

GMG



Green Mountain Guard | Summer 2015



INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**COMMANDER OF ACC
DRILLS WITH VTANG 9**



**CNGB VISITS GREEN
MOUNTAIN BOYS 15**



**COMBAT ENGINEERS
TRAINING BLOWS UP 24**



INFANTRY LIVE FIRE 32

FEATURES

ASIAN COOKING CLASS HELD AT GREEN MOUNTAIN ARMORY 10

CST CONDUCTS DECONTAMINATION TRAINING 12

SOLDIER RECEIVES RECRUITING MEDAL 20

VT STATE POLICE BOMB SQUAD TRAINS WITH VTANG EOD 21

VERMONT NATIONAL GUARD MIBT WRAP UP 22

FIELD MECHANICS 23

TOC OPERATIONS 26

CLEARING THE OBJECTIVE 29

VTANG SAVES TIME AND MONEY ON PHAST TRACK 34

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ON THE COVER



U.S. Soldiers with Charlie Company, 3 Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), Vermont Army National Guard, move towards an objective on Fort Drum, N.Y., June 22, 2015. The Soldiers are participating in a multi-echelon integrated brigade training, or MIBT, incorporating more than 4,500 active and reserve-component Soldiers. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison)

IN & AROUND VTARNG



ABOVE: Spc. Shane Alston, infantryman, 86th Brigade Special Troops Battalion (Mountain), searches his training lane for landmines during the Humanitarian Mine Action Basic Course for the HMA 05-15 class at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Aug. 13, 2015. This is the first humanitarian mine action course taught at this location. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

LEFT: U.S. Army Sgt. Sean Fernandes (right), team leader, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), leads a team during the rehearsal portion of the unit's live-fire training range at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. (Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)



ABOVE: U.S. Army Spc. Gerald Schartner, mechanic, D Company 186th Brigade Support Battalion, removes dirt from his fighting position at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 22, 2015. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) and support units participated in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year. (Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

LEFT: The 15th Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) service members maneuver equipment to the spill during decontamination training at Edward F. Knapp State Airport, Barre, Vt. July 30, 2015. This exercise is part of defense support of civil authorities training. (Photos by U.S. Army National Guard Pvt. Avery Cunningham)

IN & AROUND VTANG



LEFT: A Vermont F-16 Fighting Falcon, assigned to the 158th Fighter Wing, receives fuel from a KC-135 Stratotanker, from the 157th Refueling Wing, as part of the Boss Lift 2015, Aug. 14, 2015. The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program recognizes employers of drill status guardsmen by giving them an opportunity to ride during a refueling mission. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Tatro)

BELOW: U.S. Air Force Capt. Zachary Clark, commander of the Deployment and Distribution Flight under the Logistics Readiness Squadron, helps a crew load cargo onto a C-17. The LRS team is responsible for ensuring all cargo is properly weighed, loaded and secured on the aircraft. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Dana Alyce-Schwarz)



ABOVE: U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Corey Vincelette, from the 158th Medical Squadron, begins the check-in process for Airmen completing their medical examinations, South Burlington, Vt., June 6. The 158th Medical Squadron has become the first Air Guard base to process both Preventative Health Assessments and Occupational Health Physical Examinations in one large push, creating a cost-saving and efficient format for other bases to emulate. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Jon Alderman)

RIGHT: U.S. Air Force Gen. Hebert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, Commander of Air Combat Command, speaks to Airmen during an "All Call" at the 158th Fighter Wing, Burlington International Airport, South Burlington, Vt., April 11, 2015. Visiting his first Air National Guard base as the COMACC, Gen. Carlisle met with leadership, had lunch with Airmen and recognized outstanding performers. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison)



Commander of ACC drills with the VTANG

by SrA Jonathon Alderman, 158 FW

SOUTH BURLINGTON, Vt. - Gen. Herbert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, commander of Air Combat Command (COMACC) at Langley Air Force Base, Va., visited the Vermont Air National Guard, Saturday April 11, 2015.

"The COMACC came to the VTANG to see what makes the Green Mountain Boys world renown," said Chief Master Sgt. Brian Marchessault, the command chief master sergeant of 158th Fighter Wing. "It's because of the 1,100 great Airmen who bring combat capability through a collaboration of federal, state and security efforts and members. The Green Mountain Boys have never failed to respond when the need arose."

Carlisle visited several units including the VTANG as part of his new position as COMACC. This marks his first official visit to an Air National Guard unit. Throughout his tour, the general made several stops at base offices to meet with the Airmen of the VTANG. A segment of Carlisle's tour took him to the VTANG Fire Department where he recognized a few Airmen as Top Performers. While there he spoke on the importance of skills and dedication of its members that gives strength to the Air Force.

"Burlington has blazed the trail for the nine other detachments that have stood up and accepted the Total Force Initiative as part of their mission," Tech. Sgt. Ryan Robichaud, a noncommissioned officer in charge of the 134th Fighter Squadron Detachment said. "I believe this concept of Total Force will be the new way of doing business. We are all Airman, we are all trained to the standard required to complete the Department of Defense and the Air Force mission."

Total Force Integration, where active-duty and National Guard airmen work together on the same installation. Air Guard, Air Reserve, and civilian components all function as single unit, each with unique assets and capabilities. Total Force Integration brings active Airmen to National Guard bases to learn through extensive experience creating a more effective team.

"General Carlisle's visit clearly demonstrated his deep commitment to ensuring all Air Combat Command units are mission ready," said Col. Patrick Guinee, commander of the 158th Fighter Wing. "The Airmen of the 158th Fighter Wing could not have been prouder to have him in their spaces addressing issues that matter to them."

At the conclusion of his visit Carlisle took to the stage to speak with all the Airmen of the base. He began by describing how incredibly important the Air Force's Total Force Integration program is as well as its community basing initiative. Carlisle emphasized the Air Force is confronted with a myriad of challenges, from a shrinking budget to manpower reductions, the force must continue to be

innovative to face those challenges. He stressed the significance of being able to overcome difficulties allows Airman to be ready for missions in the present and the future.

Carlisle encouraged Airmen to continue to set the standard not only for themselves but also for everyone. He said it is important to continue to learn because there will always be ways for professional development and improving mission efficiency.

"What we do as members of the military makes a difference, changes lives and benefits the world," said Carlisle.



TOP: U.S. Air Force Gen. Hebert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, Commander of Air Combat Command (COMACC), and Chief MSgt. Steve McDonald, Command Chief Master Sergeant, Air Combat Command, meet with Airmen at the 158th Fighter Wing, Burlington International Airport, South Burlington, Vt., April 11, 2015.

U.S. Air Force Gen. Hebert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, Commander of Air Combat Command, speaks with Airmen at the 158th Fighter Wing's Fire Department, Burlington International Airport, South Burlington, Vt., April 11, 2015.

U.S. Air Force Gen. Hebert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, Commander of Air Combat Command (COMACC) and Mrs. Gillian Carlisle have lunch with Airmen from the Vermont Air National Guard at the 158th Fighter Wing, Burlington International Airport, South Burlington, Vt., April 11, 2015. Visiting his first Air National Guard base as the COMACC, Gen. Carlisle met with leadership, had lunch with Airmen and recognized outstanding performers. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison)

Asian cooking class held at Green Mountain Armory

Story & Photographs by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison, JFHQ

CAMP JOHNSON, Vt. - Walking into the kitchen of the Green Mountain Armory smells of ginger and fresh-cut onion float through the air. Capt. Gene Enriquez finishes up demonstrating proper chopping techniques and instructs his class to begin prepping their ingredients. As part of Asian Pacific Heritage Month, the Vermont National Guard's Cultural Diversity Enhancement Team (CDET) hosted an Asian cooking class at Camp Johnson.

Enriquez, commander of Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 86th Brigade, Special Troops Battalion, Vermont National Guard, also functions as the Asian Employment Special Emphasis Program manager.

"Cooking is a hobby of mine, and I felt that exploring other cultures through cuisine would have a lasting impact on our members," Enriquez said.

This year's class focused on Indian cuisine and their goals were to learn how to make a bread product and a masala (curry) to serve to other members of the Vermont National Guard during the CDETs Asian Pacific Heritage event. All ingredients needed for participation were provided, while each student was asked to bring in their own knife, cutting board, mixing bowl, kitchen towel, spatula and sauce pan, to help alleviate having enough equipment to go around.

The students prepared Chana Masala, chickpeas in a masala gravy and Naan, an Indian flatbread, for the event.

"Whether experienced home-cooks or first-timers, all students learned the basics of bread making and creating a curry base," said Enriquez. "I believe that controlling the ingredients and making the dishes from scratch will make them less hesitant to try unfamiliar food from India, Pakistan and Nepal (all represented in Vermont) in the future."

Six students participated in the class, which included both military members and a state employee. For four of them, this was the first time they had ever taken a cooking class.

"Learning new recipes and a different way to cook, is what made me interested in taking the class," said Spc. Alejandra Caballero, a human resources specialist with Headquarters, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain). "The whole aspect of the class was fun. Getting a group of people together to cook and learn about another culture was an honor."

"I wanted to participate because I enjoy cooking," said Pfc.

Chelsea Smith, a quartermaster and chemical equipment repairer with Detachment 1, Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment (S&S). "I had never made Asian food before, and it sounded like a great opportunity to expand my meal options."

For warrant officer in training Jesse Lewis, this was an opportunity to take a second class with Enriquez.

"Capt. Enriquez always makes excellent food and is a quality instructor," Lewis said. "It's nice to socialize with other members of the organization, but most importantly it's good to learn about other cultures. Over a good meal is a great place to set aside any differences you might have and just connect and interact with others. I think this cooking class is an ingenious way to further cultural diversity."

Enriquez's idea to promote cross-cultural harmony through food was successful and he is hoping to make the class an annual event.

"Culture in many ways is best expressed and understood through food," Enriquez said. "This was an excellent opportunity to expose our workforce to cuisine they may not be familiar with."



U.S. Army Capt. Patrick Enriquez, Commander, Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Brigade Special Troops Battalion, Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), Vermont Army National Guard, chops ginger while instructing an Asian cooking class held at the Green Mountain Armory, Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vt., May 28, 2015. This is the second time Enriquez has instructed a class for members of the Vermont National Guard in special observance of Asian Pacific Heritage Month.



U.S. Army Sgt. Yulia Benson, a member of the 40th Army Band, Vermont National Guard peels garlic during an Asian cooking class held at the Green Mountain Armory, Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vt., May 28, 2015. Benson was one of six students that participated in the class hosted by the Vermont National Guard's Diversity Program in special observance of Asian Pacific Heritage Month.

Civil Support Team conducts decontamination training

Story & Photographs by Pvt. Avery Cunningham, 172nd PAD

BARRE-MONTPELIER AIRPORT, Vt. Civil support teams, like the 15th Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction), assist emergency personnel by providing more advanced tools to analyze hazardous substances and improved communication abilities. The 15th CST did this recently as part of defense support of civil authorities training.

“A typical mission would be to assist local law enforcement and first responders using our advanced communications assets and chemical identification abilities,” said Sgt. 1st Class Jason Anderson, communications chief, 15th CST (WMD).

“A lot of our missions are support missions, support of law enforcement, so state police and TSA are our primaries,” said Tech. Sgt. August Hoaglund, survey team chief, 15th CST (WMD). “A lot of the other missions outside of our local missions have to do with supporting other CSTs that are doing the same thing.”

The CST weren’t always as well equipped or manned. The CSTs were revamped in response to the 9/11 attacks.



“They were developed before 9/11 as a light team, after 9/11 happened it was reassessed that they needed to make these a heavy team instead of a light team,” said Hoaglund. Heavy, 22 man teams of full time National Guardsmen were instituted in every state to augment local entities in the event of a large-scale emergency.

To respond to large emergencies, civil support teams bring together different agencies to streamline an avenue of communication and share resources in response to any hazardous substance.

“The CST is important because it bridges the gap between local law enforcement, local assets and federal assets,” said Anderson. “We provide some federal capabilities that wouldn’t be available to your local fire chief, local police department, your smaller entities.

Furthermore, the CST has other crucial equipment and abilities that deliver a wider range of capabilities to local authorities.

“We have the ability to identify hazardous substances,” said Anderson. “We have a laboratory that we bring with us that gives us a preliminary analysis of what a hazardous substance may or may not be, which we have to know in regards to saving somebody’s life and evacuating areas.”

The exact ability that the CST brings is more advanced and specific than what most states have available. Without these abilities, authorities have no way of measuring or knowing if certain substances pose a serious risk to the public.

“We bring to the table a chemical, biological and nuclear detection capability that most state entities don’t have,” said Hoaglund. “We also bring in the aspect of all our air monitoring capabilities that we do. So we do air monitoring for chemicals, so anything that is industrial or military grade, we can detect in the air, in off gases.”

The 15th CST (WMD) conducted a training exercise on July 30 to test their readiness and prepare for incidents involving spills or potentially dangerous chemicals.

“It shows how we can operate with multi-agencies as well as give our leaders, which are back at the JOC (Joint Operations Center) or at the governor’s office that aren’t at this site, a full picture of what’s going on,” said Anderson.

The CST service members, dressed in their orange HAZMAT suits, cautiously approached the downed barrel. They tested



The 15th Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) service members analyze and document the spill during decontamination training at Edward F. Knapp State Airport, Barre, Vt. July 30, 2015. This exercise is part of defense support of civil authorities training.

the chemical and took pictures for documentation. From there, two service members opened a container meant to contain the barrel, therefore protecting the area from further contamination. They shifted the barrel into the container and sealed it shut.

After they neutralized the chemical threat from spreading, the service members had to complete the most important part of the task, decontamination. Armed with water, soap and a sponge they carefully washed each other’s suits. Once they had thoroughly cleaned the suits, they carefully removed them without touching the outside layer of it to prevent any chance of contamination. The suits were closed in red bags then sealed with tape.

Although it is a simple process, the entire procedure is tedious. The service members have to be extremely careful and thorough to insure that the area, themselves and anyone else are safe. These processes are overly meticulous to eliminate almost any chance of contamination.

It is training events like these that prepare the 15th CST (WMD) for chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear substances that pose a risk. No matter the substance, they’ll be prepared to assist and to prevent further contamination.



ABOVE: The 15th Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction) service members pose for a group picture during decontamination training at Edward F. Knapp State Airport, Barre, Vt. July 30, 2015.

LEFT: U.S. Army Sgt. Dorian Quarmby (left), survey team member, and U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. August Hoaglund (right), survey team chief, 15th Civil Support Team (Weapons of Mass Destruction), don their gear during decontamination training at Edward F. Knapp State Airport, Barre, Vt. July 30, 2015.

Chief of the National Guard Bureau visits the Green Mountain Boys

Story & Photographs by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison, JFHQ

Senior leadership from the National Guard Bureau visited with members of the Vermont Army and Air National Guard on May 2.

“This really is where the rubber meets the road,” said Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief of the National Guard Bureau. “We can come out and see the men and women of the National Guard. There’s no doubt about it, in my 45 years I’ve served, I’ve never seen anything better than the Guard today.

Grass and Command Chief Master Sgt. Mitchell Brush, senior enlisted advisor for the National Guard Bureau, spent the day meeting with Soldiers and Airmen while touring the various facilities at Camp Johnson, the Army Aviation Support Facility and at the 158th Fighter Wing.

U.S. Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau meets with soldiers from the Vermont Army National Guard, Army Aviation Support Facility, South Burlington, Vt., May 2, 2015. Grass and U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Mitchell O. Brush, Senior Enlisted Advisor for the National Guard Bureau are in town to meet and speak with the Soldiers and Airmen of the Vermont National Guard.



“It’s incredibly important that the Chief of the National Guard Bureau visits all of the Soldiers and Airmen across the force to let them know how much he appreciates what they do for their states, the Nation, and to personally thank them for their sacrifices. It’s important for him to meet them and their families, to get a better sense of who the National Guard is and to hear what they have to say about the role of the National Guard in today’s world,” said Maj. Gen. Steven Cray, the Adjutant General of the Vermont National Guard.

During their visit, Grass and Brush had an opportunity to visit the 131st Engineer Company, were able to speak with students attending the Warrior Leaders Course at the 124th Regional Training Institute and participate in a reenlistment ceremony during a town hall held for the Soldiers and Airmen.

After addressing Guardsmen at the Army Aviation Support Facility (AASF), Gen. Grass presented Maj. Gen. Steven Cray, the adjutant general, with the Army National Guard Distinguished Aviation Safety Award for 40 years of Aviation Service without a Class A or B aircraft incident. A Class A

accident is an accident in which the resulting total cost of property damage is \$2,000,000 or more; an Army aircraft or missile is destroyed, missing, or abandoned; or an injury and/or occupational illness results in a fatality or permanent total disability. A Class B accident is an accident in which the resulting total cost of property damage is \$500,000 or more, but less than \$2,000,000; an injury and/or occupational illness results in permanent partial disability, or when 3 or more personnel are hospitalized as inpatients as the result of a single occurrence.

“This award represents over four decades of safety culture that’s inherent in today’s aviation world,” said Cray. “As an aviator myself, I take great pride in accepting an award that represents the professionalism and the technical abilities of well over 300 aviation soldiers who contributed to this outstanding achievement.”

During a town hall at the 158th Fighter Wing, Grass and Brush addressed the Soldiers and Airmen on a variety of topics.

“Who we are as a force has changed,” said Grass. “There is a higher expectation of you today than there has ever been in history. Not only on the home-front, but overseas as well.” Grass touched on the future of the Guard, civilian support from the Guard and cyber-warfare. He also urged the Guardsmen to thank their families when they went home that day, because none of the great service that they provide happens without their families.

“Let me just say that you all have a tremendous reputation,” Grass said. “Tremendous leaders, both NCOs and officers, and in Washington, D.C., everyone knows the Vermont National Guard. They know that when you get called, you’re going to do the mission like no one else has. There are people who will step up because they know or they fought with the 86th Brigade. Or they know about the Fighter Wing because they’ve been with you somewhere. So please, please keep up this great reputation and the history you have behind a tremendous unit.”

LEFT: U.S. Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau congratulates Staff Sgt. Ian Graham, Vermont Army National Guard, for his aircraft recovery work of an HH-60M, Army Aviation Support Facility, South Burlington, Vt., May 2, 2015. Grass and U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Mitchell O. Brush, Senior Enlisted Advisor for the National Guard Bureau are in town to meet and speak with the Soldiers and Airmen of the Vermont National Guard.

TOP RIGHT: U.S. Army Capt. Austin Barber, commander, 131st Engineering Company, Vermont Army National Guard, briefs Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau, on current operations of the day, Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vt., May 2, 2015.

U.S. Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau meets with soldiers from the Vermont Army National Guard, Army Aviation Support Facility, South Burlington, Vt., May 2, 2015.

U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Mitchell O. Brush, Senior Enlisted Advisor for the National Guard Bureau, speaks with Soldiers from the 131st Engineering Company, Vermont Army National Guard, Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vt., May 2, 2015. Brush and U.S. Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau, are in town to meet and speak with the Soldiers and Airmen of the Vermont National Guard.

U.S. Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau and U.S. Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Mitchell O. Brush, Senior Enlisted Advisor for the National Guard Bureau, speak with soldiers and airmen during a town hall at the 158th Fighter Wing, Burlington International Airport, South Burlington, Vt., May 2, 2015.





A Vermont F-16 Fighting Falcon, assigned to the 158th Fighter Wing, receives fuel from a KC-135 Stratotanker, from the 157th Refueling Wing, as part of the Boss Lift 2015, Aug. 14, 2015. The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve program recognizes employers of drill status guardsmen by giving them an opportunity to ride during a refueling mission. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Tatro)

SOLDIER RECEIVES RECRUITING MEDAL

Story by Sgt. Heidi Kroll, 172nd PAD



U.S. Army Gen. Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau recognizes Spc. Joshua Kuit, 131st Engineering Company, Vermont Army National Guard, for producing five leads resulting in accessions to the Vermont Army National Guard, Camp Johnson, Colchester, Vt., May 2, 2015. Kuit, in addition to be coined by Grass, was also recognized by the Vermont Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion with a framed award and a state ribbon. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison)

CAMP JOHNSON, Vt. - Spc. Josh Kuit, horizontal construction engineer, 131st Engineer Company (Horizontal Construction), was pulled out of formation in front of his peers, to receive the Vermont National Guard Recruiting ribbon by Gen. Frank Grass, Chief of the National Guard Bureau.

Kuit said, “It was very exciting, it shows that without being a recruiter that it is still possible to generate leads.” Five of the six Soldiers that Kuit enlisted into his unit were friends that he had grown up with.

“Kuit, is the first enlisted Soldier to receive the Vermont Army National Guard Recruiting ribbon,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Douglas Cross, Vermont Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

The Vermont Army National Guard Recruiting Ribbon is awarded to Soldiers that submit four leads that result in enlistment into the Vermont National Guard.

“Kuit recruited six Soldiers in nine months,” said Cross. “Most soldiers are lucky to get one lead that leads to an accession in this time period.”

Kuit submitted his sixth lead for his unit May 1, he is filling the ranks of the unit with Soldiers from his community that work together “like a well oiled machine” regardless of the mission.

Kuit used his knowledge of the Guard and its benefits to encourage individuals to join. When he spoke to his friend, now Pvt. Joshua Robbins, horizontal construction engineer,

Kuit explained how the National Guard’s college benefits were available help Robbins while he attended college.

“If I were to refer a Soldier to the Guard, I would use Kuit as a coach and bring the interested individual to drill,” said Robbins.

Robbins had worked previously in landscaping, so when Kuit ‘brought a buddy to drill’ and showed him the military’s heavy equipment that he would be able to use, it was the gateway to working with the heavy equipment that he had always wanted.

“Just last weekend we were able to level a field, I enjoyed the experience and I was able to expand my knowledge,” said Robbins.

Kuit is setting a high standard for fellow Soldiers, working to increase the strength of the 131st, as well as the Vermont National Guard.

“The responsibility lays with each of us to work with our recruiting and retention staff to ensure that our ranks are replenished with educated, motivated, and morally sound Soldiers,” said Brig. Gen. Michael Heston, assistant adjutant general-Army, Vermont National Guard.

Kuit has taken that recruiting responsibility and excelled in every aspect, as he is already halfway to his second Vermont National Guard Recruiting Ribbon.

VT State Police Bomb Squad trains with VTANG EOD

Story by Staff Sgt. Chelsea Clark, 158 FW

JERICHO, Vt. - Two days, two teams training, and the continuous development of a working relationship. The Vermont State Police Bomb Squad and the Vermont Air National Guard Explosive Ordnance Disposal team held a joint exercise at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site in Jericho, Vt., in late May. While there the teams practiced their skills in scenario training, identifying and evaluating explosives and eliminating those hazards.

Multiple scenarios were conducted at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site over the two day training. Each situation targeted a defined objective, utilizing training and resources available. Teams practiced in blind environments where they responded to a phone call request or information requiring their expertise. Exercises began with teams responding to the initial task, surveillance of the area and identifying the threat. During the scenario, participants honed their skills with their equipment and familiarized themselves with new gear. There was encouraged dialogue through the process for awareness and accuracy. Each action and response drove future scenarios, creating progressively challenging environments where teams could test each other’s skills.

“We are fostering relationships, from day one we work on skills, training expertise and then we give feedback, critiquing each other,” said EOD Master Sgt. Christopher Derringer, an eight year veteran of EOD with two deployments to Afghanistan. “The training was an overwhelming success.”

Members of the EOD team are required to complete nine months of technical training and maintain standards on a 300 item checklist to stay current in their expertise. The reportable training requirements and continuous evaluations differ within the VSP Bomb Squad, where participation is an additional duty. The VSP Bomb Squad use a six week base line course and have limited training because of its primary duty, not to mention members work all across the state of Vermont.

Collaborative trainings began last fall and are projected to continue with several upcoming exercises including the Department of Homeland Security, Vermont National Guard Civil Support Team, and local law enforcement. Since each organization has its own particular mission, cross training offers a chance to recognize team objectives and how to address the situation simultaneously and safely, before an emergency occurs. This brings to light the importance of working together.

“The ultimate goal is having seamless interaction when we work together,” Derringer said, “we are headed in the right direction, picking up steam and everyone will benefit.” The trainings build a mutual trust and respect for each organization and their knowledge base. Each exercise helps in the development of standard operating procedures through

evaluating failures and shortfalls. Successful cross talk and discussing lessons learned will aid in the effectiveness of professional networking through a real world emergency. It creates interoperability among organizations and the further they train, the further they can benefit the community.

Mission objectives and experience levels are different, rules and policies are specific to each organization and training creates a foundation for integration between the teams. Resources, time sensitivity, diagnostics and evidence collection are all part of the different mindsets. Understanding how each team responds to a scenario only benefits the goal of becoming interoperable and aids in solidifying the members’ own skills.



Maj. Daniel O’Neil, from 158th Fighter Wing Explosive Ordnance Disposal, sweeps a fence with a mirror to see what is behind it during a training scenario at the Ethan Allen Firing Range, Jericho, Vt., May 27, 2015. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt. Daniel DiPietro)



Vermont State Trooper Bomb Squad Sgt. Bill Sweeney and Senior Trooper Jake Metayer look on as Maj. Daniel O’Neil from 158th Fighter Wing Explosive Ordnance Disposal prepares to head back to a training site at the Ethan Allen Firing Range, Jericho, Vt., May 27, 2015. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Tech. Sgt. Daniel DiPietro)

Vermont National Guard MiBT wrap up

Story & Photograph by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison, JFHQ

FORT DRUM, N.Y. - Soldiers from the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) recently returned from annual training at Fort Drum in New York. Approximately 2,000 members of the Vermont National Guard spent eight days participating in a multi-echelon integrated brigade training, or MiBT, incorporating more than 4,500 active and reserve-component Soldiers.

“The purpose of all this training, is to maintain proficiency at a high level throughout our available year as part of the ARFORGEN readiness model,” said Col. Andrew Harris, commander of the 86th IBCT. “The exercise incorporated a division headquarters, another brigade, active-duty forces, and a challenging combination of tactical events and live-fire events. It was a ‘proof of concept’ event, meaning ours was the first organization in the Army to participate and test the viability and usefulness of this type of training.”

According to Harris, the Soldiers were required to perform a variety of collective tasks in a realistic tactical environment. Platoons and companies maneuvered against an opposing force, which was comprised of active duty Soldiers. They also performed assembly area activities, troop leading procedures, convoy operations, resupply operations, tactical planning, and a variety of offensive tasks such as movement to contact, assaulting an objective, land navigation, support by fire and reconnaissance. In addition, situational exercise lanes (STX Lanes) and live-fire ranges were conducted to further hone their skills.

“Our Soldiers excelled at planning and executing field operations,” said Harris. This exercise involved no barracks or cantonment phase. We moved directly from home station into the field and it was all done with adherence to tactical standards.”

“As an infantry brigade, challenging weather is to be expected, and Fort Drum provided ample heat, rain, and dense foliage to test our mettle,” said Harris. “We were very lucky to have an actual OPFOR to work as a free-thinking adversary as we conducted our various missions. This component cannot be overstated as it forces leaders and Soldiers to be adaptive and flexible when conditions change because of what the enemy chooses to do.”

“They’ve got to know that they can live through the suck,” said Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Dayton, platoon sergeant, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain). “It’s



U.S. Soldiers with Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), Vermont Army National Guard, secure an objective at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. Approximately 300 Soldiers traveled from Vermont and spent eight days participating in a multi-echelon integrated brigade training.

been rugged. But these guys ... we didn’t have a single guy that fell out on his own and we shouldn’t.”

Dayton also mentioned that, even though it was tough, everyone pushed forward and continued on. “It was awesome,” Dayton said. “I’m proud of them, I’m proud to be a part of this platoon, part of this company. To watch these guys go through what they went through in the last 30 hours and then come and do a live-fire and execute it well, it’s awesome. You can’t really ask for much more.”

“This type of multi-echelon, integrated training is the most effective way to teach Soldiers how their individual effort impacts the entire organization and why their specific duties and role matter in the larger scheme of things,” Harris said.

Harris also went on to say that the training helped to emphasize various aspects of operating in a field environment, highlighting the importance of tactical planning and communications.

“It also was a great test of personal will and stamina, and, especially for Soldiers that are new to the military, provided an opportunity to be challenged, to rise to that challenge, and to succeed at something difficult,” said Harris. “Everyone benefits from completing a difficult thing, and gaining the pride that comes from being there and saying to oneself, ‘I did that, I accomplished something important.’”



Spc. Brandon Newland, wheeled vehicle mechanic, D Company, 186th Brigade Support Battalion, works to remove an engine from a vehicle during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 23, 2015.

Field Mechanics

Story & Photograph by Pvt. Avery Cunningham, 172nd PAD

FORT DRUM, N.Y. - Behind every good combat company is a good support company. The support company behind the 1st Squadron, 172nd Cavalry Regiment (Mountain) is D Company, 186th Brigade Support Battalion.

“We are the maintenance support for the cavalry,” said Staff Sgt. Robert Green, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with D/186th BSB.

The unit’s support role is imperative to keeping troops moving and their equipment functioning at full capacity. Annual training allows them to practice the skills required to do this.

The Delta Company dutifully fulfills its role and work their hardest to make sure the cavalry’s equipment is always ready.

“We repair all their equipment,” said Green. “It’s more than just trucks, its trucks, generators, air conditioning, weapons, heaters.”

It’s important that the Army has the essential people for the task. The equipment requires Soldiers with the skills necessary to maintain it during operations when the units are mobilizing.

“They’re a mobile cavalry, so they’re always on the move, so their expensive, complicated equipment requires maintenance and repairs by qualified individuals,” said Green.

Every company uses generators and vehicles to move and to power their systems. Companies like D company, 186th BSB keep vital systems and equipment working, so other Soldiers can do their jobs.

We need power and lights, without power we don’t have radios, computers or any of those systems said Pfc. Sean Welton, a power-generation equipment repairer with the unit.

The company needs annual training in order to keep their skills sharp and to practice their technical expertise.

“The mechanics and truck drivers get to actually do more of their MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], so they’re actually able to work on the Humvees [HMMWVs], and the generators and other miscellaneous trucks, where they don’t normally get that opportunity on many drill weekends,” said Green.

Annual training allows the entire unit to get together to build camaraderie, practice their specialties, and use their tools and equipment.

“I actually get to learn about SAMSE [Standard Army Maintenance System Enhanced], at drill I use it once, maybe twice, not even, because they don’t drive trucks often,” said Pfc. Cassidy Caron, an automated logistical specialist with the company. “I’m attached down in Bennington, so I’m actually with my unit when I go to AT [annual training], actually with the people I’m supposed to be with.”

This annual training affords the 186th BSB the opportunity to work out in the field, in a realistic environment. They get to do what they were trained to do.

Combat Engineers

TRAINING BLOWS UP

Story & Photographs by Pvt. Avery Cunningham, 172nd PAD

FORT DRUM, N.Y. - A Soldier crouches down in the safety of a bunker; in his hands he holds an igniter with a pin on one end and a wire running out the other.

He shouts, "Fire in the hole!" three times, and pulls the pin. A loud, resounding boom shakes the ground, and the air is filled with falling pieces of dirt and dust. At the other end of the wire a trench resides in the ground where the explosive bandolier once was.

"Yeah, you get a little nervous, but its fun every time," said Pfc. Benjamin Irwin, a combat engineer with A Company, 86th Brigade Special Troops Battalion. "There's never the same feeling no matter how many times you do it"

The combat engineers of A Company, work hard to set up explosives for practicing demolition skills needed for removing obstacles in theater. The engineers also participated in a mock war to practice combat operations during annual training at Fort Drum, New York, June, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) participated in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.

"We do a lot of demolition work, clearing of mines," said Irwin. "We do a lot of work with the infantry, going on rucks, glass houses [simulated structures], doing room clearing, stuff like that."

During the training event the combat engineers participated in war drills by clearing the way for the infantry and assisting the artillery.

"We just had a battle simulation, actually, where we put ourselves into a combat environment," said 2nd Lt. Michael Burkeen, an officer with the equipment section of A/86th BSTB. "We had our sapper platoon go out and work with the infantry. Our equipment section went out, and we dug in a bunch of howitzers, built up a berm for them, for their protection and concealment."

All military occupations add something to the force, and combat engineers use their unique set of skills to assist other Soldiers. Their contribution to the Army is import-

ant, and annual training events are essential, so they can improve their skills.

"Engineers clear the way!", is a popular mantra for combat engineers, who use their demolition skills and equipment to clear away obstacles.

"In the real world, if you get deployed, especially since we're out with the infantry so much, you're clearing the way for them, whether it be wire obstacles, walls, what have you, we're able to get them through whatever they need to by using these explosives," said Irwin.

Combat engineers main duties are to build fighting positions, place and detonate explosives, clear routes, and also detect land mines.

"So, for what we do, being able to get that done and do our best to keep Soldiers safe over there, that really means a lot to me," said Irwin.

The annual training that they participate in is important, because they get to do more training and train more in depth.

"It helps us prepare because what we our going to actually be doing, and it puts us in an environment that we need to be in, rather than being at our armory where it is just our company," said Burkeen. "It helps us prepare, work with other companies, work with battalion, work with brigade and set ourselves up in a more ideal situation, more ideal environment."

Training at places like Fort Drum affords the engineers the ability to practice all the demolition they'd normally get to do as part of their job.

"It's good being here, because we can basically use all the explosives we need," said Irwin. "So, when we got 40 pound cratering charges, it's good if we come here, because if we just train at Jericho [Camp Ethan Allen, Vermont], which we get to do for the rest of the year, then we have a 5 pound max, so we really don't get to get the full bang for our buck besides when we come here. "

The engineers practice demolition at annual training that could be catastrophic without proper training.

"This is one of our main jobs that we do, so to be able to keep up with what we're doing, it's definitely important," said Irwin. This stuff is tricky and obviously dangerous. One little thing wrong and we're not there anymore."

The only way for engineers to arrive at a point of high efficiency, without tragedies is for them to practice their field.

"We have a job to do, everybody here has a job to do," said Burkeen. "Coming out here makes us way, way better at our job. Coming out here, moving to Fort Drum, moving to wherever we go to, it gives us an opportunity to get better. We're much better at our job. Every time we leave here we're much better off."

TOP: U.S. Soldiers with Alpha Company, 86th Brigade Special Troops Battalion combat engineers run wires for a Bangalore torpedo at the demolition range during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) participates in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.

U.S. Soldiers with Alpha Company, 86th Brigade Special Troops Battalion combat engineers tape together wires for a Bangalore torpedo at the demolition range during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) participates in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.

U.S. Soldiers with Alpha Company, 86th Brigade Special Troops Battalion combat engineers orient a Bangalore torpedo at the demolition range during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) participates in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.



TOC Operations

Story & Photographs by Pvt. Avery Cunningham, 172nd PAD

FORT DRUM, N.Y. - The cavalry is traditionally the eyes and ears, the infantry is the arms and legs, and operating their movement is the brain of the brigade, the TOC. From the Tactical Operations Center, operations personnel coordinate with the boots on the ground to provide support, information and guidance.

The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) TOC is the center of activity during the Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y. in June, 2015.

Each section in the TOC supports operations in an effort to accomplish the mission. During the exercise, the TOC consists of Fires, Aviation, Intelligence, Personnel, Logistics, Law and Operations sections. Each section is equally vital to operations.

Intelligence is one of the vital organs to operations.

"It involves looking at the battle," said Army Staff Sgt. Henry Peterman, an intelligence analyst with the 86th IBCT (MTN). "Not in the next 24 or 36 hours. But looking at the battle instantaneous and giving an intelligence estimate based on what we currently believe the estimate is."

As an intelligence analyst, Peterman advises operations and the commanding officers and non-commissioned officers.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Henry Peterman (left), intelligence analyst, and 2nd Lt. Erika Goodwin, all-source intelligence officer, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) analyze information on the computer systems during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 21, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) participates in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.

"I advise them as to the best course of action to respond as to what that situation may need," said Peterman.

Intelligence provides necessary information for making decisions.

"It's important because it helps make future decisions for battlefield operations. It also helps in management of all our assets on the battlefield," said Peterman.

Another important organ to the TOC's body is aviation. Aviation maintains air defenses, monitors the area and manages aviation.

"We're here helping to support the brigade by managing aviation operations," said Army Maj. Doran Metzger, the brigade aviation officer.

Aviation is there to support the Soldiers in the fight.

"It's important that the Soldiers on the ground, who are conducting operations, have the ability to utilize all of the assets available to them and the aviation asset is one important piece," said Metzger. "So we help to facilitate that here at the brigade headquarters. They need close air support, reconnaissance. We're here to support the Soldiers fighting the battle."

While Aviation assists with important support, so do the other sections. Artillery, or Fires, is another support element in the TOC.

"We are in charge of all the Fires for the brigade, so if someone needs any artillery support, air support, anything like that, they need to contact us," said Army Sgt. Scott Washburn, a Fires AFATDS noncommissioned officer. "I provide the data to the field artillery battalion to provide counter fire or direct support, general support for troops on the ground."

The Fires Section has a sophisticated computer system, Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS), which assists in detecting artillery firing, generating missions and tracking where units are.

"It provides a lot of checks and balances," said Washburn. "It provides a lot of accurate gun data to our fire support network we have."

Units digitally update the system constantly said Washburn. It is linked to radar, so it can pinpoint exactly where a mortar is.

"It helps to mitigate friendly fire," said Washburn. "It also allows us a rapid response in case there is an enemy attack."



U.S. Army Lt. Col. John J. Coughlin, the senior staff judge advocate, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) studies law material pertaining to the mission during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 21, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) participates in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.

AFATDS keeps Soldiers fighting by protecting them, but it's important that all Soldiers are accounted for. Other sections in the TOC also account for Soldiers.

The Personnel Section at the TOC keeps track of Soldiers. Even in a training environment it is important for everyone to be accounted for, so that no one gets lost or injured.

"We track people on the battlefield, and when they get wounded or killed we are responsible for replacing them," said Army Maj. James J. Armstrong, an S1 officer.

Additionally, the Personnel Section deals with emergency messages that need to be delivered to Soldiers.

"We also take care of the Red Cross messages," said Army Spc. Samantha Pebley, a human resources specialist. "So if something goes on back home, and they need to get a message up to us; they send it through Red Cross and it gets to us, and we help get it back down where it needs to be."

Legal or accountability under the law is just as important as personnel accountability.

The section that deals with law, the Judge Advocate General's Corps, gives legal advice to commanders.

"The JAG office provides advice to the commander, and we're involved in the TOC in terms of operational law, and we are also involved administratively, UCMJ actions, investigations and we provide advice on the rules of engagement," said Army Lt. Col. John J. Coughlin, staff judge advocate, 86th IBCT (MTN).

The JAG office's goal is to maintain law and order.

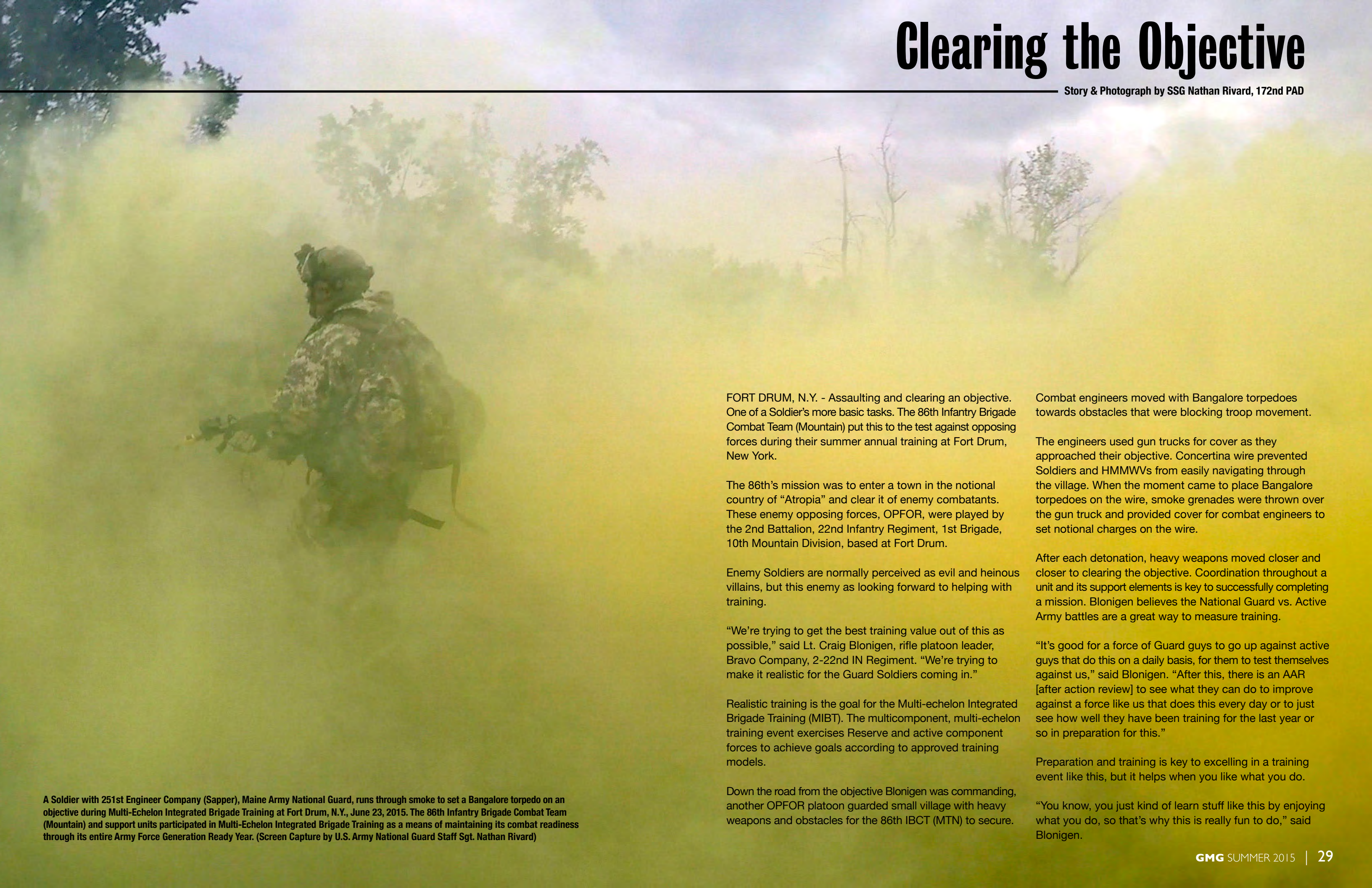
"It's important to make sure the commander complies with operational law and the rules of engagement," said Coughlin.

The sections provide additional support to Operations by sharing the workload. They all work together to advise the command and improve the unit. Each section is an important organ in the body, and without one of them, the body fails.

Supporting the troops in the fight, making one another better and working together as one makes the Army the strong force it is today.

Clearing the Objective

Story & Photograph by SSG Nathan Rivard, 172nd PAD



A Soldier with 251st Engineer Company (Sapper), Maine Army National Guard, runs through smoke to set a Bangalore torpedo on an objective during Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 23, 2015. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) and support units participated in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year. (Screen Capture by U.S. Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

FORT DRUM, N.Y. - Assaulting and clearing an objective. One of a Soldier's more basic tasks. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) put this to the test against opposing forces during their summer annual training at Fort Drum, New York.

The 86th's mission was to enter a town in the notional country of "Atropia" and clear it of enemy combatants. These enemy opposing forces, OPFOR, were played by the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, based at Fort Drum.

Enemy Soldiers are normally perceived as evil and heinous villains, but this enemy as looking forward to helping with training.

"We're trying to get the best training value out of this as possible," said Lt. Craig Blonigen, rifle platoon leader, Bravo Company, 2-22nd IN Regiment. "We're trying to make it realistic for the Guard Soldiers coming in."

Realistic training is the goal for the Multi-echelon Integrated Brigade Training (MIBT). The multicomponent, multi-echelon training event exercises Reserve and active component forces to achieve goals according to approved training models.

Down the road from the objective Blonigen was commanding, another OPFOR platoon guarded small village with heavy weapons and obstacles for the 86th IBCT (MTN) to secure.

Combat engineers moved with Bangalore torpedoes towards obstacles that were blocking troop movement.

The engineers used gun trucks for cover as they approached their objective. Concertina wire prevented Soldiers and HMMWVs from easily navigating through the village. When the moment came to place Bangalore torpedoes on the wire, smoke grenades were thrown over the gun truck and provided cover for combat engineers to set notional charges on the wire.

After each detonation, heavy weapons moved closer and closer to clearing the objective. Coordination throughout a unit and its support elements is key to successfully completing a mission. Blonigen believes the National Guard vs. Active Army battles are a great way to measure training.

"It's good for a force of Guard guys to go up against active guys that do this on a daily basis, for them to test themselves against us," said Blonigen. "After this, there is an AAR [after action review] to see what they can do to improve against a force like us that does this every day or to just see how well they have been training for the last year or so in preparation for this."

Preparation and training is key to excelling in a training event like this, but it helps when you like what you do.

"You know, you just kind of learn stuff like this by enjoying what you do, so that's why this is really fun to do," said Blonigen.



U.S. Soldiers from Alpha Company, 86th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, combat engineers, walk up to the demolition range with Bangalore torpedoes during annual training at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th IBCT (MTN) is participating in an Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year. (Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Pvt. Avery James Cunningham)

Infantry Live Fire

Story & Photographs by SSG Nathan Rivard, 172nd PAD

FORT DRUM, N.Y. - Soldiers with A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) conducted a live-fire range at Fort Drum during their Multi-echelon Integrated Brigade Training (MIBT).

“We are doing what we signed up for,” said Sgt. Sean Fernandes, team leader, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain). “Just coming out and doing what we are paid to do and actually getting boots on ground and getting live rounds down range. That’s just motivation to come here.”

Portions of infantryman training can only be simulated to a point. There is nothing that compares to live rounds going down range.

“It’s important for me just because with blanks, you can’t really do the command and control with your guys that you need to and with live rounds it really reiterates the safety portion with the proper standoff, muzzle control, so it’s good for me to be able to monitor my guys and it has that added stress factor for my guys,” Fernandes.

The live-fire range is part of the 86th IBCT’s MIBT. The MIBT is a newly established, First Army-sponsored, integrated multi-component collective training exercise. The training is conducted for Army National Guard Brigade Combat Teams that did not participate in a Mission Training Command rotation and division HQs training during the available year.

“It allows us to actually see where our platoon is at, so if they do well on the live-fire, we know that they are actually ready to perform their job in the real world if we are called upon,” said 2nd Lt. Patrick Finamore, platoon leader, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain). “It’s just a mark that we can mark to see what we need to train on in the future.”

Third platoon has experience through leadership and mentors, but the platoon still has many Soldiers that recently enlisted in the Army.

“We got a lot of work to do,” said Finamore. “We have a very very young platoon. Most of the guys have new to the unit within the past nine months or so. It was good to see that they’ve come along a long ways even since January’s AT [annual training].”

“It’s important because for us we have a lot of new Soldiers and a lot of them have only been here for like four drills,” said Dayton. “We have three in my platoon that are only four drills in and I think its key to building their confidence in their weapons system and building their confidence while firing with other people moving around them. It’s a key task that the infantrymen need to know and the biggest thing is building their confidence.”

The Green Mountain Boys are known for their endurance, but that is dealing with mountains and winter. Ft. Drum is a different training environment.

“Its good training, it’s a good place to do training because it’s different than the mountains,” said Finamore. “It’s flat and swampy and wet which most of us are used to. We’re used to cold, elevation, and more cold.”

Alpha Company waded through swampy terrain for hours to reach their mission objective during the MBIT. The grueling march tested the infantrymen.

“They’ve got to know that they can live through the suck. It’s been rugged,” said Dayton. “This has some of the most rugged stuff I’ve ever seen. Its nasty, but these guys ... we didn’t have a single guy that fell out on his own and we shouldn’t, but they all pushed through. Even the ones that were really hurting in the beginning. They sucked it up and went. It was awesome. I’m proud of them, I’m proud to be a part of this platoon, part of this company, and to watch these guys go through what they went through in the last 24 hours ... actually it was like 30 hours and then come and do a live fire and execute it well. It’s awesome. You can’t really ask for much more.”

The live fire mission was successfully completed with music coming from the guns.

“Hearing those 240s go off as we moved to our assault position today,” said Finamore. “Just something about the sound of machine guns talking is a great sound as an infantryman.”



LEFT: U.S. Army 2nd Lt. Patrick Finamore, platoon leader, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), briefs his platoon before conducting a live-fire range at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) participated in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.



MIDDLE: U.S. Army Soldiers with A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), bound as teams to clear an objective during the unit’s live-fire range at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) participated in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.



BOTTOM: U.S. Army Soldiers with A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), low crawl to their over-watching M240 Bravo machine gun firing positions during the rehearsal portion of the unit's live-fire range at Fort Drum, N.Y., June 24, 2015. The 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain) participated in Multi-Echelon Integrated Brigade Training as a means of maintaining its combat readiness through its entire Army Force Generation Ready Year.

VTANG Saves Time and Money on PHAst Track

Story by Staff Sgt. Victoria Greenia, 158FW



U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Taylor Johnson, ophthalmic technician with the 158th Fighter Wing Medical Squadron, administers a vision exam at the Vermont Air National Guard in South Burlington, Vt., June 6. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Jon Alderman)

SOUTH BURLINGTON, Vt. - The 158th Medical Group says that on June 6 it outperformed itself for efficiency by processing more than half the base's Preventative Health Assessments (PHAs) and Occupational Health Medical Examinations (OHMEs) with a percent increase in one day compared to last year's pilot run.

The medical group has dubbed the new process PHAst Track, a play on words because the program's new design cuts average wait times so much that it saves the National Guard roughly 1000 man-hours.

"There's a lot of moving pieces [to medical exams] and what PHAst Track has done is pulled all those pieces together to be done at one time," Chief Master Sgt. Kathleen Corcoran, senior health technician and chief enlisted manager, said about the program that has streamlined what was once a cumbersome process. She also said the base will never return to month-to-month preventative health processing.

It used to be that Airmen would have medical reviews during drill of their birth months, sometimes resulting in people waiting an hour or more for a five minute visit with a provider. This often created a time crunch for both the medical

staff and patients who would still need to complete other training requirements and routine duties.

But this old paradigm came under scrutiny when Corcoran, along with fellow VTANG medical members Tech. Sgt. Emily Santillo, Master Sgt. Eric Holbrook, and Physician Assistant Lt. Col. Jack Cook, took a trip out west. Their Fargo, N.D., counterpart had started to consolidate PHEs with a line of booths, or checkpoints, for a majority of the base in one large push and the VTANG medical group got to watch the process.

Impressed by the saved time in the new design, the group immediately discussed how it could be tailored to VTANG needs and set a plan in motion. If doing normal PHAs in one day was so successful, doing both PHAs and OHMEs at once would be a serious gain for the base.

"We took it to the whiteboard," Santillo, a health services technician, said, "and tailored it to our Wing. We made some changes and came out with this awesome idea of accomplishing OHMEs and PHAs all on the same day with two separate facilities on base processing Airmen." It was a project that would require lots of initial planning,

but had such a high payoff that the crew eagerly embraced it. They knew organization would be essential, starting with how Airmen were going to be scheduled. Obviously when dealing with hundreds of people, having all of them show up in one gigantic line wasn't going to save any time, and Holbrook, the non-commissioned officer in charge of public health, said he spent hours scheduling patients so that no shop would be undermanned at any given time.

The next step was to devise a way to separate Airmen into groups by medical needs, which was solved by colored folders; one color meant a quick non-occupational health assessment with only a possible lab draw and review with a provider; another color also indicated a non-occupational health assessment, but means the patient is also due for a five-year checkup of vision, dental, and skin exams; and a third color was given to Airmen in fields that require yearly occupational health exams which have special auditory, respiratory and blood tests.

Due to the nature of OHMEs having additional requirements, they decided to keep them separate from the quicker PHEs. Santillo managed the first two groups together in a similar fashion to that of a deployment processing line, while Holbrook was in charge of developing OHME stations. In order to process all the Airmen requiring hearing tests in one day, extra audiogram booths had to be brought in.

The first year, a civilian contractor provided the extra equipment, nearly quadrupling the amount of Airmen being processed at a time. This time around the Reserve Health Readiness Program, a National Guard Bureau contract, came with their equipment to help.

"They saved us a lot of time in the back-end because their technicians upload everything into the software program for us," he said, "whereas last year we had to manually enter all the data. We would love to have that contract continue in the future, because it was really successful."

There were other things the PHAst Track team changed from the previous year that either eliminated steps or improved the process. The initial colored folders that Airmen received became sheets of colored paper with instructions - this way, Santillo said, personal information was protected, which is always a priority in a medical setting.

Another huge time-saver was merging the medical roster with labeling software to create stickers to put on everyone's folders and lab work; patients no longer had to fill out medical sheets, they only had to confirm that the information printed was correct. As well as shortening time, a happy benefit to this was a near-zero discrepancy rate with lab specimens.

It's a really successful system, she said.

"Having the Wing accomplish this in one day is just the way to go," she said. "Other units have reached out to us, and Fargo

as well, and I think this is going to be the new standard." Both she and Holbrook say the program would never have been successful if they didn't have "base buy-in." Wing Command approved the pilot run and Airmen from the Wing's civil engineer squadron and communications flight helped set up the booths and make sure computer systems were working during PHAst Track operations. Unit health monitors facilitated agreeable scheduling between shops and the medical group, resulting in less delays and no-shows.

Also essential, they said, were base members filling out the web health assessment (Web HAs) forms two months ahead of time. In some cases, these advance Web HAs allowed a health services technician to review and complete the PHE process without the Airman having to go to any PHAst Track booths at all.

No longer having to worry about a flood of health exams each drill, medical staff now has the time to prepare and attend mandatory meetings such as the Deployment Availability Working Group and the Aeromedical Council. Santillo also noted that Airmen in the medical group are grateful that the extra time allows them to explore other aspects of being in the Air National Guard, like participating in the Junior or Senior Non-Commissioned Enlisted Councils.

With patient wait time now down to mere minutes, IMR rates steadily "in the green," less paperwork and discrepancies, and more time for medical staff members to expand their professional military education, the program is drawing the attention of other Guard bases. Santillo believes that it's shaping a new image of an innovative and attentive medical group with staff eager to ensure a mission-ready Wing.



U.S. Air Force Capt. Marcy O'Neil, from the 158th Fighter Wing Medical Squadron, administers a vision exam at the Vermont Air National Guard in South Burlington, Vt., June 6. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Jon Alderman)