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U.S. Army Sgt. Darwin Jurentkuff, survey, team member, 15th Civil Support Team, Vermont National Guard, searches for hazardous material during the unit's training proficiency evaluation at Roberto Clemente Stadium, Carolina, Puerto Rico, Jan. 26, 2016. The 15th CST is conducting the unit's 18-month training proficiency evaluation. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

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IN & AROUND VTANG

Members of the Vermont Air National Guard 158th Civil Engineer Squadron conduct hazardous material management training during an exercise at the Burlington International Airport, South Burlington, Vt., March 4, 2016. This exercise allows Airmen to familiarize themselves with equipment and procedures used in hazardous material management. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Senior Airman Jon Alderman)



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Sarah Ledwith, Tech. Sgt. Rebecca Martineau, and Senior Airman Marissa Vanzee pose for a photo March 6, 2016. They form an all-lady weapons load crew and in a recent evaluation earned accolades for being the “best loading operations seen to date.” Their supervisor said that their “work ethic and sense of urgency was instrumental to the 158 AMXS Weapons Section shining during Combat Hammer 2016.” (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Victoria Greenia)



BELOW: U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael Stanford with the 158th Fighter Wing Security Forces Squadron establishes a road block during a Counter-CBRN All Hazard Management Response Course at the Vermont Air National Guard Base, South Burlington, Vt., March 4, 2016. This portion of the course allows airman with the Security Forces Squadron to react and familiarize themselves with realistic scenarios



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Larry Runk, of the 158th Fighter Wing Maintenance Squadron, marshals an F-16 Fighting Falcon from the flight line during operation Combat Hammer at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016. Combat Hammer is a Weapon System Evaluation Program that evaluates the effectiveness of precision guided munitions when employed in air-to-ground combat. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Tatro)



IN & AROUND VTARNG



ABOVE: A U.S. Army Soldier with Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), climbs an ice wall at Smugglers' Notch in Jeffersonville, Vt., March 5, 2016. Soldiers performed basic and advanced mountain warfare skills like ice climbing, mountain movement techniques, and nighttime navigation as part of their mountaineering winter bivouac. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

RIGHT: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Timothy McLaughlin, an instructor at the Army Mountain Warfare School, looks for the squad ahead climbing the mountain at Smugglers' Notch, in Jeffersonville, Vt., Feb. 18, 2016. The Adjutant General of Vermont, along with other Vermont National Guard leadership, performed a Mountain Walk with basic and advanced mountain warfare students to gain a better understanding of the Mountain Warfare School and to refresh their mountaineering skills. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Avery Cunningham)



ABOVE: U.S. Army Spc. Luke Johnson, 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), Vermont National Guard, covers his buddy's movement at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Oct. 31, 2015. The Guardsmen participated in a buddy team live fire exercise that utilized the crawl-walk-run method of instruction. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison)



Left: Capt. Brian D. Williams, outgoing commander, Detachment 1, Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment (S&S) accepts the guidon during a change of command ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility, South Burlington, Vt., Jan. 10, 2016. 1st. Lt. Nathan C. Dubie took command of the unit from Williams during the ceremony. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Pfc. Avery Cunningham)

Career CrossRoads

Reenlist

ETS

MOS Change

Retirement

Story & Photos By Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard

172nd Public Affairs Detachment

NORTHFIELD, Vt. - Basic Training. Advanced Individual Training. Drill weekend. Annual Training. Peace Keeping Operation. Combat Deployment.

These are chapters in Soldiers' lives throughout their career as a National Guardsmen. Every Soldier's path is different, but progresses toward one final intersection, transitioning from the military or extending their contract.

The Vermont Army National Guard is trying to make this decision easier for Soldiers with a program they call, "Crossroads." January was the first time the program has ever been held in Vermont in an attempt to give Soldiers information on their path ahead.

"The purpose of the program is to bring in Soldiers who within the next 90 days are getting to their ETS [expiration term of service] or their retirement date and give the information they need at this crossroads in their life to make a decision to continue to serve, to retire, or to ETS," said Col David Manfredi, deputy chief of staff for personnel, Vermont National Guard.

Vermont is not the first state to do a program like this, but they knew would be beneficial for Soldiers.

"There are other states that we know of that have had some success reenlisting a number of their Soldiers who



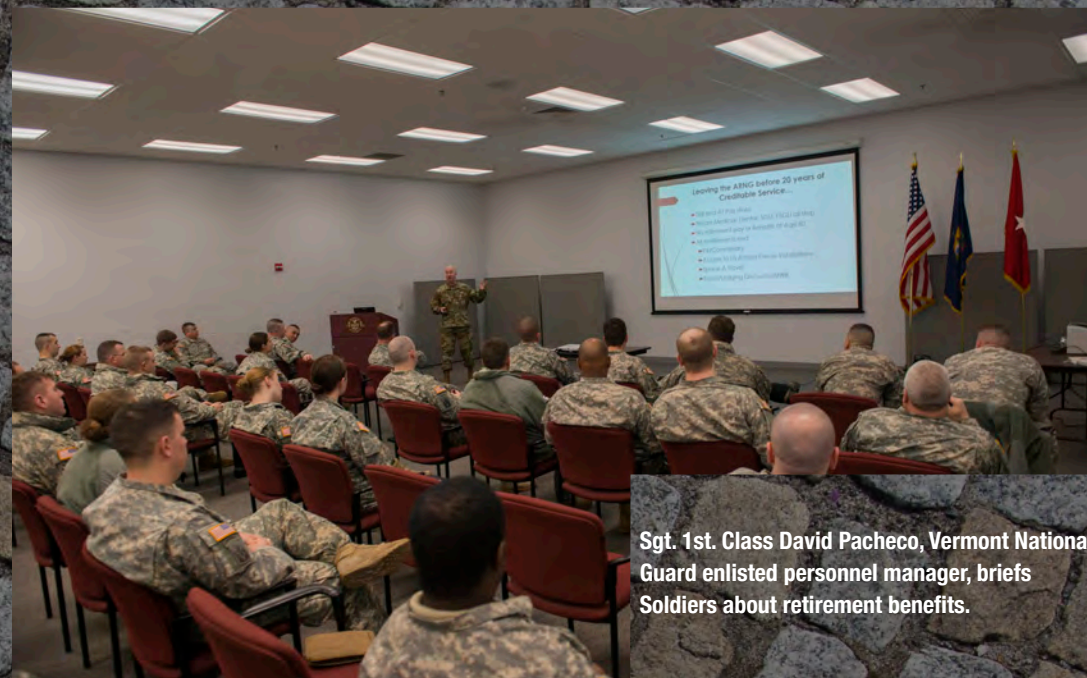
Col. David Manfredi, deputy chief of staff for personnel, briefs Soldiers during the Crossroads event at Northfield, Vt., Jan. 9, 2016. The Crossroads event informs Soldiers who are within 90 days of ETS about benefits and opportunities available to them whether they are extending or retiring.

they thought were going to get out because they ran a program like Crossroads," said Manfredi.

The program focuses on details like medical, dental, and education benefits, but it also provides opportunity for career change if they have not reached retirement standing.

"Often times a soldier is not happy with their MOS or not happy in the unit that they are in, so through this program, we're able to offer them the opportunity to extend to change their MOS [military occupation specialty] or to go into a different unit and try a different job," said Manfredi. "Whether that's going to an RTI [Regional Training Institute] to instruct or changing an MOS to serve in a different MTOE unit."

The program does more than focus on Soldiers looking to switch units or careers. Information is provided for National Guard Soldiers who have reached 20 years of service. The retirement structure and benefits are different between the Active Duty Army and the National Guard. Active Duty Soldiers can receive their benefits when they reach 20 years of service, but because traditional National Guard Soldiers serve part-time, they cannot receive retirement benefits until age 60. Crossroads filled the information gaps.



Sgt. 1st Class David Pacheco, Vermont National Guard enlisted personnel manager, briefs Soldiers about retirement benefits.

For a traditional guardsmen, you cannot collect your benefits until age 60," said Sgt. 1st Class David Pacheco, Vermont National Guard enlisted personnel manager. "So what are you going to do between the time you get out? Which is typically in the late 40s, early 50s for a lot of people to age 60."

Pacheco asked many questions, but he filled in the answers of these questions for Soldiers. He presented information on medical and dental benefits available during the timeframe between retiring and age 60. He also spoke about the benefits available once they reach 60. One of the biggest benefits he discussed was medical.

"I like to draw correlations between Tricare and Affordable Care Act and what's out on the economy," said Pacheco. "Tricare is very affordable, even in the reserve capacity, not only while you're in ... but those that are retiring, they might not realize that you can insure a family of four on a retired Tricare at age 60 for \$47 a month. It's just staggering, things that they [Soldiers] don't think about."

Pacheco stressed how important it was to push information during his briefing.

"It is a crime to just watch somebody walk away after building up for 10 years and not letting them know, 'this is what you're walking away from.' Money, medical, education benefits. There are a lot of benefits in the pipe for that Soldier. And then we need to reach out to

those that are at the 20-year level. They've reached their 20 years, they've attained their benefits and they still want to leave, but they have a lot of good years to go and my briefing primarily wants to focus on what are you going to do in the mean time.

The Crossroads event hopes to retain Soldiers, but also to facilitate an easy transition into retirement. Two very different goals, but they share a strong commonality; informed decision-making.

"The best thing would be for any Soldier that is

making a decision here today, whether it is to continue to serve or to get out is making an informed decision and if they're staying in, they are taking advantage of all of the benefits that they are eligible for," said Manfredi. "If they are getting out, that they have a plan to get out, to transition, whether that's to into retirement or the civilian world and they utilize the resources that they've earned."

Soldiers look at a chart showing the difference in retirement pay.





VTANG Houses New Squadron

Story By Staff Sgt. Victoria Greenia
158th Fighter Wing

SOUTH BURLINGTON, Vt. - The Vermont Air National Guard has lost an active-duty Air Force detachment and gained a squadron this January as part of the Total Force Integration (TFI) when Maj. Daniel McGuire assumed command of the 315th Fighter Squadron.

Although the VTANG has had active-duty members working there for about 10 years as a detachment, it is now one of the first few Guard bases to house an active-duty squadron. The inverse, Guard components at active-duty bases, has become fairly common.

Within the program’s concept, the Guard, Reserve and active-duty play equal parts in the Air Force mission of air and space superiority with a global presence ready day and night. Interoperability is essential, and that means consistent training with one another.

“We’re our own unit but we are fully and totally integrated into the Guard where your mission is our mission,” McGuire said about his assumption of command. “We don’t operate independently, but we bond and strengthen to help complete the mission. What we have become entails a more formal chain of command so our attachment folks here aren’t lost in the mix of the bigger Air Force.”

He called the change “a small piece to the giant puzzle” of TFI and said other than strengthening Vermont’s airpower, will not affect any part of how the Vermont Guard does business. Instead, it reflects the need for mentorship among the active-duty Airmen. Due to differences in promotion structure, active-duty Airmen’s careers have had the potential to lag in promotion without a clear supervisor filling out the proper forms that Guardsmen don’t as of yet use.

He sees his position as an advocate among the active-duty Airmen – a mentor to gently nudge them toward the excellence he knows they can achieve while they are getting the unique opportunity to work with their Guard counterparts.

McGuire, who is just leaving his position as director of operations at Kunsan Air Base, has had some experience in observing TFI operations while serving previously as assistant director of operations at Tucson, Arizona. Working so much with people has refined his communications skills, and he said that his ability to connect with others is a strengths that will be useful as he works with Airmen within the program.

For active-duty Staff Sgt. Robert Chistensen, a machinist and welder who has been at the VTANG for about a year, the structural change is a step in the right direction for TFI participants. While still unsure how it will affect him in his duties, he said he believes it will make the active-duty Airmen feel more like a cohesive unit. He said that being part of an active-duty detachment at a Guard base has made him feel, in his words, “detached.”

For example, when a supervisor gave out information to the group, a lot of the information would be for Guard only, and the supervisor would turn to him and say, “This doesn’t apply to you.”

“But now as a detachment becoming a squadron, we will feel more integrated into the base,” he said. “There will be less differentiation between you guys and us guys – it will be our guys, working as Green Mountain Boys rather than TFI versus Guard.”

The program is a win-win for Guardsmen, active-duty Airmen and taxpayers.

U.S. Air Force Maj. Daniel McGuire takes the 315th Fighter Squadron guidon in an assumption of command ceremony, Vermont Air National Guard base, Jan. 10, 2016. McGuire assumed command of the 315th, an active-duty squadron housed at the base as part of the Total Force Integration program. The VTANG has been involved with the TFI program for about 10 years. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Tatro



Taxpayers’ money is saved because now the active-duty aircraft are being housed at Guard bases that already have the space and equipment, significantly reducing the costs by not having separate installations.

The active-duty Airmen have the opportunity to train under decades of accumulated knowledge with the Vermont Guardsmen. Active-duty military people tend to stay in one place for a few years and might have shifting responsibilities. In the Guard, many members have been working with the equipment for decades and display a level of expertise that is noted by the Air Force for their top quality.

The Guardsmen gain the added resources of extra aircraft, pilots and the maintainers. In Vermont’s case, having the 315th increases the base’s aircraft presence by 25 percent – a boon to the security of the state as well as this part of the continent.

“Both sides benefit because they will have access to an infusion of ideas by combining the Guard’s rich experience level with the fresh sets of eyes and experience the active-duty side has,” McGuire noted. Another benefit: New VTANG members that already love the base.

Master Sgt. Miranda Shaw, currently in the Quality Assurance office, was an Airman 1st Class when she came with the first wave of active-duty Airmen to joint train with the VTANG. Back then the TFI was called Community Basing and she had no idea what to expect. Ten years later she has since officially joined the VTANG and has her life based firmly in the community.

“It’s funny how life happens- before I enlisted I lived in California but wanted to go to college in Vermont,” she shared. “To pay for college I joined the military and they sent me to Vermont!”

From her perspective, she thinks she’s had a more enriching career by being imbedded with the Guard. Although she doesn’t move from base to base, she said that when she compares tours of duty with her technical school colleagues, she’s gone more places than most of them have and without having to uproot her family. In a way, she said, she’s had the best of both worlds.

The idea of combining the best of both worlds to strengthen the Air Force mission is exactly the purpose of the TFI. As budgets and warfare tactics change, so must our military. The Air Force, including the Vermont Air National Guard, adapts to meet every challenge and obstacle head on.

Simulating Sling Loads

Story and Photos By Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard
172nd Public Affairs Detachment

BURLINGTON, Vt. - Vermont Army National Guard Aviation Soldiers used the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer, during their drill weekend to refresh and expand their aviator skills.

The AVCATT allows Soldiers to receive realistic training through simulated scenarios in a controlled environment.

“It’s a [bad] weather day, we can’t fly, so if it was a normal sling load day, we would not have been able to conduct training and either push it until next year, so it could be a whole year until you get the chance to do it,” said Staff Sgt. Robert Slater, flight medic, Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment. “This gives you that opportunity rain or shine to get at it and train and keep proficient.”

Without the danger of real aircraft, the simulators also allow junior Soldiers to take charge and operate the equipment.

“I’ve never done it [simulator] before and I’ve never done an external [load hoist] in a black hawk either,” said Spc. Cynthia Nichols, flight medic, Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment. “The simulator was kind of neat because it was like a no pressure environment and you could just practice and it didn’t matter if you screwed up.”

“New people get a chance to watch what is going on, see what is going on, versus a helicopter, you can only have so many people inside,” said Slater. “If there’s a problem, you can stop the simulation, talk about it, figure out what you did right, what you did wrong, and there is no aircraft to worry about.”

The relaxed and controlled environment is working towards training scenarios in the summer. This preparation training will make the scenarios easier for newcomers and even the veterans of sling load training.

“We were getting a chance to do some sling load training which we usually get once a year,” said Slater. “Once a year is kind of hard to keep up with everything. It’s a good chance to get a refresher on what we do. New members got a chance to see what it was like for the first time and then this summer when we do it for real, they already had a chance to practice on the terminology and know what’s coming.”



U.S. Army Spc. Cynthia Nichols, flight medic, Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 126th Aviation Regiment, adjusts her helmet to use the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer.

The terminology and proper commands are essential for an effective and safe mission.

“There are a lot of calls that you have to make, so you got to practice the calls,” said Nichols. “So before you go out into the field and have to do it for real, you’re getting to practice and really hone in the skills.”

Even though it is training and summer training missions are months away, the AVCATT allows Soldiers to experience something as close to reality as possible.

“It’s surprisingly real close,” said Slater. “You look at it and next thing you know, you’re reaching out for something that looks like its there and you’re just reaching in the air. You look up and you think you’re underneath something, so you duck down and you had all kinds of room. It’s amazing how real it is.”

U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert Slater, flight Medic, Charlie Company, 3-126th Aviation Regiment, uses the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer (AVCATT).



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Catamounts Return to the Mountain

Story By Sgt. Heidi Kroll
172nd Public Affairs Detachment

(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)

JERICHO, Vt. - The Catamounts (A Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry) are returning to the mountain in Jericho, Vermont. The unit is called the Catamounts for the tavern where the Green Mountain Boys would meet during the Revolutionary war with Ethan Allen. The catamount is also commonly known as the mountain lion.

The training on this drill weekend focused on basic mountaineering skills. This is preparing them for an advanced weekend where the Soldiers will ski to Smugglers Notch. This training included cold weather mobility mountaineering skills such as bivouacking, basic ski fundamentals and steep snow traversing.

“First and foremost the Catamounts are a tightly knit unit, the first thing that happens when a Soldier comes to the unit they can sense, we are part of something different,” said Capt. Nathan Fry, company commander. “We really work hard on building team spirit, empowering the Soldier to share knowledge across levels.”

Bivouacs were the first part of the drill weekend, the Soldiers dragged the sled based tent system “Akhio” to a location where they would spend the night. The tent system should take 15 minutes to set up. Today the more experienced

Soldiers took time to cross train other Soldiers in this skill on this relatively warm day.

“It is easier to learn skills on a day like today when it is rather warm, than on a -30 day with the wind blowing,” said Sgt. Jeff Deslauriers, infantryman. “Teaching the guys who have never seen the Akhio tent systems that you can survive in some extremely cold temperatures with the gear we have.” Sgt. Sean Fernandez, infantryman, said “Skiing is a very



(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)

important mobility skill, it is another mode of transportation in a mountainous environment.”

This is the second time the Catamounts have come to Bolton Ski Resort. Groomed snow training gets the Soldiers ready for skiing on ungroomed terrain. “Pizza” could be heard being yelled down the mountain, which is another description of snow plowing with skis. Pvt. Patrick Morris, infantryman, worked with other Soldiers, several that outranked him teaching them basic skiing techniques. This advice demonstrated how to control speed, where to put their hands, and how to properly use ski poles.

“It’s intimidating to teach higher ranking Soldiers, it is more important to teach fellow Soldiers critical skills that are needed to accomplish the mission,” Morris said.

Cross training during downtime helps widen the knowledge base across the unit. Some Soldiers have their own area of expertise and taking advantage of this resource to help strengthen the unit.

“Sharing information is critical, No matter what rank you are you should speak up and share to beneficial information with the unit,” said Capt. Kevin Elmer, logistics officer.

Sgt. 1st Class Timothy McLaughlin, infantryman, 2nd Platoon, worked with his Soldiers on steep snow traversing, which taught Soldiers how to use an ice ax to slow a descent on an ice

(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)



(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)

covered mountain. Which entailed mastering rolling over and slamming the ice ax into the ground to stop their accelerated descent. He also taught the Soldiers how to descend a snow, ice and rock covered hill. “This training is critical to our ability to operate as a mountain unit,” said Deslauriers. “Soldiers are asking for the mountaineering training, they are hungry for cold weather training, they are aggressive to learn.”

“Alpha Company is tasked with operating in a mountainous environment during the winter as well as summer, we are going back to our mountaineering roots,” said Fry.

The return of the Catamounts to the Vermont mountains is revitalizing the Mountaineering skills the unit is legendary for, a unit that will be versatile in any mountainous environment. The training this weekend will be followed up in February with a step back in time to other mountaineering roots with biathlon training, a shoot and move drill on skis which dates back to the Green Mountain Boys. The culmination of this training that started in December will be when the unit bivouacs to the notch in March.

A night photograph of a snowy forest. In the foreground, two green tents are pitched on a snow-covered ground. A bright campfire is burning between the tents, casting a warm glow. The background is filled with bare, dark trees under a starry night sky. A small, brightly lit structure is visible in the distance through the trees.

Alpha Conquers The Mountain

Story by Spc. Avery Cunningham
172ND Public Affairs Detachment

(U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)



JEFFERSONVILLE, Vt. - Panting and heaving from the exertion of hauling their gear up the mountain for more than a mile, Soldiers commenced setting up tents between two immense, snow-covered peaks. Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), Vermont National Guard Soldiers conducted mountaineering training at Smuggler's Notch in Jeffersonville, Vermont, March 6, 2016.

"We are going to be practicing a lot of mountaineering over the next day and a half," said Spc. Gavin Wageman, an infantryman in A/3-172nd INF. "As of right now we just packed up our sleds with tents, stoves, equipment, climbing gear, rope and hauled it up in squads, all the way up the mountain here."

The unit's focus during the winter has been on mountaineering skills. Alpha Company is part of the 86th

U.S. Army Sgt. Kyle Lebeau, fire team leader, Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), supervises a safety belay as Soldiers climb an ice wall at Smugglers' Notch in Jeffersonville, Vt., Marc. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain). The 86th IBCT (MTN) is the only mountain brigade in the Army.

Their current commander, Capt. Nathan Fry, told his Soldiers at the very beginning that he wanted to get back to the mountaineering skills and he's stuck to his word, said Wageman. Honoring his word, the A 3/172nd INF commander has had the company practicing many different techniques.

"We've been hitting a lot of mountain techniques," said Cavoli. "We're just trying to get that good individual base for the Soldiers, so that we can build up to bigger and better things in the future. "

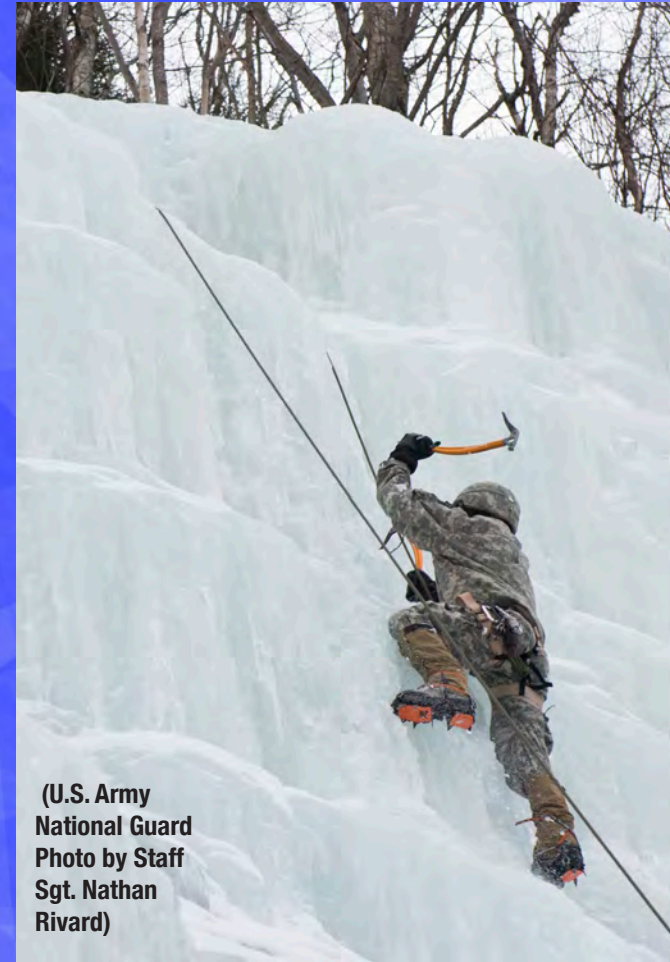
The unit performed ice wall climbs and mountain movement techniques.

"We're conducting mountaineering training where we set up a fixed rope and climb up using ice climbing techniques then move along a path set up in Smuggler's Notch," explained 1st Lt. Adam Cavoli, the A/3-172nd INF executive officer.

The training ensures that the company is ready for mountain missions.

They are the ones who are going to be called when it

(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)



(U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

comes to fighting in the mountains because this is their craft that they have learned and practiced, said Wageman.

The drilling has done more than increase their skill; it has helped build confidence and unit cohesion.

"It's very good for the Soldiers it helps them be more confident in their equipment, helps build teamwork because they're all working together," said Cavoli.

Training to be proficient in all the techniques means that they devote all their time to mastering their Soldier tasks.

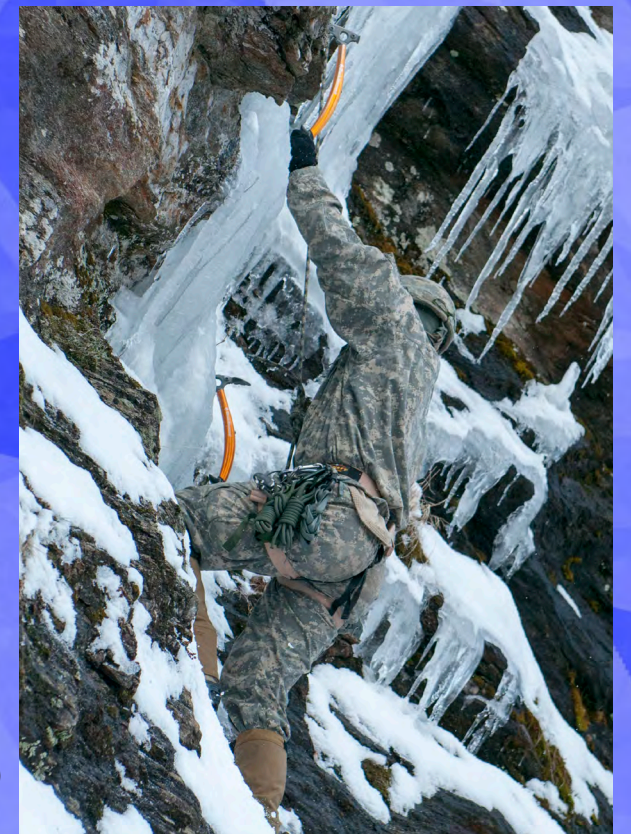
"No wasted time," said Wageman. "Even if there is downtime you have classroom training, you're going out doing land navigation, going over tying knots, setting up your harnesses, setting up tents, practicing fire maneuver patrols, everything. The second you make it to drill, you hit the ground running."

Some of that time is devoted to training for the cold weather that presents an additional challenge for the Soldiers.

"It's just finding these new problems and building on good ways to fix them," said Cavoli.

Despite all their hard work, the Soldiers' morale is high. They're all having a good time and walking away with smiles on their faces.

"As long as the Soldiers are smiling, but tired at the end of the drill, they had a good time," said Cavoli.



(Photos by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)



COMBAT

HAMMER

Combat Hammer is a Weapon System Evaluation Program that evaluates the effectiveness in precision guided of munitions when employed in air to ground combat. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Tatro)



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Bart Benckert and Tech. Sgt. Keith Zeno, of the 158th Fighter Wing Weapons Squadron, load a BDU-56 bomb on an F-16 Fighting Falcon during operation Combat Hammer at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016.



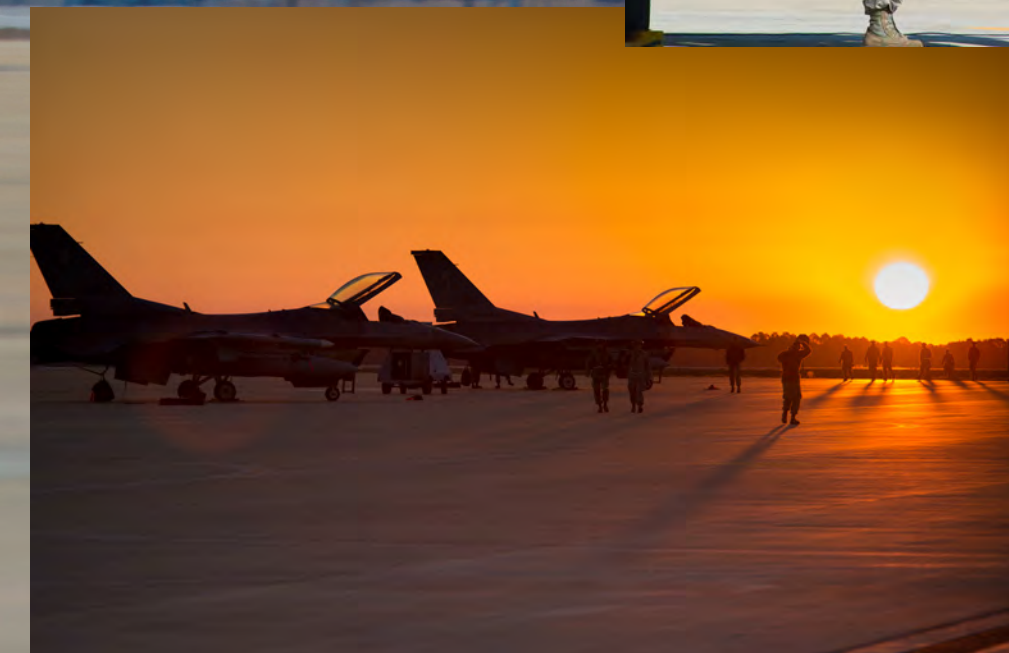
U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Chris Arnell, with the 158th Fighting Wing Maintenance Squadron, performs maintenance on an F-16 Fighting Falcon during operation Combat Hammer at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016.

BELOW: An F-16 Fighting Falcon, assigned to the 134th Fighter Squadron, 158th Fighter Wing, sits on the flight line as an F-35 Lightning II takes off during operation Combat Hammer at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016.



ABOVE: Members of the 158th Fighter Wing Weapons Squadron load an AGM-65 missile to an F-16 Fighting Falcon during operation Combat Hammer at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016.

BACKGROUND IMAGE: An F-16 Fighting Falcon assigned to the 134th Fighter Squadron, 158th Fighter Wing, takes off during operation Combat Hammer at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016.



Airmen with the 158th Fighter Wing Maintenance Squadron conduct an early morning foreign object debris walk before daily operations on the flight line at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Feb. 8, 2016.

Mission Swap

Story By Staff Sgt. Victoria Greenia
158th Fighter Wing

SOUTH BURLINGTON, Vt. - It's the first time the Vermont Air National Guard's Command Post controllers have swapped place with their Air Mobility Command (AMC) counterparts; in January they went to a guard base in Rhode Island where they got to see what their colleagues with a different mission focus do in their daily tasks.

In what the VTANG's Command Post Superintendent Senior Master Sgt. Julie Krause calls a "controller swap," two Rhode Island controllers were airlifted to Vermont by their C-130J aircraft in order to switch with seven VTANG controllers who traveled down in their stead to resume the air mobility mission.

The swap was a first for the base and Krause described its concept as "career broadening, a deployment preview and a way to improve customer service for when the base has incoming cargo crafts." Experiences

like these smooth the differences between Airmen with similar, but still very unique missions, delivering seamless interoperability when collaboration is needed.

Senior Airman Tiffany Thompson, a controller for three years with the VTANG, said she had a fantastic time while switching places with her Rhode Island counterparts. The only bad thing she had to say about the experience is that she left too early – she would love to spend more time, engrossed in the different world of the AMC. In that setting, controllers working with cargo craft spend more time interacting with the pilots and participate in different types of planning, things that could be required while on a tour of duty.

"They have a different way of flight following than we do, and if we were to deploy chances are we'd be doing an AMC mission," Thompson noted.

But, as Krause wanted, Thompson said that the experience left her with more than just a deployment preview; she now feels comfortable with the idea that if her career path leads to other types of command posts, she has the self-confidence that she can acclimate to the necessary job demands.

Meanwhile, Staff Sgt. Sarah Nichols, a command post controller from Quonset who came to Vermont as part of the swap, said she found the experience to be an eye-



United States Airmen from the Vermont Air National Guard's Command Post fly in a C-130J aircraft to participate in a mission-swap with Rhode Island counterparts in January 2016.

opener. Some of the exercises she participated in while with the Green Mountain Boys were things she had learned in technical school, but hadn't used since, and it was nice to reaffirm that unused part of her expertise.

"I would do this again in a blink of an eye," she said. "I was able to see how another base operates and see how their missions are executed."

She said she hopes to come back when the VTANG has the F-35s as well as see other bases and how they function.

Nichols may get her wish. According to Krause they are already planning a second swap, and she hopes it will be long enough so that both parties get a really good taste of what it's like to work with other types of aircraft and management systems. Krause also said she hopes that this is something that could spread to work with other bases.

Story & Photos By Staff Sgt.
Chelsea Clark
158th Fighter Wing

Celebrating Diversity

BURLINGTON, Vt. - In honor of Black History Month, the Cultural Diversity Enhancement Team (CDET) invited Dr. Wanda Heading-Grant from the University of Vermont (UVM) to speak with members of the Vermont National Guard on inclusion and diversity issues Feb. 6, 2016, at the Vermont Air National Guard (VTANG).

As the Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, Heading-Grant shared her knowledge and passion for broadening people's concepts what it means to accept and work with people who may come from different backgrounds.

An open understanding can help create a respectful community for all individuals and is particularly important for people to feel to excel in the workplace.

In recent years, the Vermont National Guard has made it a priority to foster "a culture of respect" by embracing all types of backgrounds and personalities; the result being a stronger and enriched military.

In Heading-Grant's talk which included strategies of working with different personalities and finding the strengths in groups that may have

special challenges, one focus was on what she calls "the isms"; particularly racism and sexism which can make people feel separated and create hostile workplace situations.

"The cost of all these 'isms' is the loss of good talent, lawsuits and racial profiling," she told the group of Army and Air Guard members, and then stressed that each person in the room had the ability to include diversity and embrace the strength it gives an organization.

This sentiment is shared by Tech. Sgt. Sophia Kater, Wing Knowledge Manager, who volunteers as an Equal Employment Counselor, a Black Employment Program Manager and an active CDET representative.

Kater, who has lived in the Deep South as now in Vermont, firmly believes that exposure to diversity is essential to every military member who may be put in new situations with people of different cultures and traditions. She was one of the people who coordinated Heading-Grant's visit to the base.

"When you grow up and venture out, you realize there are many types of cultures from all walks of life, different backgrounds and different skin



Dr. Wanda Heading-Grant, Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs at the University of Vermont, speaks to members of the Vermont National Guard

tones," Kater advocated for inclusion in the military.

By holding events such as Hispanic food nights and professional women forums, Kater and the CDET provide channels for military members to engage in conversation about diversity across the board. The events are open to both Army and Air Guard members, and the team itself is comprised of both services so that voices on both sides can be heard.

Symposiums such as Heading-Grant's provide an outlet of open dialogue and discussion for the community of guardsmen across the state. As

its own community the military has the potential, and maybe the responsibility, to provide a model of a culture of respect. Only by consistently bringing the topics of diversity and acceptance to the surface can barriers be broken and bridges be formed.

U.S. Army Col. Sherman Hunt, a Battalion Commander with the Vermont Army National Guard, and Chief Master Sgt. Alina Wright, a Vermont Air Guard member with the National Guard Bureau, receive awards for their pioneering contributions to the Vermont National Guard.



From Vermont to Puerto Rico

Story and Photos By
Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard
172nd Public Affairs Detachment

15th Civil Support Team Evaluation

CAROLINA, Puerto Rico - Every 18 months Civil Support Teams must take part in a training proficiency evaluation to determine if they are mission capable.

“The most important part to come out of that accreditation is for us to tell the governor of our respective state, wherever the CST is located, that we have a certain level of training and that we are judged to be highly proficient in bringing that resource to him for whatever is needed,” said Lt. Col. Randall Gates, commander, 15th Civil Support Team, Vermont National Guard.

The TPE can be a nerve-racking task and measures the capabilities of units. The evaluation by itself is intensive, but the 15th CST added an additional tasking to test their unit. They were going to airlift the unit to their evaluation.

To the best of their knowledge, no other CST unit has performed an airlift and then conducted their TPE. This gave the unit a reduced timeline for the evaluation and turned up the pressure.

“The biggest thing for us was taking two separate tasks and kind of smashing them together,” said Staff Sgt. Mason Lord, survey team chief. “Air load is an evaluated task via the command and then to pair that with TPE, so we do a whole bunch of work in order to prep up for both things and then you take that air load section and once you’re done with that you still have TPE.”

The air load task was the first mission to accomplish and the CST received some help from the 158th Fighter Wing. The Wing is known for their F-16 fighter jets and doesn’t house airlift planes, but they worked months in advance to make sure the CST had a lift.

U.S. Air Force Capt. Zachary Clark, installation deployment officer, 158th FW, and his team coordinated flights with the 164th Airlift Squadron in Tennessee and the 172nd Airlift Squadron in Mississippi to get the Vermont Guardsmen to Puerto Rico.

Clark said there were difficulties because they do not have a full-time air transportation specialist, but they made contacts with other units to accomplish the mission. He also said it was the first time they loaded this equipment

with the special guidelines they had to follow due to the size of the specialized CST equipment.

“There’s some certifications that are required because of the size of the cargo is bigger than most air force cargo, so there’s specific guidelines to how it can be loaded, where it can be put on an aircraft, what type of chains and what type of stuff needs to be put into it, so again, the aircraft is loaded safely and can fly, so nothing breaks apart.”

The departure airlift was successful and all members of the unit flew out on Sunday with return flights scheduled for Friday. To an outside source, this sounds like a weeklong vacation from the Vermont winter in a sunny location, but the unit knew better. The airlift was just the beginning of an intense week.

“Our work tempo was go,” said Lord. “From the time we got off the plane to the time we got back on the plane. We didn’t do anything else, but our TPE evaluation and our air load, both exiting from the plane and prepping to get back on the plane on Friday. A six day turn around with a lane in the middle is an extremely tight timeline.”

The commander knew this timeline was tight and he had to ensure they could accomplish the evaluation in those six days.

“We put those pieces together along with that airlift and I think the team knocked it out of the park, as expected.”



U.S. Staff Sgt. Rusty Greeno (center), survey team member, and Sgt. Dorian Quarumby (right), survey team member, 15th Civil Support Team, Vermont National Guard, walk toward the simulated hazardous area for a man-down drill.

“We actually went to the evaluators and said, ‘could we make a longer primary evaluation on Tuesday, make it a longer day and forgo a second evaluation,’” said Gates. “They were receptive to that, but they had some concerns. They were clear in telling us, that there wouldn’t be any second chance. We’re asking for the removal in the schedule of that second lane, we have to take whatever they assess on the first day.”

This decision compressed the timeline of two training lanes into one extremely long day.

“We put all of our eggs in one basket essentially and had a 21-hour duration event on that Tuesday,” said Gates. “It was a very long day. We got up at 4[am] and we got back to our hotels at about 1230 in the morning...it was a long day.”

That long day was felt during the evaluation. There was a huge temperature change from Vermont to Puerto Rico and the team noticed it.

“We’re going from 20 degrees or lower to 85 degrees, getting in Level A suits, putting on air packs and expecting to perform your job with a 50-60 degree temperature difference,” said Potvin.

“When a team member is in their fully encapsulated suit, with their breathing apparatus, it still gets very very hot and that’s outside temperature and how hot it is,” said Gates. “It’s magnified inside that suit. That suit just holds heat. We have ways to keep them cool, but they only last for a short period of time, so that was the biggest challenge that we had.”

While team members were monitored and leadership focused on the safety of it’s Soldiers and Airmen, the survey team knew it had a job to do.

“For me, in the survey section we make our money downrange,” said Lord. “So when you are doing hour and twenty minute, hour and half, hour and forty minute entries on a SCBA bottle that is only designed to take people 45 minutes, I think that speaks a lot to my unit’s commitment to our physical fitness and how these guys perform under high-heat/high-stress environments.”

Even in the heat, all members of the team had a job to do. Survey is only part of the evaluation.

“We are looking for their 12 collective tasks,” said Karl Nagel, exercise specialist, Midwest Team, U.S. Army North. “The CST has 12 collective tasks. All the way from deploy a CST unit, to redeploy a CST unit, to survey operations.”

Nagel said that each section has duties to fulfill; the analytical lab, medical section, operations section, and command element all have tasks to complete. Each section of the CST is specialized and each is evaluated throughout the event. With only 22 people in the unit, they needed to pull together for each tasking.

“Teamwork. This team pulled it off,” said Potvin. “We got together when we needed to do a job. We got it done. When things needed to be done that

were outside their job scope, they did it. When we had to be flexible, we were. When we had to make sure that we hit every piece of that evaluation with all the minutiae and all the different things going on, we pulled together and did it and we did it safely.”

“There isn’t a guy on this team that I won’t bend over backwards to help at any time and being only 22 guys deep, I think that kind of resonates through the rest of the unit,” said Lord. “I like being part of a team that is willing

U.S. Army Sgt. Darwin Jurentkuff, survey, team member, 15th Civil Support Team, Vermont National Guard, searches for hazardous material.



to help regardless. All the way from the Lt. Col. loading stanchions and stuff for the air load to Sgt. Pasquale, who is our brand new guy and couldn't operate downrange with us, but was just the guy that you could go to, to be like, 'can you go grab this for me?,' short notice and he would literally run from one point to another to get it for you. So that kind of gaps the spectrum on the attitude and how they perceive our mission and what they want to make successful."

Their ability to pull together led to success on this mission. This was one of the largest locations the unit has performed in. Their evaluation took place in the Roberto Clemente Stadium in Carolina, Puerto Rico.

"I think the thing that surprised me the most was the size of the venue," said Mason. "We've had some big venues, we've never had a 12,000 seat baseball arena to kind of sit back in the footprint and kind of say 'phew, that's a big operation', so just the sheer size of it was my biggest surprise. We've had big buildings on this scale, but nothing to that kind of grandiose plan."

The team was searching for toxins that hospitalized more than 10 people. They didn't know what caused the injuries and the survey team would have to methodically check the stadium for sources. They are the eyes for the command as they search for suspicious objects.

"We're the guys [survey] that go down range and explain to the people sitting back at the footprint what we are seeing," said Lord. "A lot of people would walk downrange to the site we went to and see a water cooler and think it was just a water cooler, but a water cooler with a water valve on the front seems odd to our guys because we are used to looking for that."

The water cooler had a metal valve instead of a normal plastic one. The survey team marked it for sampling and took photographs to analyze. After sampling, the bacterium that causes botulism was found as a contamination. The CDC reports botulism as a serious paralytic illness caused by a nerve toxin and common symptoms are double

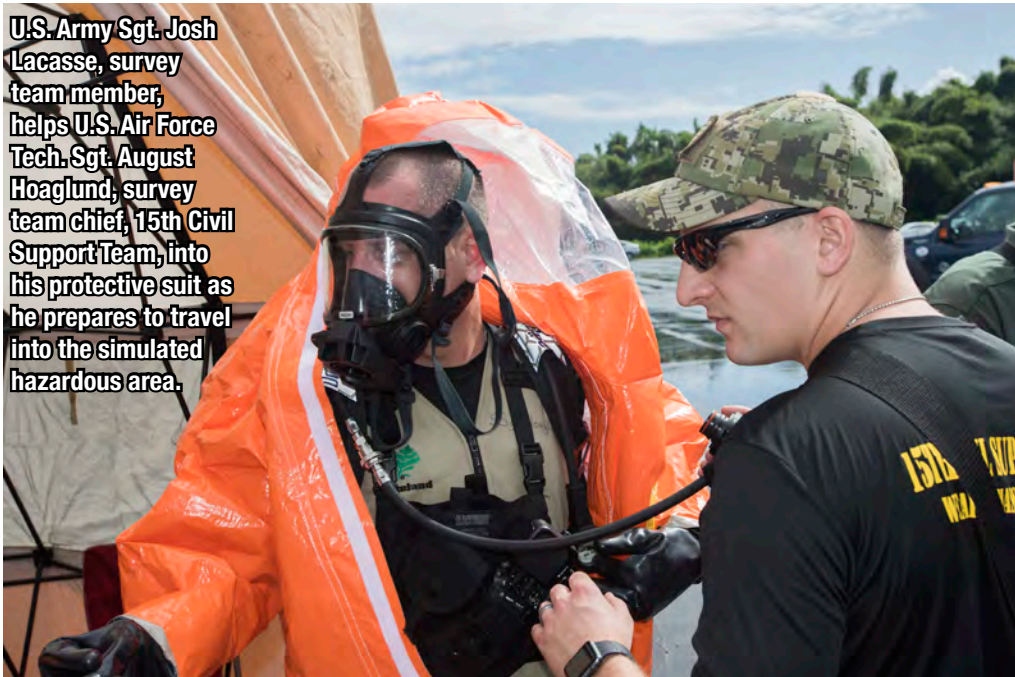


The 15th Civil Support Team loads a C-17 Globemaster as they prepare to fly to Puerto Rico for the unit's training proficiency evaluation.



Vermont Guardsmen align ramps on a C-17 Globemaster to load 15th Civil Support Team vehicles and trailers as they prepare to fly.

U.S. Army Sgt. Josh Lacasse, survey team member, helps U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. August Hoaglund, survey team chief, 15th Civil Support Team, into his protective suit as he prepares to travel into the simulated hazardous area.



U.S. Army Sgt. Darwin Jurentkuff, survey team member, uses a MutliRAE Pro and RadEye to check for toxic chemicals and radiation.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Rusty Greeno, survey team member, rinses U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. August Hoaglund, survey team chief, 15th Civil Support Team, during decontamination for a man-down drill



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Mason Lord (left), survey team chief, and Sgt. Josh Lacasse (right), survey team member, 15th Civil Support Team, prepare their cart, "Johnny-Five", before surveying additional areas during the unit's training proficiency evaluation.

or blurred vision, slurred speech, and muscle weakness.

Other areas were marked throughout their survey and sampled. Caesium-137 was also found in the stadium. According to the CDC, it is produced by nuclear fission and can be used to calibrate radiation-detection equipment as well as treat cancer through radiation therapy. However, exposure in large amounts can cause burns, acute radiation sickness, and even death.

While all the elements are notional and the team members are not in any real chemical danger, they perform and follow procedure as if they were.

"We set up a decontamination lane, we can't move down range unless we have that set up at a minimum," said Gates. "Then we structure our survey teams to go down, take a look around, record things and then set the conditions for further follow on sampling team. The sampling goes down and takes samples of the liquid, of the powder, of some sort of substance that needs to be analyzed and then we bring it back and we analyze it for a presumptive answer to tell the incident commander. We believe it's this, but it needs to be further analyzed by another sophisticated laboratory."

Performing their evaluation by the book is what led to their ranking on the evaluation.

"On the out brief, we were judged as fully mission capable and it was definitely worth all the effort that we put into it," said Gates.

"The team knocked out every task, fully trained, fully mission capable," said Potvin. "We put those pieces together along with that airlift and I think the team knocked it out of the park, as expected."

Ski...Shoot...Ski

Story By **Spc. Avery Cunningham**
172nd Public Affairs Detachment

JERICO, Vt. - Gliding quickly across the snow, a skier pushes off with his poles, tossing snow behind him. The skier is followed by another and then another; all of them wear Army uniforms. The skiers, Soldiers from Alpha Company, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), participate in snow mobility training at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Feb. 6, 2016, as part of the unit's focus on mountain skills training.

"The focus for the entire winter was to return Alpha Company to some of the mountain roots that it prides itself on," said 1st Sgt. Daniel Westover, the company 1st sergeant for A/3-172nd INF.

The training is substantially different from other training that most infantry units perform on a regular basis.

"It expands into a very specialized skill set," said Spc. John Nicastro, an infantryman and a new transfer to the unit. "You're not going to go into any other line infantry company and going to know how to do ice climbing and cross-country skiing in a combat environment."

As part of the mountaineering focus, the company practices both downhill and cross-country skiing.

Last drill they had a downhill ski day, said Westover. They're working on skiing cross-country style here, so they're continuing to grow on the over-snow mobility.

This drill, the unit combines skiing with shooting as a mini-biathlon to train Soldiers to shoot under duress.

They're planning on sending them on a one and a half kilometer loop three times, with shooting in between laps, said Staff Sgt. Joshua Cobb, a squad leader. This is an extreme test not only of their ability to ski and to shoot, but also of their ability to shoot under stress.



Familiarizing Soldiers with a new, different weapon adds an element that the M16 rifle lacks.

Using the biathlon weapons is an unexpected advantage, said Cobb. An unusual weapon gives the men confidence in being able to pick up a new weapons system that could be completely foreign to them, learn about it quickly and then implement when needed.

The new training brings the Soldiers together as a unit to face the challenge.

"A lot of us are trying something new for the first time, so we get to try it out together," said Nicastro. "It's a good cohesion activity."

Despite the new training, the Soldiers are learning quickly.

A lot of the Soldiers new to skiing have shown great improvement and can now move themselves from point A to point B without difficulty, said Westover.

"The men have been getting a lot more comfortable and proficient with their equipment and their own personal skills," said Cobb "The amount of skill that I have seen has increased a lot from last month to this month."

A large part of the company's success can be attributed to the mentoring between Soldiers.

(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)

Soldiers were coaching others under the guidance of team and squad leaders, said Nicastro.

The experienced unit leadership use their skills to teach the Soldiers and to set an example.

The higher leadership at the company level are experienced and skilled in mountaineering and over-snow mobility tasks, said Cobb. "They set the bar high for me even; I think when our Soldiers see that, see that even I'm trying; they have to keep trying."

The Soldiers don't only work on their skill set during drill, they work hard between drills to better their skills.

"Some Soldiers definitely take advantage of the equipment that we have to offer them," said Cobb. "They use it on their own time whether it's their own climbing racks, or practicing knots to make themselves proficient or ski to make themselves better on the slopes."

Though not currently in use in combat, the skills have been used in prior engagements and may be critical in the future.

The 10th Mountain Division conducted skiing and over-snow mobility missions during World War II and the skills have not been deployed since, said Westover. However, looking at possible scenarios in the Arctic where there is flat tundra terrain, cross-country skiing would be the most practical way to move troops around.

The training is great exercise for conditioning the Soldiers.

"If nothing else, it's awesome physical exercise, so at the



(Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Spc. Avery Cunningham)

end of the day I'm going to have quite a few tired soldiers," said Westover.

The training so far has greatly improved morale.

"There were definitely some people who were a little intimidated by that mission and from what we've seen so far -- I've seen guys that are really liking it, they seem happy doing it and I haven't really heard anybody complaining about it -- I think it's a success," said Westover.

The training has proven to be a success. It's this training that keeps the A/3-172nd INF prepared for missions. The skill set they attain from the training gives them a wide variety of abilities and improves the morale and cohesion of the unit.



(U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Sarah Mattison)

STAFF RIDE TO THE PAST

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
STAFF SGT. NATHAN RIVARD
172ND PUBLIC AFFAIRS DETACHMENT

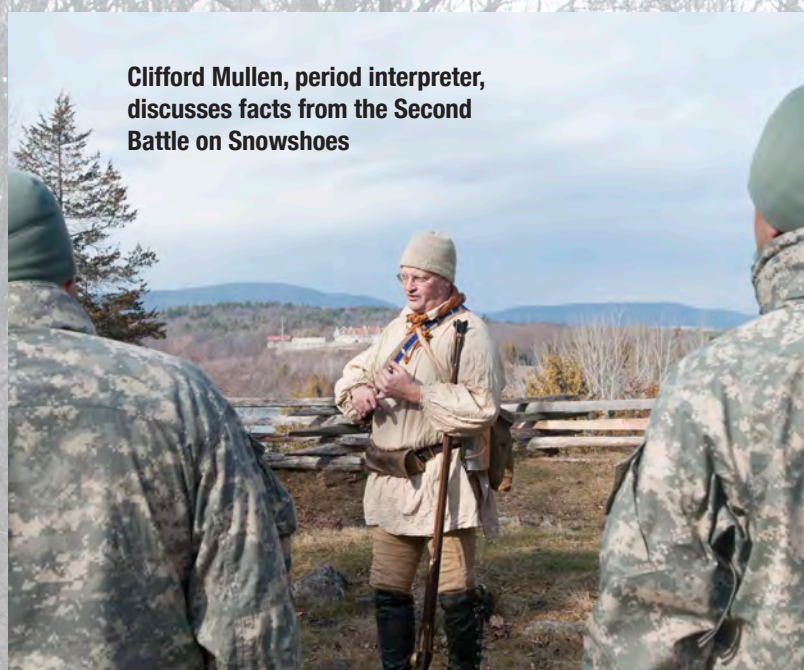
ORWELL, Vt. - Vermont and Northern New York contains location after location of historical military battles. The staff of Headquarters Headquarters Company, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), took a staff ride to Mount Independence to examine a site of one of the many historical battles.

“This gives our officers an opportunity to learn about and apply the principles of warfare that they’ve been taught, but to a different setting than what we do normally,” said Lt. Col. Justin Davis, executive officer, HHC 86th IBCT. “It also gives us an opportunity to experience or to gain an appreciation for local history and that’s important partially for this unit because so much of the inception of the United States took place right here in this area. Right here in the Champlain valley.”

Retired 1st Sgt. Clifford Mullen led the Soldiers throughout



Clifford Mullen, period interpreter, discusses facts from the Second Battle on Snowshoes



the grounds of Mount Independence. Mullen is a period interpreter who not only provides historical information on the time period, but also dresses the part and carries authentic equipment. His biggest lesson for the Soldiers was that while the times may change, tactics stay the same.

“A lot of the importance deals with understanding principles of tactics and the principles of troop leadership do not change. Somebody else has already dealt with much of the problems we deal with now. It’s a matter of learning what they did to solve their problems. Technology changes the specifics, but the principles haven’t changed. In understanding how leaders solved things before is a great way to understand how to solve things now.”

Newly promoted Maj. David Sly, intelligence officer, enjoyed the history and took part in discussion of the similarities of these events.

“I think it’s a morale builder because it gives us a chance to see our lineage and our history and what it dates back to around here,” said Sly. “We go around and see what they had to deal with on a daily basis, what they had consider and we compare that to things we have to consider. A lot of differences, but there are a lot of similarities too. There is a lot we can gain from looking at their struggles and applying the same type of mindset, the same type of mettle to dealing with our struggles.”

The battle they were studying was the Second Battle on Snowshoes between French forces from Fort Carillon, now known as Fort Ticonderoga, in New York, and a British Ranger company led by Capt. Robert Rogers, famous for ‘Rogers’ Rangers’. This battle was part of the French and Indian War.

Clifford Mullen, period interpreter, shows the length troops could travel from Canada to New York using waterways

The battle was originally a reconnaissance mission for Capt. Rogers. He and his Rangers trekked from



U.S. Army Maj. Doran Metzger, brigade aviation officer, Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), attempts to start a fire during the unit’s staff ride

Fort Edwards to Fort Carillon in more than four feet of snow. The battle itself began as an ambush from Rogers’ Rangers, but his force was decimated when they charged without reloading after the French’s initial retreat. The majority of his men were killed in the battle.

The lost battle was not the focus of the staff ride. The operation of the mission, tactics used, logistics, and even survival skills were the focus. Soldiers have even used these learning points in this time period.

“I’ve used tactics I’ve picked up from 200 years previously as a squad leader, which in one specific case allowed me to defeat a platoon with a seven man squad,” said Mullen. It was a hilarious.”

Mullen said during training he set up groups of Soldiers as ‘shock-absorbers’ and as they started to engage opposing forces they would break contact and run further back into their next position. This caused the opposing force to

waste ammunition and keep losing forces.

While the tactics were noteworthy, Soldiers also enjoyed other learning moments.

“Talking about the battles is interesting,” said Sly. “We also learned survival tactics from 1st Sgt, retired Mullen and Lt. Col. Davis. Just a wealth of knowledge on what life was like then and how they survived without all the comforts and Gen. 3 Seven-layer systems [cold weather gear] we have now.”

One of the survival skills was creating fire-building materials from cloth and starting a fire using flint and steel. Lt Col. Davis also brought food Soldiers from the time period would have eaten and cooked their dinner over the fire the same way Rogers’ Rangers would have.

The staff ride finished the night with Soldiers sleeping outside without tents in Vermont’s February cold. These Soldiers did have the comfort of modern developed sleeping bags compared to those of Rogers’ Rangers.

U.S. Army 1st. Lt. Neal Rhodes, operations officer, Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Mountain), starts a fire as Soldiers did during the 18th century



MOUNTAIN WALK

**Story By Spc. Avery Cunningham
172nd Public Affairs Detachment**

JEFFERSONVILLE, Vt. - Soldiers from the basic and advanced courses at the Army Mountain Warfare School climbed Smugglers' Notch as the culminating event of two weeks of training in Jeffersonville, Vermont, Feb. 18, 2016. The course event, referred to as the "Mountain Walk," winds its way through steep terrain and ice up the mountain and then back down, with a rappel at the end.

"It's a chance to get into a true alpine environment, to see rock and ice they haven't seen anywhere else," said Sgt. 1st Class Nick Ash, an instructor at the Army Mountain Warfare School. It is a full-on mountaineering, alpine experience, which they should leave here with as military mountaineers.

For thirty years the event has been the culmination of all the students have learned.

The Mountain Warfare School has been coming to Smugglers' Notch since the 80s, said Ash. They put all the skills they've learned in the past two weeks into practice. They set up their tents to spend the night, perform team tasks, and then they move through the mountain with techniques they've practiced.

The adjutant general of Vermont, along with other Vermont National Guard leadership, joins the students annually during the Mountain Walk to refresh what the course teaches and the importance of mountain skills training.

"We need to experience it, so we can say, 'yes, it's a good program.' We support the program," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Kim Siner, the command chief warrant officer of Vermont. "I think it's good for morale to see the command do the same thing."

It's an opportunity for the school to display the skills and work involved in mountain warfare.

Sgt. Ryan Hawley, student, 1st Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment, Colorado National Guard, climbs the mountain at Smugglers' Notch in Jeffersonville, Vt., Feb. 18, 2016. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)

U.S. Army Soldiers rappel a cliff face on Smugglers' Notch in Jeffersonville, Vt., Feb. 18, 2016. U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)



A U.S. Army Soldier rappels a cliff face on Smugglers' Notch in Jeffersonville, Vt., Feb. 18, 2016. The rappel was during the Mountain Walk, which is a culminating event for basic and advanced mountain warfare students to use the skills, taught at the Mountain Warfare School. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Steven Cray, the adjutant general of Vermont, climbs the mountain at Smugglers' Notch in Jeffersonville, Vt., Feb. 18, 2016. The adjutant general of Vermont, along with other Vermont National Guard leadership, performed a Mountain Walk with basic and advanced mountain warfare students to gain a better understanding of the Mountain Warfare School and to refresh their mountaineering skills. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Nathan Rivard)



"The benefit of VIPs coming out on the Mountain Walk is that they get a view of what it is that we do and how involved and technical it is," said Ash.

The Mountain Walk challenges Soldiers, both physically and mentally.

"The rappel was a little frightening to me, but I did it," said Siner. "It's a challenge and the best thing you can do with your fear is overcome it."

For any Soldier going through the course it's important to have confidence and the right frame of mind.

"Don't ever think you can't, just take the word can't right out of your vocabulary. You can do it. You just have to muster up a little extra courage. You might have to dig deep and find some strength when you think you're just a little too tired, but you can succeed," said Siner.