

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

State’s Best Warriors Strive For Top Titles



(Above) **EmptyTank**: Sgt. Connor Alberts, 72nd Civil Support Team, exerts all of his energy as he crosses the finish line of his two-mile Army Physical Fitness Test run, March 2, during Nebraska’s Best Warrior competition.

(Left) **Warrior Climbs**: A competitor pushes himself up and over an obstacle at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 3, during the Nebraska National Guard’s 2017 Best Warrior competition.

See stories and photos on 15-16.

Aerial refuelers set yearly flying record... again

By Capt. Alex Salmon
Staff Photojournalist

For the second time in as many years, the Nebraska Air National Guard’s Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing set a record for number of hours flown.

During fiscal year 2016, the 155th Air Refueling Wing’s eight aircraft and assembled flight crews accumulated a total of 6,665 hours in the air. That number is up from the previous year’s total of 5,211 hours and dwarfs 2014’s total of 2,502.

The unit, located at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Nebraska, flies the KC-135R Stratotanker, which is primarily tasked with aerial refueling but can also be used for transporting passengers and cargo.

According to Col. Bob Stevenson, 155th ARW commander, the increase in flying hours can be directly attributed to many of the unit’s aircraft being deployed to the U.S. Central Command and U.S. Pacific Command areas of responsibility. At any given point during the past

year, up to three of the 155th ARW’s planes were deployed.

“Our Citizen Airmen have answered their nation’s call consistently and exceptionally,” Stevenson said. “Nebraska has always been operationally in the top third of the Air National Guard mission, so we are not unique in this effort, but near the top.”

“The Air National Guard brings incredible value to both the nation’s warfighting missions and the American taxpayer,” Stevenson said. “We have had a constant presence in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility while also increasing our presence in the U.S. Pacific Command area. Additionally, we continue to train in our nuclear readiness mission.”

To put the numbers into perspective, it would take a three-person crew flying an aircraft 24/7 approximately seven months straight to accomplish what the 155th ARW did in Fiscal Year 2016. The record number of flying hours is even more impressive considering a few of

See FLYING HOURS on 4.

Former 67th Brigade commander, assistant adjutant general dies

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

“He was a person you would follow through hell because you just had so much faith in him.”

That’s how retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Bill Nelson described the late Brig. Gen. Kenneth Dermann, a former 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized) commander and Nebraska Army National Guard assistant adjutant general

who died on Feb. 7 at the age of 89.

A World War II veteran who served in the Pacific Theater Operations as a U.S. Navy Sailor aboard an American minesweeper ship, Dermann served in the Nebraska Army National in a variety of leadership roles that culminated



Dermann

in his assignments with the 67th Infantry Brigade and as the Nebraska Army National Guard assistant adjutant general in the mid-1980s.

According to those who served with Dermann, the retired brigadier general was a consummate professional military officer and caring gentleman.

“He was a great leader,” said retired Brig. Gen. Dayle Williamson, who followed Dermann as commander of the 67th Infantry

Brigade in 1983. According to Williamson, he first met Dermann in the mid-1950s. “We had a number of World War II veterans when I came in and we used to kid Ken because he had served in the Navy. But, we were extremely lucky to have gotten him into the Nebraska Army National Guard. He was really a Soldier’s Soldier. He would talk to anyone and he truly took the time to get to know people and to get to know the issues closely.”

Dermann was born on June 15,

1927, on his family’s farm near Talmage, Nebraska.

After graduating from Nebraska City High School in 1944, he attended the University of Nebraska where he lettered in football before enlisting in the U.S. Navy on April 28, 1945. He served in the Pacific Theater aboard the USS Harrier minesweeper until July 18, 1946, and then served in the U.S. Navy Reserve until May 1, 1947.

Dermann’s National Guard

See DERMANN on 9.

Nebraska Airmen support presidential inauguration

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Mission complete.

Those were the two words that nine members of the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Force Support Squadron brought back with them from a unique mission to support the inauguration of President Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States.

The nine Lincoln-based Airmen were part of a contingent of more than 7,500 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from 44 states, three territories and the District of Columbia who supported the inauguration as part of Joint Task Force-District of Columbia. While in D.C., the Nebraskans provided food support for military personnel supporting the inaugural activities.

“Our mission was to support the Army people who were supporting the inauguration, keeping them fed at the time and location that they needed to be fed,” said Master Sgt. Jennifer Gubbels, a member of the squadron’s Services Flight who serves as the dining facility manager back in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Guardsmen departed for their six-day mission on Jan. 17 aboard a Kansas Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker. In order to aid them with their missions, the Airmen deployed with their Single Pallet Expeditionary Kitchen – or

See INAUGURATION on 4.



Photo courtesy of the 155th Force Support Squadron

Serving Up A Meal Before The Presidential Inauguration: Airman 1st Class, Ethan Haberman, 155th Force Support Squadron, serves a U.S. Army Soldier, Jan. 20, while supporting the Presidential Inauguration activities at Fort Belvoir, Va. Haberman was one of nine members of the Nebraska Air National Guard tasked with supporting the Jan. 20 inauguration activities.

Nebraska Army Guard cavalymen exchange ‘Pikes’ for ‘Bowie’ knives

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Cavalry saber... meet Bowie knife. Razorbacks... meet Cornhuskers.

That was the scene that unfolded at the Mead Training Site’s Titan Readiness Center, Dec. 10, as the Nebraska Army National Guard’s 1-134th Cavalry officially became members of the Arkansas Army National Guard’s 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team during a patching ceremony held at the readiness center drill floor.

During the ceremony, which was attended by the 39th Infantry BCT commander and command sergeant major, the Soldiers of the Nebraska cavalry squadron pulled off the “Pike” patches they had worn as members of Nebraska’s 67th Battlefield Surveillance Bri-

See CAVALRY on 6.

Inside

Army National Guard kicks off year with Fit For Life annual training

See story and photos on 3.



Air transportation specialists conduct rare training

See story and photos on 4.



Index

- News Briefs 2
- Photo Story 3
- Family News 12
- Editorials... 13
- Sports 15-16

NEWS DIGEST

■Trump honors service members during military ball

WASHINGTON (DoDNEWS) — President Donald J. Trump and First Lady Melania Trump honored members of the armed forces, thanking them for their sacrifice and service during the Salute to Our Armed Services Ball at the National Building Museum, Jan. 20.

“I want to thank you on behalf of Melania, myself, the family and the millions of people all over the world,” Trump said. “The job you’ve done is absolutely incredible, absolutely incredible.”

Via live link, he addressed service members at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

“How is it over there?” he asked them.

“Congratulations on becoming the president of the United States,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Phillip Campbell of the Illinois Army National Guard.

Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Robert Gala, who advises and assists coalition partners in Afghanistan, echoed Campbell’s sentiment. “On behalf of all the Marines here in Afghanistan, we’d just like to say congratulations and good luck to you on your term,” he said.

Trump said he enjoyed receiving congratulations from the service members in Afghanistan. “You are the nicest people,” he said. “Thank you very much. I’m with you all the way. You have somebody that’s going to be right alongside you. We’re going to do it together. Honestly, not only the support you’ve given me, but the courage you show is

incredible, and it’s going to be appreciated. It’s going to be appreciated more than ever before.

“We are with you a thousand percent,” Trump continued. “Keep fighting. We’re going to win. We’re going to win. I have your back. We’re going to make America great again.”

The first lady also offered her appreciation to the service members. “I thank you all for your service,” she said. “I’m honored to be your first lady. We will fight. We will win, and we will make America great again.”

At the start of the evening’s event, Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, the senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked U.S. service members in Baghdad via satellite, “Are we taking the fight to the enemy over there?”

“Hooah,” the team responded.

Troxell then asked them, “As the world watches today, as America demonstrates democracy through the peaceful transition of power what does it mean for you to be part of this historic day for our nation?”

“On behalf of the members here of the Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, we are extremely proud to be part of this historic moment,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Rob Frasier, 1st Infantry Division. “We’re honored to serve and to work with our Iraqi partners and our coalition partners to continue to make Iraq safe for the people here.”

■Vice Chiefs: Budget controls must be lifted to boost readiness

WASHINGTON (DoDNEWS) — Military readiness will suffer if the budget constraints imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 are not repealed and are allowed to again take effect in fiscal year 2018, the military’s vice chiefs of staff told members of the House Armed Services Committee, Feb. 7.

Testifying before the full committee were Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Daniel B. Allyn, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. Stephen W. Wilson, Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. William F. Moran and Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Glenn M. Walters.

“This is a challenging time for our nation, and our Army,” Allyn said. “The unipolar moment is over and replacing it is a multipolar world characterized by competition and uncertainty. Today, the Army is globally engaged, with more than 182,000 Soldiers supporting combatant commanders in over 140 worldwide locations.”

To meet the demands of today’s unstable global security environment and maintain the trust placed in soldiers by the American people, the Army requires sustained long-term and predictable funding, he said.

“Adding additional legislation, the caps set by the Budget Control Act of 2011 will return in (fiscal year 2018), forcing the Army to once again draw down or restrict, reduce funding for readiness and increase the risk of sending undertrained and poorly equipped Soldiers into harm’s way,” Allyn said. “(It’s) a

preventable risk our nation must not accept.”

He added, “The most important actions you can take... that will have both positive and lasting impact, will be to immediately repeal the 2011 Budget Control Act and ensure sufficient funding to train, man and equip the FY 17 (National Defense Authorization Act) authorized force.”

The Air Force vice chief echoed those comments. The capabilities the Air Force provides the nation and its allies have never been more vital, and the global demand for American airpower will only grow in the future, Wilson said. However, today’s Air Force is out of balance, he said.

Years of “continuous combat,” Wilson said, have limited the Air Force’s ability to prepare for the future against advanced future threats. “We’ve attempted to balance risk across (the) force to maintain readiness,” Wilson said. “And we’ve forced to make unacceptable trades between readiness for structure and modernization.”

Today’s global challenges require an Air Force that’s ready, not only to defeat violent extremism, but an Air Force prepared to modernize for any threat the nation could face, he added. “Your Air Force needs congressional support to repeal the Budget Control Act and provide stable, predictable funding. It’s critical to rebuilding our military full-spectrum readiness, is the number one priority for the secretary of defense. We need to act now, before it’s too late,” Wilson said.

Sesquicentennial Celebration



Photo by Roxanne Smith, Office of the Nebraska Capitol Commission

Nebraska Birthday: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard serve as the color guard at the start of a March 1 ceremony during which a stamp honoring Nebraska’s 150th birthday was dedicated. The ceremony was one of several the Nebraska National Guard supported during the state’s sesquicentennial celebrations.

James Mattis takes oath as 26th Secretary of Defense

WASHINGTON (DoDNEWS) — By a 98-1 vote, the Senate confirmed retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis to be the 26th secretary of defense, and Vice President Michael R. Pence administered his oath of office shortly afterward.

James Mattis took office as the 26th secretary of defense shortly after his Senate confirmation, Jan. 20, 2017.



Mattis

Mattis is the first retired general officer to hold the position since General of the Army George C. Marshall in the early 1950s. Congress passed a waiver for the retired four-star general to serve in the position, because the law requires former service members to have been out of uniform for at least seven years to serve as defense secretary. Mattis retired from the Marine Corps in 2013.

Mattis is a veteran of the Gulf War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. His military career culminated with service as commander of U.S. Central Command.

The secretary was born in Washington State and raised in Richland, Washington, graduating from high school there in 1968 and enlisting in the Marine Corps the following year. He was commissioned in the Marine Corps in 1972 after graduating from Central Washington University.

He served as a rifle and weapons platoon commander, and as a lieutenant colonel, he commanded the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines in Operation Desert Storm. In Afghanistan, he commanded some of the first troops to go into the country. In the

Iraq war, he commanded the 1st Marine Division in the drive to Baghdad in 2003.

He was instrumental in publishing the Army and Marine Corps counter-insurgency manual when he served at Marine Corps Developmental Command in Quantico, Virginia. He then commanded the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force before being chosen for four-star rank as the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command and NATO’s Allied Command Transformation in 2007. He was named Centcom commander 2010.

Mattis is a student of the study of war. Former Defense Secretary William S. Cohen called Mattis “a man of thought as well as action,” when he introduced him at the Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing last week.

The world is awash in change, Mattis told the committee. “Our country is still at war in Afghanistan, and our troops are fighting against (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and other terrorist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere,” he said. “Russia is raising grave concerns on several fronts, and China is shredding trust along its periphery.”

The “islands of stability” in the world are under attack by nonstate actors and rogue nations, Mattis said. “Our armed forces in this world must remain the best-led, the best-equipped and the most lethal in the world.”

He told the committee that he will be “the strongest possible advocate for military and civilian personnel and their families” and that he will “foster an atmosphere of harmony and trust at the department with our interagency partners and the congressional committees.”

National Guardsmen, U.S. Reservists finally receive ‘veteran’ designation

ARLINGTON, Va. (DoD-NEWS) – A recently signed law gives official veteran status to National Guard members who served 20 years or more. Previously, Guard members were considered veterans only if they served 180 days or more in a federal status outside of training.

“As long as you were deployed on active duty for at least 180 days and you didn’t get a dishonorable discharge or a bad conduct discharge coming off those orders, then you could be considered a veteran,” said Sgt. Maj. Matthew Krenz, a legislative liaison at the National Guard Bureau who provided background information to Congressional members working on the bill.

Prior to the new law’s passage, even if Guard members served for 20 years or longer they were not deemed veterans unless they served on active duty. That

included those serving in an Active Guard and Reserve status.

“They could have served 20 years as (AGR) but that wasn’t considered qualifying time,” said Krenz, adding that veteran status was specifically linked to serving on federal orders rather than on state orders.

“(If) they were never activated on (federal) orders they weren’t, from the government’s perspective, considered veterans,” he said.

Now, under the new law, anyone eligible for reserve component retirement benefits is considered a veteran, said Krenz.

“Anyone who has reached 20 years of service, even if they were never activated on a (federal) order for more than 180 days outside of training, will now be considered a veteran,” he said.

The change in law, said Krenz, simply recognizes those who serve. For those in the Guard, that can mean responding to large-scale

emergencies, natural disasters and other events at home in addition to training for combat and deploying overseas.

“There are many Soldiers (and Airmen) who can serve 20 years in the National Guard and never see an overseas deployment,” said Krenz, adding he feels “that shouldn’t diminish their service to this country and what they’ve done for this organization.”

The change in status, however, does not entitle Guard members to any additional retirement benefits.

“Basically, it gives them the ability to be officially honored as a veteran,” said Krenz. “They are already going to be getting their retirement incentives based on their 20 years of military service.”

Krenz said he feels the change in law is a positive one.

“I think this is a good step in the right direction,” he said.

Prairie Soldier

2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, Nebraska 68524-1801
DSN 279-8390/8393, phone (402) 309-8390/8393

The **Prairie Soldier** is the newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, authorized and published by the State Public Affairs Office, Military Department of Nebraska, in accordance with AR 360-1 and AFI 35-101.

Deadline for all submissions is the first Wednesday of the month: February, April, June, August, October and December.

Letters, articles, notices of events, photographs and art are welcome, but may be edited for clarity or brevity. Publication of any submission is at the discretion of the editor. Submissions can also be emailed to kevin.j.hynes.mil@mail.mil. All photos must be high resolution and include complete caption information.

The views and opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the Military Department of Nebraska or the U.S. Department of Defense.

The **Prairie Soldier** can be read online at: www.ne.ng.mil

Commander-in-Chief
Adjutant General
State Public Affairs Officer
Acting Editor

Gov. Pete Ricketts
Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac
Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
Spc. Lisa Crawford

STAFF

Nebraska Army National Guard

1st Lt. John McNally
Staff Sgt. Amy Jacobson
Staff Sgt. Heidi McClintock
Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen
Sgt. Jason Drager
Sgt. Anna Pongo
Spc. Daniel Balkovic

Nebraska Air National Guard

Capt. Alex Salmon
Senior Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen
Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Tech. Sgt. Denise Mommens
Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Sgt. Jason Wilson
Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

Hitting The Trail: Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers run in the Super Bowl 5K race in Omaha on Feb. 5. The 5K run was part of the second Fit For Life training exercise.



Photo by Sgt. Jason Drager



Photo by Spc. Daniel Balkovic

In It Together: Nebraska Soldiers encourage each other while completing a set of plank exercises during the Jan. 30 - Feb. 12 Fit For Life annual training.



Photo by Sgt. Jason Drager

Getting The Hang Of It: Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers perform TRX training at Offutt Field House Fitness Center on Feb. 4. Dozens of Soldiers participated in the second Fit For Life training exercise, which is designed to help Soldiers better their fitness levels and APFT scores.

Fit For Life

■Nebraska Army Guard builds upon strengths of first training exercise to help state’s Soldiers rebuild fitness

By Sgt. Jason Drager
Staff Photojournalist

Physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle are values anyone serving in the armed forces should strive for.

The Nebraska Army National Guard helped its Soldiers do just that, recently, during the second iteration of Fit For Life, held Jan. 30 to Feb. 12 at Camp Ashland and Offutt Air Force Base. The two-week training exercise consisted of 44 students representing units from across Nebraska and 14 cadre, who were selected based upon their military and civilian-acquired physical fitness skills.

According to the training organizers, Fit For Life is designed to help Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers receive some extra training and support in building and maintaining healthy lifestyles. It is also designed to help prepare Soldiers to take advantage of upcoming military occupational special and professional military education classes by being prepared to take those courses’ physical fitness tests.

“We take kind of a holistic approach,” said Capt. Jennifer Myers, Fit For Life officer-in-charge who normally works as the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion’s medical logistics officer. “We want to talk to them not only about their physical health, but their mental health and their emotional state while they are here because that impacts their whole physical fitness.”

Those who participated either volunteered or, in some cases, were sent to the training by their unit. Their daily routine consisted of a mix of both classroom learning and exercising. The exercises ranged from running, weightlifting, TRX, and CrossFit training techniques, which were taught by a variety of Nebraska Army Guard instructors.

The Soldiers even participated in a 5-kilometer ruck march, held on a chilly Jan. 31 morning at Camp

Ashland, and a 5-kilometer “Super-bowl” race held in Omaha on Feb. 5.

According to Myers, Nebraska officials try to bring in experts in the various physical fitness and nutrition fields to ensure that the participating Soldiers receive a valuable training experience.

“The wealth of experience (the cadre had) about nutrition and exercise science just blew me away,” Myers said, adding that some were experienced nutritionists while others were ex-college athletes.

“All attendees walked away with a basic knowledge in exercise science, nutrition, behavior modification, resilience and performance optimization,” said Sgt. Collin Baldwin, an instructor from the 195th Forward Support Company. “Also, there is a reinvigoration of loyalty and duty for all those involved.”

“I personally saw physical, emotional, social and spiritual improvement in all the Soldiers I had the pleasure to work with during those two weeks,” Baldwin added. “That is all I am concerned with. I want to keep Soldiers in the fight. If I help achieve this, then I consider it a success.”

Spc. Joeline Georgina, a participant from the 1-376th Aviation (Security and Support), was one of those Soldiers who found great value in the training. She said the level of instruction was particularly impressive.

“Fit For Life is a program to help Soldiers who are having trouble with their P.T., or just need an extra boost,” Georgina said. “We’ve covered (nutrition), exercises, (physical readiness training) and even discussed different types of shoes to wear.”

Although this was the second time the training was held, not many changes occurred between the first and the second, Baldwin said.

“This program is in its infancy,” Baldwin said. “There will be improvements made over time, but an opportunity to continue on with this program will be an investment with great returns.”



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Words Of Advice: Sgt. 1st Class Lillie Chambers, Fit For Life noncommissioned officer-in-charge, gives her class some parting words of advice during a ceremony marking the end of the second FFLAT exercise.

At the end of the two-week training, an evaluation of everyone’s progress was made. Success can be measured by comparing APFT scores, weight loss or inches lost. In the case of this iteration of the Fit For Life exercise, the group combined to complete 174 more push-ups, 390 more sit-ups and cut more than 13 combined minutes from their two-mile run.

However, not all success is measured numerically.

“If you could see yourselves through our eyes, you would be blown away by the professionalism and the growth,” said Sgt. 1st Class Lillie Chambers, Fit For Life noncommissioned officer-in-charge during the final evening’s award ceremony. “Some of the Soldiers who came in here the first day couldn’t even look us in the eye – and you know who you are. Today, you’re standing tall, head held high because you know you can do it.”

“You found it,” added Chambers as she addressed the combined class at Camp Ashland’s Memorial Hall. “You are a Soldier deep down inside and you’ve got to remember that. You’ve got to find it. You’ve got to harness it and you’ve got to let it (help you) when that time is there. You have to tell yourself you can do it. Get that doubt out of your mind, because the sky is the limit.”

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, seconded those thoughts as he spoke to the Soldiers.

“I see what Sergeant Chambers saw: heads held high by a different



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Nearly Halfway There: Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers conduct an early morning 5-kilometer road march during the Fit For Life annual training, Jan. 31, at Camp Ashland, Neb. The FFLAT was designed to help Soldiers prepare for upcoming military schools and training opportunities by spending two weeks focused on improving their physical, mental and emotional health.

spirit in front of you today than perhaps what you showed up with. Never forget that feeling of transformation,” Bohac said. “Never forget how you got to this moment in time.”

“It’s what we do,” he added. “It’s what we have an obligation to do when we take young men and women – the blood and treasure of this nation and this state – into our ranks. What are we responsible for? To transform and to train; to help them be somebody they didn’t even know they could be; to do things they didn’t even know they could do. That happened to you these last 15 days.”

“I encourage you to remember these lessons when you leave here tomorrow,” Bohac said.

Moving forward, the state will hold the training twice a year, Nebraska Army National Guard officials said. One will be held in the winter and the other in the summer months, giving more Soldiers throughout the state an opportunity to participate.

“Everyone would benefit from this program, either in performance optimization or continuing education,” Baldwin said. “My advice to those who may wish to attend is

to answer the following question – ‘What can I do to motivate, inspire and empower you to want to adopt a fit and healthy outlook for life? Look past the two weeks; what will it take to lead into the next month, year, decade?’ I made a commitment to those with whom I serve or served, and that commitment is for life.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, state command sergeant major, echoed those thoughts.

“Our mission as Soldiers is to fight our nation’s wars. Part of that is readiness and readiness starts right here with us,” Baker said on the final evening of the course. “Individual readiness means team readiness.”

Baker then issued a challenge to the attending Soldiers: “This is not the end. Tomorrow is not the last day, it’s only the beginning. Set goals... it’s hard, I know, but sometimes the longest journey is from the living room down to the street. But once you get going, it’s a great feeling.”

“I challenge you to take what you learned here... and take it to your units and take it to your families,” he said. “Make sure you live this.”

Editor’s Note: Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes contributed to this article.

Rare Air

Off weekend mission gives air transportation specialists unique training opportunity

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

When members of the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Air Refueling Wing Air Transportation Office received a call that they were needed for a “non-drill” mission on Sunday, Jan. 22, they didn’t see it as a burden; they saw it as an opportunity to get some unique and much-needed training.

The mission was related to the return of nine fellow 155th Air Refueling Wing Airmen from a Jan. 17-22 mission that had taken them to Washington, D.C., for the 58th U.S. Presidential Inauguration activities. Those Airmen – members of the 155th Services Flight – had spent the week providing food support to Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers working at the inauguration.

On Jan. 22 the Airmen – and their single pallet expeditionary kitchen – were scheduled to return to Nebraska via a C-17 aircraft from the Hawaii Air National Guard.

That is where the story of the Air Transportation Airmen begins.

According to Master Sgt. Jarrod Tisthammer, air transportation section chief, the return mission involved what he called an “engine running offload” operation, which means that the returning Airmen and their equipment would all get off of the aircraft in Lincoln while the C-17’s engines continued to run.

“An ERO is utilized to expedite



Offloading: Members of the 155th Force Support Squadron file off of a C-17 on Jan. 22 at the National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb.

the flow of aircraft through airfields during operations where the reduction in ground time warrants a departure from normal operating procedures,” Tisthammer said. “They can also be used as a training opportunity, such as for us in this case.”

Tisthammer said the opportunity to conduct an ERO operation provided his Airmen – many of whom are new to the organization – the chance to do some fairly unique training that could help prepare them for future, high-tempo operations. He said it’s training the new Airmen sorely needed.

“It’s super rare. We get to do something like this maybe once every three years in Lincoln,” Tisthammer said. “So, it was really important for us to get our new Airmen some experience in working in this type of operation.”

Especially considering the type of aircraft the Nebraskans would

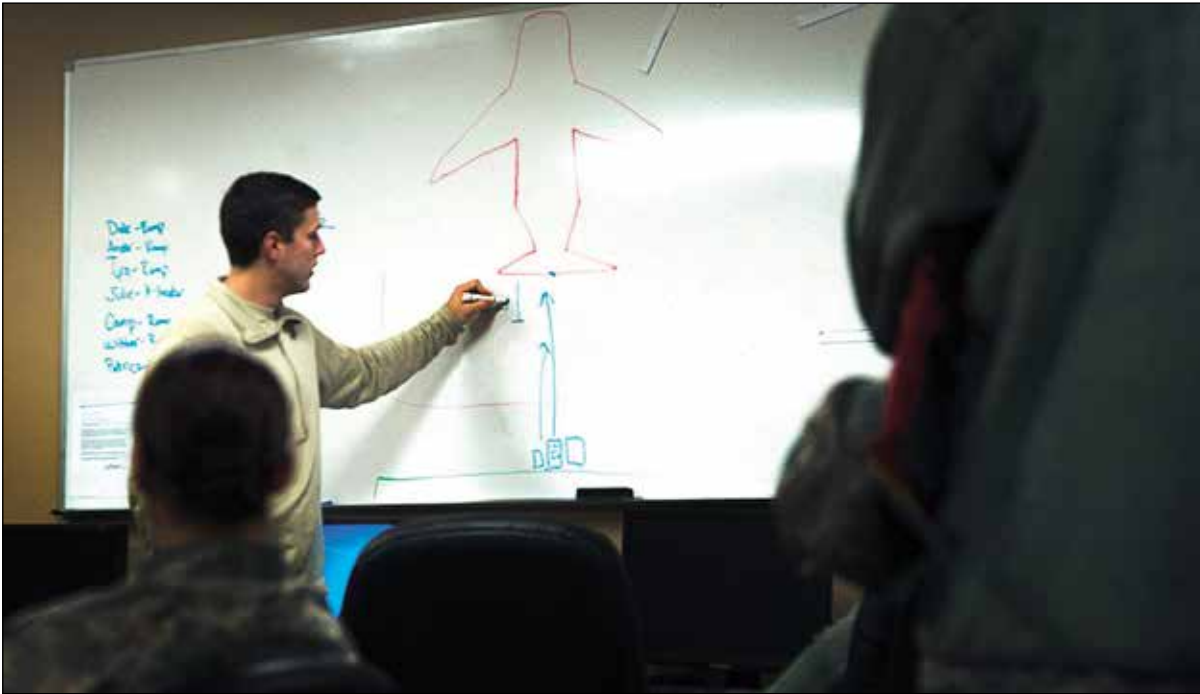


Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Drawing It Out: Tech. Sgt. Chaz R. Jensby, 155th Air Refueling Wing air transportation operations center noncommissioned officer-in-charge, uses a white board to conduct a mission and safety brief on Jan. 22 for members of his air transportation team in preparation for offloading an incoming C-17 jet transport. Special safety considerations are required during an Engine Running Offload operation due to the risks involved in operating around an aircraft that has its engines running, creating significant engine wake.

be working around. When a C-17 aircraft’s engines are running, it generates a significant amount of engine wake – essentially engine-generated wind – that can make moving and operating heavy equipment difficult and potentially dangerous if precautions aren’t taken.

For the Air Transportation Airmen, this meant taking time before the aircraft arrived, walking through the various steps they needed to take to ensure the mission was accomplished both safely and within the time constraints they had been given.

About an hour before the mission, Tech. Sgt. Chaz R. Jensby, the Air Transportation Operations Center noncommissioned officer-in-charge,



Hand Signals: Airman 1st Class Tyra D. DeRozairo gives spotting signals to Airman 1st Class Julie M. Fricke as Fricke maneuvers a Nebraska Air National Guard NGSL K-Loader up to a highline dock.

gathered the participating Airmen around him and walked through the operation, using a white board in the ATOC to explain how equip-

ment would be parked and the sequences they would use to offload the passengers and their equipment.

That pre-mission work definitely paid off as the entire operation was conducted in roughly 15 minutes. Despite engine wake that shook the various vehicles and caused the Airmen to bow forward as they walked, the Airmen were able to quickly and safely offload the passengers and equipment, allowing the C-17 crew to continue on their way back to Hawaii within the given time constraints.

“It went super quick and super easy,” Tisthammer said. “And we were able to get our new, inexperienced Airmen some really good training.”

FLYING HOURS

continued from page 1.

the 155th ARW’s aircraft underwent a multiple-week software and hardware upgrade, meaning those planes weren’t flying during the upgrade.

Although the gaudy flight numbers are impressive, the increased operations tempo does have a human cost.

Tech. Sgt. Bryan Schuka, a boom operator with the 173rd ARS, knows that human toll all too well. Schuka, a firefighter with the Omaha Fire Department, has spent the last decade as a boom operator, responsible for “flying” the KC-135R extendable refueling boom into other aircraft during air refueling missions. He said he’s seen flight hours more than double and deployment schedules continue to increase. As a husband with two daughters and a son all under 12-years-old, he’s been forced to miss multiple family events.

“It’s almost like living two lives,” Schuka said.

Balancing family, a civilian career and Air National Guard duties is definitely challenging, he said, adding that his family is mostly used to him being gone, although it’s never easy. The Omaha Fire Department has also been very supportive of his increased time away from work, he said.

“It’s kind of become the new normal,” Schuka said. “You kind of get used to it, but then again, in some ways you don’t get used to it.”

Stevenson said that impact is very real. “Our mission has an effect upon our Airmen’s lives and the lives of their families. Technical Sergeant Schuka talks of being gone. You can’t get those birthdays, holidays, soccer tournaments, ballet recitals back. But this is important work that is being done. Our aircraft are vital in providing air support and (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) support to those who are fighting ISIS.”

(Editor’s Note: The above article was republished from the Nebraska Military Department 2016 Annual Report.)

INAUGURATION

continued from page 1.

SPEK – which is designed to be deployed via aircraft and then put into operation within three hours after landing.

“This is the same equipment that we would use to support a mission like this, or a natural disaster or an overseas deployment,” said Gubbels about the training value the inaugural mission brought to her unit’s Airmen, six of whom had never supported an inauguration before. “This is the same kitchen we would use for zero to 30 (days) if we were deployed. So, it’s nice to get that experience with a real-world mission.”

National Guard support to presidential inaugurations dates to April 30, 1789, when local militia members (today’s National Guard) joined with U.S. Army and Revolutionary War veterans to form an honor detail and escort Gen. George Washington to his inauguration ceremony in New York City. Since then, National Guard support has grown and is designated to honor the commander-in-chief, recognize civilian control of the military and celebrate democracy.

This year, the Joint Task Force – DC was formed in response to requests for assistance from local and federal agencies in the National Capital Region. There, the National Guard Soldiers and Airmen augmented the U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Capitol Police and the D.C. Metropolitan Police forces in a wide array of support missions, including traffic control, crowd management, logistics and communications.

Over the course of the 2017 inaugural support mission, the nine Nebraska Airmen prepared a total of six hot meals and provided two Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) meals for approximately 100 Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers. Most of these meals were prepared out of a fixed facility at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, located on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., meaning that the Airmen didn’t get to use the SPEK as they had originally hoped.

Still, say the Airmen involved, the experience of supporting a presidential inauguration is something they won’t soon forget.

“It was really cool to be part of it,” said Senior Airman Katherine Walsh, a native of Wahoo, Nebraska, who currently is attending school at Wayne State College. While



Photo courtesy of the 155th Force Support Squadron

Team Nebraska: The members of the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Force Support Squadron who supported the 2017 Presidential Inauguration Mission were: (Back row, from left) Master Sgt. Jennifer Gubbels, Tech. Sgt. Joshua Triplett. (Second row, from left) Senior Airman Katherine Welsh, Staff Sgt. Lucas Buike, Airman 1st Class Ethan Haberman. (First row, from left) Airman 1st Class Nandi Thomas, Airman 1st Class Zachary Sagstetter, Airman 1st Class Shea Shannon and Airman 1st Class Brian Jacobson.

deployed, Walsh was responsible for maintaining accountability of the meals they were serving. “I felt like I learned a lot.”

“It was just surreal. I’ve never gotten a chance to be part of something this big,” added Airman 1st Class Ethan Haberman, a services apprentice who is also from Wahoo, but is currently studying Accounting at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. “It was probably the craziest election ever and just being part of it at this time was pretty neat.”

According to Haberman and Walsh, probably the most difficult part of the mission was maintaining flexibility to meet the nearly ever-changing requirements of the operation. The best part, they added, was probably the interaction they had with Soldiers from around the country.

“It was crazy in the sense that we didn’t know where we were going or what we were going to be doing most of the time,” Haberman said about the constant changes to their schedules.

“They were really nice,” added Walsh

about the interactions she had with the Army Soldiers she met.

Along with their cooking duties, there was also some time to take in the entire inaugural experience. Two days before the actual event, the Airmen were able to visit the National Mall and see exactly all that was going on to prepare for the Jan. 20 inaugural activities.

“It was absolutely crazy,” Walsh said, adding that stages and large video screens had been set up at various locations around the Mall, while the area around the White House was completely blocked off. “There were just people everywhere. It was really crowded.”

According to Gubbels, the mission, which ended with a Jan. 22 trip back to Nebraska aboard a C-17 transport aircraft from the Hawaii Air National Guard, was a great experience, especially for the youngest Airmen that participated in it.

“I think they learned a lot about our mission and gained an understanding about what we were talking about,” she said. “They actually (got to) do the mission.”

Nebraska Air National Guard names year’s top Airmen

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Four Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen – two from the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing and two from the Guard’s 170th Group at Offutt Air Force Base – have been named the Nebraska Air National Guard’s “Outstanding Airmen of the Year” for 2016.

The Airmen were selected by Nebraska Air National Guard senior enlisted leaders based upon a variety of criteria that included work the Airmen did over the past calendar year in completing professional military education, civilian education, accomplishments within their prospective work areas or during overseas deployments, and involvement in community or volunteer activities.

This year’s selectees are:

- Outstanding Airman of the Year:** Staff Sgt. Tyler Johnson, an instructor airborne systems engineer with the Offutt-based 238th Combat Training Squadron;
- Outstanding Noncommissioned Officer of the Year:** Staff Sgt. Natalie C. Nason, an emergency management crafts-



Outstanding Airman of the Year
Staff Sgt. Tyler Johnson



Outstanding Noncommissioned Officer of the Year
Staff Sgt. Natalie C. Nason



Outstanding Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year
Master Sgt. Clashaud Robbins



Outstanding First Sergeant of the Year
Senior Master Sgt. Brandon L. Viet

man with the Lincoln-based 155th Civil Engineering Squadron;

- Outstanding Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year:** Master Sgt. Clashaud Robbins, a recruiting and retention manager with Offutt’s 170th Group;
- Outstanding First Sergeant of the Year:** Senior Master Sgt. Brandon L. Viet, first sergeant with Lincoln’s 155th Maintenance Squadron.

“These four Airmen are rep-

resentatives of what it means to be a Citizen Airman,” said Chief Master Sgt. Doug Lierz, Nebraska Air National Guard state command chief master sergeant who led the board of senior enlisted leaders conducting the Outstanding Airmen of the Year selection process. “These Airmen are just four of many, many Nebraska Airmen who are extremely busy doing great work for our Nebraska Air National Guard and their respective communities while also pursuing

both professional military or civilian educational goals.”

According to Lierz, the selection process included both nomination packets made by each respective Airmen’s units as well as an in-person interview process that was conducted in January by the selection board. Lierz said those selected represent a wide cross section of the organization that includes units both at the National Guard air base in Lincoln as well as Air National Guard units located at

Offutt Air Force Base.

“When you think of the words ‘well rounded,’ that is exactly what these Airmen represent,” Lierz said. “These Airmen really are people that you would like to see as models for the rest of our organization.”

The Airmen will now compete for national honors in their respective categories in the upcoming Air National Guard “Outstanding Airmen of the Year” competitions to be held later this spring.

Nebraska Army Guard seeks to expand recruiting reach, build ties with state’s teachers

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Acting Editor

Eleven educators from seven Omaha-area schools climbed aboard two Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and flew from Millard Air Field in Omaha to the Lincoln Air National Guard Base, Feb. 11, to participate in a learning event designed to increase awareness of the Nebraska Army National Guard.

“The purpose of this educator flight is to develop centers of influence with area high schools by informing educators about the National Guard and how we can partner with them in education,” said Lt. Col. William Prusia, commander of the Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

He said the Nebraska National Guard has conducted orientation flights with coaches during the Nebraska Coaches Association Coaches Clinic, but said he believes it is the first time briefings were presented following the flight.

Maj. Kristen Augé, executive officer for the Nebraska National Guard’s RRB, said this particular effort was designed to build relationships and partnerships with Nebraska educators so they can be an added resource in schools to identify students who are suited for the National Guard.

The participating Omaha educators spent the morning listening to a series of presentations by Nebraska Army National Guard leaders who highlighted the benefits offered to Guard members including education and health benefits,

and the variety of career opportunities.

Brig. Gen. Kevin Lyons, Nebraska Army National Guard land component commander and an educator himself, spoke about how the National Guard had prepared him to be an education administrator.

“The leadership skills I learned in my military training helped me bring a more strategic mindset to education administration,” Lyons said.

In addition to member benefits, National Guard presenters discussed programs offered to Nebraska Public Schools free of charge. These include well-known programs like the Junior Officer Training Corp (ROTC) and other lesser-known school programs such as the Help Everyone Achieve Respect (HEAR) and You Can programs.

According to Prusia, both HEAR and You Can programs are designed to educate potential Guard members, but also teach important life skills to students who may not be interested in joining the military.

HEAR was developed in partnership with nationally renowned subject matter experts at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The program helps students explore the topic of bullying in relation to the National Guard’s core values and teaches ways to minimize bullying by strengthening respectful behavior in their schools.

The You Can program includes award-winning, dialogue-driven programs for more than 30 issues relevant to young adults including subjects such as leadership, paying for college, diversity, communication and substance abuse avoidance.

For many of the educators in attendance, this was their first real exposure to the National Guard.

“I knew very little,” said Greg Tiemann, principal at Millard West High School who said the new relationship is mutually beneficial. Tiemann said he recently talked to recruiters and became more interested in the programs as a result. “We are trying to instill some of the leadership and climate of anti-bullying within our school and the Guard is helping us tremendously by setting up that (HEAR) program for us.”

“They are coming



Building Relationships: Lt. Col. Will Prusia, Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion commander, talks to Anthony Anderson, Transportation, Distribution, Logistics Academy instructor from Omaha’s Bryan High School during a Feb. 11 engagement at the Nebraska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln.

to us and we really appreciate that,” he added.

“It’s a two-way street,” said Irene Urendowski, a teacher at the Integrated Learning Program School. By incorporating these programs into Omaha schools, she said she hopes to build a relationship between students and the Nebraska Army National Guard. “The Guard programs can teach us all to become better citizens.”

Brittany Strong, a teacher in the Native Indigenous Center to Education Program at Bryan, Benson and North High Schools, admitted she did not know much about the programs offered by the Guard prior to the event, but said she now sees them as a tool for upward mobility.

“A lot of my students come from homes where they don’t have a lot of opportunities and the Guard is a tool I can use to help them get out of the situation they are in,” she said.

After a morning of presentations, participants took a break for lunch where they had the opportunity to talk with mem-

bers of the National Guard. Educator Flight participants were also asked to fill out evaluation forms measuring the usefulness of the day’s events. Nearly all said they would share the benefits of the National Guard with their students.

Following lunch, each participant was presented with a framed photo of the group in front of a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter and given backpacks filled with useful information to share with their colleagues and students. They were then taken back to the flight line where they climbed aboard two helicopters and flown back to Omaha.

The effectiveness of this first education flight event cannot be immediately realized, but Prusia said he expects this event, and more like it, to increase the number of National Guard applicants because of an increased presence in high school classrooms.



Thanks For Coming: Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska National Guard adjutant general, greets Jilleen Houser, the Religion Department chair at Boys Town High School in Omaha, Neb., shortly after she and other Omaha educators arrived in Lincoln, Neb., for an engagement with National Guard leaders on Feb. 11.



(Top) **All Aboard:** Omaha-area educators file toward a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter before a Feb. 11 flight back to the Millard Airport. The flight was designed to help the Nebraska Army National Guard build relationships with centers of influence within the Omaha-area schools.

(Lower) **Buckle Up:** Anthony Anderson and Alyssa Gudenkauf check their safety harnesses before the Feb. 11 flight back to the Millard Airport following the engagement at the Nebraska National Guard’s Joint Force Headquarters.

Getting Connected

Annual brigade communications exercise takes on added importance

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The late winter and early spring months in Nebraska are typically a time when the state’s brown prairie grass begins to give way to a whole new crops of green plants.

On March 3-5, Camp Ashland’s prairie training grounds saw some rapid growth, but they didn’t have anything to do with grass seedlings. In this case the structures were multiple mobile satellite and tower antennas that seemed to spring from the ground like some sort of alien plant life. The communications systems were part of a weekend-long exercise designed to test the newly-created 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade’s ability to maintain communications networks across a wide area.

According to Maj. Carlos Van Nurden, 67th MEB communications officer, this year’s exercise – while smaller than past years – was designed to help the brigade and its subordinate units continue to work through the various challenges taking place as the organization transitions from its previous battlefield surveillance brigade mission.

“This exercise is extremely important,” Van Nurden said as teams of Soldiers from the 126th Chemical Battalion and 234th Network Support Company pored over various computer monitors, shelves of equipment and satellite dish readouts to figure out how to fix problems that were limiting the groups’ ability to create and maintain multiple communications networks. “Our needs for communication remain. It doesn’t matter what or (Modified Table of Organization and Equipment) say, we have to provide these services.”

“So, it’s extremely important for us to keep going on, no matter what type of unit we are,” Van Nurden added.

The brigade communications



Troubleshooting: Spc. Arturo Romero, an information technology specialist with Lincoln’s 234th Network Support Company, attempts to figure out why his computer is unable to connect into the U.S. Army network during the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade’s March 3-5 communications exercise.

exercise is an annual training event designed to test just that. Van Nurden said the brigade typically brings the communications sections of the various battalions that make up the organization to Camp Ashland. There, they then set up their satellite dishes, antenna masts and other communications equipment to see if they can rapidly create a communications network that meets the needs of the various organizations that make up the brigade.

“We like to centralize this at Ashland because then we have our expertise here and we’re able to help (the various sections) get whatever issues they have ironed out to better prepare them for the training year,” he said.

That’s particularly important this year, Van Nurden said, due to the fact that many units are receiving new equipment while numerous Soldiers are reclassifying into new communications positions.

“Some of the battalions are still getting their equipment in,” he said. “Some of the battalions have started getting in their equipment, but they haven’t yet gotten their

people trained on the equipment.”

Take Spc. Zachary Faraj from the Omaha-based 126th Chemical Battalion, for example. A former truck driver, Faraj is currently transitioning into the communications specialty. So, the March exercise couldn’t have come at a better time.

“It’s helping me prepare for reclassifying,” said Faraj, who works as a software engineer with First Data in Omaha. “It’s also helping prepare us as a team so that we’re not just depending on one person. Everybody knows how to utilize the equipment.”

It’s all about readiness, added Spc. Arturo Romero, an information technology specialist with the Lincoln-based 234th Network Support Company, as he and Pfc. Guadalupe Lopez attempted to troubleshoot a laptop computer that was having difficulty connecting into the military network.

“We need to be ready,” said Romero, who works as a quality assurance specialist for software engineering at PayPal in Omaha. “This really shows what our strengths are, what our weaknesses are and what we need to develop more.”



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Hooked Up: A Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier tries to establish a connection on a Joint Network Node/Command Post Network satellite dish during the March 3-5 communications exercise at Camp Ashland, Neb.

“(This exercise) is a great refresher because a lot of us don’t do this fulltime on the civilian side, so we can come out here and get retrained and refreshed,” he added.

Lopez agreed. A private security specialist in civilian life, Lopez said the exercise allows Soldiers like him the opportunity to get hands-on experience working with the equipment and the networks before the annual training season begins or a major emergency occurs. Then, the

equipment needs to be ready and working, he added.

“It’s nice to be able to come out here and actually get hands on the equipment,” Lopez said. “We try to the equipment out as much as we can during the year, but sometimes it just sits in storage because we can’t get it out every weekend.”

“So it’s nice to be able to get it out... see what state the equipment is in,” he said. “Plus, we get a lot more knowledge on the equipment.

CAVALRY continued from page 1.

gade and replaced them with the new “Bowie Knife” patches of the 39th infantry BCT.

The ceremony was just the latest visible example of the ongoing transformation of Nebraska Army National Guard units across the state as the old 67th BfSB transforms into a new mission as a maneuver enhancement brigade. In the case of the 1-134th Cavalry Soldiers, that transformation led them to become members of the Arkansas Army National Guard organization, marking the first time that Nebraska Soldiers have served within an infantry brigade formation since the 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized) transformed into an area support group in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

According to Col. Michael Spraggins, commander of the Little Rock, Arkansas-based 39th Infantry BCT, the Nebraskans are a welcome addition to his formation.

“I look at this as a great opportunity,” Spraggins said, adding that the 39th Infantry BCT had recently deactivated its long-time cavalry squadrons as part of their ongoing force structure changes. He said that deactivation was followed by a heavy dose of somber emotions as those cavalrymen concluded a mission that had seen them racking up numerous accomplishments during their history.

“Replacing that unit was hard,” Spraggins said. “Then I walk in here and I see that same ‘Cav’ swagger and it does my heart good.”

According to Spraggins, the Nebraska patching ceremony signifies the start of a “new partnership” between two historic organizations.

“I think we’re going to work well together. For one thing, our universities belong to different conferences so we can root for your football team and you can root for ours,” Spraggins said, smiling. “Many a fight has occurred over football, fortunately I don’t think that’s going to be a problem with us.”

“As you take you patch off, I know that it’s a part of your history,” he added. “It’s something I don’t want you to get rid of because I know it’s always going to have a



New Patches, New Mission: Members of the 1-134th Cavalry place new “Bowie Knife” patches onto their uniforms during a Dec. 10 patching ceremony at the Mead Titan Readiness Center. The ceremony officially signalled the cavalry squadron’s transition to the 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the first time that a Nebraska Army National Guard unit has been part of an infantry brigade in nearly 20 years.

sacred place in your hearts.”

Among those attending the early Saturday morning ceremony was Brig. Gen. Kevin Lyons, Nebraska Army National Guard land component commander who began his career within the old 67th Infantry Brigade formation as a member of the 1-195th Armor and 1-167th Cavalry. According to Lyons, the 69th Infantry BCT patch into Nebraska is a welcome addition.

“By bringing the 39th patch into Nebraska, it adds to our relevancy of being a strong Army National Guard state that is ready and able to be a full partner within the U.S. Army and the Department of Defense,” Lyons said.

Lyons said the partnership will also have direct impacts on the Nebraska Soldiers involved.

“It’s going to be very beneficial for the Soldiers. They’re going to gain valuable experiences and more training opportunities,” he said. “There are a lot of training opportunities



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Cavalrymen Take On New Mission: Lt. Col. Tom Golden (far left) and Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Winn (center, right) place the 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team patches onto the shoulders of Capt. Ryan McIntosh (center, left) and Sgt. 1st Class Alan Wineinger of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry, during the Dec. 10 patching ceremony.

out there. The nice thing is, the 39th has been very open in advertising these opportunities for the Soldiers while also giving them the time to also keep up with their state-specific training so that they remain ready and reliable for the state of Nebraska.”

Spraggins echoed those comments, saying he believes both units will complement each other extremely well as they tackle their combined challenges of ensuring Soldiers are physically fit and have received the required military schooling to function well in a highly unpredictable world.

“We have some of the same challenges,” he said, adding that his entire brigade must

work as a team to ensure Soldiers are eligible to receive the training and promotion opportunities that are available. “Here is my challenge to you. I look to the leadership here to be ready when nation calls. It’s not a matter of if; it’s going to be a matter of when because as you have noticed, the world hasn’t calmed down any in the last 10 or 15 years. And we have figured out that the terrorist threat is not the only threat out there.”

“Large units deploying and going hand-in-hand against a large formation is definitely on the horizon,” he added. “I hope that that day never comes, but I also hope that if it does come that we will all be prepared.”

Sand Table Training: (From left) Spc. Gabriel Penaherrera, Staff Sgt. Matthew Harre, Spc. Melissa Rahorst and Maj. Tony Woodruff discuss a training scenario as Staff Sgt. Gale Maberry makes movements on a sand table before a simulation exercise.



Photo courtesy of the 402nd Military Police Battalion

■Premobilization training helps Omaha-based military police battalion head into upcoming mission...

Armed For Success

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

After many months of planning, meetings and initial training, Soldiers from Omaha's 402nd Military Police Battalion (Detention) saw their preparations for an upcoming overseas deployment kick into high gear in late January and early February when then conducted a two-week premobilization annual training at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Nebraska.

The Soldiers – roughly 50 in number – are preparing for a deployment in support of U.S. Southern Command where they will be responsible for staffing a military police brigade headquarters that will provide command and control of various military police units operating at a detention center.

According to Lt. Col. Eric Hunsberger, 402nd MP Bn. commander, the training was designed to get the Soldiers focused onto their upcoming mission.

"This event has been extremely beneficial (in) preparing the team," Hunsberger said toward the end of the Jan. 29 – Feb. 11 training exercise. "Our ability to assemble the force from across many formations – Joint Force Headquarters, 92nd Troop Command, 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), as well as Recruiting and Retention Command – will pay many dividends come mobilization in April."

"By maximizing this opportu-

nity, it gives Soldiers a chance to focus on their families and civilian matter prior to deployment," Hunsberger added.

While at the Greenlief Training Site, the MP Soldiers focused on a number of training exercises that included computer-based simulations, classes and weapons qualification, all designed to improve each Soldier's readiness, and the collective team and unit readiness as well.

"It has been extremely important for the unit to maximize this two-week opportunity, leveraging training time plus promoting individual and unit readiness," Hunsberger said. "Staff and Joint Operations Center 'rigorous' training exercises were essential for deployment. Individual training events, like land navigation, HEAT rollover training and weapons qualification were (also) sweet."

Members of the unit agreed that the battalion staff accomplished a lot over just two weeks, adding the work done at the Nebraska Army National Guard training site will immeasurably aid the Soldiers as they prepare to move off into their upcoming deployment.

"A lot of it has been good training," said Sgt. Chad Mascari, a 402nd MP Bn. police investigator who is currently studying Cybersecurity and Computer Science at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. "As an M.P., we really haven't focused on that as much as compared to our (Mission Essential Task List) tasks. We're really learning our basic Soldier skills, here."

"It's been excellent," Mascari added. "As a sergeant and as a potential team leader, it's good to be well-rounded in that aspect... to know how to lead squad and team



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Steady Aim: Staff Sgt. Kyann Sheets coaches Staff Sgt. Kimberly Mahlberg as she attempts to qualify with her M-9 pistol, Feb. 11, at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb. Both of the 402nd Military Police Battalion (Detention) Soldiers were participating in a two-week annual training exercise designed to help prepare them for their upcoming overseas deployment.



Photo courtesy of the 402nd Military Police Battalion

Training In Cyberspace: Sgt. 1st Class Jason McAtee serves as an administrator and evaluator as members of the 402nd Military Police Battalion (Detention) conduct an exercise on a Virtual Battle Space 3 simulator.

movements."

Like Mascari, Spc. Melissa Rahorst is putting her academic career on hold for this deployment... at least, sort of. A senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she is studying Criminal Justice with an emphasis in Music, Rahorst said she plans to continue to take courses online during the deployment so she can graduate

in December.

She said the training she and the other Soldiers received at the Greenlief Training Site was particularly useful in helping them fine-tune skills for the deployment.

"I think it's a good experience," she said. "We're definitely doing a lot of training that I'm not used to... a lot of which I haven't done since basic training. It's good to refresh

on just the simple things, like search and seizure."

Along with the skill training, probably just as important has been the bonding of teammates that occurred during the annual training exercise, say Rahorst and Mascari. Being able to build strong bonds as a team will be extremely important during the months ahead.

"You see a lot of integration in the chow hall," Mascari said. "It reinforces knowing your Soldiers. As leaders – as (noncommissioned officers) and officers – knowing your Soldiers is one of the biggest keys."

"It's definitely getting more real," Rahorst added about the deployment. "I think it's becoming the experience that I and all of us envisioned it to be. Now that it is happening, we all have to get ready."

According to Hunsberger, the annual training was a major success.

"Approximately 95 percent of all requirements were completed, keeping in mind the battalion is deploying as a brigade staff," he said. "Overall, I feel like we are on point."

Nebraska City Soldiers practice critical reaction force skills during March drill

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

Nebraska Citizen Soldiers assigned to the Nebraska City-based 192nd Law and Order Detachment conducted quick reaction for training, March 4-5, at the Camp Ashland training site near Ashland, Nebraska.

The training ensures, if called upon by state leadership, the unit is prepared to preserve the peace in case of a civil disturbance. One of the Nebraska National Guard's enduring priorities is to protect the safety and welfare of the citizens of



Hard Hitting Practice: Spc. Elliott Schmit, a member of the Nebraska City-based 192nd Law and Order Detachment, practices his baton techniques during quick reaction force training at Camp Ashland, Neb., on March 4.

Nebraska.

The Soldiers were instructed in the use of pressure point control tactics to restrain and subdue protestors using the minimal amount of force required, and practiced tactical unit maneuvers using batons, shields, and pepper ball launchers to control and disburse hostile gatherings.

According to 1st Lt. Jade Dale, acting 192nd Law and Order Det. commander during the training, the time spent at Camp Ashland is invaluable.

"With the Nebraska Army National Guard fully-invested in transformation, our unit has many new members," Dale said. "The new members, who are extremely motivated to learn, benefit from working together on these tactics, techniques and procedures while experienced members are helped by the refresher."

Brig. Gen. Wendy Johnson, Nebraska National Guard director of the Joint Staff, observed portions of the training and then addressed the assembled Soldiers.

On Saturday, the Soldiers undertook classroom instruction and hands-on training before learning hand-to-hand defense tactics along with small tactical team maneuvers. The instructors taught and demonstrated techniques while the Soldiers practiced throughout the day. On Sunday, the unit Soldiers put their skills to the test during a simulated riot with staff increas-



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom

Hands-On: Tech. Sgt. Christina Krueger, Nebraska Air National Guard Joint Force Headquarters, demonstrates how to use a set of handcuffs on the 192nd Law and Order Detachment's Sgt. Kyle Russell during quick reaction force training at Camp Ashland, Neb. The March 4-5 exercise was designed to help the Nebraska City Soldiers brush up on their riot control techniques.

ing their levels of resistance throughout the scenario.

The Nebraska National Guard provides properly manned, well-trained, fully-

equipped and adequately maintained Nebraska Military Department resources in support of all federal, state and local mission requirements.

Words of Advice: Maj. Scott Henrickson teaches a lesson on decision-making and problem-solving to Army and Air National Guard students participating in the Nebraska Military Department's two-day Leadership Enrichment and Development (LEAD) training course held Jan. 11-12, at Offutt Air Force Base. "You are all leaders, regardless of rank," Henrickson told the 12 students in the LEAD course.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

■Focusing on strengths to help people LEAD... Course helping strengthen organization's leadership skills

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

Opportunities to speak one-on-one with Nebraska National Guard senior leaders don't come around all that often.

While the Nebraska Military Department's command team strives to be transparent and readily accessible to the state's troops and employees, their busy schedules often make it difficult for lower-enlisted Soldiers and Airmen, junior officers and civilian employees to meet the state's highest leaders outside of ceremonial events.

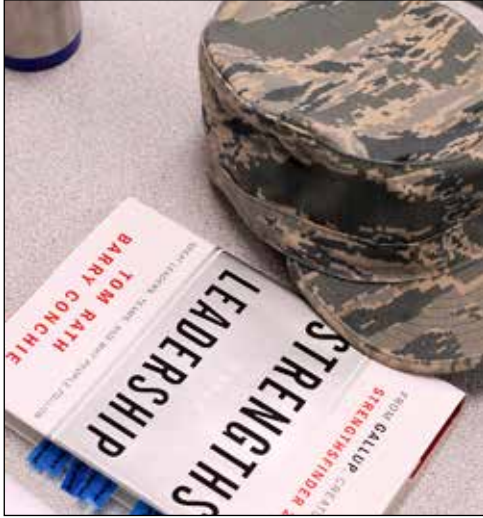
In an effort to allow up-and-coming leaders to not only learn from, but also engage socially with these senior leaders, the Nebraska Military Department founded the two-day Leadership Enrichment and Development (LEAD) training course in 2007. Since then, more than 200 future leaders have completed the training, taking the knowledge and advice they learn from the course back to their respective units and work environments.

"As they say, 'You can't be the best unless you learn from the best'," said Master Sgt. Jeremy Dean, Nebraska National Guard 155th Air Refueling Wing recruiting and retention manager. Dean was one of a dozen students who completed the most recent LEAD course, held Jan. 11-12, at Offutt Air Force Base near Bellevue, Nebraska.

"This training really allowed us to relate to the leaders," Dean said. "It allowed for more real-world idea sharing where we could talk to senior leaders in an unofficial status and really pick their brains on the leadership styles they used to reach their personal success."

The LEAD course is a two-day retreat designed to provide an opportunity for emerging leaders explore such leadership topics as communication, strategic thinking, decision making, motivation, collaboration and ethics.

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, solicits student nominations from major support command commanders. Nominees must have at least three years



Course Work: In preparation for the January LEAD course, students were asked to read "Strengths Based Leadership," by Barry Conchie and Tom Rath. The book focuses on being a more effective leader, including identifying personal strengths and investing in others' strengths.

retainability, and while the course's target audience is typically for E-6 to E-7, CW2 to CW3 and O3-O4, commanders can nominate students of all ranks if they perceive there is leadership potential.

"My hope is the students will emerge from the course with better understanding of who they are as a leader," said Lt. Col. William Prusia, LEAD course co-director. "They should also recognize the value the Nebraska National Guard places on developing its leaders by investing in them with a program such as LEAD."

The LEAD course includes two days of leadership-focused classroom lessons and an evening social event that allows the students to network with the state's senior leaders in a relaxed environment.

As a traditional Guard Soldier, 2nd Lt. Tessa Harding, a medical operations officer



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Getting It Together: Nebraska Army and Air National Guard students attempt to complete an exercise where they were tasked with flipping over a tarp they were all standing on without having anyone step off of it.

with the 1-134th Cavalry, said the LEAD course gave her the opportunity to meet and greet with senior leaders and share stories in an intimate setting and on a casual level.

"I've truly been impressed with this course," Harding said. "I didn't expect the multitude of instructors or their willingness to connect with us. We've had some really good blocks of instruction. The content is exceptional and it's exciting to take tips from (our) own leadership and develop them further with the different advice we're getting here."

In preparation for the January LEAD course, students were asked to read "Strengths Based Leadership," by Barry Conchie and Tom Rath. The book focuses on being a more effective leader, including identifying personal strengths and investing in others' strengths.

"The course taught me to really listen and learn the strengths of the people I lead," Dean said. "I want to be that type of leader,

the kind who develops others and puts them in positions that they'll be most likely to succeed in."

Similarly, Harding said she hopes to take her newfound understandings of leadership—including her self-identified strengths—and translate it to her team members, both in the Army National Guard and her civilian career as a child and family services specialist for the Department of Health and Human Services.

"The overall message I'm taking away from this course is that it's more productive to capitalize on strengths than to overcome weaknesses," Harding said. "You don't have to do everything yourself, that's why you have a team that can cover down on areas where you lack—and that's okay."

"I am absolutely grateful to have this opportunity early in my career," Harding said. "What I've learned over these two days? I just wish I would've known this about myself sooner."

Nebraska Air Guard headquarters receives national recognition

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters staff recently received the U.S. Air Force Organizational Excellence Award by the Secretary of the Air Force Personnel Council Awards and Decorations Branch, for the period of Oct. 1, 2013 to Sept. 30, 2015.

This marks the third straight time that the Air Guard headquarters has received the prestigious award, which was officially presented to the organization on Feb. 11 during an early morning ceremony.

According to Brig. Gen. Keith Schell, Nebraska Air National Guard assistant adjutant general, the award is recognition of the quality of work that the members of the Nebraska Air National Guard headquarters staff are doing.

"Receiving the Air Force Organization Excellence Award is a significant accomplishment for our Airmen because it recognizes the dedication, the climate of inclusion and service of all members of our team," Schell said.

"We take great pride in answering the call of duty and are ready to serve wherever and whenever we are needed in Nebraska or anywhere else around the globe."

Brig. Gen. Wendy Johnson, Nebraska National Guard Joint Staff assistant adjutant general, echoed those sentiments.

"Our Airmen, as part of the joint team, support and accomplish a variety of local, state, federal, emergency management and homeland security missions every day while staying positively engaged with the local community," Johnson said.

"This award was earned, not given, and each Airman played an integral role by putting our core values—'Integrity First,' 'Service before Self,' and Excellence in All We Do'—into action."

The award specifically recognized the work Nebraska Airmen did conducting groundbreaking domestic preparedness training events that culminated in the first-ever full-scale Joint Force Headquarters Continuity of Operations exercise. That exercise saw nearly 300 personnel relocate to alternate operating sites enabling the continued performance of essential functions.

Additionally, JFHQ-assigned Airmen achieved successes in recruiting, retention, professional development programs and Civil Support Team agency assistance while increasing State Partnership Program engagements. JFHQ Airmen also provided support to numerous community outreach events including media support for domestic

operations training events, the National Guard marathon team trials and the State Games of America.

Schell said he fully believes the numerous contributions made by the Citizen Airmen leading to the recognition would not have been possible without the steadfast and unwavering support of their families and friends.

The Secretary of the Air Force authorized the AFOEA on Aug. 26, 1969, to recognize the achievements and accomplishments of U.S. Air Force organizations or activities. It is presented to Air Force internal organizations that are entities within larger organizations. They are unique, unnumbered organizations or activities that perform functions normally performed by numbered wings, groups or squadrons.

Airmen assigned to the element for at least one day during the qualifying period are authorized to wear the AFOEA ribbon.

The 2015 award was presented by the U.S. Air Force in recognition of the Nebraska Air National Guard headquarters staff's significant contributions in a variety of activities including the JFHQ's first-ever full-scale Continuity of Operations exercise; successes in recruiting and retention; professional development programs; and increasing State Partnership Program engagements.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom

Awarding Excellence: Brig. Gen. Keith Schell, Nebraska Air National Guard assistant adjutant general, places the U.S. Air Force Organizational Excellence Award streamer onto the Nebraska Air National Guard Joint Force Headquarters unit guidon, Feb. 11.

Total Force Integration

Leadership change occurs at Air Guard squadron on Offutt Air Force Base

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

NebraskaAirNationalGuard Lt. Col. Michael Holdcroft assumed command of the 170th Operations Support Squadron from Lt. Col. John Von Osterheldt during a March 4 change-of-command ceremony held inside the 557th Weather Wing headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.



Von Osterheldt

More than 100 were in attendance for the ceremony including friends, family and members of Team Offutt. Col. Mark Hopson, 170th Group commander, presided over the ceremony and lauded Von Osterheldt for his many accomplishments and leadership while welcoming Holdcroft to command. “The state of Nebraska does Total Force Integration right,”

Hopson said. “We do it right because of servant leaders like John (Von Osterheldt) and Mike (Holdcroft).” Under Von Osterheldt’s guidance, the 170th OSS earned numerous awards at all levels of the 55th Wing organization, numbered Air Force, Air Force and state level.



Holdcroft

Holdcroft said he intends to remove barriers and enable his subordinates’ continued successes. In a time-honored tradition, the 170th OSS guidon was exchanged from Von Osterheldt to Hopson to Holdcroft signifying the authority of the incoming commander. Holdcroft will now lead a diverse team of Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen assigned to Offutt under the Offutt Future Total Force Initiative. Under this initiative, highly-qualified Air National



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom

Changing Of The Guard: Col. Mark Hopson, commander of the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 170th Group, and Lt. Col. John Von Osterheldt and Lt. Col. Michael Holdcroft stand at attention while the Offutt Air Force Base Honor Guard presents arms during the March 4 change of command ceremony for the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 170th Operations Support Squadron.

Guard instructor aircrew integrate into the 55th Wing and 338th Combat Training Squadron specifically to provide initial qualification, re-qualification and upgrade training to active duty and Air Guard aircrew members. The highly-experienced 170th OSS Citizen Airmen integrate into various sections within the 55th Operations Support Squadron to

increase their capability to support U.S. Air Force global operations. These functional areas include requirements, weapons and tactics, intelligence, base operations, weather and aviation resource management. Holdcroft thanked the men and women of the 170th OSS and noted the importance of the group’s mission and his intent to lead them

in a way that continues to enable their success. Von Osterheldt, who commanded the squadron for two years, will now transition to retirement. Holdcroft is a command pilot with more than 4,300 flying hours and is a graduate of the University of Virginia. He most recently served as the 170th OSS director of operations.

DERMANN continued from page 1.

career began on June 10, 1947, when he enlisted into Nebraska City’s Company A, 134th Infantry, as a private first class. Between 1947 and April 1951, Dermann served in various capacities within the unit, ultimately reaching the rank of platoon sergeant before being appointed as a second lieutenant in Co. A.

During the next decade-and-a-half, Dermann served in a variety of leadership roles within Co. A, Beatrice’s Co. C and the 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry, headquarters.

Along with his military career, Dermann worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service for 26 years before finally taking a fulltime position with the Nebraska National Guard in 1973.

According to Williamson, who believes he first met Dermann while he was working at the Soils Lab, the future general was an impressive person to be around.

“I probably got to know him best when he served as our company commander,” Williamson said, adding that the Nebraska Army National Guard of the 1950s was vastly different than the Nebraska Army National Guard of 2017. “The Guard at the time was poorly supported.”

Williamson said he was amazed at the old equipment and manuals that the Nebraska Soldiers were using when he returned to the state following his stint with the active Army, and this continued to be a problem throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

“Between the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Pentagon lost interest in the Guard,” Williamson said, adding that members of the Guard simply had to do the best they could to keep up to date on current tactics or weapon systems.

Retired Brig. Gen. James Murphy, who would one day succeed Dermann as the Nebraska Army National Guard’s assistant adjutant general in the late 1980s, echoed those comments.

According to Murphy, who served as an aide to a former brigade commander, Brig. Gen. William Bachman, during the 1960s, attitudes about the Guard began to change with the designation of the 67th Infantry Brigade as “Selective Reserve Force.”

In 1965, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara created the Selective Reserve Force (SRF), which allowed him to focus on preparing a core group of 150,000 Guardsmen for immediate overseas deployment, if needed. SRF organizations were to be authorized at 100 percent strength and receive priority training funds and modern equipment. Nebraska’s 67th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized) and Kansas’ 69th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized) were part of the SRF.

Training increased from 48 two-hour training periods per year to 72 four-hour drills, six per month. Some companies began holding back-to-back drills on weekends (where the term Multiple Unit Training Assemblies or MUTAs was born.)

Nebraska’s SRF units’ strength rose from



Nebraska National Guard Photo

Famed Leaders: (From right) Brig. Gen. Kenneth Dermann, commander of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s 67th Infantry Brigade (Separate), and future chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Brig. Gen. Colin Powell, assistant commander of the U.S. Army’s 4th Infantry Division, took time out for a photo during an annual training in the 1980s at Fort Carson, Colo. The two commanders built a relationship that would prove pivotal during the 1980s as the Army began to test the Total Army concepts.

50 to 80 percent. Training opportunities, supplies, new facilities such as the old Atlas missile sites at Mead and Arlington, and more realistic training opportunities were all benefits of the SRF.

The SRF era also saw a change in the organization’s annual training program as the 67th Infantry Brigade shifted its focus to Fort Carson where it worked alongside active Army Soldiers.

“That’s when the active Army started taking a lot more interest in us,” Williamson said. “We became attached to the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson and they would assign mentors who were people of equal ranks to the ones in the Guard that were receiving mentorship. They would come up and spend a lot of time with us at drills and throughout annual training.”

“I got to know (General Dermann) during the SRF era,” Murphy said, adding that as a general’s aide, he had a chance to be around many of the organization’s senior and upcoming leaders.

“He was the kind of guy who never got in trouble. He taught me a lot about how to treat people,” Murphy said about his interactions with Dermann. “I think it went back to the fact that he had started out as an enlisted Soldier, so he knew to treat people at every rank because he had done many of the jobs that they were now doing. It was just a pleasure to watch how he spoke to people and how he treated them.”

Murphy added that Dermann’s leadership was always present.

“He was definitely squared away from his uniform to his conduct,” Murphy said. “He was very important to the role of the Guard in that day. You could tell which units were squared away and his were always at the top of the list.”

Following an assignment as commander of the 2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry, Dermann was reassigned to the 67th Infantry Brigade as the executive officer, then deputy commander. After several additional assignments within the state headquarters, Dermann returned to the brigade as its commander on Feb. 15, 1980, and was promoted to brigadier general on Aug. 31, 1980.

By this time, the SRF era had ended, but the brigade, now a “separate” brigade, still had a significant relationship with Fort Carson and the 4th Infantry Division.

According to both Murphy and Williamson, Dermann was the perfect commander for that period of time.

“It was extremely important that General Dermann served in the position that he did,” Williamson said. “We didn’t want to be overcome by the active Army; we wanted to be on equal footing with them.”

“General Dermann had the ability to go in and speak with the active leaders on equal footing,” Williamson said, adding that this particularly the case with one Brig. Gen. Colin Powell, 4th Infantry Div. assistant commander, who worked closely with Dermann during annual training. “He had developed a lot of respect and that was really important in the development of the brigade.”

Murphy agreed. “He was as near to perfection as you get. He was always honest, direct and always in control. He was a superb officer. He was an unusual straight arrow in that he really knew his stuff and he really knew how to treat people.”

Retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Bill Nelson was one of those Soldiers. As the brigade’s fulltime unit support specialist, Nelson had frequent interactions with Dermann.

“He was a no-nonsense leader, but he also gave everyone the latitude to do what they needed to do,” Nelson said. “He wasn’t a micromanager. He would back you 100 percent, but if you made a mistake he always made sure that he would counsel you in private instead of in front of other Soldiers.”

That level of professionalism, Nelson added, went a long way in developing the relationships that Dermann created with the active Army leaders he came into contact with.

Dermann left the brigade on Nov. 1, 1983, when he became the Nebraska Army National Guard’s assistant adjutant general. Once again, he left his mark on the organization.

“Probably one of the most significant things he did was really putting focus on making sure that people were recognized for their accomplishments,” Nelson said. “Up until then, we didn’t put in many people for military awards. I think he deserves a lot of credit for changing that focus.”

Williamson said Dermann also continued to be a role model for the Soldiers he led.

“Everyone really looked forward to talking to him. He was just so thorough and knowledgeable about the issues we were dealing with,” Williamson said. “He was really a good leader in that he excelled as a tactician, as an administrator and as a strategic thinker. Often you find people who are really good in one area, but not so good in the others. General Dermann was extremely good in each of those aspects.”

“You were always assured that you would get your questions answered and that they would be the right answers... and that you would be backed up by them when you made a decision.”

“He was just a solid individual,” Murphy added. “He was kind of person we need to see more of today.”

Following his retirement from the Nebraska Army National Guard on June 1987, Dermann was inducted into the Nebraska National Guard Military Academy Hall of Fame in 1995.

Dermann was also a long-time volunteer at the Bryan Medical Center in Lincoln where he served as a member of the volunteer board of directors. He was also a long-time volunteer at his church and served in numerous other volunteer activities.

Dermann was buried at Lincoln Memorial Park with full military honors on Feb. 11. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Shirley; two sons and their wives; three grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Nebraska Air National Guard loses early aviation pioneer

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Air National Guard lost one of its early aviation pioneers, Feb. 12, when retired Lt. Col. Clarence Christensen Jr. died at the age of 94.

Christensen, a World War II veteran who flew B-24 bombers in the European Theater of Operations, served in the Nebraska Air National Guard from 1949 until his retirement from the organization in 1978 as the director of operations. He was buried with full military honors on Feb. 16 in Valparaiso, Nebraska.

According to his published obituary, Christensen was born on a farm in Hooper, Nebraska, and helped his father with the farm until the Depression when his family moved to Fremont. There he helped support the family by delivering newspapers.

In his teens, the Christensen family moved to Dwight where Clarence helped his father in the family’s machinery repair shop. During high school, they moved to Valparaiso where the future aviator attended Valparaiso High School.

As a teenager, Christensen built a ham radio, secured a license and communicated with ham radio operators around the country, even serving as an operator for the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES). Christensen worked with his family at Christensen Implement in Valparaiso where they repaired and sold farm equipment. There he was able to purchase a ride with a barnstormer pilot, launching his love for flying.

Christensen volunteered for the Army Air Corps to train as a B-24 pilot. At 22, he flew 35 combat missions over Europe during WWII, and brought his nine member crew home safely to conclude their tour. He earned two distinguished Flying Crosses for his bravery.

After the war, Christensen joined the Nebraska Air National Guard where he not only served as an aircraft instructor, but also worked as an aircraft maintenance officer earning and honoring the respect of the aircraft mechanics. He finished his career with the military as a director of operations.



Nebraska National Guard Photo

Top Pilot: Capt. Clarence Christensen Jr. posed for a photo in front of a Nebraska Air National Guard F-86D Sabre jet shortly after winning the Ricks Trophy Race in 1958.

Christensen bridged the gap between propeller airplanes of the 1940s such as the B-24 (and his favorite, the P-51), finishing his career in the supersonic R-F4.

None of Christensen’s personal achievements surpassed his winning the prestigious Ricks Trophy Race in 1958. Representing the

Nebraska Air National Guard’s 173rd Fighter Interceptor Squadron, “Chris” Christensen flew his F-86D Sabre jet over the 850-mile course between Jacksonville, Fla., and Dallas, Texas, in one hour, 48 minutes and 20 seconds.

While that accomplishment was one that would give him lasting fame, for those who

worked with him, Christensen will be forever remembered as an outstanding leader, skilled pilot, extremely knowledgeable maintenance officer and complete gentleman.

Retired Chief Master Sgt. John Bailey, a long-time Nebraska Air National Guard maintenance sergeant, first got to know Christensen shortly after he enlisted into the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1972. At the time, Bailey said, the unit was transitioning between the RF-84 “Thunderflash” jet and the much more advanced RF-4C “Phantom II.”

According to Bailey, Christensen was one of a handful of World War II veterans still in the unit.

“We really looked up to them,” said Bailey. “Those (Airmen) were really invaluable to us.”

As a crew chief on the RF-4, Bailey said he and the other unit aircraft maintainers quickly learned to listen closely to Christensen’s suggestions.

“He knew the airplane so well to the point that, as a maintenance crew chief, if he asked you something about the aircraft that you didn’t know, you’d be well served to look it up because he already knew the answer,” Bailey said. “Even though we were just transitioning into the airplane, he already knew it so well. His leadership, his skill in the aircraft, plus his knowledge of aircraft maintenance made him invaluable during that transition.”

The level of admiration was to such a level that when Christensen retired from the organization in 1978, the members of the maintenance unit presented him with a chrome wrench, making him an honorary crew chief. It was only the second time that the maintenance unit had done that up to that point, Bailey said.

“I remember that it was a pretty emotional presentation for him because I think he really thought highly of the maintenance community,” Bailey said.

Christensen would later be inducted into the Nebraska Aviation Hall of Fame in 1993.

According to Bailey, Christensen leaves a lasting legacy within the Nebraska Air National Guard. “He was just one of the most complete leader I ever met,” Bailey said. “Plus, he was just an outstanding gentleman.”

As winter comes to end, time to make plans to attend upcoming retiree events

As we move through the final months of the winter season, I’m reminded of the need to be safe in our travels and to ensure our homes are safe and keep us warm as the wind blows outside. Take time, if you haven’t already, to ensure your vents are clear, furnace is working properly and all windows are sealed.

You’ll save yourself time and money in the long run when everything is in good working order.

Congratulations to Allan Riggins and Deb Tankesley, the newly elected treasurer and secretary of the Nebraska Military Retiree Council. Both are retired Army National Guardsmen and bring a wealth of knowledge to the committee.

Ron Kroon, our long time treasurer, has opted to step down and take some well-deserved time for travel and enjoying life. Thanks, Ron, for all your hard work and dedicated service.

The NMRC Spring Social is rapidly approaching. Save the date of Saturday, May 13, 2017. Our dinner social will be at the Country Inn and Suites in Lincoln, Nebraska, at 6 p.m. Our guest speaker will be Ms. Cindy Van Bibber, director of the new Omaha National Cemetery. We will have a great meal and learn more about Nebraska’s newest national cemetery.

Check expiration date on your identification card

Have you updated your ID card? Your Retired ID Card is your identification for Tricare, Tricare for Life, and to validate your Medicare eligibility.

Have you moved, changed a phone number or added an email address? Please contact us to update your information so we can keep our information current.

As always, thank you for your dedicated military service. The

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

DEERS/ID Card Stations

- G1 – 2433 N.W. 24th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524: (402) 309-8167/8168/8169;
- “Spirit of 1776” Armory 1776 N. 10th St. Lincoln, NE 68508 (402) 309-7359/7737;
- Penterman Armory at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln (402) 309-1724/1719;
- Air Guard (Lincoln Air Base) Bldg 600 Room E209: (402) 309-1542;
- Norfolk Armory 817 S. 1st St. Norfolk, NE 68701 (402) 309-8900/8908;
- Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney: (402) 309-7758/7752;
- 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), 220 County Road A, Bldg. 508, Ashland, NE 68003, (402) 309-7809/7628;
- Offutt Air Force Base: (402) 294-2374;
- The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.

Remember, you need two forms of ID when you arrive for your appointment.

Nebraska National Guard is rightfully proud of its heritage and you were part of that legacy.

Retiree NCO Update

We encourage you to call (402) 309-8191 if you have had a change in address or spousal status so we can update the Retiree data base.

We are planning retirement briefs for this coming year and will post the schedule as soon as we finalize details. These briefings will provide you updates on your benefits as well as any changes. Please note, there are many agencies that support this event by providing briefings and booths to provide information and answer your questions and concerns.

Keeping you informed and helping you anyway possible is a very important to me, my section and the leadership of the Nebraska Army National Guard. If you have any

Early Bird Breakfasts

• Lincoln, Army National Guard retirees: **First** Monday of each month, 7 a.m., Virginia’s Travelers Café, 3820 Cornhusker Highway

• Lincoln, Air National Guard retirees: **Last** Monday of each month, 7 a.m., Stauffer’s Café, 5600 S. 48th Street

• North Platte area retirees: **Second** Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., Airport Inn

questions or need assistance you can reach me at (402) 309-8162 or vincent.e.luhn@mail.mil. Thank you for your service and a BIG thank you to the family members who gave their support.

Nebraska Air Guardsmen support Australia training

By Airman 1st Class Jaime Titus
Staff Photojournalist

Fourteen Airmen from the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Air Refueling Wing joined approximately 230 Airmen from the active duty Air Force and reserve component of the Air Force for a Feb. 9-28 joint exercise with the Australian Air Force at Darwin Royal Air Force Base in Darwin, Australia.

Two KC-135R Stratotankers, one from the 155th ARW and another from the 434th Air Refueling Wing from Grissom Air Reserve Base, Indiana, helped eight F-22A Raptors from the 525th Fighter Squadron from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska get to Australia by serving as their flying gas station.

While in Australia, the Airmen from the 155th ARW supported and took part in air-to-air and air-to-ground engagements with the Australians. They also shuttled the F-22s from Tindal RAAF Base to an air show in Melbourne, Australia.

Exercises like this show what the Nebraska Air National Guard can do, said Col. Don M. Neff, 155th Operations Group commander.

“The display of eight F-22s and two KC-135s from the total force effort in the Air Force forward deploying to Australia (and) working together with the Aussies, that does two things,” said Neff. “First, it builds that relationship with Australian Air Force and shows that we can work together with another Air Force, one of our really close allies. (It) also shows the other players in that part of the world that we’re committed to that (area of responsibility).”

Neff added that deployments such as the Australian effort help



Photo courtesy of Col. Don M. Neff

High Flying Refueling: A U.S. Air Force F-22A Raptor from the 524th Fighter Squadron receives fuel from a Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker during a mission in support of the Feb. 9-28 joint exercise with the Australian Air Force in Darwin, Australia.

demonstrate interoperability between all functions of the Air Force, such as U.S. Pacific Air Force, U.S. Northern Command, Grissom Air Reserve Base and the 155th ARW.

“It reassures our allies that we’re committed to the area and that we will bring our latest and greatest technologies and that we’ll share and that we’re there to help them if the need arises,” said Neff.

“We can go anywhere in the world with very little support and we can stand up and not only operate, but provide customer service.”

Stories of the Nebraska National Guard

Lyle Welch led 1960s Nebraska Guard with musician’s touch

By Jerry Meyer
State Historian

As the Nebraska National Guard Museum goes through thousands of photographs from the 1960s, one can’t help but be impressed by the adjutant general who led the organization through that turbulent decade, Maj. Gen. Lyle Welch.

The general seemed to be everywhere and was always meeting and talking with Soldiers and Airmen. His leadership would inspire the next decades’ leaders to carry the Nebraska National Guard forward to conquer new challenges and to become what we are today.

Lyle Welch was born on Jan. 27, 1909, in Milford, Nebraska. He graduated from Milford High School in 1927 and went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in Music from the University of Nebraska in 1931.

While at UNL, Welch enlisted into the Nebraska National Guard in 1927 with the Service Company, 134th Infantry Regiment. He later became a warrant officer in 1933



Welch

and served with the 110th Medical Regiment Band.

Welch mobilized with the 134th Infantry, 35th Division, when they were called to federal service on Dec. 23, 1940, but soon transferred to another division where he was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1941. Welch then went on to serve with distinction in the Pacific Theater of Operations during the World War II, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel when the war ended.

After the war, Welch rejoined the Nebraska National Guard and became the 34th Division “Red Bull” quartermaster in 1948. He also served as director of instrumental music in the Lincoln Public Schools from 1931-1940 and 1946-1959.

Nebraska Governor Ralph Brooks appointed Welch as the Nebraska National Guard’s 25th adjutant general on July 16, 1959. He would serve until Jan. 26, 1973. Along with serving as the Nebraska adjutant general, Welch also served as the state director of Civil Defense, state disaster coordinator and director of Emergency Planning.

Welch’s duties as adjutant general would take him around the state and nation where he observed Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen



Nebraska National Guard Historical Photo

Reviewing The Troops: Maj. Gen. Lyle Welch (second from left) reviews members of the Nebraska Army National Guard during an annual training ceremony at Camp Ripley, Minn. Welch served as the adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard from 1959-73.

in training exercises, presented awards and provided general officer leadership of the Nebraska National Guard. Many pictures of Welch during the 1960s show him among the Soldiers and Airmen, especially the 43rd Army Band (he loved to stand behind performers in amongst the band).

Welch also involved the civilian leadership in training exercises by flying them to places like Camp Ripley, Minnesota, and Fort Carson, Colorado, and many air bases across the United States to see Nebraska’s Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen in action.

Welch passed away on Nov. 13,

1978, and is buried in Blue Mound Cemetery in Milford. His story and many others are coming to life at the Nebraska National Guard Museum in Seward.

If you have artifacts related to your service in the Nebraska National Guard...we would like to hear from you. Please call (402) 309-8763.

Five Nebraska Air Guardsmen became guiding force behind organization’s transition to tankers

By Airman 1st Class Treyton McNeese-Polivka
Staff Writer

They literally held the future livelihood of the Nebraska Air National Guard in their hands.

The responsibility that five key Nebraska Air National Guard officers were handed in 1985 when they were convened to examine the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance Group’s aging aerial reconnaissance efforts and then make suggestion as to what future flying missions the organization should pursue.

The decisions that these five individuals made would have major, lasting impacts throughout the Nebraska Air National Guard that continue to this day.

Back in 1985, the RF-4C Phantom II that the Nebraska Air National Guard had flown since November 1971 was rapidly reaching its retirement age. With the future of manned aerial reconnaissance in doubt, it seemed likely that when the U.S. Air Force retired to the two-seat RF-4C there wouldn’t be a similar aircraft or mission to replace it.

“The RF-4 was leaving the inventory (of the Air Force) and no dedicated reconnaissance fighter was going to replace it,” said Col. Paul Cohen, who served as the Nebraska Air National Guard staff director of logistics at the time.

“With no follow-on reconnaissance/fighter, the Nebraska Air National Guard should be prepared for a major mission change,” Cohen said at the time.

This reality caused the upper leadership of the Nebraska Air National Guard and the 155th Tactical Reconnaissance Group to realize that it needed to begin looking for a suitable replacement mission and aircraft to secure the future of the organization. In 1985 Brig. Gen. Richard Bertrand, Nebraska Air National Guard chief of staff, commissioned a panel of five key personnel who were to be chosen from amongst the leadership of the 155th TRG to discuss and consider the unit’s future.

Selected were: Col. Bruce Shantz, 155th TRG commander; Col. Darrel Thomssen, director of operations; Col. Paul Cohen, staff director of Logistics; Lt. Col. Laverne Neumann, 155th TRG chief of Maintenance; Lt. Col. James McMurray, executive support staff officer; and Lt. Col. Kenneth King, 155th Civil Engineer Flight commander.

With the panel members selected, the Nebraska Airmen were each charged with examining other aircraft, talking to outside sources and figuring out which potential aircraft mission would best meet the Nebraska Air National Guard’s needs and capabilities. In doing this research, each panelist was required to keep in mind four elements: the impact of a new mission on people, the impact

on Nebraska Air National Guard facilities, the anticipated availability of aircraft and missions, and anticipated future U.S. Air Force, Air National Guard and 155th TRG force structures.

By 1986 the panel had focused its energies on five aircraft: F-16, F-111, KC-135, C-141, and C-130.

The F-16 was quickly dropped from the list, as it would result in a significant loss of personnel for the organization. At that time, the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln was authorized 1,137 personnel. If the unit was transitioned into an F-16 mission, the base would only be authorized 750 personnel.

While the F-16 aircraft itself was very attractive to the base and fit within the tradition of the 155th TRG, which had flown fighter-type aircraft since its founding in 1946, this significant loss of personnel was unacceptable.

So, the list was revised and put in order of desire for the Nebraska Air National Guard: F-111, KC-135R, C-141, and C-130.

The two-seat F-111 “Aardvark” tactical fighter bomber was the first choice of the Nebraska Air Guard, but it was a long shot. The F-111 had never been stationed in the Air National Guard before. Still, the aircraft made the most sense due to the fact that the authorized personnel for the F-111 was roughly the same as the RF-4C. Additionally, very little new construction would be required for the F-111 transition, while the unit had the skills and training knowledge required to fly a fighter aircraft.

The second choice of the panel’s was the KC-135R “Stratotanker.”

The KC-135R was the most attractive of the aircraft, in large part due to the refueling mission, its importance to the total force, life span of the aircraft, its mission and the new engine upgrades that had recently occurred.

The only downfall to this new aircraft was the requirement for major construction.

In order to transition to the KC-135R, \$50 million was needed to accommodate for the mission and aircraft. Some personnel reductions would also be required, but not nearly as many as it would be for the F-16. Finally, Nebraska Air Guard personnel would need extensive training and retraining.

A significant cultural change was also required.

The refueling mission and aircraft was particularly different than what the 155th TRG was used to in that the KC-135R required a crew-based system of a pilot, co-pilot and an in-flight refueling technician during each in-flight refueling mission. However, the upside was significant in that the Air Force believed that the mission and the KC-135R would be around for a significantly long time



Prairie Soldier Archive Photo

Waiting Their Chance To See A Tanker: A line of Nebraska Air National Guardsmen and their families line up to take a look at the first Nebraska Air National Guard KC-135R Stratotanker — named the “City of Lincoln” — during a rainy Sept. 18, 1993, aircraft unveiling ceremony in Lincoln, Neb.

as a fundamental part of the U.S. Air Force’s world-wide mission.

In describing the mission, Cohen said: “The future of the Nebraska Air National Guard would be set for a generation.”

With the list and reasons behind each aircraft completed, the list was then forwarded to National Guard Bureau (NGB). There, the chief of the NGB forwarded the list to the planners, who immediately threw out the F-111, saying there were no plans in the foreseeable future for the aircraft to enter the Air Guard inventory.

National Guard Bureau planners then asked if Nebraska was serious about the KC-135R. When the organization replied that it indeed was, the KC-135R aircraft and mission were offered to Nebraska, which the organization quickly accepted.

Since NGB offered the Nebraska Air National Guard it’s second choice on the list, the possibility of transitioning to the C-141 or C-131 missions were never discussed.

In April 1992, the Air Force announced its decision to retire the last RF-4 Phantoms. The 155th TRG was then directed to convert to the KC-135R Stratotanker mission.

The actual conversion to the aerial refueling mission began in 1993 with the arrival of the first KC-135R Stratotanker, which was given the name “City of Lincoln.” In transitioning to the new mission, the unit was actually stepping backward in the fact that the KC-135R was actually older than the RF-4Cs it was replacing.

The KC-135R Stratotanker was first deployed by the Air Force in August 1956. Since then, however, it has been constantly upgraded and will continue to undergo life-cycle upgrades to expand the aircraft’s capabilities and improve reliability.

The KC-135R can fly at speeds of 530

miles per hour at 30,000 feet, with a ceiling of 50,000 feet and range of 1,500 miles with 150,000 pounds of transfer fuel. To reach these speeds it is equipped with CFM-56 Turbofan engines which gives it 21,634 pounds of thrust per engine.

The KC-135R has a maximum transfer fuel load of 200,000 pounds. To operate this massive aircraft, it calls for a pilot, co-pilot and boom-operator. The KC-135R has a wingspan of 130 feet and 10 inches, with a length of 136 feet and 3 inches, and a height of 41 feet 8 inches.

In September 1993 the last RF-4C Phantom from the Nebraska Air National Guard was flown into retirement and was refueled in route by the “City of Lincoln.” Then, on Oct. 1, 1995, the unit was redesignated as the 155th Air Refueling Wing.

The 155th Air Refueling Wing passed its first post-conversion inspection and operational readiness inspection conducted by Air Mobility Command in April 1996 and was certified as fully combat ready.

The Nebraska Air National Guard’s 47 year-old fighter and reconnaissance era had come come an end. In its place came a new era of aerial refueling that continues on today as members of the organization provide support to U.S. and coalition aircraft around the globe.

With the foresight and knowledge of the leadership during the years of 1985-1986, the Nebraska Air National Guard has had a stable, respected and well known future for two-plus decades and counting.

Editor’s Note: Airman 1st Class Treyton McNeese-Polivka has been working in a temporary assignment within the Nebraska National Guard public affairs office in archiving the history of the Nebraska Air National Guard. This article is the first of a series of articles detailing that history.



Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



Deployment doesn't mean separation for husband, wife

By Sgt. Anna Pongo
Staff Photojournalist

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Couples where both partners are in the military have many experiences most civilian couples do not share. Being a dual-military couple is one of the few instances where a military member has the chance to deploy with their spouse.

With the Married Army Couples Program, which helps place married service members in proximal units, some couples have the chance to spend their time overseas together.

The 1st Infantry Division Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion has several pairs with this unique status. Three dual-military couples within the “Big Red One” are at Union III together.

The 1st Inf. Div. is part of Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command — Operation Inherent Resolve. CJFLCC-OIR is a global Coalition of more than 60 regional and international nations have joined together to enable partnered forces to defeat ISIL and restore stability and security.

Families of deployed service-members understand all too well the challenge that communication can pose. From bad phone and internet connections to night and day time differences, keeping up communication can be difficult.

For Capt. Cody Hennelly, maneuver advisor to Iraqi Ministry of Defense, CJFLCC-OIR, and his wife, Capt. Jessica Deason, plans and operations officer in charge for the headquarters personnel section, being deployed together means they can share those meaningful times instead of being at the mercy of technology.

“It’s not lost on us how lucky we are,” Deason said. “Everyone else here has to wait until the wee hours of the morning to call and talk to their spouses, and I just get to see mine every day for lunch and dinner.”

Deason and Hennelly met several years ago at the Field Artillery Basic Officer Leader Course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where she was one of three females in a class of 130



U.S. Army Photo

Serving In Iraq Together: Capt. Cody Hennelly (left), maneuver advisor to Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command — Operation Inherent Resolve, and his wife, Capt. Jessica Deason, plans and operations officer in charge for the headquarters personnel section of CJFLCC-OIR, pose for a photo, Feb. 4, on Union III, Baghdad, Iraq. They are one of several dual-military couples deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, with the 1st Infantry Division Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion.

students. Through mutual friends, they became friends and later fell in love. This began an interesting life together as the military took them to other continents.

After they met, Deason ended up in Korea as a platoon leader and battery executive officer for a year, while Hennelly’s service with the National Guard took him to Alaska for two years. So, separation isn’t new for them in their relationship. On this deployment, however, they can be together.

Hennelly is assigned to the Main Command Post — Operational Detachment out of Lincoln, Nebraska. The MCP-OD is a new type of National Guard unit designed to augment and enhance an active Army division or corps headquarters staff during deployments. Hennelly is one of 95 Soldiers attached to the 1st Inf. Div. Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion.

“It just was by chance that I joined the Nebraska National Guard and she was already in the 1st Infantry Division,” Hennelly said.

Deason served with the 1st Brigade, 5th Field Artillery, 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div., before transferring to the

DHQB, 1st Inf. Div., so she could deploy with her husband.

“My previous battalion commander found out that Cody was deploying with the division headquarters and he pulled some strings and was able to get me into this position so that I would be able to deploy with him,” Deason said. “It was a prime example of leaders taking care of Soldiers.”

Hennelly agreed with his wife about how much they valued the ability to deploy together.

“It sort of reaffirmed our faith in the Army, that they really did look out for the families,” Hennelly said. “Even before we just got here, we were working for a good couple months to get Jess on the deployment. It’s great being together.”

The experiences they are sharing as a couple are bringing them together more each day.

“Our marriage has grown because of this experience,” Hennelly said. “Just like it did from being separated for the two years. And now being deployed together in a combat zone, it just helps it grow... We will be able to look back in years to come and say ‘We shared that whole nine months together and everything that came with it.’”

Resiliency’s six pillars can help people build solid foundations

The beginning of a new year brings fresh hope and expectations of the next chapter in life. It can also bring the baggage of disappointments and hurts from the previous year.

Resiliency is a cornerstone to establishing that our endeavors will remain strong and functional.

Generally, there are six pillars of resiliency that can be used as a solid foundation to prevent aspects of our life from crumbling: physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and gratitude.

If a ‘resiliency engineer’ were to examine these six pillars in our own lives, what would they find? As all buildings age, the original materials used to construct them begin to show wear and tear. In structures held together by brick and mortar, the process of masonry tuckpointing is used to carefully examine each brick and joint for cracks or decay.

Sometimes, we need to use the process of tuckpointing to intentionally examine ourselves and the aspects of our own life brick by brick. Resiliency can be likened to an all-weather coating that helps protect from the stresses of the environment. It is that quality that enables us to resist or bounce back from adversity. Stress cracks can develop over time into larger issues, which is why we must be carefully attentive to each of them.

Take a moment to examine these pillars in the context of your own life:

Physical: Regular physical activity of even a moderate amount can have a big impact in our mental and physical health. Physical exercise helps to reprogram our body’s chemistry for success. Even just 20 minutes of focused physical exercise can produce significant releases of natural chemicals and hormones which combat stress. Small things such as going for a walk around the block or standing up in place and conducting breathing exercises can be of value.

Related to our physical activity is eating healthy foods, drinking water and getting enough rest.

Mental: Conducting mental exercises such as crossword puzzles, word searches, trivia challenges, or other such “games” help us to stimulate portions of our brain that are generally less active during periods of stress or depression. Even a 10-minute mental health break to challenge

a co-worker to name as many State Capitals you can remember (or to list them in alphabetical order), or to list titles of hit records of a favorite band, or Old Testament books named after prophets, can

help with resetting our mental energy in the midst of stress.

Emotional: We have to learn to hunt for the ‘good stuff’ in the midst of our emotional life. Having a 3:1 ratio of positive-to-negative emotions during the course of the day is important for a positive mental outlook. Laughing with a friend, viewing videos about puppies, feeling good about a work or personal accomplishment, or even scoring in an electronic video game can all put positive points on the emotional scoreboard.

Social: We were each created for some type of companionship.

We are social beings. Interacting with friends is an important part of our well-being. Taking a moment to write an old-fashioned letter via paper and pen, or using the modern version of sending a friend a text helps us to develop social resiliency. Having a cup of coffee with a friend or even an electronic video chat can also help. A physical handshake, hug, or hand on the shoulder for as

little as six seconds can boost oxytocin and increase feelings of trust — all of which deepen resiliency.

Spiritual: Taking a moment to silently admire the beauty of creation and acknowledging that it was formed by a power greater than ourselves can help us to keep a resilient perspective on the problems of life. Habits of prayer, worship, ritual and contemplative reading are just some of the building blocks that develop the spiritual life.

Gratitude: The ability to identify and daily count our blessings can be of enormous benefit in mixing the mortar of resiliency. Thankfulness and appreciation for even the smallest things in our lives can help us to combat the anxieties and stress that life throws at us. Being grateful and expressing it to others lays a solid foundation against the worries of life.

For more information about building resiliency, check out the work of Dr. Jane McGonigal, author of *SuperBetter: The Power of Living Gamefully*. You can find information about her innovative research on increasing resiliency at www.superbetter.com.

Building Resiliency
By Chaplain (Capt.) Steve Thomlison

‘Resiliency can be likened to an all-weather coating that helps protect from the stresses of the environment. It is that quality that enables us to resist or bounce back from adversity. Stress cracks can develop over time into larger issues, which is why we must be carefully attentive to each of them.’

Veterans Crisis Line

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text.

Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, chat online, or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Visit the following link for more information on the Veterans Crisis Line.

www.veteranscrisisline.net ★ 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)



Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**



Street Talk

“What does being a Nebraskan mean to you?”



Tech. Sgt. Jeff Legge
Joint Force Headquarters

“Friendly folks, wide-open spaces, long road trips, cold winters, Cornhusker sports and Runza!”



Spc. Caleb Geiger
1075th Transportation Company

“Being corn-fed. I’ve been here all my life. I grew up, and to put it simply, it’s really just home.”



Staff Sgt. Kendall Thompson
Joint Force Headquarters

“Strong values, family-ties and focus on the community combined with an eagerness to help and engage in activities. Things like summer fairs and time well-spent with good friends.”



Pfc. Whisper Harris
Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation

“Nebraska means community. There’s diversity of people, cultures, religions and points of view, but together we make a nice little community that we call home.”



Master Sgt. Kenny Brown
Joint Force Headquarters

“To be a Nebraskan isn’t flashy or even desired. It’s like bucking the wind and getting the job done without complaining or excuses.”



Staff Sgt. Justin Olson
189th Transportation Company

“I’m proud to be from Nebraska. We have the perfect blend of hard work and small town friendliness.”

Are you ready for the Army Guard’s next challenge?

Readiness is our number one priority. From General Milley, our Army Chief of Staff, all the way down to the new private swearing the oath of enlistment, everything we do is about building readiness.

Director’s Viewpoint

Lieutenant General

Timothy Kadavy



difficult to be warriors. Army Guard 4.0 will open the opportunity for the training days and equipment modernization we didn’t have in the early days of Total Force implementation.

What am I asking of you as a Soldier in the

Building readiness isn’t new to anyone who’s been in the Army National Guard long enough to see a mobilization cycle. We do this well. We’ve mobilized more than 561,000 Soldiers for the warfight since 9/11 and we’re continuing to mobilize.

Even though mobilizations for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have decreased, our nation still requires us to serve across the globe. This is why building readiness is so critical: we’re needed for rotational commitments, we’re needed for homeland response and we’re needed for the future fight.

How we train for the warfight is changing. Since the Total Force Policy was adopted in 1973, we’ve been an integral thread in the fabric of the Army. That model has evolved out of necessity and continues to evolve.

When I joined the Nebraska National Guard in 1982, we were building readiness, but under the idea that we were a strategic force only to be used in “break glass in case of emergency” types of situations. I served alongside some committed Cornhusker Soldiers, but it was a very different National Guard than today. The Guard was intentionally resourced at a lower level with longer post-mobilization training times.

During Operation Desert Storm, the Army’s force was tested. The Army couldn’t go to war without the Guard, but the readiness level wasn’t high enough to get us where we needed to be when the warfight needed us to be there. Desert Storm was a turning point that drove home the fact that Army National Guard readiness levels were not adequate

to accomplish the missions placed upon us.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, we have become an operational reserve. We’ve proven how essential the Army National Guard is and we have had 15 years to hone our processes. We’ve had the advantage of rotational deployments with longer lead times, and at times the Army force generation cycle, to make these combat deployments more predictable.

But here’s the crux of readiness: Those who would threaten our country will not always give us years of warning. History has shown that when we fall for a lower level of readiness, we pay for it. All of our units must be at higher levels of readiness than in the past, but some of our units must be even more ready than that.

That’s our next challenge: How do we get the Army National Guard prepared for our future threats?

At any given moment, some of our units will be engaged in homeland defense or deterrence missions while others must build readiness for the future. What I see leading into the future is that all units must be continually building readiness and holding higher levels of readiness than in the past. This sustained readiness balances current and future needs, supports long-term modernization, and offers the predictability we know is so important.

I call this turning point Army National Guard 4.0.

As a young officer in the 1st Squadron of the 167th Cavalry, our training opportunities and equipment were so slim it was more

Nebraska Army National Guard? Army National Guard 4.0 is a cultural shift down to the Soldier level, one that I need each of you to accomplish. Focus on building your individual readiness. Your personal medical readiness is more critical now than ever. Army Guard 4.0 opens up more opportunities to complete your Military Occupational Specialty or professional military education training, but you’ll need to be ready to accept that challenge.

Critical units must attain a higher level of readiness through increased training and the opportunity to perform at the gold standard of Army training—Combat Training Center rotations. These training opportunities get us to where we are training hard on current equipment alongside our counterparts from the Active Component Army Reserve.

As Soldiers in the Nebraska Guard, you’re not the only members of the team that we’ll need to implement Guard 4.0. Making this next iteration of the future of the Army Guard successful is going to take support from your families and employers.

Start these conversations early. Engage them towards building your individual Soldier readiness. This will take increased commitment, but in exchange, you’ll have more predictability. This is not something we do because we want to, it’s something we do because our nation requires it.

Readiness is a challenge, but never one that I’ve doubted that the Soldiers of the Army National Guard will be ready to accept. When we pull together as leaders of character, committed to meeting the nation’s needs, we’re unstoppable.

Nebraska’s tale also story of Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen

This is a great year to be a Nebraskan as our state celebrates its 150th anniversary of statehood.

That also means it’s an even better year to be a Nebraska National Guard Soldier or Airman as we also celebrate the role our organization had in Nebraska’s founding and its enduring preservation.

The Nebraska National Guard was founded on Dec. 23, 1854, by acting Nebraska Territorial Governor Thomas Cuming in response to growing fears among the settlers following a series of Native American conflicts with the U.S. Army and travelers along the Mormon Trail. That makes the Nebraska National Guard fully 12 years older than the state itself.

Since then, a total of 109 Nebraska communities have hosted at least one Nebraska militia or Nebraska National Guard unit.

This year, on March 1, the state paused for a day to mark Nebraska’s 150th Birthday. Numerous ceremonies were held at the State Capitol in commemoration of the many, many Nebraskans who built this state into what it is today. It was a remarkable day filled with remarkable moments, not the least of which were speeches by Gov. Pete Ricketts who spoke about the contributions of many of the state’s well-known forefathers and foremothers.

My Turn

State Public Affairs Officer

Kevin J. Hynes



Guard men and women.

Today, more than 162 years after the Nebraska National Guard was founded, I shudder when I think of all those untold stories about what these brave Nebraskans did in the face of floods, blizzards, tornadoes and wars.

Imagine, if you can, what it was like to serve on the wide open plains when blizzards or tornadoes wreaked unimaginable destruction upon unsuspecting villagers. Imagine what it was like to serve in the Philippines following the Spanish American War, or on the dusty plains of Texas during the Mexican Border Dispute, or the muddy trenches of World War I France? Imagine, the horrors that our fellow Nebraskan’s faced during the nightmarish battles of St. Lo, Mortain or Habbkirchen during World War II?

Or consider how our most recent deployments to Kuwait, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia or Afghanistan have added to our state’s ongoing tapestry.

So, as we continue to celebrate Nebraska’s 150th Anniversary, take pride in the fact that our Nebraska National Guard has added immeasurably to our state’s heritage. For the story of Nebraska cannot be told – at least not accurately – without telling the story of our Nebraska National Guard, just as we cannot fully tell our story without also telling the story of Nebraska.

The story of Nebraska is indeed a remarkable tale that can be told in almost limitless ways. For some, the story of Nebraska is about the natural resources and wildlife that lie within the state’s enormous borders. For others, it’s a tale about remarkable men and women from all walks of life who, through efforts both great and small, overcame enormous odds to create the rich patchwork quilt of what is Nebraska.

I’m pretty sure if you asked 10 Nebraskans what the story of Nebraska is, you would get 10 response back, because there is no one way to tell this amazing and ongoing story.

However, as I sat in the audience at several of those ceremonies, I found myself thinking about how the story of Nebraska is really, in many ways, also the story about the Nebraska National Guard. And vice versa.

Consider for a second that out of these 109 communities – cities and villages ranging from Plattsmouth, Bloomfield, Broken Bow, Fontanelle, Hastings and Dublin to Stromsburg, Valentine, Chadron and Wood River — emerged tens of thousands of Nebraska National

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Captain
Robert G. Book
Vincent T. Dvorak

First Lieutenant

Darren C. Harden

Chief Warrant Officer 4

Brian L. Anderson
Patrick L. Hegemann

Chief Warrant Officer 3

Eric V. Cole

Sergeant Major

Richard D. Schneider

Master Sergeant

Lucuas R. Gerdes
Heath F. Hamilton
Michael G. Hayes
Scott A. Kennec
Landen C. Koopman
Joshua R. Loos
Robert A. Page
Natosha D. Siemek
Jeremy S. Tiede
Patrick E. Tucker

Sergeant First Class

Stephen P. Dorcey
Michael B. Eaton
Bo R. Feltz
Cody A. Graff
Randy A. Graves
Cody K. Green
Jeffrey J. Hergott
Tanner K. Hippen
Matthew R. Lamb
Jared S. Wiehn
Alex J. Williams

Staff Sergeant

Nicholas G. Davids
Francisco E. Hernandez
Michael C. Lair
Candice M. Lyon
Brandon A. Pedersen
Michael S. Ronk
Kathryn J. Ryder

Sergeant

Charles W. Bailey
Joseph D. Battiato
Luke A. Davidson
Cody L. Emge
Brandon K. Husted
Patrick J. Kelly
Jacob I. Kendrick
Cameron L. Oden
Jacob T. Mikesell
Matthew C. Miller
Austin J. Peterson
Adam M. Pierce
Bradley J. Pierce

Anna M. Pongo
Melissa C. Rahorst
Cole W. Ratkovec
Michael B. Shaw
Parry W. Siebenaler
Thomas M. Springhower
Alexander J. Svitak
Juan C. Villagomez
Robert C. Wells

Specialist

Lily S. Baines
Logan D. Berck
Dustin E. Bertschinger
Travis J. Brewer
Jason A. Camp
Guillermo R. Chavez
David M. Cherry
Seydou Coulibaly
Austin R. Duermyer
Garrett G. Grubbs
Tanner D. HrbeK
Erik L. Jacobson
Skylar A. Jenkins
Rowdy B. Jensen
Colby T. Keiser
Neil J. Kermmoad
Kiefer J. Kotrous
Jeffrey D. Lechner
Brandon J. Moninger
Brooklyn A. Orcutt
Luis G. Perez
Brady A. Renter
Hunter T. Robinson
Michael R. Schmitt
Collin T. Sindt
Alexander J. Stang
Nathaniel T. Stoddart
Jorge A. A. Vergameza
Chase D. Watson
Anthony E. Weyers

Private Two

Matthew J. Deckert
Collin M. Dirks
Timothy L. Dubry
John R. Haberer
Donald S. Kaspar
Nicole M. Kennedy
Lazaro S. Torres

Private One

Kevin M. Lindsey
Brian L. Obermeier

Chief Master Sergeant

Jason L. Schroeder

Senior Master Sergeant

Ronald D. Enriquez Jr.
Shea T. Harkness
Jody L. Kouma
Paul M. Savick

Master Sergeant

John P. Garza
Brannnon K. Lourtizen
Aaron L. Wescott
Mark S. Wiemeyer
Jarod M. Wozniak

Technical Sergeant

Cody Carlow
Tyler J. Kleinshmit
Shawn M. Patsios
Brandon M. Sewell
Vey V. Thach

Staff Sergeant

Samuel D. Eddings
William J. Johnson
Bridgette E. McKnight
Jase R. Stevens
Nicolas P. Tenhulzen
Cameron R. Walther
Jonathan A. Zgainer

Senior Airman

Cleyton L. Hartman
Jordan A. Hemmingson
Caehn M. Knobbe
Nathaniel D. Matlock
Issac S. Maytum
Tyler J. Wellman

Airman

Juliana R. Brehm

Walker J. Prather
Ibis A. Quintero
Isaiah D. Thornton
Mason G. Ulmer
Curtis S. Weber
Steven J. Wilson

Private Two

Matthew J. Deckert
Collin M. Dirks
Timothy L. Dubry
John R. Haberer
Donald S. Kaspar
Nicole M. Kennedy
Lazaro S. Torres

Air National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel

Bryan R. Scholtes

Captain

Kevin M. Lindsey
Brian L. Obermeier

Chief Master Sergeant

Jason L. Schroeder

Senior Master Sergeant

Ronald D. Enriquez Jr.
Shea T. Harkness
Jody L. Kouma
Paul M. Savick

Master Sergeant

John P. Garza
Brannnon K. Lourtizen
Aaron L. Wescott
Mark S. Wiemeyer
Jarod M. Wozniak

Technical Sergeant

Cody Carlow
Tyler J. Kleinshmit
Shawn M. Patsios
Brandon M. Sewell
Vey V. Thach

Staff Sergeant

Samuel D. Eddings
William J. Johnson
Bridgette E. McKnight
Jase R. Stevens
Nicolas P. Tenhulzen
Cameron R. Walther
Jonathan A. Zgainer

Senior Airman

Cleyton L. Hartman
Jordan A. Hemmingson
Caehn M. Knobbe
Nathaniel D. Matlock
Issac S. Maytum
Tyler J. Wellman

Airman

Juliana R. Brehm

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Christopher J. Weskamp
Maj. Jason Palatas
Maj. Jeremiah J. Szymskie
Capt. Nathaniel C. Krcilek
Sgt. 1st Class Cody K. Green
Sgt. 1st Class Michael S. Krefft
Sgt. 1st Class Samuel A. Malone
Sgt. 1st Class Chad E. Sample
Sgt. 1st Class Michael B. Warrick
Staff Sgt. D. J. Johnson
Staff Sgt. Robert B. Thompson

Joint Service Achievement Medal

Lt. Col. Theodore E. Hanger

Army Commendation Medal

Maj. Charles D. McWilliams
Capt. Mathew A. Field
Capt. Dustin J. Mckenna
1st Lt. Matthew T. Broman
1st Lt. Jonathan S. Gronewold
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Donald G. Renner
Sgt. Maj. Bruce A. Nakai
Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy S. Borrell
Sgt. 1st Class Lillie D. Chambers
Sgt. 1st Class Mark J. Goodrich
Staff Sgt. James A. Adelman
Staff Sgt. Nicholas J. Anderson
Staff Sgt. Justin T. Clausen
Staff Sgt. Andrew P. Cook
Staff Sgt. Craig D. Hoppes
Staff Sgt. Brison G. Kuhn
Staff Sgt. Eugene T. Schroll
Staff Sgt. Shawn M. Sullivan
Sgt. Dylan M. Bryant
Sgt. Alex D. Fischer
Sgt. Kyle A. Russell
Sgt. Dustin L. Stoner
Spc. David M. Foley

Army Achievement Medal

Capt. Zachary L. Brueningsen

Capt. Veronica L. Jones
1st Lt. Owen M. S. Bargar
2nd Lt. Grant J. Hewitt
Sgt. 1st Class Dominik G. Chase
Sgt. 1st Class Michael G. Uhing
Staff Sgt. Megan G. Dannelly
Staff Sgt. Darrin D. Fulford
Staff Sgt. Joshua J. Kushen
Staff Sgt. Dustin E. Schlote
Sgt. Christopher L. Franssen
Sgt. Lawrence M. Lind
Spc. Yocelin J. Avinasanchez
Spc. Morgan L. Saylor
Pfc. Makayla L. Brooks

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal

Maj. Charles D. McWilliams
Chief Warrant Officer 1 Alisha S. Kelly
Pvt. Edgar Alejandro

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal

Maj. Charles D. McWilliams
Capt. Eric C. Otte
2nd Lt. Kyle d. Gaudreault
Sgt. Maj. Bruce A. Nakai
1st Sgt. Pamela R. Whisenhunt
Sgt. 1st Class Amber D. Engelman
Sgt. 1st Class James C. Mendoza
Sgt. 1st Class Penny F. Winterburn
Staff Sgt. Craig D. Hoppes
Staff Sgt. Justin D. Mccoy
Staff Sgt. Dominic Rossitto
Staff Sgt. David J. Tunnison
Sgt. Erica A. Hansen
Sgt. Freeman S. Sandquist
Spc. Damian R. Hort
Spc. Annie T. Szczepaniak
Spc. Andrew A. Thomas

Air National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Brenda Fujan

Lt. Col. John Decker
Lt. Col. David Preisman
Lt. Col. Jason Ragone
Lt. Col. Allen Simpson
Maj. Travis Degen
Maj. Karl Duerk
Maj. Johnny Harrison
Maj. Jennifer Leavitt
Capt. Ryan Watson
Chief Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham
Chief Master Sgt. Randal Eickmeier
Senior Master Christian Bradley
Senior Master Sgt. Thomas Reimers
Senior Master Sgt. Jason Schroeder
Master Sgt. Sherri Bejvancesky
Master Sgt. Tommy Butts
Master Sgt. Keith Lund
Master Sgt. Susan Melcher
Tech. Sgt. Neal Stocking

Aerial Achievement Medal

Tyler Johnson

Air Force Commendation Medal

Master Sgt. Jaime Barlow
Master Sgt. Kathryn Claypool
Master Sgt. Gerald Dorn
Tech. Sgt. Brittany Bowers
Tech. Sgt. Frank Holman
Tech. Sgt. Randy Prine
Tech. Sgt. Justin Worrell
Staff Sgt. Tuan Phun

Air Force Achievement Medal

Capt. Melissa Umholtz
Tech. Sgt. Rashelle Mommens
Staff Sgt. Timothy Jurgena
Senior Airman Austin Hans
Senior Airman Cody Purcell
Senior Airman Michael Young

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kevin E. Monismith
Sgt. Maj. Gregory M. McBride
Sgt. 1st Class Michael W. Hoover
Sgt. 1st Class Charles E. Lindbloom

Air National Guard

Lt. Col. John L. Decker
Lt. Col. Brenda L. Fujan
Lt. Col. Jeffrey Mathemeier
Lt. Col. Patrick S. Ryan
Lt. Col. Jason L. Ragone

Lt. Col. Allen D. Simpson
Maj. Johnny J. Harrison
Capt. Mahleene M. Wright
Chief Master Sgt. Michael M. Courtney
Senior Master Sgt. Christian D. Bradley
Senior Master Sgt. Thomas H. Reimers Jr.
Master Sgt. Aaron D. Aulner
Master Sgt. Ryan E. Buck
Master Sgt. Susan R. Melcher
Tech. Sgt. Neal B. Stocking
Staff Sgt. Lawrence G. Hudecek
Staff Sgt. Timothy A. Jurgena

TAPS

Brig. Gen. Kenneth Dermann
Lt. Col. Clarence Christensen
1st Sgt. Richard Mailander
1st Sgt. Ron Marshall
Staff Sgt. Matthew Bauer

Shorttakes



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Top Recruiter: Brig. Gen. Keith Schell presents Senior Master Sgt. Stuart Stofferahn with his Air National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Superintendent of the Year in Region II for fiscal year 2015 award, Dec. 3.

Recruiting sergeant tops in region

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Staff Photojournalist

Senior Master Sgt. Stuart Stofferahn, recruiting and retention superintendent for the Nebraska Air National Guard, was recognized as one of the nation's best recruiters when he awarded the Air National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Superintendent of the Year in Region II for fiscal year 2015 on Dec. 3 in Lincoln, Neb.

Brig. Gen. Keith A. Schell, the Nebraska Air National Guard assistant adjutant general, officially presented the award at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, which was first presented to Stofferahn last April during the National Annual Recruiters Certification and Training course in Gulfport, Louisiana April 2016.

"It was an incredible honor to receive this award and to represent the entire recruiting career field in this way," Stofferahn said. "It

has been a very humbling experience."

The regional Recruiting and Retention Superintendent of the Year awards are a distinction reserved for the top recruiting noncommissioned officers in each of the nation's five Air National Guard recruiting regions.

Region II is a nine-state region which includes Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Stofferahn, Nebraska's senior Air Guard recruiter, enlisted in the South Dakota Air National Guard in November 1986 before joining the Nebraska Air National Guard in May 2002. He has served as served as Nebraska's Air National Guard RRS at Joint Force Headquarters for eight years.

In his position as the RRS, Stofferahn advises the state command staff on all recruiting and retention issues, providing periodic updates on initiatives and incentives.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Andrew Nystrom

Retiring chief of staff receives rare honor

Colonel Brett Andersen, former Nebraska Army National Guard chief of staff, received a rare honor during his Jan. 22 retirement at the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb., when he was inducted into the prestigious Order of St. George, the patron saint of the U.S. Army armor and cavalry. Andersen, who retired from the Army National Guard on Dec. 31, 2016, after 31 years of military service, was the recipient of the order's Silver Medallion in recognition of his past service as a U.S. Army armor and cavalry Soldier.

MappingThe Course: A 2017 Best Warrior competitor uses his protractor to plot locations on a map, March 4, during the daytime land navigation competition.



RacingToThe Finish: Spc. Taylor Wroblewski runs to a first-place finish in the ruck march portion of the Best Warrior competition. Wroblewski completed the nearly 10-mile march in one hour and forty-two minutes.

Under the Gun!



Facing The Board: Sgt. Connor Alberts sits in the hot seat while being questioned by a panel of higher-enlisted noncommissioned officers, March 2, during the Command Sergeants Major Appearance Board portion of Nebraska's Best Warrior competition. Alberts ultimately went on to win noncommissioned officer category, earning the state NCO of the Year title.

Nebraska's top Soldiers descend upon Greenlief Training Site for grueling Best Warrior Competition

By **Spc. Lisa Crawford**
Acting Editor

Sometimes the biggest challenges are internal. Such was definitely the case on a dark, 15-degree morning as a group of Soldiers trudged through the final remnants of a blackened night as the sounds of the scuffing of boots against a gravel road and the occasional labored breaths cracked the early morning air.

Moving steadily forward as 40-pound rucksacks bit into their already sore back muscles while ice-cold weapons chilled already clammy hands, the Army Guard Soldiers pushed on toward an unknown finish line. As the new day sun finally began to peek over a hill just conquered, the only reassurance the Soldiers received as that miles already trekked would not have to be repeated, although many more miles and many more challenges still awaited in the hours ahead.

To call the 2017 Nebraska National Guard Best Warrior contest grueling would be an understatement, as the three-day event was designed to test the physical and mental toughness of 16 specially-selected Soldiers from across Nebraska. With minimal rest

and under constant stress, each competitor battled through various Army Warrior Tasks and physical obstacles with one goal in mind: to be selected as the top Soldier or Noncommissioned Officer in the state of Nebraska.

Sgt. Samantha Garcia, a supply specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, flashed her best smile as she hit what would be the half-way point of the ruck march portion of the competition. By the end of that event, however, the blisters that had emerged on her feet showed the real pain she'd endured.

"That ruck march was no joke, even though we had prepped for it," said Sgt. 1st Class Jenna Schneider, Garcia's competition sponsor. "It can get a little discouraging, especially in the dark. It's mile after mile, but we came around that corner and we saw the ending, and she got encouraged. I was very impressed with as fatigued as she probably was, because I know, I've been there. It's tiring."

Since 2008, the Nebraska Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition has been the defining moment of the year for not only the winners, but for every Soldier who chooses to compete. According to the competition organizers, the contest is designed to test the Soldiers in



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Obstacle Agony: Sgt. Samantha Garcia tries with all her might to get over the final obstacle of the newly-built obstacle course at the Greenlief Training Site, March 3, during Nebraska's Best Warrior competition. Garcia was one of just two female competitors to participate in this year's competition.

multiple ways, both physically and mentally, through a series of events based upon the various skills that Soldiers are expected to have.

"Seeing the Soldiers on day zero and then seeing their faces right now...wow," said Master Sgt. John Ruden, a competition Trail Boss, before the final awards ceremony. "You can definitely see, like yesterday, when they were going through the ruck march portion, they were just drained, but currently now you see smiles, you see relief, you see an end in sight and almost like a sense of accomplishment regardless of how they ranked."

A full-time student, Garcia – one of just a handful of female Soldiers to have ever attempted to compete at the Nebraska Best Warrior Competition – said she wanted to attempt – and complete – the Best Warrior contest as a way to keep pushing herself to her limits while also gaining the experience she needs

to encourage other female Soldiers to do the same.

"Being able to better myself as both as a Soldier and a leader as well makes both myself stronger, my unit stronger and the Nebraska National guard stronger too," Garcia said.

Like Garcia, Schneider – who served as Garcia's mentor during the competition – is one of the few female Nebraska Soldiers to have ever competed in the Best Warrior contest. She said Garcia really gave it her all during the ruck march and did well the remainder of the competition.

"I was really encouraged this year to see there were two competitors," Schneider said. "I'm proud of them. I always try to encourage females to compete because I have said, 'If I can do it, anyone can do it.' It just takes work."

Like Garcia, Sgt. Connor Alberts of the 72nd Civil Support Team

See BEST WARRIOR on 16.



Radio Use: Spc. Ryan Marshall uses a radio to call for fire during a combat and medical evacuation simulation, March 3, during Nebraska's Best Warrior competition. Marshall ultimately finished second in the junior enlisted category of the competition.

Building international ties during Best Warrior

Czech Airmen compete alongside Nebraska Soldiers

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

Two Airmen and one Soldier from the Czech Republic Armed Forces, the Nebraska National Guard's State Partnership Program country, visited the United States, Feb. 24 - March 5, to participate in and observe Nebraska's annual Best Warrior Competition.

"In Czech Army, we want to start a new military (competition) and your best warrior competition is for us a big inspiration," said Master Sgt. Richard Merka, a Commando Course instructor in the Czech Army. "So I'm here to see it and to bring some experience on how to prepare it for us, to make such a competition for the Czech Army."

Merka said the Czech's Commando Course is the equivalent of the U.S. Army Ranger School. He said the seven-week course prepares young commanders by improving their Soldier skills. It is, Merka added, the hardest course in the Czech Army, with only a 15-20 percent completion rate.

Merka participated in Nebraska's Best Warrior Competition mostly in the role of a sponsor for two Airmen from the Czech Republic: Senior Master Sgt. Karel Dostalek and Master Sgt. Vaclav Bergman. Dostalek and Bergman were unofficial competitors, completing each assigned task alongside their American counterparts.

The three Czech service members arrived in Lincoln on Feb. 24 and spent the weekend familiarizing themselves with Nebraska by exploring Lincoln, Omaha and even tiny Prague, Nebraska. The Czechs then traveled to Camp Ashland where 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) instructors familiarized them with various U.S. weapons systems, land navigation techniques and other Army Warrior Tasks that would be part of the state's Best Warrior Competition.

Dostalek and Bergman began the Nebraska Best Warrior Competition on March 5 with 15 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers by completing the Army Physical



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Pistol Match: Master Sgt. Vaclav Bergman, an Airmen in the Czech Republic Armed Forces, attempts to qualify with an M-9 pistol during the Best Warrior competition, March 3, at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

Fitness Test: two minutes each of pushups and sit-ups, followed by a 2-mile run. Following the APFT, competitors drew and zeroed M-16 rifles for a variety weapons tasks, before changing into their dress uniforms and standing before Command Sergeants Major Appearance Boards.

While most of the Best Warrior activities remained unchanged between American and Czech competitors, there was a slight twist with the appearance boards. Merka sat on the panel for the NCO CSM Appearance Board and questioned both Dostalek and Bergman in Czech. Then, each Nebraska command sergeant major had a turn asking the visitors a question in English.

The Czechs quickly gained points among the assembled Nebraskans.

"They were very professional," said Command Sgt. Major Shawn Griffith, president for the NCO CSM Appearance Board. "When we asked them specific questions on Army Warrior Tasks they had just learned about earlier that week,



Belly Logging: Senior Master Sgt. Karel Dostalek, an Airmen in the Czech Republic Armed Forces, maneuvers over an obstacle during the Best Warrior competition, March 3. Dostalek was one of three Czech service members who visited Nebraska to observe and participate in the Nebraska Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition through the State Partnership Program.

they could answer every one of them. They interacted great with our guys and vice versa, and I think it was good exposure for our guys to see and work with folks from a partner country, just as they might in a joint coalition environment."

The Best Warrior competitors began the second day of the competition before sunrise with a 10-mile ruck march. As the sponsor, Merka didn't carry a ruck, but he still completed the entire march alongside his two competitors. While it was the most challenging part of the competition, Merka said it was also his favorite because it was great exposure for his guys and it motivated them to have a better time and to accomplish the entire competition.

The second day also included an obstacle course and completing various Army Warrior Tasks such as various weapons systems usage, weapons disassembly and reassembly, medical assessment and evacuation, radio communications, nighttime land navigation and a written essay. The third day began with daytime land navigation,

followed by individual weapons qualification and ended with drill and ceremony.

"I think they enjoyed it and they competed very well," said Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, Nebraska state command sergeant major. "I think it was great culturally and militarily."

Baker recognized all three Czechs at the final Best Warrior awards ceremony on March 4, giving each his state command sergeant major coin. Dostalek and Bergman were also awarded the Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal for participating in the Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

The award certificates, signed by Brig. Gen. Kevin Lyons, Nebraska Army National Guard land component commander, read: "Your participation has strengthened the military and cultural ties between the state of Nebraska and the Czech Republic. Your performance reflects great credit upon yourself, the Nebraska National Guard and the Army of the Czech Republic."

"It was a great honor having you," Baker told the Czechs during the awards ceremony. "You competed well and we hope you learned something while you were over here."

"For us it was a very big opportunity to see (the competition)," Merka said. "It was great and very good to see how American Soldiers are prepared."

Merka said he was impressed with how the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers were as capable as professional, full time Czech Soldiers. And, overall, he enjoyed his time in Nebraska.

"I like it here," Merka added. "Nebraska is a little bit windy and flat, but it's a country of great people and it was a really good experience (overall) because the people here are really friendly and kind... And you have the best steaks in the world."

Merka said they Czech Army wants to start their own Best Warrior competition beginning in the summer of 2018, and hopes to have Nebraska competitors compete in the Czech Republic in the future.

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 15.

found his motivation in an untraditional way. A 2016 Best Warrior competitor, Alberts said he was unhappy with how he finished last year's contest. So, 2017 was about redemption.

"After the last competition, you know, you always have that feeling that you let those who helped you down - that you let your leadership down - and so I kind of had some regret after that," Alberts said.

As a full-time Soldier with the Nebraska National Guard, Alberts trained the entire year with the goal of returning to the competition and placing in the top three. While this year's competition was structured differently from the previous year, he was grateful his leadership encouraged him to compete again.

"I'm glad I was able to come out, compete at the highest standard that I've set for myself and make my leadership proud of me, make my family proud of me and make myself proud," Alberts said.

While Alberts had nearly a year to prepare for this competition, not all were as fortunate. Spc. Hunter Smith, Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry, found out he would be competing for Best Warrior just a week prior to the start of the competition.

Always looking for the positive in every opportunity, Smith said he considered it a gift and reported to Greenleaf Training Site for the competition on his 23rd birthday.

"I guess this is just the Army's way of giving me a birthday present, so you can't turn it down," Smith said.

With no preparation time, Smith

said he just went out and did his best to push through all the challenges - even the ones he wouldn't have been able to plan, like when his compass broke during the daytime portion of land navigation and he had to rely on alternative methods, like terrain association.

Smith said that the competition really pushed him to the limits in multiple ways.

"Mentally, I have to say the (Command Sergeant Major) Board (was the most difficult). I've never been in front of a board before," Smith said. "Physically, the ruck march definitely pushed me to my limits."

Another junior enlisted Soldier, Spc. Ryan Marshall from the 623rd Engineering Company said the combination of physical and mental tasks was the greatest challenge to overcome overall. For example, he said, on the second day of the competition, the competitors moved directly from the ruck march to the obstacle course before completing a number of different Army Warrior Tasks.

"That was probably the most difficult time for me because I was exhausted physically, and then we had to immediately go to mental tasks... it's just a whole different type of energy that's required and you weren't sure in what order the AWTs were going to come in," he said.

"So, the surprise factor was definitely a stressor all of its own," Marshall added.

With barely a year and a half of military experience under his belt, Marshall said he saw the Best Warrior competition as the ultimate



Top NCOs: Sgt. Connor Alberts, 72nd Civil Support team, earned the NCO of the Year title, with Staff Sgt. Christopher Moulton, 1-209th Regional Training Institute, and Sgt. Stephan Laboy, Headquarters Headquarters Detachment, 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, placing second and third, respectively.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Top Soldiers: Spc. Hunter Smith, Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry Regiment, earned the Soldier of the Year title, with Spc. Ryan Marshall, 623rd Engineer Company, and Spc. Andrew Thomas, HHT, 1-134th Cavalry, placing second and third, respectively.

culmination event to practice being a Soldier.

"If I want to make the most of a military career and learn the most that I can; it's a great opportunity to work with those that have a lot of experience," Marshall said. "As a very green Soldier, I wanted to jump right in and learn a lot of different drills and gain some experience from those that have been in the military a lot longer than me."

Marshall said he volunteered for the Best Warrior Competition to fulfill his curiosity and keep his Soldier skills sharp. He said the Best Warrior Competition helps a person gain respect for a lot of different military occupational specialties. "I've learned a ton, and that's exactly what I came here to do," he said.

According to the state's senior enlisted Soldier, the competition at this year's Best Warrior contest was significant.

"We had a good robust competition, with nine enlisted and seven

NCOs," said Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, state command sergeant major, during the March 4 awards ceremony at the conclusion of the competition. "That represents just a percentage of the Nebraska National Guard. You know you guys were here, and no one else was, and I'm proud of you. Not everyone's going to be able to win. We have one winner in each category, but in my eyes you're all winners."

For the Noncommissioned Officer category, Alberts' training and persistence paid off when he earned the NCO of the Year title. Staff Sgt. Christopher Moulton placed second and Sgt. Stephan Laboy earned third.

"All my success falls back on my leadership," Alberts said. "Without good leadership I wouldn't be the Soldier I am right now."

In the junior enlisted category, must to his surprise, Smith took home the Soldier of the Year title, with Marshall as runner-up and Spc. Andrew Thomas in third.

"It's a surprise, but it feels pretty good," Smith said. "Now I need to actually train for the regionals."

Both Alberts and Smith will compete at the regional Best Warrior Competition in late May. Last year, Nebraska's Soldier of the Year, Sgt. Calvin Koziol, went on to win the regional competition and ultimately the National Best Warrior title as well, leaving this year's winners big shoes to fill.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel some pressure just because he was able to make it nationals, take that title and bring it back for Nebraska," Alberts said. "All I can do is prepare myself, not concentrate on something that has been done in the past, but look to bring something to Nebraska in the future."

"The bar has been set," Baker said, "but I have no doubt that team Nebraska is going to compete well. The tougher team sets the rule, and team Nebraska has set the rules. We're here and everybody's going to be chasing us."