a source of frustration."

Keener currently serves as the group and wellness workshop coordinator for counseling and psychological ser-

vices at California State University, San Bernardino, where she created a veterans group to provide a forum for vets to relieve stress and speak with others who can relate to their issues.

"I really like doing the group context for veterans because they can give feedback to each other. It means a lot more coming from someone else who has served, someone else who has been through what they've been through," Keener said. "Someone who has been out longer can say, 'I know what you're talking about, and this is how I handle it.' The group is a place where they can come and get support, give support and feel a certain camaraderie you have in the military that they don't necessarily feel with civilians."

Keener's role at the 163rd will involve interacting with spouses as well as guiding the Peer-to-Peer Support Program, which trains unit members in basic counseling skills and gives wingmen the ability to give and receive emotional support from Airmen such as themselves.

"The sky is the limit on the gamut to which Doctor Keener can reach and help our Airmen," said Maj. David Sarmiento, 163rd chaplain. "I have never met, in all of my years as an educator on the outside and as a chaplain here, a person with so many accolades who is so humble and dedicated to what she does. I'm excited to see what things are going to happen in the future as a result of her talent being utilized here in the unit."

With Keener having raised her right hand and sworn into the ranks of the CSMR, returning California Air Guard veterans will be better equipped to remain spirited and strong in the face of the great challenges they face.

"Although I came into the field of psychology with a strong interest in post-traumatic stress, over time I've realized that I much prefer to focus on what makes people thrive," Keener said. "Helping other people remove the barriers to reaching their fullest potential to living meaningful lives gives me a lot of joy and sense of meaning and purpose. We all need to figure out what makes us come alive to face each day, and for me it's helping others reach that potential in their own lives."

CSMR embeds support behavioral health needs

State Military Reserve members attach to Army Guard units to provide assistance at each training assembly

By **CAPT. DUSTIN HARRIS**
CA Military Dept. Behavioral Health Program

California National Guard Soldiers and their families have felt both the pride and the strain of responding to our nation's call

during more than 10 years of conflict. Over the past two years the CNG Behavioral Health Office has worked in partnership with the California State Military Reserve to form a specialized support team to embed CSMR volunteers in California Army

Guard units as a monthly resource.

This follows the active component Army's model of embedding behavioral support right where it is needed — in units. Although only five CSMR volunteers are currently embedded in Army Guard units, interest in the program and assignments are growing.

"This concept takes the behavioral health professionals out of the clinical setting and places them in the units, where they will have the most direct and positive impact and develop relationships with Soldiers," said Capt. (CA) Michael Franc, officer in charge of the embed program. "Embeds put a face to the name of behavioral health and help reduce stigma and remove barriers to Soldiers seeking care. Embeds are already in and around the unit and can immediately suggest resources."

A shining example of the program's success is the support provided to the 578th Engineer Battalion during June's annual training at Camp Roberts, California, Maj. (CA) Lydia Thomas stayed with the unit throughout all aspects of the training and responded to emergent and routine behav-

ioral health concerns. For her efforts, she was awarded the California Achievement Medal.

"Being on the ground with the Soldiers is where we need to be," Thomas said. "It is such a rewarding experience."

Second Lieutenant (CA) Jim Hyde, agency coordinator for the program, said the CSMR behavioral health staff have been attached to units that displayed the greatest needs. As those volunteers have continued their successful support, word of mouth has brought interest from additional CSMR volunteers, and the program will add additional units in the coming year.

"The CSMR volunteers' presence will be invaluable to units they support and greatly help the full-time behavioral health clinicians throughout the state meet the continued needs of guardsmen," Franc said.

The program's ultimate goal is to place a CSMR behavioral health volunteer with every unit that needs support. The staff hopes to expand to 10 units in the next year.

For more info or to join the program, email Franc at michael.franc.nfg@mail.mil.



Maj. (CA) Lydia Thomas and Capt. (CA) Michael Franc are key members of the California State Military Reserve (CSMR) Behavioral Health Embed program, which attaches CSMR members to Army Guard units to provide support each month. Photo by Behavioral Health Program

129th Rescue Wing earns Excellence in Diversity award

By **1ST LT. ROD BERSAMINA**
129th Rescue Wing Public Affairs

The California National Guard's 129th Rescue Wing was recognized today for its commitment to promoting diversity within its ranks as it received the National Guard Bureau Excellence in Diversity award.

The Silicon Valley-based 129th was selected because of its wide array of diversity initiatives, which have contributed to a top-notch unit that reflects the multicultural community in which it is based. The award was presented by Gen. Frank Grass, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, during the National Guard Diversity Conference in Savannah, Georgia.

"The diversity of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives in California is one of our state's greatest strengths," said Maj. Gen. David S. Baldwin, Adjutant General of the California National Guard. "I am proud to be part of an organization that strives every day to reflect that diversity."

The 129th closely reflects the diverse demographics of the San Francisco Bay Area and boasts 41 airmen who have been certified as translators for the Department of Defense. The 129th

Chaplain's Office provides support for more than 50 denominations, and the wing regularly promotes cultural awareness through its social media pages, enabling internal and external users to participate in special observances and events.

"The greater the diversity of the California Guard and its leadership, the greater its language, cultural and social capabilities," said Col. Gregory F. Jones, 129th Rescue Wing commander. "The diversity of the 129th translates directly into mission success, both overseas and during domestic operations here at home."

The spirit of cultural diversity extends beyond the 129th's home at Moffett Federal Airfield, with many members volunteering to support nonprofits that benefit people of diverse backgrounds in the U.S. and other countries. The 129th's recruiters also led the way in recruiting gay, lesbian and bisexual members following the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, reaching out to Californians at Pride events across the northern part of the state.

The Excellence in Diversity award is presented each year to one Air National Guard wing that makes significant contributions to its community; shows growth in diversity and



Army Gen. Frank Grass, chief, National Guard Bureau, presents the 2014 National Guard Bureau Excellence in Diversity Award to California Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Nate Reddicks on behalf of the 129th Rescue Wing during a ceremony at the Savannah Combat Readiness Center, Garden City, Georgia, Dec. 10. Photo by Tech. Sgt. David Eichaker

under-represented groups; provides an effective mentoring program; and implements an effective action plan including partnerships with the civilian community.

Cal Guard chaplain helps veterans heal

By **BRANDON HONIG**
California Military Department Public Affairs

As a young infantry officer candidate, Nathan Graeser suffered the loss of his best friend, Brett Hershey, with whom he had joined the Indiana National Guard along with two of their high school lacrosse teammates. The death was devastating for Graeser, and even more so for his two friends who had deployed to Afghanistan with Hershey.

Graeser, who had stayed stateside to complete Officer Candidate School while attending Indiana University, began to notice that combat had changed his friends and other returning Soldiers. He said it was his first experience looking in someone's eyes and saying, "You guys look really different."

"They were getting [charged with driving under the influence] everywhere, all the chaplains were deployed, and no one was helping these guys. It was just, 'Here's your four-month leave.'

"I remember thinking, 'I want to help you guys.' And they said, 'That's what chaplains do.'"

Graeser's desire to help set him down a new path that would define his military service as well as his civilian career. He attended Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, where he focused on questions of identity, morality and other issues at the heart of the human experience. But upon graduation, he was unclear how to use his new knowledge to help Soldiers.

On a visit to the University of Southern California to view a friend's film, Graeser found the missing piece of the puzzle: USC's new Military Social Work program could bridge his role as a National Guard chaplain and his aspiration to effect positive change in the larger military community.

"At USC, I learned the practical 'hows' — hands-on counseling, application of higher-level values, the differences between military and civilian culture," he said. "I had great tools from seminary, but I didn't know how to apply them. Then at USC, I could see exactly how to apply it."

USC clearly agreed, as the school offered Graeser a position at its Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families (CIR) after he graduated in 2013. For the Defense Department-funded CIR, Graeser oversees the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative, a network of more than 250 organizations and stakeholders that work to identify and resolve the needs of local veterans.

Graeser said he helps those stakeholders "drive the engine" to get information and services to veterans who need them.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Nathan Graeser

He directs eight working groups centered around particular topics of need, and he works to inform community groups about the issues facing veterans.

CIR recently finished a major research project, the Los Angeles Veterans Need Survey, which gathered input from 800 veterans. The participants included 400 National Guard Soldiers, who Graeser said are at greater risk of post-deployment troubles than their active component counterparts because they often return to unemployment and lack the support services offered on active duty bases.

Among other findings, the center discovered that more than half of post-9/11 veterans do not know how to obtain the services offered to veterans, and about 40 percent of veterans with mental health conditions are not receiving help. To connect veterans with available services, the LA Veterans Collaborative spearheaded the creation of online resource database www.LAVeteransPortal.com.

"My arm [of CIR] works with agencies to make sure we have leads to apply the research; otherwise it's just ivory tower people writing reports," said Graeser, who is a captain in the California Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 144th Field Artillery Regiment. "We should be writing policy and adjusting programs based on this data."

At an early Veterans Collaborative meeting, while Graeser

was still a student at USC, Mark Mitchell was intrigued by the "kid" who seemed to be the only chaplain social worker in the room. Mitchell, a licensed marriage and family therapist at the Catholic school Loyola Marymount University, said Graeser introduced him to the concept of "moral injury" — the acknowledgement that one has violated their own moral code, and they require healing.

"From my point of view there was no real strong Catholic voice in helping vets with moral injury or [post-traumatic stress] ... and the church needed to get off its butt and do something," Mitchell said.

Mitchell decided he would be the one to do something, and he organized a successful series of panel discussions at the university with Graeser's advice and participation.

"Nate has Midwestern qualities about him. He's not your typical LA guy, and I think it's disarming to some people," Mitchell said. "People listen to him, respect him. Sometimes with a young leader, some of the colonels say, 'I gotta listen to a captain?' But I don't get any of that [about Nate]."

He added that Graeser's ability to unite people from different backgrounds and organizations is invaluable for a community effort that requires many different partners to be effective.

"There's a huge competition for clients and resources with some [organizations], and you go, 'Come on. Let's work together,'" Mitchell said. "With Nate there's not a feeling of a political agenda."

Graeser's civilian job enables him to improve many lives by effecting systemic change, but at the heart of the journey that led him to CIR is his passion for providing spiritual and emotional support to Soldiers as a chaplain. One of Graeser's oldest friends, Capt. Colin Stark of the California Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment, said he has experienced firsthand how Graeser's compassion and guidance can benefit a returning Soldier.

"When I came back from Iraq in 2007, I was shut down and jaded and not open to talking about the deployment," said Stark, one of three lacrosse teammates who joined the Indiana National Guard with Graeser 15 years ago. "Nate gave me the space to talk about it and express my feelings. He's been really integral to that process of transitioning back to the civilian world and [working through] things I'd seen over there."

"With what he's done for me and continues to do for others, I know he's going to make a huge impact down there [in Southern California]."

Spc. Javier Tapia-Garcia, B Company, I-160 Infantry Battalion, foreground, engages a pair of targets during Team California combat pistol practice on Jan. 30 at Camp Roberts, California, in preparation for competing at the U.S. Army Small Arms Championships at Ft. Benning, Georgia in February. Photo by Lt. Col. Daniel Markert



Sgt. Troy Lopez, left, and Staff Sgt. Benjamin Garcia of C Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, enjoy a moment with the NHL Stanley Cup during a game between the Ontario Reign and the Idaho Steelheads in Ontario, California, on Jan. 30 when Garcia was honored as "Hero of the Night." Photo by Lt. Col. (CA) Richard Lalor



Senior Airman Allan Valladares, of the 562nd Air National Guard Band of the West, plays the trumpet during the 2014 California National Guard Soldier and Airmen of the Year Banquet in Santa Clara on Jan. 17. Photo by Senior Airman Brett Clashman



A new Cal Guard CH-47F Chinook is tailed by a CH-47D over San Francisco. CH-47-D Chinooks and replacing them with CH-47F Chinooks equipped with... ceremony in Stockton on Feb. 9. Read about the unveiling in our next issue. PH

At a Glance



on Jan. 9. The California Army National Guard is retiring its fleet of high-tech digital cockpits. The new fleet was officially unveiled at a photo by Master Sgt. David Loeffler



Members of the San Luis Obispo County Search and Rescue team exit a 1-140th Aviation Battalion UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter during a joint training exercise at Camp San Luis Obispo, California, on Nov. 11. Photo by Megan Grouse



A senior citizen examines a card he made, which reads, "We could not be free without your service." Senior citizens at the Magnolia Senior Center in San Francisco made more than 750 valentines for deployed Guard members on Feb. 6. Photo by Lauren Hall

Silicon Valley hosts 2014 Cal Guard Soldier and Airmen of the Year Banquet

The California National Guard's exceptional performers are honored at an annual gala attended by VIPs

By **CAPT. WILL MARTIN**

California Military Department Public Affairs

The drive into downtown Santa Clara borders on the surreal. Lined with towering buildings that bear iconic, illuminated signs of Silicon Valley giants, the city's skyline reminds one that in this Bay Area town, tech is king.

But on Jan. 17, a different kind of royalty was crowned when the city hosted the 2014 California National Guard Soldier and Airmen of the Year Banquet. Held annually to recognize the year's most outstanding Soldiers, Airmen, NCOs and State Military reservists, the ceremony serves as a reminder of the excellence that permeates the nation's most dynamic and frequently deployed National Guard force.

This year's banquet recognized winners who followed differing paths to Santa Clara. For the Army's Soldier and NCO of the Year, their awards were claimed only after victory at the California Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition. Held each year on the state's Central Coast, the contest includes a grueling ruck march, marksmanship competitions and rigorous military boards that would make even the strictest of sergeants major grin.

For Sgt. Ricardo Ledesma, of the 1072nd Transportation Company, winning NCO of the Year was a direct result of "the hard work, dedication and sacrifices I made to prepare my body and mind" and instilled in him a greater respect for all involved.

"[Not only do] I respect myself for finding the motivation to push myself, I have respect for all the competitors," said Ledesma. "We have our families at home and civilian jobs that make our days longer [in order] to train and compete. And the leadership that works and builds a better competition each year—that takes a lot of commitment and dedication."



Amber Ertel claimed her NCO of the Year award from the California Air National Guard after excelling through several rounds of military boards that tested her mettle as an Air Force leader, an experience she said she couldn't have survived without the examples of others – both good and bad.

"My first mentors were my parents. Being in the military, they really shaped me before I joined, and I continue to lean on them today," said Ertel, who serves as an operations intelligence journeyman with the 234th Intelligence Squadron. "But once I joined the military and formed my own path, I had mentors every single step. I could say that I learned just as much from the poor representatives of the military as I did from the exceptional ones, but I absolutely required both to define the type of Airman I wanted to be."

Serving as keynote speaker at the event was Congressman Mike Honda, who represents California's 17th congressional district in the U.S. House. A stalwart veteran's advocate, Honda spent his early childhood in a Japanese-American internment camp in Colorado, an oppressive experience which compelled him to pursue a life of ser-



vice through the Peace Corps, teaching and eventually elected office.

"I understand it is one of the National Guard's most prestigious awards as it is so difficult to win," said Honda of the evening's honorees and their commitment. "When the men and women of the Armed Forces come home... [I'm] also dedicated and committed to your well-being."

While the evening centered on the present achievements of those being recognized, the awardees understood that with the honor came a responsibility to pay forward their success.

"Looking back over my career, there were periods of time when I became complacent and apathetic about my career," said Air Guard Senior NCO of the Year Master Sgt. Darin Laity, a space and terrestrial weather forecaster at the 216th Space Control Squadron. "[It was] the quality of leadership and mentorship around me at various points in my career [that] had a direct influence over my motivation and development. I try to keep this in mind every day when I'm working with younger troops because I know it can make all the difference in their careers."



TOP LEFT: Congressman Mike Honda, D-San Jose, addresses the crowd at the 2014 California National Guard Soldier and Airmen of the Year Banquet in Santa Clara on Jan. 17. **TOP RIGHT:** A joint California National Guard color guard presents the colors during the 2014 California National Guard Soldier and Airmen of the Year Banquet. **BOTTOM:** The 2014 Airmen and Soldiers of the year stand at attention during the ceremony while being applauded by California National Guard Adjutant General Maj. Gen. David Baldwin, at right. **Photos by Senior Airman Brett Clashman**

Top performers

Four Airmen, two Soldiers and two members of the California State Military Reserve were honored this year for their outstanding achievements and commitment to the California National Guard



California Air National Guard 2014 First Sergeant of the Year: Master Sgt. Sally J. Ford is a first sergeant assigned to the 129th Mission Support Group. She served several years in the active duty Air Force before transitioning to the Air Guard in 2010, and was promoted to first sergeant in 2012.



California Air National Guard 2014 Senior NCO of the Year: Master Sgt. Darin Laity is a space and terrestrial weather forecaster assigned to the 216th Space Control Squadron. He completed his master's degree in 2013 and is currently preparing to apply for Ph.D. programs at Stanford and Cornell universities.



California Air National Guard 2014 NCO of the Year: Staff Sergeant Amber J. Ertel is an operations intelligence journeyman assigned to the 234th Intelligence Squadron. She holds an associate's degree in intelligence studies through the Community College of the Air Force and recently completed a bachelor of arts in intelligence studies through American Military University.



California Air National Guard 2014 Airman of the Year: Senior Airman Harry Vong is an aircraft production controller assigned to the 144th Maintenance Operations Flight. He graduated from the University of California, Irvine in 2009.. Senior Airman Vong is currently pursuing a Community College of the Air Force degree in Maintenance Production Management



California Army National Guard 2014 NCO of the Year: Sgt. Ricardo Ledesma, of the 1072nd Transportation Company, 746th CSSB. Ledesma deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom as an active duty Soldier. His short-term goal is to finish his undergraduate degree and complete the Fresno City College police academy with a long-term goal of becoming a police officer.



California Army National Guard 2014 Soldier of the Year: Spc. Joshua Fernandez serves as an infantry team leader with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment. He served in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom while attached to a Special Operations Task Force. He is pursuing a career with the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department. A short-term goal is to become an Army NCO, with a long-term goal of becoming a Green Beret.



California State Military Reserve 2014 NCO of the Year: Sgt. Adam Walsh is assigned to Headquarters, California State Military Reserve, joining July 21, 2011. Walsh currently serves as a signal trainer and travels all over the state participating in ground-to-air communications training, system orientations, as well as rescue flight training with the United States Coast Guard. In August, he provided communication (IC4U) support for Operation Lightning Strike II.



California State Military Reserve 2014 Solider of the Year: Spc. Clinton J. Vallee is assigned to the Installation Support Command, California State Military Reserve, Joint Forces Training Base, Los Alamitos, California. He joined the California State Military Reserve July 17, 2012. His airfield operations support was instrumental in the success of the 2014 Wings, Wheels and Rotors Air Show in Los Alamitos, California.

Cal Guardsman finds opportunity and camaraderie as a correctional officer

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has 7,000 openings and Work for Warriors is helping vets fill them

By **CAPT. JASON SWEENEY**
California Military Department Public Affairs

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is going through a big hiring push right now, and California National Guard members are at the top of the list when it comes to who is selected to attend the department's training academy.

California's department of corrections is one of the largest state government departments in the nation, overseeing 35 facilities and more than 160,000 inmates and parolees.

Assistant Chief of Peace Officer Appointments Steve Stone, who is a veteran of the California National Guard, said Cal Guard members are just the kind of people the department is looking for.

"We recognize the value of citizen Soldiers, and we are very supportive of their annual training requirements and their drill weekend requirements," Stone said. "Soldiers have been trained to rely on their training in a crisis and will do as they're trained. That makes them, for us, better than the average guy off the street who doesn't have that background to fall back on."

Jose Gonzalez, 22, a specialist with the California Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment, is one of the newest correctional officers at California's corrections department. He graduated from the corrections academy in December and soon after reported to his first assignment at the California Health Care Facility in Stockton where patient-inmates receive health care.

Gonzalez said his experience in the Army National Guard prepared him for the 16 weeks of academy training at the Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center in Galt, California.

"It's been good training," Gonzalez said.

"When you come here, you already have a one-up on some people who don't have military experience when it comes to marching, formations, or when it comes to having just a little discipline to sit in class through hours of PowerPoint presentations."

Gonzalez explained that the corrections academy was similar to attending Army Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training. He said the corrections academy is a little more academic, but the structure is familiar and there is a similar feeling of camaraderie with fellow cadets as with fellow Soldiers.

"I feel that coming into corrections, for me, has been like basically doing the military on the civilian side, just with a different uniform," he said.

For Gonzalez, his new civilian job is ideal. The pay and benefits are good. He has job security and he gets to work in his hometown, where he also drills as an aviation operations specialist with the 3-140th.

One perk for veterans is that they can collect the GI Bill on top of earning a salary while at the academy. With academy life over, Gonzalez is now earning a base pay of \$3,990 a month, plus benefits.

Gonzalez said he got help securing his slot at the academy from California National Guard 1st Lt. Matthew Haygood, whom he deployed to Kosovo with. After the deployment, Haygood was hired on with the California National Guard's Work for Warriors program which is tasked to help military members find jobs.

Gonzalez had already been interested in working as a correctional officer when Haygood told him that there were job opportunities at the corrections department.

About a year ago, the department began seeking applicants to fill 7,000 projected



Stockton native Jose Gonzalez completed the 16-week correctional officer academy at the Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center in Galt, California, in December. He said his experience in the Cal Guard served him well at the academy. Photo by Capt. Jason Sweeney

openings.

"My generation is retiring," said California Department of Corrections Lt. James Fox, who is also a Cal Guard veteran. Fox said a new generation is needed to fill all the openings as his cohort moves on.

Recruits must be 21 by the time they graduate. There is no upper age limit on entering the academy. When cadets graduate, they are assigned to one of the department's facilities that are located throughout the state.

The appointment process to make it into the academy can take anywhere from nine to 12 months. Gonzalez called the process a waiting game that pays off for those willing to stick it out.

First Lt. (CA) Chris Mitchell, who works for the Work for Warriors program, said his office has the manpower and contacts to help guide Cal Guard members and other veterans through the process of applying and qualifying for an appointment at the corrections academy in Galt.

Guard members and other veterans interested in becoming correctional officers, or in finding other employment, should call Work for Warriors at 916-854-4426; or email apply@workforwarriors.org.

As of December 2014, Work for Warriors assisted more than 3,500 Cal Guardsmen, reservists and recently separated veterans find employment at various businesses and agencies at no cost to applicants or business partners.



ABOVE: Jose Gonzalez's class forms up at the Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center in Galt, California, in December. Gonzalez said the camaraderie at the academy was similar to what he felt with fellow Soliders in the Guard. RIGHT: Cadets at the the Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center train to become correctional officers in December. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is undergoing a hiring push and veterans are at the top of the list for jobs. Photos by Capt. Jason Sweeney



Sharks star Brent Burns teams up with Defending the Blue Line

By **STAFF SGT. SALLI CURCHIN**
California Military Department Public Affairs

On Nov. 1, California National Guard Brig. Gen. Sylvia Crockett awarded National Hockey League (NHL) star Brent Burns, defenseman for the San Jose Sharks, and Shane Hudella, founder of Defending the Blue Line (DTBL), with the California Commendation Medal. This medal can be awarded to civilians who distinguish themselves through meritorious service. Burns and Hudella were awarded for their generous and passionate support of military members and their families.

"With my grandfather and great-grandfather both having been in the military, I have a great appreciation and respect for the sacrifices our service members make to defend our freedom every day," said Burns. "I think Defending the Blue Line is doing a great job of taking care of military families by helping out with equipment and other costs related to hockey. [My wife] Susan and I wanted to do our part by helping out as well. I'm proud to be associated with these programs, and I look forward to working with them on future projects."

Burns, a Canadian professional ice hockey defenseman currently playing for the San Jose Sharks, is a major contributor to Defending the Blue Line, a nonprofit organization that benefits children of military members.

"It was either the military or hockey, and hockey turned out pretty good for me," said Burns, who earns a salary of more than \$5 million.

As further proof of Burns' commitment to DTBL, for the last two years he's starred in an event called Burnzie's Buzzcut, getting a buzz cut and shaving his beard for pledges, raising more than \$38,000 to benefit three charities – DTBL, The Katie Moore Foundation and the San Francisco Zoo.

Also recognized and awarded was Shane Hudella, founder of DTBL and a retired Minnesota National Guard first sergeant. He established DTBL in 2009 with a group of active duty Soldiers. It is governed by a board of directors comprised of senior military officials, hockey executives, hockey legends and other notable figures. DTBL operates solely from private and corporate donations and has been able to give back an astonishing 85 percent of revenues to



Brig. Gen. Sylvia Crockett, center, awards Brent Burns, left, his wife, second from left, and nonprofit Defending the Blue Line (DTBL) founder Shane Hudella, far right, and his wife, California Commendation medals on Nov. 1 in San Jose. Photo by Capt. Shannon Terry

military families, according to their website.

Hudella was inspired to create DTBL when he was serving full-time with the Guard and working on community projects involving Burns, then an NHL player for the Minnesota Wild.

"I did some research and there wasn't another program like ours out there," Hudella said. "So I literally woke up one day shortly after and told myself, I think I'm going to start a nonprofit."

DTBL's mission is to ensure that children of military members are afforded every opportunity to participate in hockey. The organization provides free hockey equipment—courtesy of the NHL Player Association's Goals and Dreams Foundation, Easton-Bell Sports and Graf Canada—as well as access to some of the finest summer hockey camps at no cost and it provides grants to help with local association fees. DTBL also provides unique experiences for military families, including attending NHL, minor affiliate and collegiate hockey games.

From its humble Minnesota beginnings, DTBL now has programs in 15 states across the country that plan fundraisers for donations used to buy and donate hockey equipment

and provide grants for military parents. The organization's staff plans events and finds sponsors to host them. It locates hockey camps for military children of all ages and brings in corporate partners, pro teams and hockey players like Brent Burns to endorse DTBL.

In addition to partnering with hockey benefactors like Burns, it has given birth to sister programs for Major League Baseball, and soon, the National Football League.

"It's a very calculated growth on our part," said Hudella. "One of the biggest challenges I have is managing growth so we don't grow too big too fast, as I'm still the only full-time employee. To sum up, our success in the expansion into other sports and markets really hinges on the professional player and team support for the mission."

He indicated the baseball program will launch this spring with support from MLB pitchers Ross Detwiler and Craig Stammen, both with the Washington D.C. Nationals.

Hudella and DTBL have received national recognition. The organization was one of the 2012 Joining Forces Community Challenge winners that were invited to the White House and recognized by first lady Michelle Obama.

The Burns family purchased a luxury suite for the entire San Jose Sharks season of home games and for the past several years has invited local service members, veterans, wounded warriors and their families to enjoy the game as their honored guests. The suite, managed by DTBL, has quickly filled with military memorabilia, including unit coins, patches and other gifts left in appreciation of the Burns family.

"We are very excited to partner with Brent and Susan again this year," said Hudella. "Military families sacrifice so much. Attending a Shark's game courtesy of the Burns [family] is a great way for our families to relax and take their minds off the stresses of deployment. Our service members' children and families are so excited to have this great opportunity, and we are very grateful to the Burns family."

To sign up for tickets to the San Jose Sharks home games, visit defendingtheblueline.com and complete the form on the front page. DTBL has products for purchase on their website, with all proceeds going to the organization. Donations are accepted on the site as well.



The San Jose Sharks warm up before a game in San Jose on Nov. 1. Sharks defenseman, Brent Burns, is a major contributor to causes that support military members. Photo by Capt. Shannon Terry



9th CST trains for toxic chemical incident at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park

By MASTER SGT. JULIE AVEY
San Diego Regional Public Affairs

Imagine finding yourself sick, having a hard time breathing and not understanding what is happening.

Volunteers from the San Diego Zoo Safari Park acted out this scene during a simulated toxic chemical incident at the park on Dec. 16. The 9th Civil Support Team (CST) teamed up with San Diego agencies to train for terror response as part of a multi-agency exercise that included the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CAL OES) and nearly 20 other law enforcement and first responder organizations.

"Conducting exercises of this magnitude helps to build a collaboration of skills and assets amongst the emergency response community for the San Diego region," said 1st Lt. Keith Hapenney of the 9th CST. "It also helps to build a continuity of understanding of what will happen during a multi-casualty incident at a high-value target such as the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. The experience derived from these exercises is invaluable to all participating members and allows the response community to continue to hone and build a stronger response package."

The exercise tested coordination and communication between the Cal Guard, Cal OES and local San Diego fire, police, hazardous materials and emergency response agencies. The Safari Park exercised its internal command and control medical first responders as the call went in to the local San Diego dispatchers. Once the call was received, San Diego Fire and Police responded quickly on the scene to support the internal first responders.

"Through this kind of collaborative emergency drill we are able to evaluate the systems we have at the Safari Park while reinforcing key relationships that would be invaluable in the case of a real challenge," said John Liken, Environmental Health and Safety Manager for San Diego Zoo Global. "We learned a lot and hope to continue working together in the future."

The 9th CST was then called in along with San Diego County Hazmat once the first responders detected signs of a chemical incident. The interagency teams worked to set up a decontamination station and administered triage on the scene to the role player patients. The exercise had widespread support much like a real

world event would.

"This exercise will strengthen our ability to work as a team in the face of a man-made threat to the people of San Diego," said Lt. Col. William Lee, commander of the Los Alamitos-based 9th CST. "The CST spearheads several large-scale, interagency exercises throughout the year to ensure optimal coordination with its emergency response partners."

As the night went on, the members of the specialized 9th CST and San Diego Hazmat donned their hazmat chemical protection suits to enter the chemically contaminated environment in the food preparation area of the Safari Park. While in the hazmat zone the members recovered samples and took photos of the chemicals detected by their specialized equipment in order to conduct testing at their command and control site.

The members of the 9th CST are on call 24 hours a day. They are National Guard Citizen Soldiers who answer their nation's call. These specialized units have the ability to rapidly deploy faster than federal resources to incidents involving possible weapons of mass destruction. They routinely provide guidance and assist civilian incident commanders to give them a feel for their capabilities before the unimaginable occurs.

"Being a member of the 9th CST takes an individual with great devotion, fortitude and stamina to mission accomplishment no matter the situation in which they may find themselves," said Sgt. 1st Class Jason Kronebusch. "There are few occupations within the nation that encompass the skill sets necessary to meet the demands that the Civil Support Team requires. It is those skill sets that help provide protection of family, community, state and nation every day, all day, throughout the year."

A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew from the Los Alamitos-based 1st Battalion, 140th Aviation Regiment flew patients to Scripps Memorial Hospital earlier in the day to be treated as a part of the exercise.

"I think it is important to our community to exercise for all types of potential events," said Christine Wells of Scripps Memorial Hospital. "Being able to work with the Guard and learn from their expertise was invaluable to our Scripps team. They were able to give us feedback that we will be able to use to improve our

response. In addition, exercising together means that in a true response our agencies are able to work together seamlessly, which is beneficial to all."

On the next day, the exercise continued to the initial site of entry of the simulated chemicals at the San Diego port. Coast Guard entry teams participated alongside the 9th CST and secured the port.

"An effective response to an emergency involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents will require coordina-

tion among local, federal, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector," said Mark Ghilarducci, Cal OES director and Homeland Security advisor for Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. "The relationships developed and enhanced, as well as the skills refined by our participation with the California National Guard's 9th Civil Support Team, local government and private sector partners in the San Diego Zoo Safari Park drill will help all of us in our joint effort to save lives and reduce injuries should such an event occur."



TOP: Staff Sgt. Steven Kemp, Sgt. Alfonso Anaya and Sgt. Brian Quinonez, of the 9th Civil Support Team (CST), are briefed before entering a simulated hazardous materials area at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. The Soldiers' role is to examine and collect evidence. BOTTOM LEFT and RIGHT: 9th CST members search for hazardous materials at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park during the exercise on Dec. 16. Photos by Master Sgt. Julie Avey

163rd RW tours UC Riverside with first responders

By **MASTER SGT. JULIE AVEY**
San Diego Regional Public Affairs

The 163rd Reconnaissance Wing, firefighters, hazardous materials teams and other public safety officials from Riverside County met up at the University of California, Riverside Dec. 17 to tour the campus labs and discuss first responder preparations for responding as one cohesive unit. Among the discussions was their ability to swiftly and effectively respond to massive chemical spills, propane explosions and other hazards in their area of operations.

"The Hazardous Materials Operations Group is important because diversity within a group is strength," said Staff Sgt. Tyler Crumpton of the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing Emergency Management shop. "Combining different agencies to respond to events brings different viewpoints, assets and experiences."

The Riverside County HAZMAT Operations Group (CHOG) conducts joint meetings and training opportunities with agencies associated with hazardous materials incidents in the county.

"The response exercise at the University of California, Riverside was a valuable opportunity for all of us to meet with one of our local stakeholders and see the unique hazards which we could be called on to support," said Master Sgt. Mark Trujillo. "People may not realize the hazards and vulnerabilities that exist on a university campus. The labs and university infrastructure could be subject to an act of terrorism or impacted by a natural disaster. It's important that all of the possible response and support organizations be informed of potential hazards and resources before arriving on the scene."

The CHOG meets quarterly to discuss training, incidents, equipment and grant opportunities. Participating agencies in CHOG take turns hosting quarterly drills in their jurisdictions. This training gives the agencies an opportunity to work together in realistic scenarios and discuss real world potential hazards.

"Conducting CHOG meetings allows opportunities to be

multiplied by the number of agencies involved as each agency incorporates members of CHOG into agency-specific training and response opportunities," said Senior Airman Katlyn Thomas of the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing Bio-Environmental shop. "This is most important due to increasingly strapping financial situations with government funding and decreasing training events due to funding concerns. Being a part of a collaborative effort allows agencies to maintain training opportunities and have multiple chances to benefit and not be hindered by lack of funding."

The CHOG quarterly meeting included teams from the Corona, Hemet and Riverside fire departments; personnel from the Riverside County environmental health, public health and sheriff's departments; Riverside police; mem-

bers of the California Air National Guard; and FBI agents.

"The CHOG is an important organization because its sole purpose is to bring together all the emergency response personnel, local, county, state and federal (agencies), enabling them to meet and train together and most of all build a strong working relationship," said Trujillo. "We don't want our first meeting to be the day we are all called to respond together for a major natural or manmade disaster."

"The CHOG meeting at U.C. Riverside allowed me to meet our civilian counterparts," said Airman 1st Class Michelle Gomez. "I was able to see our role in emergencies, as the 163rd Reconnaissance Wing, as a state asset, and how we would be involved in the incident. It also gave exposure to how the civilian sector handles incidents."



LEFT: Airman 1st Class Shiyan Chen, of the 163rd Civil Engineer Squadron, checks out a Geiger counter at the University of California, Riverside during a tour of the campus on Dec. 17. **RIGHT:** A Riverside County Deputy Sheriff briefs members of the 163rd Civil Engineer Squadron during a tour of U.C. Riverside with Riverside County first responders. Photo by Master Sgt. Julie Avey

FIT to FIGHT with LT. COL. DANIEL MARKERT

The winter holidays are behind us and a new year has begun. For many people, restoring physical fitness is a significant goal. For the citizen Soldier, it is a year-round requirement.

Sometimes we think we need to just double down with more willpower and work harder. My experience working with officer candidates and instructors struggling with the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) at the 223rd Training Regiment and the more senior officers and NCOs at Special Operations Detachment North shows me this is not the case.

For most of us in the military, it's not so much that we are out of shape or deconditioned, it is that we have occupational and lifestyle adaptations that act as brakes on our physical performance.

I've seen a range of moderately disciplined to highly disciplined Soldiers who push themselves, but are lacking power and training which results in poor performance and injury. Some have lost their discipline from chronic stress, high workloads, frequent travel and/or pain and injury.

Army Field Manual 7-22, Army Physical

Readiness Training, states physical training sessions should have a preparatory warm up, exercise drills and a cool down. Methods are prescribed, but they are a lowest common denominator approach and geared towards a generally younger demographic. I have used this training model to take Soldiers who previously failed the APFT to passing it by improving their 2-mile run time by a minute and a half in less than four weeks with no running during training.

Choose joint mobility drills as the warm up to activate the nervous system and lubricate the joints. The goal is to mobilize the joints that are supposed to be mobile such as wrists, shoulders, neck, mid-back, hips and ankles and stabilize the joints that are supposed to be stable, including elbows, scapula, lower back and knees. Do this for 10 minutes as the warm up. Then select exercises for strength or endurance in the ranges of motion you need for your tactical tasks such as pull-ups to scale fences or windows, and one-arm burpees for dropping to the prone position with your rifle.

Begin with a simple time protocol such as 30 seconds of work followed by 30 sec-

onds of recovery. Choose seven exercises and do them in a circuit four times. Keep one constant tempo and keep your heart rate between 60-80 percent the first day and do the same workout at 80-100 percent of maximum heart rate the next day. Finish with a 20-minute cool down of light mobility drills that alternate between opposite movements such as alternating between Down Dog and Up Dog yoga poses. This switches off the tension in the tissues from the workout so you don't stiffen from adapting to the tension of training. It also releases serotonin which allows you to relax, feel happy and sleep better.

In order to properly do the light mobility drills and stretches as a cool down, you need to have full motor control over the tight tissues. This requires the neurotransmitter dopamine which gets released by intense exercise but is depressed by chronic stress and depression. So you have to get some intense exercise to release the dopamine in order to do the cool down.

But you can't exercise safely and consistently at moderate and high intensity if you have stiffness in your joints, pain from impingements and reduced range of motion. So you have to restore mobility through the proper joint warm up.

Pain is last to arrive and first to go. The restoration of neurotransmitters and hormone balance from exercise is instantaneous within the workout. The nervous system adaptations and restored joint mo-



bility happen within weeks, though full restoration may take months depending on the individual and prior injuries.

Metabolic adaptations take several weeks and new muscle growth is slow, taking months and even years as there are diminishing returns the more lean mass you add. So you are only one workout away from feeling better, a few weeks from moving better and a few months of being stronger, faster and harder to kill. Your move.

For further information contact Lt.Col. Markert at dmarkert@mac.com; connect on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/daniel.markert>. For training material connect at milSuite <https://www.milsuite.com/book/groups/bleak-tactical-fitness-center/>.

Council seeks best of the best

EPC process delivers career development, mentorship for top CMD officers to guarantee best possible fit for leadership roles

By **COL. ROBERT SPANO**

Director, Joint Staff, CA Military Dept.

A professional military force relies on its senior leaders to set objectives, care for its members and set them up for success. Without strong, educated, well-prepared leadership, the organization cannot reach its potential — and worse, lives may be jeopardized unnecessarily.

The California Military Department's (CMD) new selection process for leadership positions — whether M-day or full-time — ensures the best Soldier or Airman is chosen for each leadership slot. More importantly it ensures promising officers and non-commissioned officers receive crucial mentoring and are placed on career development tracks that guarantee the CMD will have the best possible leaders for generations to come.

For more than 10 years, the California Army National Guard (CAARNG) has selected officers to fill its senior M-day positions (traditional, part-time Guard slots) through an Executive Personnel Council

(EPC) process in which all CAARNG brigade commanders and general officers provide input on the selection. The council votes on the eligible candidates and recommends the best individual to the adjutant general for a final decision.

The officers chosen through the EPC process generally do not apply for these leadership positions, nor are they hand-selected by a single superior officer. Instead the panel of general officers and brigade commanders looks closely at qualified candidates from every part of the CAARNG to determine the best fit for the officer and for the organization.

Upper echelon officers must have well-rounded skills and knowledge to be successful, and the EPC process enables the department to groom its up-and-coming leaders with those credentials. On a regular basis, promising officers are pulled out of their comfort zone and introduced to a new challenge in a different Army arena that will help them gain the skills to be a top-flight senior officer for the department.

The California Air National Guard and California State Military Reserve (CSMR) followed the CAARNG's lead and implemented similar selection processes in recent years, and now the CMD is establishing an EPC for its full-time staffing slots, many of which can be filled by either a Soldier or Airman, and in some cases can be filled by a civilian. The EPC will give the adjutant general the widest possible breadth when considering candidates for these positions, as the council will evaluate all qualified candidates regardless of military component or employment status.

When the CMD's first EPC for full-timers convenes, it will bring transparency to the selection process, and it will promote cooperation between the three components of the department: Air, Army and CSMR. As a joint force, it is imperative we learn to work together, appreciate each other's distinct cultures and assess each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The establishment of these councils is just one facet of the CMD's strategy to develop and retain quality leaders and continue or-



Col. Robert Spano U.S. Army photo

ganizational growth. These steps are expected to foster a culture of integrity, trust and service; cultivate a positive and professional command climate; and encourage learning among CMD personnel.

The State Public Affairs Office is offering instruction on...

- . Creating and managing a social media site
- . Capturing and sharing your unit's story
- . Getting published in the Grizzly
- . Document training and events
- . Share deployment/AT memories
- . Interacting with the media
- . FRG focused training

Sign up for 7-8 March at Okinawa armory or 2-3 May at CSL0

Unit **P**ublic **A**ffairs **R**epresentative

Interested? Email shannon.r.terry.mil@mail.mil or paul.r.wade4.mil@mail.mil to request training.



A brand new Cal Guard CH-47F Chinook flies lead in front of a CH-47D over the Golden Gate Bridge on Jan. 9. Photo by Master Sgt. David Loeffler

CNG dominates Army Small Arms

Four infantrymen from the California National Guard proved themselves the Army's elite marksmen when they brought home top prizes in the U.S. Army Small Arms Championship in February, solidifying a three-year dynasty of dominance over the Army marksmanship community.

In winning the Army Small Arms Team Championship for the third consecutive year, Team California bested 27 other squads from active-duty Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard units nationwide. The Team Championship measures a squad's ability with a rifle and pistol in a variety of events that test physical fitness, decision-making, motor skills and psychological resilience. In addition to the overall title, Team California took first place in the competition's Multi-Gun Championship, Pistol Championship, Pistol Team Match with 1.5-Mile March and Paper Team Match.

Look for a feature article about the competition in the next Grizzly.

144th FW wins Employer of the Year Award

The California Air National Guard's Fresno-based 144th Fighter Wing received an Employer of the Year Award in January from the California Disability Services Association.

The honor came for the unit's record of hiring persons with developmental disabilities. For more than 25 years, the unit has hired work crews for landscape maintenance and janitorial services through an organization called The Arc Fresno and Madera Counties. Seven people with developmental disabilities are employed through these contracts.

Stockton unveils new CH-47F Chinooks

The California Army National Guard unveiled its new CH-47F Chinook helicopters during a ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility in Stockton on Feb. 9.

The CH-47F Chinooks are replacing the Cal Guard's aging CH-47D fleet, which consists of aircraft originally built in the 1960s and 70s, some of which have more than 10,000 flight hours.

"The Chinook has been our heavy-lift workhorse for both our state and overseas missions for decades," said Col. Robert Spano, Director of California Military Department Joint Staff and Army aviator. "The new upgrades and advanced capability the F model brings to the fight will only further our ability to save lives and property here at home and support operations abroad."

Cal Air Guardsmen deploy to Horn of Africa

About 30 California Air National Guardsmen from the 129th Rescue Wing deployed to the Horn of Africa on Jan. 24 to provide combat rescue support for ongoing operations there.

Pararescuemen (PJs) and Combat Rescue Officers (CROs) of the wing's 131st Rescue Squadron will be the primary personnel recovery force for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) during the four month deployment.

DID YOU KNOW...

if you are an Army Enlisted Soldier in the grade of E-4 thru E-8, you should be working on updating your Enlisted Promotion System (EPS) packet right now?

The California Army National Guard G1 Memorandum of Instruction (MOI) for Fiscal Year 15 EPS states that brigades and battalions will conduct Decentralized Promotion Boards during April and May 2015 for promotion to the ranks of sergeant and staff sergeant. While this may seem like plenty of time to assemble a promotion packet, April 5 is the cutoff date to enter administrative points, and March 31 is the promotion eligibility cutoff date. Units develop their internal cutoff dates to ensure G1 suspense dates are met. A common mistake made during the EPS process is for Soldiers to bypass their unit's cutoff dates and use their next higher element's EPS timeline as it may allow additional time to complete their packet. Soldiers are responsible for the following: identifying missing administrative points on their NGB 4100 and providing supporting documentation to the unit for correction; assembling and submitting their "hard copy" or paper promotion packets for consideration by the promotion board.

The California Army National Guard G1 will download Senior NCOs' (E6 thru E8) Army Military Human Resource Record (AMHRR) from iPERMS on April 23. Senior NCOs will prepare their AMHRR in iPERMS for review by the Centralized Promotion Board prior to turning in their NGB 4100 series/promotion packet checklist. NCOERs (last 5 years), civilian education, NGB Form 4101-1B-R-E, military education, biographical sketch IAW NGR 600-200, Army Physical Fitness Test (minimum of last 3 years w/profile for alternate event and body fat as applicable), weapons qualification, awards, letters to the board, DA photo, and Enlisted Record Brief (validated by the Soldier) are the minimum reviewable board documents in iPERMS. Additionally, Soldiers will be given and instructed to use the Soldiers Records Review Guide found in PPB 13-008 and to work with their Readiness NCO to correct any deficiencies.

Nobody will have a more vested interest in your promotion than you. Submitting your completed promotion packet in a timely manner will help ensure your EPS packet is reviewed accurately by the promotion board. Army Regulation 600-8-19, California Army National Guard (CAARNG) Pamphlet 600-8-19, and the MOI for FY15 Promotion Boards provide regulatory guidance for the Enlisted Promotion System.



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A brand new California Army National Guard CH-47F Chinook helicopter and a CH-47D Chinook perform a flyby over the Army Aviation Support Facility in Stockton, California, on Feb. 9. The flyby was part of a ceremony during which the Cal Guard's new CH-47F Chinooks were unveiled. Look for a story on the unveiling in our next issue. **Photo by Capt. Jason Sweeney**

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