

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Medevac Soldiers return home in April

■Heroes’ welcome greets Nebraska Army Guardsmen after long mission to Afghanistan

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

They had waited through months of separation, worried over known and unknown dangers, and celebrated annual milestones through the “magic” of the internet.

Now, nearly 10-months after they had last said farewell to the members of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Company G, 2-109th General Support Aviation Battalion, as they deployed on yet another important overseas mission – this time to Afghanistan – it was time to welcome the Soldiers home in true Nebraska style.

And so they came by the hundreds – family members, friends, neighbors and fellow military service members. They crowded into the Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 hangar and the nearby grassy area carrying signs or other mementos of the long separation. They came seemingly united by a determination to make sure the Soldiers’ April 15 return would be something to remember.

“Nerves and excitement and giddy and all of the other feelings,” said Brooke Brollini, the wife of Staff Sgt. Antonio Brollini as she attempted to

See AFGHANISTAN on 6.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Home From Afghanistan: Chief Warrant Officer 3 Ross Haselhorst, a pilot with the Lincoln-based Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, is mobbed by his welcoming family after completing a deployment to Afghanistan, April 15. Members of the aerial medical evacuation company received a raucous welcome home from another deployment at the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1.

Czech minister takes time from U.S. visit to meet Nebraska partners

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska National Guard recorded a major milestone in its 24-year partnership with the Czech Republic when it hosted the Czech Minister of Defense for a short visit to the Cornhusker State.

Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický, who was visiting the United States for a series of discussions with senior U.S. military and Czech governmental leaders, took a day out of his schedule to travel to Lincoln, Nebraska, to learn more about the Guard’s continuing relationship with the Czech Republic that stretches back to 1993 and the fall of the Soviet Union.

It was the first time that a Czech Minister of Defense – which is the equivalent of the United States’ Secretary of Defense – had visited Nebraska to discuss State Partnership Program-related activities.

“We have an amazingly robust relationship; a relationship that is based on mutual trust and mutual desires to be able to serve together and to lead this world into a better place,” said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, who hosted the May 3-4 visit to Lincoln.

According to Stropnický, the visit was an important stop on a trip that also saw him meeting with Defense Secretary James Mattis at the Pentagon, senior military



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Welcome To Nebraska: Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac welcomes Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický to Lincoln on May 3.

leaders in Norfolk, Virginia, and a final meeting with the Czech Ambassador at the United Nations in New York City.

“I almost came back home because 5 percent of the population of Nebraska is of Czech origin, which is quite a lot,” Stropnický said during an engagement with local Nebraska journalists. “We have a strong cooperation with the National Guard here. We have doubled within two years the intensity of the cooperation.”

See CZECH MINISTER on 4.

Nebraska helicopter crew awarded Air Medals for battlefield heroism

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Four Nebraska Army National Guard aviators assigned to a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter crew were honored, May 20, when they were presented with the Air Medal with “Valor” device for the bravery they displayed while rescuing a wounded U.S. Special Forces Soldier in the Helmund Province

near Sangin, Afghanistan.

Honored were Chief Warrant Officer 3 William Score (pilot), Chief Warrant Officer 2 Hector Lima-Bermudez (pilot), Staff Sgt. Matthew Hawke (helicopter crew chief) and Sgt. Jared Cornell (flight medic). The four Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers are members of the Guard’s Lincoln-based Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, that returned in April

from a 10-month deployment to Afghanistan.

Standing before families, friends and a formation of fellow Soldiers, the four Guard aviators were presented with the blue and gold medals by Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts. Also attending the ceremony were Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Col. John Cyrulik, commander of the U.S. Army’s “Task Force Nightmare”

that served as the unit’s higher headquarters during its deployment in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel.

“They exemplify the best spirit and standings of the United States Army,” Ricketts said during the award ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard’s Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln. “They worked together as a team and their cohesion, effort, determina-

tion is something you only see in the military... that willingness to sacrifice for each other.”

The medal presentation goes back to Feb. 9 when the four Nebraska Soldiers were dispatched to evacuate a wounded Special Forces Soldier. Approaching the landing zone, which was still receiving heavy machinegun, mortar and small arms fire, and difficult to approach due to

See AIR MEDALS on 8.

Nebraska Army, Air Guard participate in major national cyber exercise

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

Eighteen members of the Nebraska National Guard – including 14 Army and four Air Force – joined more than 800 other participants at Camp Williams, Utah, for Exercise Cyber Shield 17, the National Guard’s premier cyber defense training event, April 23-May 5.

The exercise includes members of the National Guard from 44 states, the U.S. Army Reserve, state

and federal government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private industry. It is designed to assess participants’ ability to respond to cyber incidents.

“This is a great opportunity for our teams,” said Maj. Alex Zeller, Nebraska National Guard cyber plans officer. “Nebraska is currently setting up a Defense Cyberspace Operations – Element and a Cyber Protection Team, so this training provides a lot of insight for Guardsmen moving into those teams.”

See CYBER SHIELD on 5.

Nebraska Vietnam veterans welcomed home

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

A single pair of olive green and black combat boots placed poignantly in front of the gleaming ebony granite of the Wall. Oh, if those boots could talk – what stories would they tell?

More than 650 Nebraska Vietnam Veterans flew to Washington D.C., May 1, as part of Patriotic Productions’ Final Mission Honor Flight. While in the national capitol, the veterans toured various monuments in D.C. – including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – before returning to Lincoln to be “welcomed home” by a crowd of approximately 7,000 at the Lincoln Municipal Airport.

One of those veterans was Patrick Stanosheck of Lincoln, who carried the boots he wore in Vietnam

See FINAL MISSION on 13.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Thanks For Your Service: Vietnam Veteran Charles Smith of Wymore, Neb., receives a handshake from Master Sgt. Ronald Hagge of the 155th Air Refueling Wing, May 1, in Lincoln, following the Final Mission Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.

Inside

Nebraska Soldiers compete at Best Ranger competition

See story and photos on 3.



Air Guard fire fighters practice putting out live blazes in June

See story on 9.



Index

- News Briefs 2
- Photo Story 3
- Family News 16
- Editorials... 17
- Sports 19-20

NEWS DIGEST

■Mattis welcomes new Air Force secretary back home

WASHINGTON (DoD NEWS) — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis ceremonially swore in Heather Wilson as the 24th secretary of the Air Force at the Pentagon, May 16.

“If we wanted to do one thing to Webster’s Unbridged Dictionary to define a patriot with no words, we could put up Heather Wilson’s picture right next to the word, and we would explain what a patriot truly is,” Mattis said.

“On behalf of the entire Air Force community, on the behalf of the Department of Defense — welcome home.”

Wilson, who was administratively sworn in as secretary May 12, has more than 35 years of professional experience in a range of leadership and management roles in the military, higher education, government and private industry.

The defense secretary called Wilson well-suited to lead the Air Force and said he needs her ideas and wisdom as the Air Force begins a new chapter.

Mattis said he, Wilson and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein are committed to restoring the readiness of the force, modernizing and advancing new capabilities to meet future threats, and developing exceptional leaders to command the finest combat force in the world.

“History is not predetermined or static. History hangs on a hinge. Air supremacy



Wilson

is not America’s ordained right and there are other hands pushing on history’s door,” Mattis said.

“By Secretary Wilson’s leadership, by the superior service of America’s airmen, ... they push in vain. ... The U.S. Air Force must be better than anyone else.”

Goldfein and Wilson first served together as cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy, where they took the oath of office for the first time as members of the same class.

“Here we stand together again as you repeat these same sacred words,” Goldfein said. “What a journey it has been and what a journey it will be. We follow in the footsteps of service secretaries and chiefs of the past who have put their heart and their soul into building the most combat capable and lethal Air Force the world has ever known.”

From the start, Wilson said, she will be focused on not taking air and space power for granted.

“We have got a lot of work to do under the guidance of Secretary of Defense Mattis, and with the support of the United States Congress, we will restore the readiness of the force so that we can win any fight, anytime, anywhere,” Wilson said. “We’re going to cost-effectively modernize the force and drive innovation to bring new capabilities to the service of liberty, and underpinning it all will be a commitment to people.”

“Thank you to the Airmen who protect the freedom we enjoy,” she continued. “You and your families represent the best of what it means to be an American.”

■National Native American veteran memorial to be erected

WASHINGTON (ARNEWS) — A memorial to Native American veterans will be erected on the outside grounds of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian.

The anticipated dedication of the National Native American Veterans Memorial is Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2020, according to Rebecca Trautmann, project manager of the memorial.

Ben Nighthorse Campbell of the Northern Cheyenne nation and Chickasaw Nation Lt. Gov. Jefferson Keel are leading an advisory committee of tribal leaders and veterans in assisting with outreach to Native American nations and tribes and advising on plans for the memorial, Trautmann said.

Also, the advisory committee and the museum are conducting community consultations to seek input and support for the memorial, she added. “Regional events bring together tribal leaders, Native (American) veterans, and community members to gather their insights and advice.”

There have been some 30 consultations to date with several more planned this summer.

Trautmann noted the memorial has received congressional approval and that no federal funding will be used for the project. The project is expected to cost \$15 million and donations are being solicited.

Eileen Maxwell, public affairs director

of the museum, said the memorial is fitting because “Native Americans have served in the armed forces in every major military conflict since the Revolutionary War and in greater numbers per capita than any other ethnic group.”

She added today, the Defense Department estimates that some 24,000 American Indian and Alaska Native men and women are on active duty, and more than 150,000 veterans self-identify as American Indian or Alaska Native.

A new exhibit opened recently on the museum’s second floor honoring Native Americans in the nation’s wars, Maxwell said. The exhibit, titled “Patriot Nations: Native Americans in Our Nation’s Armed Forces,” consists of 24 panels that depict achievements of Native Americans in various wars. Several duplicate panels have been made and the museum has been sending these “traveling” exhibits to both Native American and non-Native American communities across the U.S., she said.

Another exhibit, which is temporary and will close Oct. 7, is titled “For a Love of His People: The Photography of Horace Poolaw.” Poolaw, a citizen of the Kiowa nation, was a World War II photographer and many of his photographs are of Native American veterans.



Defense Department photo

Pentagon Welcome: Defense Secretary Jim Mattis shakes hands with Czech Republic Defense Minister Martin Stropnický before an honor guard ceremony at the Pentagon, May 2, 2017. The two defense leaders met to discuss matters of mutual importance.

Mattis, Czech minister discuss collaboration

WASHINGTON (DoD NEWS) — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis met with Czech Republic Defense Minister Martin Stropnický at the Pentagon May 1 to discuss U.S.-Czech defense collaboration, focusing on the counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria campaign and Afghanistan, chief Pentagon spokesperson Dana W. White said.

Mattis thanked Stropnický for his country’s contributions to the counter-ISIS fight, highlighting the positive difference Czech air advisory and surgical teams are making in Iraq. They discussed other potential Czech contributions to the campaign.

Mattis told the Czech minister that his country’s assistance in the counter-ISIS campaign “is heartening.”

The defense secretary added, “It shows you stand with the civilized nations of the world. Your ground troops in the Baltic and your policing. You’re a full-fledged member of NATO, as are we, and now on that common ground we welcome you here, so again, welcome, and the floor is yours.”

Mattis also thanked Stropnický for his country’s assistance in combating terrorism, noting, “NATO is beading together on this.”

He added, “And certainly, we look forward to standing strong with our bedrock alliance all the way through on this fight.”

Stropnický thanked Mattis, adding, that he’d “like to underline that for us, the membership in the (NATO) alliance is absolutely crucial ... and it’s one of the main pillars of democratic development after 1989, after the democratic changes, and that we of course want to remain on that track.”

The Czech defense minister also said his country agrees to fair burden sharing among NATO member-nations. Such an arrangement, he said, is “absolutely logical and fair, so that’s one of the main reasons I’m here.”

Mattis also thanked Stropnický for his country’s long-term commitment in Afghanistan. Both he and the minister pledged to consult further at the upcoming NATO defense ministerial.

■President signs bill to extend Veterans’ Choice health care law

WASHINGTON (DoD NEWS) — President Donald J. Trump signed the Veterans Choice Program Extension and Improvement Act on April 18, so military veterans can continue receiving health care in the civilian sector when care is not easily accessible from a Veterans Affairs Department provider.

“The veterans have poured out their sweat and blood and tears for this country for so long, and it’s time that they’re recognized, and it’s time that we now take care of them, and take care of them properly,” Trump said after signing the continued health care bill into law in the Roosevelt Room.

“This bill will extend and improve the Veterans Choice Program so that more veterans can see the doctor of their choice ... and don’t have to wait and travel long distances for VA care. Some people have to travel five hours, eight hours, and they’ll have to do it on a weekly basis, and even worse than that. It’s not going to happen anymore,” he said.

“This new law is a good start, but there is still much work to do,” Trump said. “We will fight each and every day to deliver the long-awaited reforms our veterans deserve and to protect those who have so courageously protected each and every one of us.”

National Guard more relevant, ready to face new threats, bureau chief says

WASHINGTON (DoD NEWS) — Given the uncertain nature of the world today, the National Guard motto “Always Ready, Always There” is even more important than in the past, Air Force Gen. Joseph L. Lengyel told the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, April 26.

Lengyel, the chief of the National Guard Bureau and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the Guard is evolving quickly to meet the challenges posed by state actors, terror groups and natural or man-made disasters.

“The National Guard is more resilient, relevant and ready than ever before,” he said.

The Guard is no longer simply a reserve force. Rather, it is a force that combatant commanders depend on to accomplish their missions.

“Our security environment is more dynamic and complex and our nation places greater

reliance on its National Guard,” the general said in prepared remarks.

“This is why my focus every day is to ensure we are ready and we have the resources to accomplish our three core missions — fighting America’s wars, securing the homeland and building enduring partnerships at the local, state, federal and international levels,” Lengyel said.

The attacks of 9/11 transformed the National Guard, he said. “Since then, Guard members have deployed more than 850,000 times to locations such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, the Balkans, Guantanamo Bay and the Sinai,” the general said.

“On any given day, the National Guard has approximately 18,000 Soldiers and Airmen mobilized in support of combatant command missions overseas.”

Guard members fold seamlessly into the joint force when called upon, Lengyel said.

“Our interoperability with the joint force will deepen and evolve

as we confront future threats — threats that are now global, emanate from all domains, and are adaptable and multi-functional in their forms,” he said. “Only a well-integrated and well-trained force will keep our nation safe and secure our national interests.”

Guardsmen are also integral to homeland defense, he said. They train constantly to respond to natural or manmade disasters, the general said.

The Guard plays a part in defending against cyber assaults and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks.

The Guard often provides the logistic support and communications to tie operations together and to get people and supplies where they are urgently needed, he said.

On average, more than 4,000 Guard members conduct operations here in the United States on any given day, Lengyel 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. Edward Bosland
Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry
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



Darby Queen Swing: Nebraska National Guard Staff Sgt. Luke Katz slides across a rope at the Darby Queen obstacle course at Fort Benning, Ga. The Darby Queen was one of the 26 tasks that made up the April 7-9 Best Ranger Competition.



Ranger Rope: Staff Sgt. Luke Katz slides down a rope from the side of a tower during the Best Ranger Competition at Fort Benning, Ga., April 7-9. The three-day competition was comprised of 53 two-man teams. This was Katz second consecutive competition. He finished 10th overall.

Grueling Challenge

Three Nebraska Soldiers compete for Army’s coveted Best Ranger title

By Sgt. Jason Drager
Staff Photojournalist

Imagine an extremely physical competition that lasts for over 60 continuous hours, requiring competitors to travel nearly 100 miles on foot – at times carrying up to 80 pounds of equipment – without any scheduled sleep and a limited food supply.

Sound brutal?

That is exactly what three Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers faced, recently, when they were selected to compete in the U.S. Army’s 34th Annual David E. Grange Jr. Best Ranger Competition, April 7 – 9, at Fort Benning, Ga. The grueling three-day event involved 52 two-Soldier teams competing to be named Best Ranger. Out of the eight National Guard Soldiers selected to compete in the prestigious competition, three were from Nebraska.

“This is a world class competition,” said Lt. Col. Tom Golden, commander of the 1-134th Cavalry, which sent the three Nebraska Soldiers to the competition. “The fact we sent three individuals says a lot about the caliber of Soldier in the Nebraska Army National Guard.”

This actually marked the second straight year that the Nebraska National Guard has sent Soldiers to compete in the Best Ranger competition. In 2016, Nebraska had two Soldiers selected to compete in the event. Unfortunately, due to an injury, only Staff Sgt. Luke Katz, of the Mead Training Site-based Detachment 2, 165th Quartermaster Company, was able to compete.

Katz, a native of Fairbury, Nebraska, ultimately finished in 17th place.

This year, Staff Sgt. Nathan Neuirth of West Point, Nebraska; Staff Sgt. Jose Torres-Garcia of Lexington, Nebraska; and Katz, all with the Mead Training Site’s Company E (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry, set out to Fort Benning in hopes of being named Best Ranger.

In preparation for the Best Ranger Competition Neuirth,



Team Finish: Staff Sgt. Luke Katz and his teammate cross the finish line of the buddy run during the Best Ranger Competition at Fort Benning, Ga.

Torres-Garcia and Katz spent three months at Fort Benning training with the other National Guard selectees. The three months of training gave the Soldiers an opportunity to hone their Ranger skills and abilities, and prepare them for a competition that is designed to simulate battlefield conditions.

Prior to the competition, the National Guard representatives were broken down into four teams. The teams were designed so one Soldier would compliment his teammate’s strengths and skillset. Coincidentally, Neuirth and Torres-Garcia were teamed together while Katz was teamed with Sgt. 1st Class Troy Conrad of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard.

The first day of competition began at 6:15 a.m. at the famed Camp Rogers, one of the main training sites for the Rangers. The day’s events included a swim across Victory Pond, a physically intense obstacle course, a body armor run, an urban assault course and a “stress shoot” designed to test the Soldiers’ ability to engage targets with their weapons while under physical duress. To top it all off, the Soldiers then completed a nearly 20-mile foot march at the end of the day.

The only rest competitors might have received was in between events and that was only for the few lucky ones who finished an event quick enough before the next one started. Otherwise, there was no scheduled rest.

“It was a very humbling experience,” said Torres-Garcia, a 2002 graduate of Lexington High School who currently works as an intensive care unit nurse at Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney. “There were a lot of talented, tough guys out there.”

Unfortunately, Neuirth and Torres-Garcia were medically dropped from the competition during the foot march event. At about Mile 10 of the march, Neuirth said his hip locked up, which caused him to stop every 100 – 150 feet to stretch it out. In doing so, a lot of other teams started to pass them. Neuirth said he knew he wouldn’t be able to make it the rest of the way.

“This is definitely one of the toughest things I’ve ever done,” said Neuirth, a 2004 graduate of West Point Central Catholic who currently works in concrete construction and foundation repair. “It’s meant to determine who’s the best of the best.”

The foot march rolled right into the next day of competition. Once each team finished the march, they then started the “Night Stakes” events, which were essentially a series of tasks and skills the competitors were required to complete in the dark. The rest of the day was comprised of a “Spartan Race,” “Day Stakes” and night orienteering.

Again, the last event of the day continued into the next day of competition.

Once each team finished the night orienteering, competitors had to conquer the “Darby Queen” obstacle course. Once completed, the competitors then performed a helocast into Victory Pond that required the teams to swim to shore and then perform combat water survival assessments.

Finally, the last event of the competition was a buddy run to Camp Rogers, where friends and family cheering welcomed the competitors.



Litter Run: Nebraska National Guard Staff Sgt. Nathan Neuirth and Staff Sgt. Jose Torres-Garcia carry a weighted litter on their way to a stress shoot at Malone Ranges in Fort Benning, Ga. during the Best Ranger Competition, held April 7-9.



Mastering Malvesti: Nebraska Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Jose Torres-Garcia climbs over one of the obstacles at Malvesti Field in Fort Benning, Ga. The Malvesti obstacle course was one of the numerous events that made up the Best Ranger Competition, April 7-9, at Fort Benning, Ga.

By the end of the three-day competition, Katz and his teammate, Conrad, made their way to a 10th place finish. Although the 10th place finish was not as high as Katz had hoped, it was a seven-place improvement over the previous year’s finish.

All three of Nebraska’s competitors stated they hope to return and compete again in 2018.

“I’m very proud of all three of them,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, Nebraska Army National Guard state command sergeant major. “It’s an honor to know them and the entire state is proud of them.”

“More importantly, the real winner of this competition is these three Soldiers’ unit,” Baker added. “They are going to take the skills that they learned at the Best Ranger competition and make their organization better.”

Building Sergeants

■Camp Ashland staff helps Czechs build first basic leadership course

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

When Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac first travelled to the Czech Republic in 1998 as a participant in the State Partnership Program, he went with a fellow 155th Air Refueling Wing officer with the understanding that they would be speaking with their Czech counterparts on aircraft maintenance and logistics support.

His visit had little to do with those subjects, however.

“They were much more interested in our enlisted development process because they had to convert from a conscript service to an all-volunteer force to be full NATO members,” recalled Bohac, the current Nebraska National Guard adjutant general who was a major at the time. “I can remember sitting in a hotel room calling back to Nebraska because (Maj.) Kelly (Carlson) and I didn’t know a lot about the Army approach, the training cycles and the paths for their (noncommissioned officers).”

“We built a briefing on the fly sitting in a hotel room in Prague that we presented to senior Army leadership of the Czech Armed Forces,” Bohac said. “They were very interested in that... much more interested than what we had to say about logistics and maintenance.”

What Bohac probably didn’t completely understand at the time was that this theme of NCO leadership development would become enduring as the Nebraska and Texas National Guard’s partnership developed from its fledgling beginnings in July 1993 into what is now an enduring and multifaceted partnership that is considered one of the most robust in Europe.

Recently, the Nebraska and Texas National Guard had a major hand in helping the Czech Armed Forces make a major leap forward in the development of their NCO Corps when Guard Soldiers from both states helped the Czechs develop and then conduct their first-ever Basic Leaders Course in Vyskov, Czech Republic, this past spring.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Monte Kerchal, the commandant of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), which is responsible for conducting NCO development courses, the Czech BLC was the result of years of conversations and planning that picked up considerable steam in April 2016.

“In April 2016 the Czech military hosted a senior NCO meeting with their partners from Texas and Nebraska,” Kerchal said, adding that Command Sgt. Maj. Bill Uhing

of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and state operations and training office represented Nebraska at the conference.

Kerchal said the NCOs discussed the American approaches to NCO education and development.

“Right now (the Czechs) are going through an education of how important an NCO can be on the battlefield,” said Kerchal. “Under the Soviet system, it was real heavy in officers in comparison to enlisted (personnel)...now it’s NCO-heavy, but the roles really haven’t been let go.”

“For example... a captain or a lieutenant shouldn’t be doing pre-combat inspections; that should be an NCO doing those things so that officers can focus on missions and mission planning... NCOs take care of training, clothing, maintenance and making sure that the soldiers are ready to complete that mission when the commander gives the word,” Kerchal said. “So, this is really that natural progression.”

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, Nebraska Army National Guard command sergeant major, it is part of an ongoing debate within the Czech Armed Forces.

“There are still a number of (Czech soldiers) who remember the old Russian model, which was officer heavy. Basically your NCO is just another private (in that system),” Baker said. “And what (NCOs) did, sometimes, was no different than what their privates do.”

“So, (the Nebraska and Texas National Guard has been working with the Czechs) to help them ascribe to our school of thought where the officers do the planning and the NCOs do the executing,” Baker said. He added that in his discussions with senior Czech NCOs, it became clear that the Nebraska and Texas National Guard could play a significant role in this evolutionary way of thinking.

Kerchal said that during the April 2016 meetings, the Czech leaders indicated they wanted to develop a similar approach to training their NCOs. When Uhing returned to Nebraska, he contacted Kerchal and gave him the initial concept of what the Czechs wanted to develop.

Last September, the Czechs once again convened a meeting in the Czech Republic to further discuss the actual implementation of a basic leaders course. This time, Kerchal and 1st Sgt. Marc Sheehan of the 209th RTI represented Nebraska.

“We showed them how we were going to deliver their instruction. It was going to be a lot of PowerPoint and instructors talking,” said Kerchal. “The next day we put them through the Adult Learning Module Facilitation type instruction,” Kerchal said, adding that this program is designed to help instructors better understand how adults learn so



Photo courtesy of Command Sgt. Maj. Monte Kerchal

Helping Allies Build A Strong Noncommissioned Officer Corps: Members of the Nebraska and Texas Army National Guard regional training institutes pose for a photo with members of the Czech Republic military academy staff at Vyskov, Czech Republic, in September 2016. The American Soldiers were helping the Czech leaders develop their first basic noncommissioned officer leadership course.

that they can cater their course instruction to best meet the needs of their classes.

“They fell in love with it,” Kerchal said.

The next month, October, National Guard BLC instructors from Nebraska and Texas returned to the Czech Republic where they taught “a condensed” instructor training course, small group instructor course and the adult learning module for approximately 25 Czech candidate instructors. Staff Sgt. Nick Reece, a small group leader with the 209th BLC was one of those chosen to attend the instruction.

According to Kerchal, the Guardsmen also worked with the Czech military academy officials on the course content and then built a training schedule from that.

“(The Czechs) decided that it was going to be a 50-day course. So, between October and early January, the Czechs worked on finalizing their courses of instruction before initiating their first BLC in January,” Kerchal said.

A total of 52 Czech students attended the course, with most of the attendees being between the ranks of corporals and sergeants “with a couple of staff sergeants.”

This past March, the Czechs graduated their first class of BLC students. In attendance at the graduation ceremony in Vyskov were Kerchal and Baker. Baker also served as the keynote speaker for the graduation.

“One of the things that I said was that our Army has been around for a long time,” Baker said, “but we still change things. We have a good base over time, but we’re always willing to make changes to make it better. In a lot of ways, they’re still reforming.”

Baker, who has had a number of engagements with the Czech military – especially its senior NCOs over the past year – said he senses that in some quarters of the Czech

military there is frustration that it has taken so long to institute some of the changes in regards to the duties and responsibilities of NCOs. In a lot of ways, he said, it’s understandable considering how large of a shift was required to go from a Warsaw Pact model to one based upon NATO’s framework.

“No matter where you go, there’s always this debate between the ‘Old Army’ and the ‘New Army,’” Baker added. “It wasn’t like you were going to change that overnight. It’s going to take time and they have to buy into the changes... I think that’s kind of where they’re at right now.”

Later, the two Nebraskans had an opportunity to visit some of the classrooms where advanced NCO training was taking place.

“It’s pretty close to what we teach,” said Kerchal. “Obviously, their doctrine isn’t perfectly in line... but some of it was almost identical to what we teach.”

“They have their own way of teaching specific subject areas... but it’s obvious they’re working pretty hard on this,” Kerchal added.

“They have some riveting instructors because when they were up there talking, you could look around the room... everybody looked really attentive to whoever was speaking,” Baker said, adding that they also got to join in classroom discussions about the students’ feelings about the differing roles of officers and NCOs. “It was kind of fun to see what their perceptions were. A lot of the concepts that they were putting down on the butcher block paper were the same as ours.”

Baker said it’s clear the Czech military is making huge strides.

“To be able to get a project like this is a breath of fresh air and it’s real stimulating,” said Kerchal. “I’ve been in (the military) for 32 years and to be included in a project like this is pretty neat.”

CZECH MINISTER

continued from page 1.

tion. And next year we will be preparing even more substantially the training of our troops together.”

The Nebraska and Texas National Guard have been matched with the Czech Republic since July 1993 through the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program. Initially designed to help the Czech Republic’s military prepare itself for membership within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the relationship has evolved over the years into many different facets which allows all three organizations to learn from each other through numerous annual exchanges.

Stropnický said this has been particularly evident in the work that the Nebraska Air National Guard has done in helping Czech pilots learn how to conduct aerial refueling. It has also been seen in the medical and chemical decontamination fields as well.

“These are very practical things that we need to learn,” Stropnický said.

During the course of his visit, which also included members of Stropnický’s staff as well as the Czech Counsel General in Chicago, Borek Lizek, the minister was able to participate in discussions with the Nebraska National Guard staff on



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Planning For The Future: Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický and Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, discuss possibilities for future partnership efforts between the Czech Republic and the Nebraska National Guard, May 4, in Lincoln.

possible training opportunities. He also met with Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, members of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature and the mayor of Wilber, Nebraska. He also talked with members of the Nebraska National Guard during a visit to the air base

in Lincoln where he learned more about the Nebraska National Guard’s (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive) Enhanced Response Force Package – or CERF-P for short.

Stropnický and members of his traveling



Learning About Nebraska’s Capabilities: Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický listens as Tech. Sgt. Robert Simon describes the equipment he works with as a member of the Nebraska National Guard’s Chemical Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosives (CBRNE) Enhanced Response Force Backage (CERF-P).

staff were also made honorary Nebraskans by Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale.



Learning More About The 170th Group: Lt. Gen. Scott Rice, director of the Air National Guard (far right), listens to a discussion about the Nebraska Air National Guard's role within the active Air Force's 55th Wing during a May 23 visit to Offutt Air Force Base.

Air Force leaders check out Guard, 55th Wing teamwork efforts at Offutt

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 170th Group and the active Air Force's 55th Wing had an opportunity to spotlight their unique partnership to two senior Air Force leaders in May when they hosted the Air Force's senior administrative officer and the director of the Air National Guard. According to Col. Mark Hopson, commander of the Guard's Offutt-based 170th Group, the May 22-23 visit by Lt. Gen. Gina Grosso, the Air Force's senior officer-in-charge of manpower, personnel and services, and Lt. Gen. Scott Rice, director of the Air National Guard, offered the 170th and the 55th Wing an opportunity to showcase the two organizations' continuing collaboration as part of the Air Force's Total Force Integration efforts. "We were able to show them how well the Total Force Integration works here at Offutt," said Hopson. "It's important to note that when I say 'we,' I mean the 55th Wing and the 170th Group. The 55th Wing has been tremendously supportive of the 170th Group. In fact, the 55th Wing treats us as their seventh group." "We – the Guardsmen in the 170th Group – in turn, belong to the 55th Wing," he added. During the course of the two-day visit, the visiting generals had the opportunity to learn more about how the 170th Group and its two



Total Team Effort At Offutt Air Force Base: Lt. Gen. Gina Grosso, U.S. Air Force senior officer-in-charge of manpower, personnel and services, listens as Lt. Col. Derek Rachel of the 338th Combat Training Squadron describes the role that Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen play at the 55th Wing at Offutt Air Force Base, May 22.

subordinate squadrons help support the larger 55th Wing mission. In particular, along with providing a level of continuity within the 55th Wing and 55th Operations Group because the Guardsmen tend to stay within the organization for long periods of time, the 170th Group also helps support the wing in the areas of training and operations support. It's a level of support the Nebraska Air National Guard has provided to the 55th Wing for more than a decade. It's a level of support that some still feel is one of the Air Force's "best kept" secrets. "At Offutt, just like when you're deployed, you can't tell who is active duty and who is in the Air National Guard until you figure out the riddle of the name tag colors

and patches," said Hopson. "In (Airman Battle Uniforms) you can't tell at all." "We truly work together as 'One Wing, One Boss, One Fight,'" Hopson added. The two visiting Air Force leaders attended briefings on the effort presented by members of the 55th Wing and 170th Group command staffs and then visited the 238th Combat Training Squadron, where members of the 170th and 55th work together to provide critical flight training, and several sections where members of the two organizations work shoulder-to-shoulder together. Hopson said he felt the visit was a major success. "As a result of the visit, we feel like we have support and a way forward to expand our partnership," he said. "The 55th Wing would love for the Nebraska Air National Guard to bring our current successes in the 55th Operations Group to the 55th Maintenance Group, 55th Mission Support Group and the 55th Communications Group." Hopson said the organizations are currently working with Air Combat Command planners and manpower specialists to expand the 170th's footprint at Offutt, which if approved, could grow the 170th in the next few years.

CYBER SHIELD continued from page 1.

By working closely with interagency partners and the private sector, the National Guard seeks to strengthen network cybersecurity and the capability to support local responses to cyber incidents. Cyber Shield 17 is part of the National Guard's ongoing effort to improve Guard ability to respond to real-world cyber incidents. This is the sixth iteration of this training exercise. Nebraska participants came from the state's Joint Force Headquarters, the 234th Signal Company, Regional Training Institute and the 155th Air Refueling Wing. The exercise was divided into two phases: the first week offered participants the opportunity to hone their skills through academic instruction covering everything from the legal aspects of cyber operations to the nature of cyber threats to hands-on technical training. Equally important, the Soldiers and Airmen learn about their roles as part of the larger cyberspace defense community. Exercise participants emphasized that the threat cyber attacks pose makes this challenging training crucial. "Cyber threats are real," said Capt. Joshua Hull, Nebraska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters. "They are already all around us and they affect every aspect of our daily interactions." During the first phase of the exercise, participants belong to one of several cells. Red Cell members play the role of adversary hackers. Members of the Blue Cell, such

as Hull, attempt to defend against the Red Cell's attacks. Members of the Gold Cell support the Blue Cell with coaching and mentorship, while White Cell members evaluate the Blue Cell's performance. Hull said he is confident his team will be able to succeed in warding off the Red Cell attacks, thanks to effective collaboration he has observed among his comrades. "We have very good team cohesion," Hull said. "We have a very good flow of information and we've pulled our best and brightest. They have a good understanding of how network operations work." During the second phase of Cyber Shield, exercise participants from cyber protection teams faced off against trained antagonists, who simulated online adversaries. The teams try to defend their networks and mitigate the



Classroom Work: Staff Sgt. Kevin Boggs, a cyber systems noncommissioned officer with the 155th Air Refueling Wing, joins other Army and Air National Guard, Reserve members and civilians, in courses conducted during Cyber Shield 17 at Camp Williams, Utah.

state-federal character makes it uniquely positioned to help civilian agencies and critical nongovernmental entities, such as public utilities, if an incident occurs. Because of their status as a state military force when not under federal mobilization orders, Guard units are available to respond to state-level emergencies at their governor's discretion.

effects of attacks in a free-wheeling clash of cyberspace acumen. "The Soldiers and Airmen are working with tools, systems and networks they'll be using in the future," Zeller said. "This exercise prepares us for when we do partner with local civilian organizations in an event regarding an issue of cyber security. We'll be able to provide them with better support and expertise in the field." The National Guard's dual

Camp Ashland untethers students during virtual classroom experiment

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The staff of the Camp Ashland-based 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) has long been extremely proud of the work it does to ensure that students attending one of the many noncommissioned officer education or military occupational specialty courses receive world-class educational opportunities. The proof of that commitment is present all around the campus of the Nebraska National Guard installation that sits on the banks of the Platte River near Ashland, Nebraska. Not the least of which are the banners noting the 209th RTI as a U.S. Army Institute of Excellence.

Camp Ashland instructors took another leap forward this past February when the first class of Basic Leader Course students transitioned to receiving their course work through a wireless/mobile platform. According to Lt. Col. Steve Collins, administrative officer for the 209th RTI, it's part of a continuing effort to address how today's Soldiers learn best. "The decentralized delivery of the (program of instruction) through mobile platform and making the entirety of the operating environment of these students their virtual classroom was something we knew immediately would yield enormous success," Collins said. "It fits in with the data that demonstrates that this generation of young (people) learns differently than you or I did at that age." Currently, the Camp Ashland-based institute teaches a variety of military courses for thousands of Army National Guard, U.S. Army Reserve and active duty Soldiers from across the Midwestern region. These courses include the basic leaders course, a military truck driving course, officer candidate school, warrant officer candidate school and the foundation instructor facilitators course. Collins said institute leaders began thinking about new ways to deliver instruction last year leading up to a visit by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command command sergeant major. The concept they came up with involved "untethering" the students from traditional teaching modules and "untethering" them from centrally located computer workstations.

This in turn, Collins said, would allow students to be able to access their course manuals, doctrine, course materials and tests via wireless internet connected devices. "The virtual classroom is brought to the fingertips of every student regardless of where they are inherently," Collins said. When the Camp Ashland staff briefed Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport Sr., the senior enlisted leader of U.S. Army TRADOC, about their ideas and the work they had already invested into making the virtual classroom a reality, Collins said Davenport "stopped our presentation cold in its tracks and he directed his group to start taking pictures and notes of 'what right looks like.'" In preparation for this year's roll-out, the 209th RTI began investing in dozens of new Dell tablets and laptops, wrote Sgt. 1st Class Sebastian Nastase, 209th RTI information technology manager, in an information paper this past February. When students arrive at Camp Ashland, they log onto a tablet or a laptop, which then allows them to log into the RTI network with their CAC cards during the duration of their course. This gives students access to a Share Point webpage where they can download such course material as Army manuals, lesson plans and slideshows. "The material is also manually loaded on the tablets or laptops to allow the students to complete their homework when they are not in the classroom," Nastase wrote. "Once the (tablets or laptops) are placed in docking stations in the classrooms, all the homework that is completed outside of the classroom can be uploaded to the Share Point drop box for the instructors to review." "Feedback on performance is immediate," added Collins. "The legacy administrative tasks of capturing, manually performing deskside counseling, and uploading counseling and testing results are now obsolete." Collins said while work still needs to be done to continue building the infrastructure, the students who participated in the virtual classrooms have given it positive reviews. "Students are able to take the tablets with them at the end of the day, which has led to continuing learning outside of the classroom when most of the homework is worked upon," Collins said.

"As a governor would call up the National Guard...for a state disaster, such as a hurricane, it's no different for a cyber event," said Louisiana National Guard Lt. Col. Henry Capello, the exercise commander. Moreover, the National Guard's long-standing connections with state and local governments and private industry, combined with its familiarity with the cyberspace environment in which these organizations operate, make it an ideal partner. "Being a Citizen-Soldier and being able to work in the communities in which I live is a little bit different. It means a lot more to me and I'm able to help them because I understand their problems better," Capello said. The Nebraska Army National Guard is currently seeking applications from highly qualified personnel interested in an opportunity to perform duties in traditional technology positions in the Defense Cyberspace Operations - Element and the Cyber Protection Team. All interested personnel need to apply for consideration in order to fulfill unit manning and mission requirements. For questions regarding these positions, contact Zeller at 402-309-8348 or alex.m.zeller.mil@mail.mil. **Editor's Note:** This article is a collaboration by Lt. Col. Wayne Minami of the Maryland Air National Guard, Sgt. Michael Giles of the 100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, and Spc. Lisa Crawford of the Nebraska National Guard.

Ready To Celebrate: Families, friends and co-workers line the tarmac of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Lincoln as they await the arrival of their Soldiers, April 15.



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

'I can finally breathe now.'
— Brooke Brollini



Warm Hugs: Sgt. Lynda James, Company G, 2-104th General Support Battalion, receives a huge hug moments after stepping off of a bus at the Nebraska Army National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Lincoln.



Finally: Maj. Thomas Traylor, commander of Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, gives his infant son, Zion, a kiss shortly after returning home from a nearly year-long mission to Afghanistan. "I've been very impatient. I couldn't wait, that's for sure. I'm very excited to get here and see him... getting to see the little big man."

AFGHANISTAN continued from page 1.

describe the feelings she and her three children were experiencing as they counted down the minutes until their Soldier's return. "Throughout the deployment we just tried to keep busy. But today we had a bunch of family staying with us last night to keep our minds off of (the homecoming)."

"And now we're just counting down the minutes," she added.

Those feelings seemed to multiply exponentially as the minutes passed. Soon the entire crowd, hearing that the Soldiers' bus was nearing its arrival, pushed forward toward the edge of the facility's concrete flightline. There, lined up four and five people deep, signs in hand, the crowd suddenly burst into raucous cheers as the bus drove onto the tarmac and then pulled into position.

And then, as the bus door suddenly burst open, the once orderly crowd dissolved into dozens of individual tearful reunions.

The Soldiers were home at last.

"I'm just glad to see the kids, my wife and to get to know this one," said Brollini as he held his 5-month-old daughter Ainsley while being surrounded by his wife and two other children who "got taller" during the deployment.

"I can finally breathe now," Brooke Brollini added.

To understand what the Co. G Soldiers accomplished during their mission overseas, one first needs to understand the type of mission these Guardsmen do when they're deployed. As members of a helicopter medical evacuation – or medevac – unit, the Soldiers are responsible for evacuating wounded American and coalition service members from the battlefield back to medical treatment facilities. That means they were often faced with placing their UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters into the heat of battle to rescue desperately

wounded Soldiers who might not survive the journey via ground ambulances.

It's a mission that requires a combination of skill, teamwork and bravery. It's a mission that the members of Co. G have honed during the numerous deployments they have supported over the past decades, going all the way back to Operation Desert Shield/Storm in 1990.

"We went there to do medevac and we nailed it," said Brollini, one of the unit's platoon sergeants during the mission to Afghanistan. "I think we did an exceptional job. All our guys did."

"It's a good feeling coming back home knowing what we did," he added, smiling.

The numbers bear that out. According to Maj. Thomas Traylor, unit commander, the unit added some significant laurels to its history that includes deployments to such places as Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

"We moved over 100 patients while we were there... not one patient on that aircraft perished," Traylor said during the formal part of the welcome home ceremony.

"The unit did a great job," he added later. "They were prepared. There were certain things they couldn't plan for, but they fully executed upon receiving the mission; no issues, no hesitation."

Sgt. Devin Hergenrader echoed those comments. Surrounded by his wife, Shannon, Hergenrader said he and his unit mates were extremely proud of the work they did in Afghanistan.

"It's amazing," Hergenrader said. "It feels like we just left, but it's good to be home, absolutely. I definitely feel like I deserve to be a veteran because we did a good job over there."

Following the individual welcomes, the Soldiers and their fami-



The Separation Is Almost Over: Brooke Brollini and her children make final adjustments to their signs welcoming home Staff Sgt. Antonio Brollini, April 15, at the Nebraska Army National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1. The Brollinis were celebrating the end of a nearly year-long separation brought on by the deployment of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, to Afghanistan.

lies were officially welcomed home by senior Nebraska delegates that included Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and U.S. Senator Deb Fischer. Both said the Soldiers and their families had earned the gratitude of both the state and nation.

"Thank you for your service to our country and the sacrifices you made," Ricketts said, before turning to the assembled families. "We really appreciate all of the sacrifices you made while your loved ones were in Afghanistan. You made it possible for them to accomplish their mission."

"You went into a pretty uncertain environment and you faced uncertainty while you were there," Fischer told the assembled Soldiers. "You accomplished your mission and you came back safe. That's what matters this afternoon. I thank you for your dedication to our country."

Fischer then addressed the Soldiers' families: "You sacrifice so much so that your warriors can serve overseas. You give so much to your state and to this country."

For Traylor, the ceremony was extra special. Along with the satisfaction that comes with successfully leading a unit through an overseas deployment, the afternoon also marked a significant milestone for Traylor and his family: it was his first chance to hold his infant son, Zion, who had been born just two months earlier.

"It's great to be home. It's great to be home," Traylor said as he held his son up close to his chest, his daughter clutching his leg while family members and friends passed by to give him their congratulations.

"This is my first time seeing him," Traylor said, a smile beaming from his face. "I've been very



Holding On: Sgt. Devin Hergenrader kisses his wife, Shannon, after arriving home in Lincoln, April 15, after his deployment to Afghanistan.

impatient. I couldn't wait, that's for sure. I'm very excited to get here and see him... getting to see the little big man."

Traylor said that maintaining a focus on his unit and their mission meant "compartmentalizing" his thoughts about home and family. "I just stayed compartmentalized, more or less," he said. "You've got to focus on the mission so you can get back home to your family. We needed to take care of one another and we did so."

That, said Traylor's wife, Rondi, made the reunion all the more special. "I didn't know what to expect. I was just happy and reacting to it," she said, adding that the day was everything she had hoped for, "and more, definitely."

That sentiment was probably multiplied exponentially by each of the Soldiers, their families and their friends.

It was definitely a day to remember.

Cuba Bound

Military Police battalion wished well before start of unique deployment

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard's largest military police formation was given a hearty send-off, April 15, before the start of what is expected to be a 10-month deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in support of U.S. Southern Command.

Approximately 50 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion are involved in the call-up in support of U.S. Southern Command's Joint Task Force Guantanamo. While deployed, the Soldiers will be working as the staff of a military police brigade headquarters.

All that was, for at least the moment, in the future. On this particular Easter Saturday morning, all thoughts were on the Soldiers and the families they were leaving behind.

"Thank you to the men and women of the 402nd who have been serving our country and are now going off on this very important mission to Guantanamo Bay," Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts told the Soldiers and their families during the send-off ceremony held in a nearly-packed gymnasium at the Alfonso W. Davis Middle School in Omaha. Ricketts was one of a long list of state governmental and military leaders who gathered to wish the Soldiers and their families good luck and to thank them for their service.

"They will be detaining the most dangerous terrorists that we know about in this war on terror," Ricketts said. "It's an important mission and they are living up to the tradition of the Nebraska National Guard and all of the men and women who over the centuries put on that uniform to defend our freedoms overseas."

"Nebraskans are patriotic and I know they are so grateful for your service that all of you are doing by defending this country and by protecting our liberties," Ricketts added.

The deployment ceremony



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Preparing For The Separation: A Nebraska Army National Guard family listens to speakers thank them for their sacrifices during the send-off ceremony for members of the Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion before the start of their April 15 deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

marked the culmination of months of training in preparation for the unique mission, said Lt. Col. Eric Hunsberger. This marks the first time the 402nd MP Bn. has mobilized for an overseas mission since it deployed to Afghanistan in 2010-11.

Hunsberger said his team of Nebraska Soldiers is ready for the challenges ahead, adding they will not forget they carry with them the legacy of the Nebraska National Guard.

"In the words of (Lt. Col.) Thomas Golden, we will not forget our roots. We will not forget where we come from, representing Nebraska and our values," Hunsberger said. "Bottom line, we're going to 'giddy-up.' We're going to get the job done and then we're going to bring everybody home."

According to Maj. Gen. Daryl



Marking Their Service: A number of families wore t-shirts to the April 15 sendoff ceremony emblazoned with the work that their 402nd Military Police Battalion Soldiers would be doing during their deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, he has great confidence in the battalion's ability to do just that. He also pledged the full support of the organization to help the Nebraska

military policemen be successful in their mission.

"The 402nd – mission ready, mission focused," he said. "Our commitment to you, Lieutenant Colonel Hunsberger as your team leaves the state is to you and your families. We are here so that they can stay mission ready and mission focused."

"To the families, I will tell you this: You have our number 24/7/365 and we are here to take care of the other things you left behind so that you can serve your nation," Bohac said. "We are firmly committed to that. We will not fail in our mission."

And make no doubt, said the numerous dignitaries that spoke during the nearly hour-long sendoff ceremony, that mission is extremely important to the security of the United States.

"All of us know that terrorism remains a grave threat," said U.S.



A Governor's Thanks: Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts speaks to the Soldiers and families of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 402nd Military Police Battalion Headquarters during the April 15 send-off ceremony.

Senator Deb Fischer. "We watch it every day. We see that the world is a dangerous place. We see what is happening currently in Syria, in North Korea, in Russia, all around the world and it's because of the men and women who are with us here today who have stepped forward to be those Citizen Soldiers that our homeland is safe."

"It is because of your dedication, your sacrifice and your love of country you keep every one of us safe," Fischer added.

U.S. Senator Ben Sasse echoed that sentiment, saying the families also sacrifice for love of country when their Guard Soldiers deploy.

"Thanks for sharing your families with us," he said. "In every county of this state, people pray for you over their breakfast table. They know that the sacrifices you are making are not just for those of you in the 402nd... there are lots of people who are grateful for you and there are people are praying for you during this time of separation."

The deployment is expected to last between 10 and 11 months.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Savoring The Moment: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Marla Stephen holds her son in her arms while listening to speakers thank members of the Lincoln-based Detachment 1, Company A, 641st Aviation Regiment, for their service and sacrifices during an April 14 sendoff ceremony in Lincoln, Neb. The Soldiers were deploying on a mission that will take them ultimately to the Horn of Africa.

Nebraska Army National Guard aviators heading to Horn of Africa

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Soldiers assigned to one of Nebraska's smallest units were wished well by families, friends and fellow Guardsmen, April 14, before they deployed in support of an overseas mission that will ultimately take them to Africa in support of Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa.

The deployment initially involves four members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Lincoln-based Detachment 1, Company A, 641st Aviation Regiment. Two additional Nebraska Soldiers will mobilize to support the 10-month mission later in the year.

According to the unit's commander, Capt. Oliver Bergland, the team is ready to tackle its first overseas mission since deploying to Afghanistan in 2012-13.

"The mission doesn't change for us," Bergland said as he stood in the Guard's Army Support Aviation Facility No. 1 surrounded by his family. "It's the same... just that it's in Africa instead of the United States."

The unit – which flies the two-engined C-12 aircraft – will be responsible for providing aviation support for the movement of personnel and cargo within the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility.

Bergland said he's "blessed" in that the team – made up of detachments from Nebraska and Louisiana – is highly trained and highly experienced in flying the C-12 mission.

"We have a (chief warrant officer five) who has been flying for 30-plus years. I have two (chief warrant officers four) who have been flying just as long," Bergland said. "And the two (chief warrant officers two) are full-time corporate airline pilots."

"I've deployed with most of them in the past," he added. "We're going to be just fine."

One of those deploying is Chief Warrant Officer 2 Marla Stephen, a unit pilot. Although this isn't the first time she has deployed, it is the first time that Stephen has done so as a mother.

"It's harder being a mother," said Stephen, who is leaving behind her son during the mission. She said it has been hard getting ready to go, but she's confident she and the team are trained and ready to tackle the mission ahead.

"We're ready to go... ready to get there and get started," she said. "There's a lot of experience and lots of personalities coming together. It's going to be good."

The deploying Soldiers were assured during a 30-minute send-off ceremony held on the floor of the AASF No. 1 that Nebraska is ready to support them and their families.

"You go with our love and prayers and deep admiration," said Nebraska Lt. Gov. Mike Foley. "We celebrate what you are doing."

Foley added Nebraskans across the state are praying for their successful mission and safe return.

"At the end of the day," Foley said, "people are pretty smart. They know who it is who is stepping out and serving us."

And that goes for the families who "pick up the extra work" as well, he added. "They worry about you. They pray for you every day... as do we. You go with all of our love, admiration and our prayers."

U.S. Senator Deb Fischer echoed those thoughts as she spoke to the deploying Soldiers and their families.

"Your sacrifices to be in the Guard to take on these dangerous, challenging, important missions... we thank you for that," she said. "We also thank your families who sacrifice all the time so that you can do missions for the United States of America."

"We give you our gratitude. We also give you our admiration and our thanks for the work you do each and every day to keep our country safe," Fischer said. "We live in a dangerous world. Everyone here understands that and they understand that through your sacrifice and your dedication and your patriotism, you make that dangerous world less dangerous for us."

Special operations support team returns from overseas mission 'This group absolutely crushed it'

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

During the minutes leading up to the return of seven 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne) Soldiers to the North Omaha Readiness Center after a six-month deployment overseas, it almost looked as though the families might have gotten the wrong address for the evening ceremony.

Typically, for most unit welcome homes, parking lots are filled with anxious families and friends, sometimes hours before the scheduled arrival.

However, the families of the 195th FSC Soldiers could be forgiven for waiting up until the last 10 minutes or so to arrive in force in front of the North Omaha Readiness Center on a beautiful, crisp April 12 evening. This wasn't their first rodeo, so to speak.

Take Jamie Wortman, for example. Arriving at the parking lot about 15 minutes before the expected arrival of her husband with her two young children, parents and "a couple of siblings," Jamie said in order to keep the anxiousness to a minimum, she held off arriving at the parking lot too early while also waiting to tell daughter, Reece, and son, Mack, until the last minute that their father, Sgt. 1st Class Greg Wortman, was coming home. "They just found out when we got here because I knew they would be all over the place if I told them sooner," said Jamie, smiling as she watched as her two children play tag with each other and the other extended family members. "They're very, very excited."

This wasn't Jamie's first welcome home ceremony. Like the majority of the other six family groups, their Soldiers have deployed before as members of the company's Army Special Operations Forces Support Operation (ASPO) Team, which is responsible for providing a wide array of primarily logistical support to Joint/Combined Special Operations Forces operating around the world, but primarily in the Middle East.

However, like several members of the team, this was the Wortmans' first deployment as parents.

"It was a whole different ballgame," said Jaime about the difference between the 2011 deployment and this most recent one. "Usually, we would talk about once a week on Facetime. The kids would take the phone and walk around the house playing with him."

"(I had) a lot of support from family and friends and work. That made it a lot easier," she said. "We just tried to stay busy."

A few minutes later, with the families now lining the sidewalk in front of the readiness center, a van bringing the Soldiers back from the Omaha airport pulled up to the curb and deposited the returning Soldiers into the arms of their awaiting loved ones.

One of the Soldiers welcomed by a huge throng of loved ones was Sgt. 1st Class Shawn McMahan, who acted as the senior noncommissioned officer for the ASPO team. Surrounded by his family members, McMahon said the welcome homes continue to be something special.

"This is my fourth time coming home, so I'm kind of getting used to it I guess," said McMahon laughing. "It wasn't too bad with the technology we have today... you can visit on video, so it's not that bad being overseas anymore... but it's nice coming home and seeing everybody."

He added the seven Nebraska Soldiers provided far more significant impact than their small numbers would imply.

"It was a very good mission," he said. "I can say this with all of the confidence in the world: This was by far the best APSO team to date."

"We supported an entire region; we supported people from Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria to the Horn of Africa," McMahon said. "We definitely had an impact. There were things that we moved that two months later, when the news came out, we were like, 'Oh we moved that stuff.' It was very rewarding."

While deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of operations, the Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were responsible for coordinating, monitoring and synchronizing Joint/Combined Special Operations Forces logistics requirements. What made this particular team's impact particularly noteworthy was



Celebrating With Dad: Sgt. Christopher Schmid plays with his son, Colt, after arriving home in Omaha, April 12, following a six-month deployment to the Middle East.

the fact few of the Soldiers were operating within their primary military occupational specialty.

According to Capt. Nathan McGruder, ASPO team officer-in-charge, each of the six enlisted Soldiers worked outside of their normal military specialty. For example, Sgt. Thomas Shupe normally works as a cook. During the deployment, he served as the transportation movement specialist. Sgt. Christopher Schmid is normally a generator mechanic, however in order to deploy he "reclassified" as an ammunition supply specialist.

"This group of individuals knocked it out of the park," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, a flawless deployment. You do not have a deployment like this... it just doesn't happen. And this group absolutely crushed it."

"Not a single one of these Soldiers was deployed doing the job they are traditionally used to doing," McGruder added a short time later. "That's because we here at the 195th know that the MOS doesn't matter as much as taking the best quality and qualified NCOs and going over and getting the mission done. And



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

We Missed You: Sgt. 1st Class Greg Wortman receives long-awaited hugs from his two children, April 12, following a deployment to the Middle East as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne).

that's exactly what we have done."

Along with the families and friends who travelled out to the North Omaha Readiness Center to welcome the Soldiers and thank them and their families for their service were a number of senior military and governmental leaders. The words of praise the Soldiers and their families received were universal.

"From the day that you put on that uniform, you set aside your lives (to protect) the freedoms that are important. You are willing to fight for it... to put your lives on the line to protect those values and preserve them for the next generation," said Nebraska Lt. Gov. Mike Foley. "You are all heroes," Foley added, referring to the Soldiers and their families.

"I congratulate you on a job well done," added Brig. Gen. Kevin Lyons, Nebraska Army National Guard ground forces commander. "To the families, your support over these last months has allowed these Soldiers to

do their jobs and do them well." According to Sgt. Christopher Schmid, who was greeted by warm embraces from his nearly two-year-old son, Colt, and wife, Justine, the homecoming was everything he had hoped it would be.

"I'm just relieved to see my family. I'm ready to work back in with them," he said.

Schmid added that he was extremely proud of the job he and his fellow Soldiers did.

"As a team, we moved a lot of equipment to the warfighters. It's very fulfilling knowing that we were helping the guys on the front line."

Greg Wortman echoed that sentiment.

"It speaks a lot," said Wortman about the job that the 195th FSC Soldiers did. "It speaks a lot about the Nebraska Army National Guard... I don't know how to put it, but we're extremely flexible."

Now, he added, he was simply excited to finally be home.

"It's hard to put it into words. It's nice to be home."

AIR MEDALS continued from page 1.

a number of nearby obstacles, the four Guard aviators were successfully able to rescue the patient.

"The crew could've, quite frankly, made the decision that there was too much risk to the helicopter," said Cyrulik in describing the situation the Nebraska Soldiers faced that day. "Without hesitation, so that others might live, the crew swept in at low altitude and at high speed, surrounded by dust and chaos and explosions, and landed in broad daylight in an area that would only fit one aircraft."

"There's a moment where we're all measured as Soldiers and this was their moment, this was their measure," Cyrulik said. Ultimately, after days of treatment, the Soldier lived and was reunited with his family "and lived to fight another day."

According to Score, there really wasn't a choice about whether or not to rescue the wounded Soldier. "On that particular day, it was like many others except when the call came over, 'U.S. military, urgent surgical injury.' That's a drop everything and go type of mission," Score recalled. "Honestly, it happened so fast."

According to the Soldiers' citation, as the helicopter approached the evacuation site the crew learned that the landing zone was hot; that they would be landing under fire in broad daylight, an extremely dangerous situation,

to say the least.

"We didn't have time to think, thankfully," Score said. He added, "I told (the crew) what the situation was when we went in. There's an American down. It's a hot L.Z. They said, 'Let's go get him.'"

Hawke said there was never any question what the crew should do. "We were there to do our job," he said. "One of our comrades was down so we had to take care of him."

"That's what we're trained to do. That's what our whole purpose is there," he said. "We've never dropped a mission and were not about to start."

According to Score the helicopter was on the ground for "maybe 30 seconds," long enough for the wounded Soldier to be placed aboard the aircraft and for the crew to quickly take off again.

Score said even though it might have seemed like the aircraft was alone, they knew they weren't.

"We were not the only ones there. You have your gunships covering you, (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) assets covering you," he said.

After transporting the wounded Green Beret to the medical facility, the crew then moved to a nearby refueling point. While there, Score said he noticed something "interesting." To the rear of the cockpit, a bullet hole pierced the skin of the helicopter.

Having seen and investigated battle damage in the past, Score



Award Honorees: Four Nebraska Army National Guard aviators assigned to a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter crew were honored, May 20, for the bravery they displayed while rescuing a wounded U.S. Special Forces Soldier on Feb. 9 near Sangin, Afghanistan, in the Helmund Province.

said he was able to tell when and from what direction the bullet had entered the aircraft. Based upon where Hawke and Cornell were operating at that moment, Score said he realized that bullet had passed within inches between his two crew mates.

"It literally went right between them," he said.

By the time the aircrew had returned to their base, Score said it was dusk. After reporting in to his commander, Maj. Thomas Traylor, that they had completed their mission, Score said he simply slumped down on his bunk.

The mission was complete, soon to be forgotten. At least that's what Score and the rest of the crew thought.

A couple weeks later, however, Traylor contacted Score and asked him to write up an account of the mission. They might be put in for an award, Score recalled.

Days, weeks and months passed. The unit returned home to Nebraska.

And then, some three weeks after their Nebraska homecoming, Traylor contacted the crew to let them know that the award had been approved. What award? Score remembered asking.

Following the award ceremony, Score and Hawke both said they and the rest of the crew were overwhelmed by the medal presentation.

"I kept asking myself, 'How did I get here,'" Score said as he and his three crewmates had their medals



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

With Valor: Four Air Medals with "Valor" device wait to be presented to Nebraska Army National Guard aviators for their bravery while deployed to Afghanistan.

pinned onto their uniforms by Gov. Ricketts. "I really didn't expect much of this."

"I feel like everyone in our unit deserves the same thing because they do the same job," added Hawke. "We just had a little more sporty of a mission that day."

According to Score, the medal simply confirmed what he already knew. "I'm just extremely proud of the crew I had that day," he said. "Everybody performed to standard and above standard."

"And it had a pretty good outcome."

Smoke Eaters

Nebraska Air Guard firefighters test lifesaving skills in June

By Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus
Staff Photojournalist

When the weather turns hot and humid with temperatures hovering in the 90s, one's first thought isn't to run into a burning aircraft.

However, members of the 155th Civil Engineering Fire Department did exactly that when they took part in a live burn training exercise, June 3-4, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln.

The simulation allowed the 155th Air Refueling Wing firefighters to experience a life-like aircraft fire while teaching them their positions so they know what they're supposed to be doing. The exercise, which is part of an annual certification requirement, also helps the Air Guardsmen practice safety techniques, such as hustling – not running – to the aircraft.

According to exercise officials, firefighters are cautioned against running toward the fire because it can cause tunnel-vision, thus preventing the ability to understand the full situation they are presented with.

For the firefighters, this training allows them to practice every aspect of aircraft firefighting such as cutting, fire attack and search and rescue, said Tech. Sgt. Adam Schaaf, a crew chief in the 155th CEF.

"Everybody is going to take something a little different and it just all depends on the stage that you are at in your Air Guard fire career. So a lot of people who have just gotten in are going to take away really good live fire training, feeling the heat and just getting used to seeing how the fire behaves in certain situations," Schaaf said.

"For me, I take away just trying to be better at organizing, motivat-



Lifesaver: A member of the 155th Civil Engineering Fire Department carries a mannequin to safety during a live burn training exercise, June 3, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln.

ing, encouraging, teaching and just trying to pull everybody together and finding where everybody's at and meet those needs so that we can just keep going each year and get better and better. And then the individuals that are ready to step up to more of a leadership role, getting them ready for that," he added.

Along with learning their positions, the exercise helps teach the participating firefighters how to gain entry, put out fires, look for victims, search inside an aircraft, know how to turn off the engine and batteries, and get people out, said Tech. Sgt. Jason Loch, a firefighter with the 155th CEF.

"I think that it's getting your



Photos by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

Live Burn Training: Members of the 155th Civil Engineering Fire Department practice their skills during a live burn training exercise June 3, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln. The firefighters are required to be certified in this training each year so that they are ready at a moment's notice to respond to similar situations.

hands on the equipment, being comfortable with the equipment, and knowing its limitations," Loch said.

Firefighters begin with modulating. This is a procedure in which firetrucks circle the burning aircraft and douse it with water. Modulating helps the firefighters to assess the situation, figure out what kind of fire they are dealing with, as well as any other distractions that may be in the area, Loch said.

Then, they practice entering the aircraft and rescuing a mannequin for the purpose of practicing search

and rescue. This allows them to practice repetition and gain muscle memory since hands-on practice is the best way for them to learn and enhance their skills.

Training like this is not uncommon for the firefighters since they must be certified in all areas of their career field, he added.

"There's always training; we have so many certificates that we have to keep on," Loch said. "We're not just firefighters...we are (also) emergency medical technicians, we deal with hazardous materials, we do swift water rescue, we do wild-

land (firefighting)... there are all these other things that you have to go to school for that require so many hours a year to keep up, to be able to provide that service."

With every bit of training, the firefighters ready themselves for any situation that may come knowing that the more they train, the more prepared they will be when an actual fire occurs.

"We pride ourselves that when the Nebraska Air National Guard Fire Department comes around, we hustle, we get the job done. We push hard, we work hard," Schaaf said.

Guard's long-range surveillance Soldiers train with active Army units in February

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

The Nebraska Army National Guard has a specialized unit of Soldiers that are slowly becoming extinct. Company E (Long-Range Surveillance), 134th Infantry Regiment, (often referred to as just the LRS) is currently one of just a handful of such units left in the U.S. Army.

And while the Army has proposed to deactivate all LRS units in the near future, it hasn't stopped Nebraska's team from training to be the best.

In February the LRS had the unique opportunity to participate in a volunteer mission to support 2nd Brigade, Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, called Operation Danger Focus II.

"Basically, we are the eyes of the commander, letting him know where the enemy is, the enemy composition, disposition and strength," said Capt. Joshua Metcalf, LRS commander.

From Feb. 7-16, the LRS worked alongside the 1st Infantry Division to conduct deep reconnaissance and surveillance for the entirety of Danger Focus II, perhaps the largest exercise Nebraska's LRS has participated in to date.

"Working for a brigade element isn't foreign to us at all," Metcalf said. "Still, as far as a pure LRS mission, this is probably the best event we've participated in. It was very long hours, both physically and mentally demanding, with tactical, administrative and logistical and sustainment challenges all mixed together. I am very proud of everyone who participated in the level of

dedication to ensuring that these challenging missions were executed to their fullest potential."

Staff Sgt. Thomas Shirey, a team leader who has been with the LRS for eight years, said Danger Focus II was unique because it was the first time he can recall working on such a large-scale mission.

"A lot of other missions we do are training only and typically at a company level," Shirey said. "This time we're actually being utilized with another unit to show off what we can do and assist them on their mission."

Another team leader, Staff Sgt. Dominic Rossitto, agreed with Shirey both on the amount of practical application their Soldiers were receiving at Danger Focus II and their overall exposure to the U.S. Army.

"It's wonderful to be able to work with Big Army, while being in the National Guard," Rossitto said. "With this unit being as specialized as we are, it's nice to show them what we can do, our accessibility and expertise, and to let them know that if you need anything that we can provide, that we're more than welcome to help you out with anything you need."

Rossitto said the hands-on, real-mission training gives the LRS Soldiers better understanding of their individual jobs, while also shining a broader light to what they can do as a company.

"This is a great opportunity for us to work with the active duty and to show them what we are," said Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, Nebraska Army National Guard state command sergeant major, while visiting with the LRS at Fort

Riley on Feb. 10. "This is what you folks do. You make Nebraska proud."

Baker said he was proud of all the Nebraska Soldiers who "volunteered" for Danger Focus II. The mission was considered volunteer for Co. E as their official two-weeks of annual training was scheduled for later in the year. Participating in Danger Focus II was helpful for annual training preparation.

Metcalf said Co. E is currently slated to attend Exercise AURORA 17, a Swedish National Defense Exercise with seven countries and around 30,000 personnel participating this September.

"Our company will be conducting multiple airborne exercises facilitating insertion to execute our LRS mission essential tasks of conducting long-ranger surveillance operations, reporting on priority intelligence requirements and developing the battlefield for our higher headquarters," Metcalf said. "Operation Danger Focus II was a great test to ensure that we are ready to go participate in yet an even larger scale training scenario."

Rossitto agrees the Danger Focus mission helped with preparing the LRS Soldiers for their upcoming overseas training. "It helps them with repetition to give them more confidence, refining their skills and broadening their horizons," Rossitto said.

While some Soldiers were initially hesitant to work with an active duty element, Sgt. Austin Stinger said working with the 1st Infantry Division was the best training by allowing his team to see how larger units organize and operate.

"It was a whole new environment and a good learning experience to



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Table-Top Tactics: Soldiers from Company E (Long-Range Surveillance), 134th Infantry Regiment, discuss their mission plans using table-top exercise examples while training at Fort Riley, Kan., Feb. 7-16, during Operation Danger Focus II. The volunteer mission was an opportunity for the LRS to support active duty units in the 1st Infantry Division.

work side-by-side," Stinger said. "Everyone got along really well. It seems like everyone was there to help fight the same fight."

Even with the future of the Army's LRS units unclear, the Nebraska National Guard's Company E (Long-Range Surveillance), 134th Infantry Regiment, has no plans

to slow down. Co. E Soldiers are ready for their upcoming mission to Sweden and hope to continue to show their relevance to the Army's overall mission.

"We don't know the future of the LRS, but we're going to drive on and continue to do what we do and we're going to do it well," Baker said.

Nebraskan runner-up at regional Best Warrior contest

By **Spc. Lisa Crawford**
Acting Editor

After unexpectedly winning the Soldier of the Year title during the Nebraska National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, Spc. Hunter Smith of Kearney trained hard and promised to give his all at the regional competition.

Both Smith of Troop B, 1-134th Calvary Squadron and Sgt. Connor Alberts of the 72nd Civil Support Team proudly represented Nebraska in the Region V Best Warrior Competition, May 23-25, at Camp Beauregard in Pineville, Louisiana.

The Region V Best Warrior Competition was a grueling three-day event designed to test the physical and mental toughness of 14 specially-selected Soldiers from seven states.

With minimal rest and under constant stress, each competitor battled through various Army Warrior Tasks and physical obstacles in pursuit of the regional title.

The Nebraska Soldiers competed against enlisted Soldiers and non-

commissioned officers from Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas.

"I've been around this competition almost 10 years and this is arguably one of the toughest competitions I've ever seen," said State Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker.

Smith entered the state's Best Warrior Competition with just a week's notice. After winning, he spent the next two months vigorously training for the regional competition, with hopes of securing the regional title for Nebraska for the second consecutive year.

"Specialist Smith was kind of a hurting unit after day two... but he gave it everything he had, finished third in the road march... and he was in striking distance up to the last event, but it just wasn't meant to be," Baker said. "I'm very proud of him and Sergeant Alberts did very well. They gave it everything they had."

Smith ultimately earned runner-up in the Enlisted Soldier category at this year's Region V Best Warrior Competition. Arkansas' competitors placed first for both categories

and will represent Region V at the national competition later this summer.

Baker said Nebraska has a pretty good history of doing well at the regional competition. He said Nebraska Army National Guard Sgt. Calvin Koziol's national-level win last year showed Soldiers that the Best Warrior Competition is something they get to do – and not something required.

"Sergeant Alberts is a great example of that," Baker said. "He competed last year in the state Best Warrior competition, didn't win it and vowed to come back. And he did this year; he came back with a vengeance and destroyed the state competition. And his performance in the regionals was admirable."

Baker said Soldiers hoping to compete in Nebraska's Best Warrior Competition next year should share their interest with their leadership and begin training now.

"We've got a great group of organizers running this competition," he said. "If we keep putting the most motivated Soldiers forward, we'll continue to see positive results."



Photo courtesy of Louisiana National Guard

Nebraska Proud: Nebraska Army National Guard Spc. Hunter Smith carries the Nebraska state flag toward the finish line of a 13-mile road march while competing in the Region V National Guard Best Warrior Competition, May 23-25, at Camp Beauregard in Pineville, La. Smith ultimately earned runner-up in the competition's Enlisted Soldier category.

Army Guard Soldier plays unique role in Iraq

By **Sgt. Anna Pongo**
Staff Photojournalist

BAGHDAD, Iraq - The Joint Visitors Bureau (JVB) for the Combined Joint Forces Land Component - Operation Inherent Resolve is responsible for coordinating VIP visits to Baghdad.

One half of the two-person team that handles the visitors is a Nebraska National Guard member, Spc. Michael Chelewski. U.S. Army Master Sgt. Stephanie Rhoads is the JVB noncommissioned officer-in-charge. The two Soldiers organize the process for distinguished visitors to see what the coalition is doing in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.

The JVB is responsible for organizing travel, lodging, visitor access, meetings, office calls, troop engagements, facility tours and whatever else is needed during the VIP visits. For the JVB team, flexibility is very important. They can have anywhere from a couple months to a four day notice for visits.

Before deploying to Iraq, neither Rhoads nor Chelewski had ever worked in any JVB capacities.

"It was difficult at first because I didn't know I was transferring in until a couple days before it happened," Rhoads said. "I had never done it before. I didn't have any clue as to how you were supposed to execute something like that."

Before transferring to JVB in December, Rhoads was the Analysis and Control Element NCOIC, supervising the intelligence section for CJFLCC.

Chelewski came to JVB when he joined the Main Command Post - Operational Detachment, a Nebraska National Guard unit that stood up a few months earlier to augment the 1st Infantry Division for its deployment to Iraq. Chelewski's previous job was working as a supply specialist.

"I didn't even know what JVB was when they told me I'd be working here," Chelewski said. "I was anxious because I had never done anything like it before."

Since the 1st Infantry Division got to Iraq, JVB has been responsible for coordinating over 85 VIP visits, to include former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, U.S. Sgt. Maj. of the Army, Daniel Dailey and Swedish Chief of Joint Operations, Vice Adm. Jan Thornqvist, just to name a few.

From learning how to set up a briefing to coordinating a dinner, there were a lot of things for the duo to learn about what goes into a VIP visit. Through research and asking questions, they learned about the protocol involved.

Rhoads said she learned a very valuable lesson: Be able to ask for help. "I learned to be able to turn to anyone, no matter who they are and what they do, and ask questions," she said. "And, not be embarrassed to not know what to do because nobody has all the answers."

As a team that has come together for such a diverse job, the two motivate each other to keep going and push each other to be better, said Rhoads.

"It is two people from two completely different areas who bring a different mindset



Photo by Sgt. Anna Pongo

Jack Of All Trades: Spc. Michael Chelewski, Joint Visitors Bureau specialist, Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command - Operation Inherent Resolve, hangs a flag in preparation for a promotion ceremony in Baghdad on Dec. 3, 2016.

together," said Chelewski. "This strengthens our teamwork. We have a very good working relationship. We can laugh. We can joke and we can get things done."

Not only have they learned together about their job at JVB, they have been able to learn from each other about some of their different experiences within the Army.

"He's educated me on another aspect of the Army, because I don't know a lot about the National Guard," Rhoads said. "He asks me a lot about active duty and I ask him about the National Guard."

While both Rhoads and Chelewski agreed the process to coordinate visits is time consuming and sometimes frustrating because there are so many moving pieces that could go wrong, the completed visit can make the hard work worth it.

"You have a (distinguished visitor) come in and you get to personally meet them, and you get to see their expressions throughout the visit," Chelewski said. "It's pretty rewarding to know that they are happy with how the visit turned out and that they got to see everything that they wanted to."

Nebraska general receives honors from University of Nebraska-Omaha

By **Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes**
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Maj. Gen. Richard J. Evans III was one of three University of Nebraska-Omaha College of Business Administration alumni honored, May 11, for their career and community achievements.

Evans, who earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration in 1984, was honored as one of the college's recipients of the 2017 Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award. The award was presented during a luncheon at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.



Evans

Evans currently serves as the director of Reserve Forces and Mobilization Assistant to the Commander, U.S. Strategic Command. Evans is responsible for over 600 reserve members and is principal advisor to the commander on the command's diverse missions, including strategic deterrence and assurance, space and cyberspace operations, full-spectrum global strike, integrated missile defense, joint electromagnetic spectrum operations, and joint warfare analysis.

Evans graduated with a BSBA in finance from UNO in 1984 and began his career in the U.S. Air Force and Nebraska Air National Guard later that year. He has had operational, instructor and evaluator flying assignments in both the RF-4C Phantom II and KC-135R Stratotanker aircraft.

Evans has commanded multiple units, including leading the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln from 2007-12.

Evans is a current member of the UNO military and veterans affairs cabinet, past president of the National Guard Association of Nebraska, and a graduate of Leadership Lincoln's Executive Series Class XX. He has chaired the KC-135 and space, cyber and intelligence councils for the Air National Guard and served as vice chair of the National Guard Association of the U.S. mobility air forces council. He is an active life member in local and national military and veteran's organizations and supports local civic organizations, including the Down Syndrome Association for Families of Nebraska.

(Editor's Note: Information for this article was taken from a UNO news release.)

Recruiting more than X’s and O’s

Air Guard recruiter spends free time mentoring Omaha kids as youth basketball coach

By Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus
Staff Photojournalist

At 6-foot-3, with brown hair and an athletic build, Tech. Sgt. Kyle Eddy describes himself as an extreme extrovert who is out-going and loud, yet laid-back. Coworkers of Eddy, a production recruiter and retainer with the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Force Support Squadron, see his big personality, too.

“Kyle’s got a very upbeat attitude at all times, and he consistently provides a positive energy to the people around him,” said Tech. Sgt. Daniel Dibbern, a production recruiter and retainer with the 155th FSS. “He’s very happy-go-lucky.”

For someone who likes to talk to people, being a recruiter for the military is the perfect job for Eddy. The job also gives him a chance to be a mentor to those he interacts with.

“As a mentor for me, it’s a good image to have,” said Staff. Sgt. Devin Davila, an administrative assistant with the 155th FSS. “I think if you’re sulking around and you hate your job, it kind of reflects on the shop, and could bring down morale. But I see him highly motivated and it excites me and motivates me to eventually, one day, become a recruiter as well, because I see how much he loves it.”



Coach Kyle: Tech. Sgt. Kyle Eddy, a production recruiter and retainer with the 155th Force Support Squadron, also coaches basketball with the Millard Basketball Association in Omaha.

Along with the busy life a recruiter, Eddy finds time to engage with his community by coaching basketball for middle school students.

Eddy was 18 when he joined the military as a member of the 155th Security Forces Squadron. At the same time, he began to coach for the Millard Basketball Association.

He said balancing the military and coaching is not too hard. The MBA has been very supportive of his military responsibilities and deployments. For Eddy, missing a half a season for a deployment was almost easier than missing one or two games because of a drill weekend.

After eight years in the 155th SFS and multiple deployments, Eddy decided to become a recruiter, a four year tour that he hopes to extend. He was sent to the Production Recruiting School at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, San Antonio, Texas, and he has been a recruiter for a little over year.

Eddy said recruiting is a full-time job, with many demands. There is no such thing as a typical day at the office.

Eddy said he is either in the office or on the road. When he is in the office, he said he meets with applicants, answers phone calls, or answers any questions about benefits offered to those in the military. He added that more than 50 percent of his days are spent on the road, whether it’s for a job fair in Scottsbluff, or a mock interview at a high school in Omaha. In September, he spends nights in hotels making his way around rural areas of Nebraska for job fairs.

He said, the biggest challenge he sees is that most people know very little about the Air National Guard.

“He goes above and beyond when it comes to recruiting,” said Master Sgt. Jeremy Dean, recruiting and retention manager for the 155th FSS. “As far as working with individuals, the events that he plans and goes to, and getting out into the community lets everyone know the Air National Guard exists. He’s the type of person that when he puts his mind to something, he follows through.”

With this busy schedule, Eddy works hard to balance his work and coaching.

Eddy has now coached with the MBA for nine years. He said he loves working with kids and teaching kids to plays sports such as basketball, volleyball and flag football.

“I love sports,” Eddy said. “I absolutely love athletics and I think that especially in today’s age where kids are getting caught up with the wrong things, I really think sports, or different clubs are their saving grace in high school and middle school and is one of the reasons I made it through with a ‘clean nose.’”

The kids he coaches range from sixth-graders to eighth-graders who plan to go to Millard-West High School in Omaha. Eddy spends four to five days a week in the evenings coaching. Time is spent practicing drills such as dribbling, shooting, and footwork along with playing against other teams in the program.

The kids on his team get to know him pretty well and he said that his team knows to give 100 percent in practice because there is no toleration for lack of effort. Eddy uses the 30



Photos by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

Dual Jackets: Nebraska Air National Guard Tech. Sgt. Kyle Eddy is a production recruiter and retainer with the 155th Force Support Squadron. Recruiting is a full-time position and includes a four year tour, but it isn’t Eddy’s only passion. When he is not on the road recruiting for the Nebraska Air National Guard, he coaches with the Millard Basketball Association in Omaha. Knowing he is shaping futures both on the court and in the military, Eddy strives to be a positive guide to those he coaches and recruits.

Nebraska Air Guard speeds up mentoring

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

Air Force Manual 36-2643, “Air Force Mentoring Program,” defines mentorship as “a relationship in which a person with greater experience and wisdom guides another person to develop both personally and professionally.”

Note the above does not include a timeline governing the mentoring relationship.

While many longtime Air Force members might believe a typical mentor-mentee relationship must develop deliberately over a long period of time, Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen are continuously seeking ways to innovate and engage junior Airmen in new and exciting ways.

As a result, the Nebraska Air National Guard Top 3 Council hosted a speed mentoring event, June 4, in Lincoln.

“The speed mentoring event is designed to provide experienced Airmen the opportunity to share their insights with less experienced, oftentimes younger, Airmen in a relaxed, engaging forum in a relatively short amount of time,” said Senior Master Sgt. Megan Zuver, 155th Air Refueling Wing human resource advisor.

The event organizers enlisted the help of 19 subject matter experts, including senior NCO mentors and retirees, who then engaged directly with the more than 25 mentees who attended. The mentors were assigned topics that junior enlisted Airmen requested in advance. Topics included discussions about different work areas, Airmen Comprehensive Fitness and best-practices for new supervisors.

The mentee groups spent four minutes with each mentor before moving on to the next.

“It was a great experience,”

said Airman Sara Holling, a 155th Operational Support Squadron aviation resource management specialist. “I feel like I got a lot out of a short investment of time.”

In addition to the speed mentoring, 155th Public Affairs Office specialists provided on-camera media training opportunities for the mentees.

“Every Airman is an ambassador,” said Senior Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen, 155th Public Affairs superintendent. “Every Airman, regardless of rank, should be able to speak on-camera, to us or external media, about their generic job duties and how they contribute to overall mission accomplishment. Even if they aren’t comfortable at first, we’ll provide tips, techniques and practice opportunities to set them up for success.”

Pending feedback, the Top 3 Council is open to organizing more speed mentoring sessions in the future.



Photo by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

Advice From Above: Airman Edward Wisnieski, who enlisted as an aircrew flight equipment technician with the 155th Operations Support Squadron, talks to Senior Master Sgt. William Triplette, the inspector general superintendent with the 155th Air Refueling Wing headquarters, June 4, about providing feedback in the workplace.



Scoping It Out: Larry Vrtiska, Nebraska National Guard's environmental program manager, helps an Ashland-Greenwood student look through a spotting scope used to view eagles in their natural habitats.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Look There! Nebraska National Guard Natural Resources manager, Amy Dirks (back right) and students from Ashland-Greenwood Elementary point to the sky when a juvenile eagle flies overhead during their May 12 visit to the Camp Ashland Training Site for Operation Bald Eagle 2017, a Nebraska National Guard outreach program.

Operation Bald Eagle

Annual youth outreach program highlights Nebraska Guard's natural habitat protection efforts

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

What bird did Benjamin Franklin want as America's national symbol instead of the bald eagle?
Answer: The wild turkey.
That's one of the questions Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, asked a group of curious young learners, May 12, when he and Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman, deputy adjutant general, joined Nebraska National Guard Natural Resources manager, Amy Dirks, and nearly 60 students from four Ashland-Greenwood Elementary classrooms at the Camp Ashland Training Site for Operation Bald Eagle 2017.
This annual event allows students, who have been studying about bald eagles, the opportunity to be recognized for their educational efforts. Each year the Nebraska National Guard presents two awards, one to the student who wrote the best eagle essay, and another to the top classroom.
"Originally we set it up as a natu-

ral resources education platform with special emphasis on how the National Guard keeps our natural resources in check," Dirks said.
The event later focused in on environmental conservation and specifically the Nebraska National Guard's support of eagle habitats.
"Every state National Guard has an environmental office and every Department of Defense has to have an integrated National Resources Management Plan or some sort of plan that says this is how we are going to take care of our national resources," Dirks said.
"Our Environmental Management Branch has a commitment to environmental stewardship, which includes prioritizing compliance with environmental laws and regulations, for the conservation and preservation of natural and cultural resources so they will be available for present and future generations."
Nebraska's Environmental Office has five full-time employees dedicated to managing a wide range of environmental programs and has been recognized multiple times nationally and locally for its envi-

ronmental stewardship. Operation Bald Eagle is an annual attempt to share the state's programs and importance with some of the youngest members of the community.
This year, Ann McKnight, 9, won the student award for the best eagle essay, and Ms. Taylor Ruzicka's third grade class won top classroom – and the right to name the new eagles.
"I'm a big advocate for agriculture and nature explore classrooms, so this is near and dear to my heart," Ruzicka said. "I think it's something (the students) have never been exposed to before, and I know other schools don't always get these opportunities, so it's really nice that Camp Ashland is within a five-minute drive and that the students get to come out into nature."
The class of 18 students chose

to name the two juvenile eagles Destroyer and Hurricane-Tsunami, respectively.
"Alright, our first hyphenated eagle name," Dahlman said after the announcement. "Nice strong names for these strong birds."
Dahlman, who has attended the certificate presentations in the past, said this was his first trip to watch the kids actually view the eagles in their environment.
"We have a great respect for not only the community, but the environment that we're in and we're a part of," Dahlman said. "It's pretty neat to have the kids be a part of that, to not only see the eagles and get out of class, but to interact with our team, too. You know some of these kids are going to be Soldiers and Airmen. They're going to be in our team and they're going to drill

out here. It's just a really great thing for me to get to come out and see that."
After the awards presentation the students had an opportunity to view the eagles nest, using binoculars and a spotting scope. While the nest was empty at the time, the students were excited for a chance to view "Destroyer" in flight, as one of the juvenile eagles flew overhead near the nest during the event.
"I really love getting the kids out here, it's really exciting to be able to share the natural habitat that I get to see at our training sites," Dirks said.
"Soldiers get to come out for their training and all that, but other than that the public doesn't get to see these natural areas. It's fun to get the kids out here because they have a whole new sense of wonder that's fun to experience."

Annual Training Heats Up




Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

2017 training season one for history books

Members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard spread out across the country for annual training season this year and the staff of the *Prairie Soldier* was there to document what these Soldiers and Airmen were doing, which in some cases involved learning new skills such as firing newly-acquired TOW missiles (above) or how to breach a door with explosives (right).

See stories and photos in the upcoming Annual Training edition of the *Prairie Soldier*.




Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton

Waverly Airman earns major U.S. Air Force titles for work in Nebraska Air National Guard

By Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus
Staff Photojournalist

Senior Airman Ryan Dalton, a Waverly, Nebraska, native who now serves as an aircrew flight equipment technician with the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Operations Support Squadron, was recently named the United States Air Force Outstanding Aircrew Flight Equipment Award 2016 Air Reserve Component Airman of the Year at the 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln.

This award adds to a growing list of accomplishments that includes receiving the Outstanding Airman of the Year for the 155th Operations Group, the 2016 Air National Guard Aircrew Flight Equipment Airman of the Year along with completing Airman Leadership School and graduating from the University of Nebraska at Omaha with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aviation as a Cum Laude Honors Graduate recipient.

Dalton was also recognized for spearheading the project to install nuclear flash blindness goggles into helmets, making his shop one of the first to have their helmets nuclear ready.

Additionally, when an order came down to install a new piece of equipment into the 20-men life rafts on our jets, Dalton and his supervisor, Tech. Sgt. Michael Wellman, noncommissioned officer in-charge of the 155th Aircrew Flight Equipment, decided to test it after installing the new equipment. The test showed flaws in the new equipment, which was then recognized at the national level.

"I don't want our aircrew members to ever have to use any of the life-saving equipment we maintain. That means something terrible has happened. But God forbid that situation takes place, the aircrew and passengers on board can trust that we have done our jobs to ensure that they return home safe," Dalton said. "I take that responsibility very seriously and treat each piece of equipment as if it were my own, as if I might have to use it. I want that gear to be top of line, and function perfectly."

Dalton's hard work ethic and his attention to detail, show others around him what it means to go above and beyond the responsibilities of his job.

"You definitely have to be proactive in your own career, because it's what you make of it," Dalton said. "I make a list of tasks to do and keep myself focused on the next step, that's how I stay motivated."

This June marked Dalton's fourth year in the Nebraska Air National Guard.

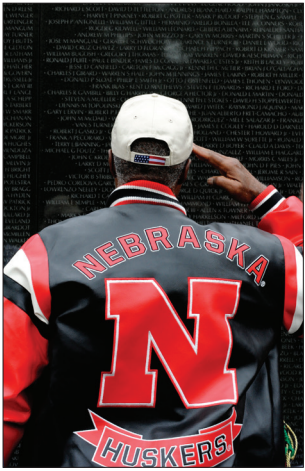


Photo by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

Honored: Senior Airman Ryan Dalton poses with Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac after receiving his award for being named the United States Air Force Outstanding Aircrew Flight Equipment Award 2016 Air Reserve Component Airman of the Year.



Helping Hand: An Honor Flight companion helps Vietnam veteran Robert “Bob” Rediger of Lincoln rub a pencil copy of a fallen friend’s name, which is etched onto the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.



Final Salute: A Vietnam veteran from Nebraska salutes the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., May 1, as part of Patriotic Productions’ final Honor Flight. The flight made history as the largest group of Vietnam Veterans from one state to ever visit the wall.



Reflections: Cheryl Feala of North Bend, Neb., the only woman veteran on the May 1 Honor Flight, pauses to reflect on her service while visiting the Vietnam Women’s Memorial in Washington, D.C.

FINAL MISSION continued from page 1.

to the airport in Omaha where he boarded the “Red Plane” for the trip onward to Washington, D.C.

Four planes – Red, White, Blue and Uncle Sam Too – carried the veterans and about two-dozen companion volunteers and media from Eppler Airfield in Omaha to the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The veterans knew they were in for an eventful day, but no one was prepared for the whirlwind of emotions that would be associated.

Like most of the Vietnam veterans, Richard Sutton of Lincoln was immediately surprised by the crowd greeting them as they disembarked the plane in Washington.

“I was shocked,” Sutton said. “I didn’t think we’d have anything when we came in... and then there they were. It just moved me, to have people applauding me and thanking me for coming back. That meant as much to me as anything. That brought tears to my eyes.”

The veterans funneled through the airport shaking hands, laughing and crying with strangers who had come to greet them. One of the final passengers to leave the plane was Stanosheck, his left hand firmly grasping the tied-together laces of his beloved combat boots.

One-by-one each plane’s occupants traveled by bus to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to take group photos before being released to explore the Washington Mall, including the most popular stop on the trip: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

“It’s very moving,” said Barry Higgins of Omaha. “This is the first time I’ve ever been here to actually feel the pain of everything.”

Higgins and his good friend Larry Baasch said they were both fortu-

nate enough to not only be selected for the Honor Flight, but to travel the entire trip together. The two served separately in the U.S. Navy in Vietnam and ultimately met as co-workers at Mutual of Omaha after leaving the service.

“I would go again,” Higgins said. “I think in everybody’s heart here we would say yes. We would defend the country again.”

Near the center of the left wall, Stanosheck placed his boots at its base along with a set of his own dog tags as a memorial to his late brother Michael – also a Vietnam veteran – who passed away in 2015 from complications due to Agent Orange exposure.

“I wrote a note and left it inside the boots about my brother,” Stanosheck said. “Those were my boots, but my brother wore a pair just like them. There were more victims than the names on that wall and I hope they are all always remembered.”

Just down from the boots, at the wall’s apex, a patriotic wreath was presented at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall on behalf of Nebraska’s veterans.

As Taps echoed from a bugle, the veterans stood at attention and saluted the names of their fallen comrades. Then, as the bugle retreated to silence, the memorial slowly grew lively again as everyone returned their attention back to the wall and their own personal endeavors.

“I haven’t had to use eye drops all day,” said Melvin Harms of Lincoln, laughing away a few tears. “My eyes stay wet.”

Harms said he was honored to find the name of a childhood friend he grew up with. “He’s on the wall,” Harms said, nodding affirmatively while his eyes drifted and became



Left Behind: Combat boots and ID tags belonging to Lincoln native and Vietnam veteran, Patrick Stanosheck, left in memory of his late brother at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall.

glossy once more. “He got killed his first week over there.”

Cheryl Feala of North Bend, Nebraska, was the only woman veteran on the May 1 trip. A former U.S. Army nurse, she is now a wife, mother and grandmother. And standing before the Vietnam Women’s Memorial, she was all of those in one as she wrapped her arm around the shoulders of a small boy who was asking her questions as his mother watched close by with a smile.

The trip allowed time for more than just the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Leaving the Washington Mall, the Red Plane headed for Arlington National Cemetery for the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As unique an experience as viewing the Changing of the Guard, it was surprisingly a different event at Arlington that affected many of the veterans.

“When we were leaving the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the bus got stopped by a live funeral procession,” said Clayton Marsh of Papillion. “The horses, the body with the flag on it, the band... I’ve never seen that before. That was really special.”

Married but without children, Marsh was drafted into the Army during the height of the Vietnam War. Marsh said he knew he’d be going overseas, so when he was offered a chance to commission as pilot, he took it – and ultimately served 23.5 years.

“It wasn’t my intent by any means, but I actually liked it,” Marsh said. “I was treated right and I had great opportunities, and I have no regrets whatsoever.”

The short tour of Washington, D.C., allowed the Vietnam veterans to view a few other monuments as well, including the World War II

Memorial and the Marine Corps War Memorial. Viewing the Iwo Jima statue for the first time in-person was particularly moving for Marine Vietnam War veteran Richard “R.J.” Riggs of Omaha.

“The Marine Corps has so much tradition,” Riggs said. “This is really close to any Marine’s heart, so it’s a special treat and an honor to see memorials like this dedicated to us and our forefathers.”

Riggs carried a photo of his father, a World War II veteran, and shared it with others at the base of the Marine Corps War Memorial. He said he came from a long line of service members of all major conflicts, as his uncle served in the Korean War and his grandfather served in World War I.

“This was a once in a lifetime trip to see these memorials and to honor my relatives that were here before me,” he said.

Bill Wilber of Chappell, Nebraska, never once thought he’d ever get the chance to visit Washington, D.C., though he always wished he could. “I fought for the country and all of this is here for us, and I’ve never seen it,” he said.

A former high school teacher, Wilber said his students often asked him about his military service and his time in Vietnam, and he’d share some details. Then about a year ago, Wilber said the senior girls asked if he had a DD-214, stating they wanted to do something for him for Veterans Day. Curious, he gave them a copy, but the holiday came and went and nothing happened. Then, early this year he received a call from Bill and Evonne Williams – founders of Patriotic Productions – asking him to sign his paperwork to be part of the Nebraska Honor Flight.

“I just thought, ‘Wow...they actually set it all up for me,’” Wilber said. “It felt great and it makes it all worthwhile.”

Wilber said he never expected he’d be in Vietnam. He enlisted to pay for college, and his first child was born just a month after he left home. But it wasn’t being in the Vietnam War that he struggled with most.

“Coming home though was the worst,” Wilber said. “I was sewing a kid up and they said you’re going home: right now.”

Wilber said he was covered in blood and had little time to gather his gear before being put on a plane with others.

“It was the most silent trip I’ve ever been on in my life,” he said. The plane landed in Japan, and Wilber said when they disembarked, they were ordered to grab their duffle bags, taking everything they were wearing off, change clothes and throwing everything else into a pile. Thirteen and a half hours later, they

landed in the United States and he paid a \$60 cab fare to get home.

“It was terrible,” Wilber said, swallowing back tears. “My wife didn’t even know I was coming.”

Returning from their Honor Flight was a completely different experience. This time, Wilber’s family would be waiting – with nearly 7,000 others.

The Nebraska Vietnam Veterans Honor Flight concluded with a Welcome Home celebration at the Lincoln Municipal Airport, starting around 8 p.m. As each veteran left the plane and came into the airport terminal, they were greeted by nearly 7,000 members of the community with cheers of thanks, praise and heartfelt chants of “Welcome Home.”

Included in the Welcome Home were volunteers from the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, including Maj. Scott Hendrickson. Hendrickson volunteered because he felt the welcome home was long overdue for most of the veterans, who never received one when they returned from war.

“In fact,” Hendrickson said, “it was just the opposite as more often than not these folks were harassed for their affiliation with the military even though they put their lives in harm’s way.”

During the event, Hendrickson positioned outside the terminal and said “Thank you,” and shook hands with every veteran within his reach.

“These veterans were so humbled by the welcome home, that they along with their families were the ones saying thank you,” Hendrickson said, adding that seeing all the veterans and their families truly appreciating the welcome home with such warm attitudes reaffirmed his affinity for the military.

“It goes to show that whether you served over 40 years ago, or enlisted today, we are family,” he said.

The \$600,000 trip on May 1 was the final Honor Flight for Patriotic Productions. In total, the non-profit organization flew 3,300 World War II, Korea and Vietnam Veterans on 11 Honor Flights to Washington D.C. and back. This final flight made history as the largest group of Vietnam veterans from one state to ever visit the wall – over 650 veterans from 180 Nebraska communities.

Patriotic Productions plans to focus all future efforts on continuing the Remembering Our Fallen Memorial exhibits, including the unveiling of a new national traveling exhibit this fall.

“It has been an honor to organize the flights these past 10 years,” Bill Williams said. “We look forward to Nebraskans seeing the Tribute Towers honoring the nation’s fallen in the War on Terror.”



Comforting Crowd: Patrick and Synthia Stanosheck of Lincoln make their way through the 7,000-strong crowd at the Lincoln Municipal Airport who were there to welcome home more than 650 Nebraska Vietnam veterans - and their 500 spouses - after a one-day Honor Flight event to Washington, D.C.

Honorary promotion ceremony recognizes student’s resiliency, motivation

Call him ‘Sergeant Major Hanks’ now

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Acting Editor

When Staff Sergeant Bubba Page first went to Crawford High School for one of his initial visits as a newly-assigned Nebraska Army National Guard recruiter out of Chadron, Nebraska, he wasn’t quite sure what to expect. Page met with the school’s counselor and scheduled a time to allow students interested in learning more about the Nebraska Army Guard to come visit. During his initial open meeting in September, first to the door was a young man – sophomore Jacob Hanks – wearing a U.S. Army patch on his jacket, a smile “as wide as the Grand Canyon” on his face and a perfect salute. “I’d go to Crawford every month, and he’d be the first one in and the last one out,” Page said. “Always, ‘Sergeant Page, how are you doing?’ with a smile and salute. I could tell right away that he loved the Guard and that he loved his country.”

For as long as his mother can remember, Hanks has wanted to join to the Armed Forces. “My son has dreamed of being in the Armed Forces since he was a toddler – literally,” said Teri Hanks, Jacob Hanks’ mother, recalling buying camouflage items since he was still in diapers. “He was born and had a massive stroke at birth, so he’s been challenged his whole life. He’s had numerous surgeries; he takes medication. He just hasn’t had it easy. But he never ever let go of his dream to be in the service. He didn’t



SGM’s Salute: Jacob Hanks, 17, salutes guests at Crawford High School’s Honors Night while wearing his new patrol cap after being named an Honorary Sergeant Major in the Nebraska National Guard. Hanks plans to help with recruiting efforts in Western Nebraska.

care which one, he just wanted to serve his country.” While physical and mental medical issues have challenged Hanks his entire life, he has persevered. Even with only minimal use of his left arm, Hanks plays for the school’s basketball team, for a Special Olympics team and even beat his older sister, Haley, at the Nebraska National Guard’s Boot Camp Challenge – an inflatable obstacle course. “He’s such an incredible young man,” Teri Hanks said. “He has



Courageous Case: Nebraska National Guard Staff Sgt. Bubba Page (left), a recruiter out of Chadron, Neb., shares the story of Crawford High School student Jacob Hanks’ (center) resiliency during the school’s Honors Night on May 11. For his achievements, Hanks was named an Honorary Sergeant Major in the Nebraska National Guard.

accomplished so much more than they said he would, and it’s because of his bravery, his courage and his determination. He’s an inspiration to us all.” On May 11, Page and leaders of the Nebraska National Guard honored Hanks with an impromptu ceremony at Crawford’s Honors Night. In front of his peers and family – and as a total surprise to him – 17-year-old Jacob Hanks became an Honorary Sergeant Major in the Nebraska Army National Guard. “Everything that Jake has been through hasn’t stopped him one bit,” said Page during Hanks’ ceremony. “The resilience that Jacob shows each and every day is beyond motivating. He is a true inspiration not only to myself, but to his peers, his classmates and the faculty. Jacob

exemplifies what it truly means to be a Citizen Soldier and has a true passion for the Nebraska Army National Guard.” “This is an overwhelming incredible honor for him and for us,” Teri Hanks said. “It’s truly the biggest day of his life.” During the ceremony, Hanks was presented with a certificate officially naming him an Honorary Sergeant Major of the Nebraska National Guard, a new Army patrol cap with the sergeant major rank and Nebraska State Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker’s official challenge coin. “Hanks lives the seven Army Values and exemplifies each and every day what the Army stands for,” Baker said. “I am proud to serve next to him.”

At the conclusion of the May 11 ceremony, Page told Hanks to enjoy his summer and to be ready to work come August when school is back in session. “Every time I go to the school I plan on having ‘Sergeant Major Hanks’ report to the office,” announced over the intercom, and then he’ll get to help me give the National Guard brief to the students,” Page said. He hopes Hanks’ personal motivations and enthusiasm will inspire other students. “He has all these lifelong challenges, but he never lets them hold him back,” Page said. “It just shows the amount of resilience and motivation that he has, and I wish every student I spoke to had the same. That alone can get you through anything in life.”

Nebraska retirees receive briefing on new Omaha National Cemetery, notes given on eligibility criteria

Happy summer. It seems the older we get, the faster the days and months go by. I hope you are all enjoying the weather in Nebraska – something for everyone – rain, heat, humidity, and sometimes, even a cool day. During our last spring social, we had the opportunity to hear Ms. Cindy Van Bibber, director of the Omaha National Cemetery, give an in-depth briefing on the progress of the cemetery and eligibility requirements for burial there. Many attendees took information home to review. How do I determine if I’m eligible to be placed in a National Cemetery? Go to www.va.gov and select “Burials and Memorials.” There, you can search through the various options available, including burial to memorial headstones and burial flags. Take the time, if you haven’t already, to pre-plan your arrangements so the family doesn’t have that stress on your passing. Again, I ask you to notify us when a retiree passes so we can notify the Retirement Services NCO, as well as providing any memorials that were identified. Plus, we pass along information to the other retirees as well.

■Nebraska National Guard Museum visits
On a lighter note, have you visited the National Guard Museum in Seward? What a wonderful display of memorabilia from the history of this great state and our National Guard. All involved have really made this a world-class museum we can all take pride in knowing it showcases our service.

■Defense Service Address Changes
The Defense Finance and Accounting Service’s addresses

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) 309-7359/7373;
- ♦ 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.

changed effective May 1. The old addresses are being discontinued and will be replaced by addresses in Indianapolis. The new addresses are:

Retired Pay:
Defense Finance and Accounting Service:
U.S. Military Retired Pay
8899 E 56th Street
Indianapolis IN 46249-1200

Annuitant Pay:
Defense Finance and Accounting Service:
U.S. Military Annuitant Pay
8899 E 56th Street
Indianapolis IN 46249-1300

The old P.O. Boxes in London, Kentucky, will remain open and

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., The Lincoln Highway Diner, 320 Rodeo Rd

all mail will be forwarded to the new address for one year. However, sending mail to the old address will

add three to five days to the normal processing time. The telephone and fax numbers are not changing. Please copy and paste the following web address into your web browser for additional contact information: <https://www.dfas.mil/retired-military.html>

■ID Cards
As always, keep checking the expiration date on your ID card. Does it need to be updated? Are you close to drawing retired pay and want to know what happens now? Change in marital circumstances? Notify us and we’ll help you find the resources you need. No one is in this alone. 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 is rightfully proud of its heritage and you are part of that great legacy.

■From the desk of the Retirement Services NCO
Greetings. We encourage you to call (402) 309-8162 if you have had a change in address or spousal status so we can update the Retiree data base. Keeping you informed and helping you anyway possible is very important to me, my section and the leadership of the Nebraska Army National Guard. If you have any questions or need assistance you can reach me at (402) 309-8162 or erik.j.singsaas.mil@mail.mil. Thank you for your service and a big thank you to the family members who gave their support.

Mattis says, ‘Transatlantic bonds strong’

GARMISCH-PARTEN-KIRCHEN, Germany (ARNEWS) — The transatlantic bond between the U.S. and Germany were reaffirmed by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and German Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen during a ceremony honoring 70 years of this partnership, June 28, at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies.

“Regardless of news reports, the transatlantic bond between our two nations’ militaries remains strong,” Mattis said. “Germany and the United States stand together, allied against threats to the peace and security of this continent, Canada and the United States.

“The U.S. commitment to our NATO Article 5 security guarantee is ironclad,” he added.

Mattis and Leyen delivered remarks at the 70th Anniversary of the Marshall Plan Commemoration Ceremony at the Marshall Center, a German-American international security and defense studies institute, named after Gen. George C. Marshall.

“The Marshall Plan is a centerpiece of our joint German-American and European-American history,” Leyen said. “The European community would not have succeeded without the vision of the Marshall Plan and willingness of the U.S. to engage in Europe after the war.”

The Marshall Plan also helped to bring about NATO and mutual security in Europe with Canada and the U.S., said retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, director of the Marshall Center, who added that the spirit of Gen. George C. Marshall continues to live on at the center.

Stories of the Nebraska National Guard

Refueling mission quickly ushered in operational era for Nebraska Air Guard

By Airman 1st Class Treyton McNeese-Polivka
Special for the Prairie Soldier

When the last RF-4 Phantom II jet retired from the Nebraska Air National Guard in September 1993, the transition to the KC-135R began in earnest. The 173rd Air Refueling Squadron kicked off 1994 by becoming the new 155th Air Refueling Group (ARG) as a part of the U.S. Air Force’s Air Mobility Command on Jan. 16, 1994. This mission change was the beginning of several months of non-stop training, construction, and a faster tempo of movement and purpose around the base.

While there were many changes during this period, one thing didn’t. As the newly-minted 155th ARG, the organization adopted its old insignia and motto, ‘PARATI ATQUE POTENTES,’ which means “Ready and Able.” The insignia included an eagle riding on a lightning streak set in a deep blue and white background with golden yellow trim, while eagles fly in precise delta formations in the background.

The eagle riding on lightning symbolized intensive strength and quickness to react in accomplishing missions, while the background delta formation eagles symbolize discipline and cooperation.

This motto and insignia’s meaning were going to be put to the test as the 155th Air Refueling Group soon took on its first world mission as a KC-135 unit.

Operation Support Hope

On Aug. 19-28, 1994, the 155th ARG deployed for its first world mission with the KC-135 in support of Operation Support Hope. Operation Support Hope was the U.S. effort to provide humanitarian aid to Rwanda, Africa, where a civil war between Hutus and Tutsi and subsequent genocide had affected millions in the area. Up to 800,000 had been murdered while another 2 million had fled. Additionally, around a million Rwandans were displaced internally.

President Clinton called the genocide the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis in a generation...” In response, the United States deployed over 2,500 personnel and flew over 380 humanitarian support sorties for the Rwandan refugees.

With just five days of notice to prepare, launch and perform this important mission, the 155th ARG sent one aircraft and 12 crew members in support of Operation Support Hope.

Supported by American KC-135 Stratotankers, American transport aircraft delivered necessary supplies for troops and refugees.

With the support of the United Nations and the United States, the Rwanda refugee camps soon saw an improvement. For example, prior to the operation, the refugee camp at Goma, which had an estimated population of 2 million refugees and a death rate of around 3,000 a day, soon saw significant improvements as noted by the reduction of daily deaths to approximately 500 by the end of the operation. The death rate continued to diminish and peace settled in while the UN and local government had control of the area.

Operation Allied Force

In October 1995, the 155th ARG was redesignated as the 155th Air Refueling Wing. Once again, this new organization would soon be tested... this time in the former Yugoslavia.

Throughout history of the Balkans, the tiny region known as Kosovo has been a disputed borderland between Albania and Serbia, reaching all the way back to 1200 A.D. With about 90 percent of Kosovo’s 2 million population being Kosovo Albanians (Kosovars), both Albania and Serbia lay claim to Kosovo.

In 1989, the Serbian parliament passed constitutional amendments reinstating Serbian control over Kosovo, stripping Kosovo from its position as an autonomous province. A year later, Serbs, under Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, gained control of Kosovo’s radio stations, newspapers, television stations, and universities and ‘Serbianised’ Kosovo. The local populace soon began conducting non-violent protests.

By 1998 these protest had devolved into an armed conflict, causing 300,000 Kosovars and Kosovo natives to be displaced. It is estimated that by the end of May 1999, 1.5 million people – 90 percent of Kosovo’s population – had been expelled from their homes. When peace talks failed between NATO and Slobodan Milosevic, Serb forces again massed in Kosovo, NATO air strikes against Yugoslav forces in Kosovo began on March 24, 1999, as a part of Operation Allied Force.

Along with air strikes, NATO started humanitarian efforts; by the end of May 1999, over 4,666 tons of food and water, 4,325 tons of other goods, 2,624 tons of tents and nearly 1,600 tons of medical supplies had been transported to the area.

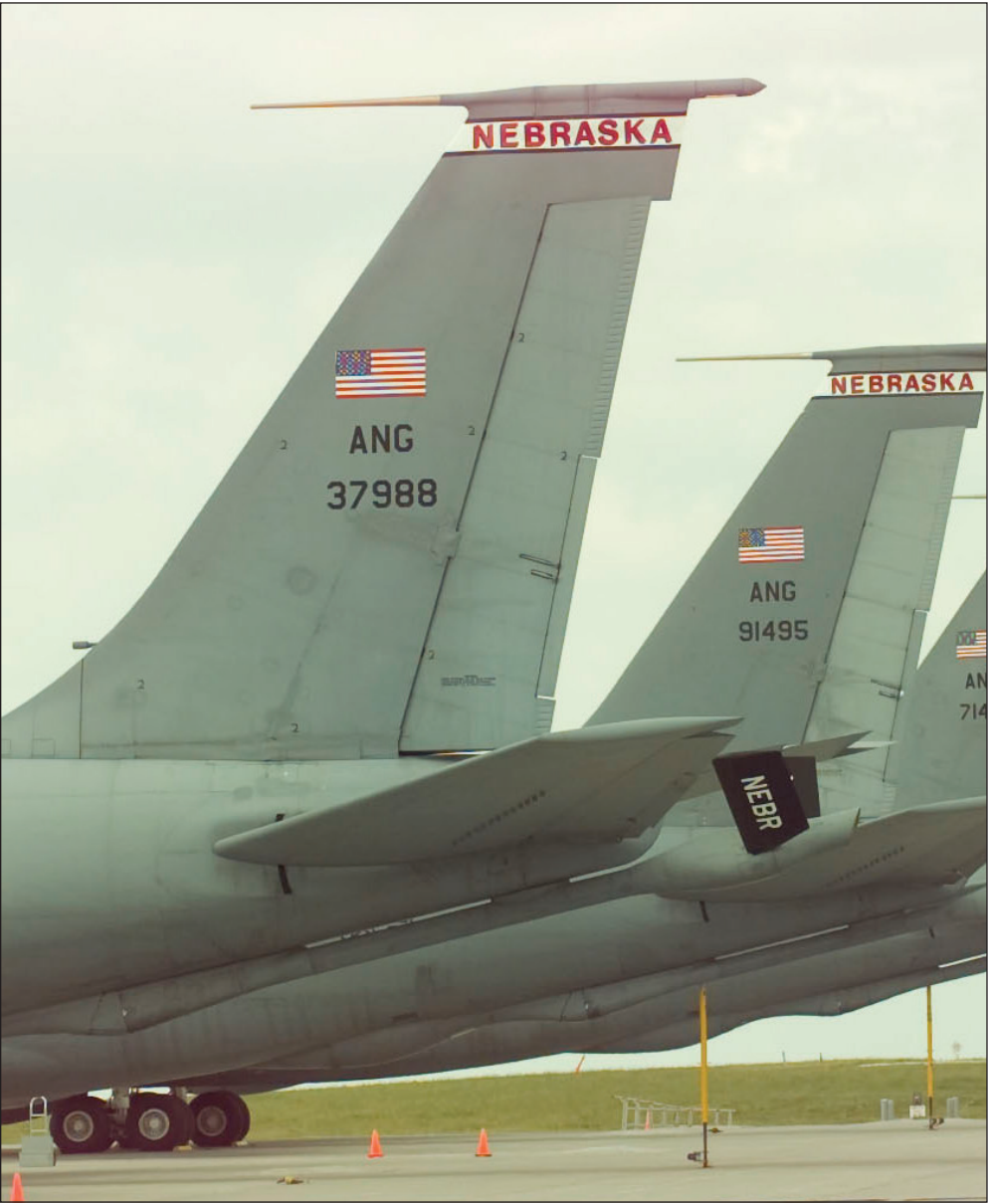
These air operations required a huge influx of KC-135 Stratotankers to keep the U.S. and NATO aircraft flying. Air Force planners used the tanker to increase the tempo of the NATO air campaign, as stated by Ken Bacon, Pentagon spokesman, “The tankers allow us to keep planes on-station for longer periods of time and increase the number of hours of the day in which we’re actually flying over or near Yugoslavia and Kosovo.”

Roughly 5,600 Reserve Component personnel were mobilized. Of that 5,600, 40 percent were KC-135 tanker aircraft crews, 25 percent were A-10 attack aircraft.

In April 1999 the 155th ARW was suddenly tasked with being the lead unit for all American reserve tanker operations supporting Operation Allied Force. Operation Allied Force would be the 155th ARW’s first combat mission with the KC-135s.

According to then-Col. Barry Bruns, 155th ARW vice commander at the time, “They wanted the 155th there and set up in 96 hours, and we did it.”

Within the three-day window the 155th ARW deployed two aircraft and more than 80 personnel to Germany for Operation Allied Force. A total of 169 Nebraska Guardsmen would eventually participate in Operation Allied Force during two rotation deployments.



Nebraska National Guard File Photo

Fresh Fins: Newly arrived KC-135R Stratotankers stand “ready and able” for their first world-wide missions in this file photo, circa 1995. The Stratotankers are decorated with freshly painted “Nebraska” tails used to distinguish them by state.

As the lead unit the 155th ARW was charged with providing maintenance, logistical, planning, personnel, and other forms of support during the operation. Soon after arriving in Germany, the Nebraska Air Guardsmen set up operations from a German air base.

This was particularly evident in the role that Nebraska maintainers played in ensuring that the KC-135s were kept mission-ready.

“We did not lose a single sortie during our month for maintenance,” said then-Maj. Rick Evans, 155th ARW chief of current operations. “That’s outstanding because we had upwards of 20 tankers out there on the flight line and we were flying each of them at least once a day.”

During a refueling mission, the typical route flown was an oblong 10-mile-by-5-mile orbits over Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia, Hungary and the Adriatic Sea. Because this was the 155th ARW’s first combat deployment, the atmosphere and adrenaline involved was different than other deployments.

“From the moment you started your preflight briefings until the time you landed hours later, you knew you were doing something that was just a little bit more important than it normally was,” said Master Sgt. Steve Minnick, an in-flight refueling operator. “When they (the fighter/bomber pilots) came back minus a few of their missiles...I kind of found that interesting, I have never seen that before,

someone had actually fired a real missile for the real reason.”

During the month-long mission, the 155th ARW would deliver a total of 2.69 million gallons of jet fuel and log a total of 604 flight hours, double the amount of hours compared to a normal month.

When the month ended, it marked the end of the Nebraska Air National Guard’s deployments in support of Operation Allied Force.

NATO air strikes continued until early June when NATO began preparing for a ground campaign. This threat caused Milosevic to give into NATO’s demands.

On June 10, 1999, Milosevic agreed to NATO’s terms, including the presence of a United Nations peacekeeping force in Kosovo.

Milosevic would later be indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal; he was overthrown the following year.

Operation Allied Force lasted for 78 days, fconsisted of more than 38,000 sorties, and restored peace to Kosovo.

Air refueling missions constituted a total of 21 percent of the 38,000 sorties flown during the operation, the highest percentage of any single mission category. The U.S. Air Force deployed more than 170 aerial refueling tankers, while the Europeans deployed about 13 tankers.

Throughout Operation Allied Force the 155th ARW not only proved that it was ready for its first combat mission, but that it was more than able as well.

Texas, Nebraska Guardsmen benefit from Czech Republic exchanges

By Senior Airman DeJon Williams
136th Airlift Wing

PRAGUE, Czech Republic — Airmen from the Texas and Nebraska Air National Guard units partnered with the Czech Air Force to participate in a subject matter expert exchange of maintenance information, March 20-23, at air bases in the Czech Republic.

The maintenance exchange was part of a state partnership program between the Texas and Nebraska Air National Guards and the Czech Republic coordinated by Maj. Mark White, bilateral affairs officer, U.S. Embassy-Prague, Texas Army National Guard.

“Having the ability to have Airmen from across multiple airframes share their experiences and

best practices is something that the Czech Air Force really appreciated and valued,” White said.

“You could see the dialog and discussion evolving with detailed questions. I was very happy with the level of information and the vast experience that the Airmen were able to share with their Czech partners.”

The state partnership program has been in place since 1993 with a multitude of military exchanges and familiarization over the course of its existence. However, it had been many years since a dedicated Air Force maintenance exchange had taken place.

“I think it’s very important to obtain a relationship with our sister units to exchange ideas and practices,” said Tech. Sgt. Jarrett

Patman, a crew chief with the 136th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. “I feel this exchange can benefit our unit in that we can learn from the way that their cargo base runs and I hope to gain knowledge to take back to Fort Worth and implement within our squadron.”

The Airmen traveled to the three Czech Air Force bases, each with different aircraft, to discuss maintenance topics such as front shop, back shop and all levels of maintenance planning.

“As a maintenance systems subject matter expert, my goal was to describe to the Czech Air Force how we do our maintenance practices back in Nebraska, help and promote some new ideas, as well as exchange ideas from them and their maintenance practices that

we might be able to utilize back in the states,” said Master Sgt. Corey Wacker, 155th Air Refueling Wing maintenance management analyst, Nebraska Air National Guard.

“The overall goal was to gain knowledge and a better understanding of how maintenance and military operations go in their country,” he added.

There have been multiple pilot exchanges, but never ones including maintenance or munitions. Both of these units are integral elements for mission success and were necessary additions for the benefit of the program.

“My role specifically was just to show them how we do it in the fighter world,” said 1st Lt. Tyson Cannon, 149th Fighter Wing maintenance operations officer, Texas

Air National Guard. “I brought a few slides to show our daily maintenance production meetings. I gave them a little insight into how we separate different shop sections, prioritize work operations and how we do our daily maintenance procedures.”

The state partnership has been in place for over 24 years between the Czech Republic, the Texas National Guard and the Nebraska Air National Guard.

Many military engagements have been conducted during this partnership, and with nearly 30 more exchanges covering the numerous mission sets within the military planned this year, the states continue to build an enduring relationship with their Czech counterparts.



Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



Nebraska Soldiers get creative while building morale in Iraq

By Sgt. Anna Pongo
Staff Photojournalist

Soldiers deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, get creative as they come together to create morale building breaks from work. After the long days, or nights, of work, service members need a few hours to relax and destress.

For U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Anna Knopes, operational contract support integration cell noncommissioned officer in charge, Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Operation Inherent Resolve, and some of her friends, this is accomplished with a crackling fire and some melted marshmallows.

"It's nice to break up the week and something to look forward to," Knopes said.

"And s'mores are good for everyone's health," she added jokingly.

Knopes and a friend discovered a fire pit by the USO not long after beginning their nine-month deployment to Iraq. After the first week enjoying the bonfire it was a unanimous decision that they needed to add s'mores to the evening, Knopes said.

"I asked my aunt to send me some s'more making supplies and she sent enough to last us for months," Knopes said. "Then we decided to make it a weekly thing."

Knopes, along with many of the service members at Union III, works around 12-15 hours a day. With those hours, she's discovered it's nice to have something to look forward to on Thursday evenings.

"It's probably hands-down the



Photo by Sgt. Anna Pongo

S'more Fun: Soldiers deployed to Iraq get creative as they come together for an evening bonfire and some s'mores to create a morale building, fun event.

most exciting day of the week," Knopes said. "We count down the days until Thursday."

"It reminds me of being home sitting around a camp fire and having fun with my family," said Staff Sgt. Aaron Kaufman, Embassy Air liaison officer, CJFLCC-OIR. "It feels like I am able to get away and it is something to look forward to in a place where the daily life is very repetitive."

The bonfire started with a couple friends from the Main Command Post - Operational Detachment, an Army National Guard out of Nebraska attached to the 1st Infantry Division. As word of the s'mores got out it quickly grew to include members of other units and Coalition partners.

This dynamic group revealed something that Knopes hadn't

realized she said. Their Coalition friends didn't even know what s'mores were.

"Turns out that s'mores are American and I had no idea," said Knopes. "So, here I was offering a s'more to some Italian Coalition forces, and they had no idea what it was and I was blown away!"

The Thursday evening event is important for more than just those with a sweet tooth, said Staff Sgt. Michael Iverson, J32 Army movement request cell noncommissioned officer in charge, CJFLCC.

"In my opinion, relaxing here in a combat zone is important for us mentally and physically," Iverson said "I think that for us to decompress after a day of pressure and fast paced work environments is important to stay alert and to stay healthy."

Pence salutes military families' sacrifices

WASHINGTON (DoD NEWS) — With military children gathered around him, Vice President Mike Pence saluted military families at an event at the White House May 9.

"We're grateful that you're here at the White House today," Pence said.

"We hope you leave here today with your hearts full of the assurance that the American people are grateful for those who serve in uniform and just as grateful for the

families who stand by their side."

Pence hosted the event with his wife, Karen Pence, along with National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and President Donald J. Trump's eldest daughter, Ivanka Trump, for National Military Appreciation Month, which is observed in May, and National Military Spouse Appreciation Day, which is May 12.

"The president asked Karen and I to host this event today just

as a way of saying thanks, paying a debt of gratitude to the families and the servicemen and women who are gathered here today who serve our country each and every day," the vice president said.

Pence said he and his wife are proud military parents who have the "great privilege of having a son and a daughter-in-law who are serving our country," he said. "Our son is in the United States Marine Corps," he added.

Physical resiliency key to maintaining 'bounce back' capabilities

In my last column, we discussed six general Pillars of Resiliency—physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and gratitude. Resiliency is the capacity to bounce back, rebound, or to have elasticity in the midst of a stressful or traumatic event.

Resiliency does not eliminate the negativity of stress, but it does enable a quicker and healthier recovery. Resiliency is the ingredient that enables a post-traumatic stress event to become a growth opportunity rather than a disorder.

Our goal in this column will be to unpack "physical resiliency" as the first and perhaps most important pillar.

Dr. Jane McGonigal points out in *Harvard Business Review*, "As you might expect, physical resilience is crucial because it allows your heart, lungs, and brain to react efficiently to stressful situations. More and more, researchers agree that a sedentary lifestyle is the number one obstacle to becoming able to endure and bounce back."

Their advice: Stand up and take at least a few steps away from your computer every hour." (*Building Resilience by Wasting Time*, HBR, October 2012)

Regular physical activity of even moderate amount can have a big impact on our mental and physical health.

Physical exercise helps to reprogram the 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.

Of course, related to physical activity is eating healthy foods, drinking water, getting enough rest and even humor and laughter. Don't forget that laughter engages shoulders, back, abdomen, and as many as 15 facial muscles.

Physical resilience is a broad category. It can include everything from house work and yard work, recreational activities, sex, caregiving or exercise.

Our physical bodies are created temples and many things can renew our spirits, detox the body from stress and restore it to proper balance: Deep breathing exercises; morning conditioning with stretching or calisthenics to become more limber and restore range of motion; being intentional to practice good posture when sitting, standing, or lying down; setting an alarm to stand up every hour to stretch and walk up one flight of stairs and back down; resolving to park at the far end of the parking lot for a few extra steps when getting groceries; taking the stairs instead of the elevator;

getting a massage or relaxing in a hot tub or stream room; playing sports or signing up to run a 5k or even a marathon; a good physical workout at a gym or in the pool; hobbies that keep us in motion such as biking or hiking; getting

a home treadmill or an electronic wrist device that will count steps – just to name a few.

In addition to physical motion comes nutrition, diet, healthy eating and sleep.

As is the goal with all resiliency efforts, intentionality and regularity is key. Set goals that are SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, trackable – when it comes to physical resilience. This is why effective time management is a core concept for all of the pillars of resiliency.

Having a daily or weekly plan and then scheduling and managing the time to accomplish resiliency goals is essential. To better enable follow-through, find a partner, mentor, team, or trainer that can help with accountability, inspiration, and encouragement.

Additionally, turning goals into a competition, in order to challenge and have fun, can help make physical resiliency seem less like a chore and more like a fun task to accomplish.

Any ongoing task is more achievable when it is broken into manageable pieces with goals and built in rewards for accomplishing milestones. Mentally rehearse how to positively respond to and overcome anticipated or natural obstacles – like being overly busy or feeling too tired.

Be on the lookout for negative self-talk that can either deflate an energetic attitude or rationalize skipping the planned activity for the day.

Studies have shown that talking with a friend or teammate about both goals and milestone accomplishments helps to channel energy into follow-through when encountering natural every-day resistance to planned tasks.

Post about accomplishments online or even use actual post-it notes to record positive success events and place them on the refrigerator or bathroom mirror as a means of self-encouragement.

Healthy living in the midst of stress requires strong pillars of resiliency.

Physical resilience is just one of the components to a holistic approach to mind, body, and spirit. Start planning now to take your own resilience up one notch to the next level.

Find one thing that you can be more intentional about doing to maximize your physical resiliency and then invite a friend or fellow service member to join you in doing it.

Building Resiliency
By Chaplain (Capt.) Steve Thomlison

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

“If you could plan your own Annual Training, what would you want to do?”



Senior Airman Adam Essenmacher
155th Security Forces Squadron
“Probably active-shooter training or a lot of high-risk searches. We just don’t do much training on that, so just for those situations, just to keep it fresh in our minds.”

Spc. Chante Williams
Joint Force Headquarters
“I would want to do rapelling and focus on high-speed field exercises because that would be something different, more fun and exciting compared to what’s usually required with my specialized military occupation (paralegal).”



Staff Sgt. Daniel Joseph
155th Force Support Squadron
“I would like to have training revolve around computers. I feel like just base-wide a lot of people have issues with computers and at least having the basic knowledge to fix the common problems would go a long way.”

Staff Sgt. Dean Martin
313th Medical Company
“I wouldn’t want to change our annual training this year. We’re going to South Dakota to support Operation Golden Coyote. It’s a great mission and accomplishes everything it needs to.”



Senior Master Sgt. Brandon Viet
155th Maintenance Squadron
“I would probably say built-in comradery events, something where you’re doing some group activity to help build comradery. Something that gets people working together, get to know each other a little bit more.”

Pfc. Kevin Knowles
110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion
“As part of a medical battalion, I’d like to participate in more real-world missions with units from other states or other countries to see what they bring to the table.”



Effective mentors often do so by simply being who they are

What does it mean to be a mentor? Who needs mentoring? How does a person become a better mentor?

Hopefully as you have paged through this recent edition of the *Prairie Soldier*, you’ve noticed an ongoing theme: Mentorship.

By my count, there are at least five articles in this issue that deal with the importance of mentorship, either directly or indirectly. There are probably others where one could say the results of good mentorship are reported.

So, it should be pretty evident that the Nebraska National Guard takes mentorship pretty seriously. As well it should because mentorship is what gives this organization its amazing abilities to constantly bring in new classes of recruits and help them rapidly become important members of our highly functioning teams and units. It’s what gives us our continuity, our flexibility and our capability.

But here’s a question I have found myself asking recently: what makes a mentor most effective and their impact more lasting?

Having served in the military for this long, I can honestly say that my career has been constantly impacted by many, many mentors. From the very first moment I stepped off of a bus at basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in May 1986 until today, I know that I am constantly being shaped by the people around me. Some are senior leaders. Many are junior members of the military. Many others have never even served in the military, but their examples of professionalism, teamwork, hard work and can-do attitudes have helped encourage me to do a better job than I am doing.

Here’s another question: How many of them know that they’re my mentors? My guess is, not many.

In fact, I would suggest that some of the most effective mentors are those who don’t even know they are serving as models for those around them. They simply go about their

My Turn

State Public Affairs Officer

Kevin J. Hynes



ably the one person I have thought about the most during the years that have passed.

So, when my friend sent me the sergeant major’s obituary, I was amazed to find out things

that I didn’t know at the time. I already knew that he had served in the Army for 30 years before his retirement, that he was a Vietnam veteran and that he was a loving husband, father and doting grandfather. I actually had witnessed all of those things while I had worked there.

I didn’t know, though, that he was a Silver Star recipient, as well as having received two Bronze Stars. I don’t know that I ever saw him in his dress uniform during that timeframe and I definitely know he never mentioned them.

While his obituary does not mention the reasons behind his Silver Star, it doesn’t take a vivid imagination to know that whatever the circumstances were, the sergeant major had demonstrated heroism during his time in Vietnam.

What I’m not sure that Sergeant Major Farley ever realized was that he, by his very nature, served as a mentor for me and probably every other junior enlisted Soldier he came in contact with. In fact, that’s probably why he was such an important mentor to me: he didn’t try to provide mentorship, he just did.

Which brings me back to those first questions. In my mind, truly effective mentorship comes in many forms. And often it is not a formal, deliberative process. Rather, often effective mentorship comes by simply doing a good job, being a good teammate and trying to do the right thing every time, especially when no one is looking.

You never know what kind of impact you are having on those around you. But you can be assured that you are indeed having an impact.

Hopefully it is a positive and lasting impact.

Vietnam veterans: Heroes cry, too

At around 4 a.m. on May 1, I boarded one of four planes carrying 650 Vietnam veterans on an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. – and more importantly – to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall.

I was fortunate to accompany the men (and one woman) on this trip as part of the media, thanks to my accommodating leadership and the generosity of Bill and Evonne Williams, founders of Patriotic Productions and the organizers of this event.

I viewed photos and video of past Honor Flights to help get a sense of what to expect, but nothing can prepare you for the emotional ride the day-trip would provide, even to a bystander. When we landed at the Washington National airport, the veterans were unexpectedly greeted with banners and cheers by a small, but mighty, group welcoming them to Washington D.C. and thanking them for their service.

Immediately, the veterans were overwhelmed with emotion, tears streaming down the laugh lines of their faces, even as they tried to keep the “military bearing” they remember all too well.

The emotions only intensified as the trip continued. At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall they would each meticulously locate a lost friend, family member or brother in arms. They would salute their fallen brethren, copy their names as a keepsake, point to and pose for an everlasting photo. And again they

would try – without prevail – to fight back their tears.

I felt privileged to have the opportunity to listen to their stories, stories told by these heroes I had traveled with from Nebraska. There was one common denominator in all of the stories they shared – they, the living Vietnam veterans, were rarely the focus and often not even present in the stories they shared.

Instead, they spoke of the fallen, remembering their sacrifices and honoring their memories.

And the twinkle in the eyes of those veterans as they shared their memories was not caused just by the tears of remembrance, but by the pride in their hearts for the brave moments they shared with one another. I can’t recall how many told me they’d serve again “in a heartbeat” if given the chance. How inspiring it was to watch these heroes – who gave so much and got spit on in return – view their monuments and memorials for the first time with a sense of longing, respect and honor.

The return home was perhaps the most overwhelming part, with 7,000 locals cheering, chanting and finally giving these Vietnam veterans the long-overdue welcome

A Different Perspective

Specialist

Lisa Crawford



home they more than deserved. The tears continued to fall even there, in the Lincoln Municipal Airport as one-by-one each Veteran came down the escalator, linked up with family and friends and headed through the parade

line towards home.

While on this trip, so many of the veterans I met with told me they wanted to share their stories. They “were finally ready,” as one specifically told me. But to be honest, I’m not sure I’m ready.

With every tear I watched each veteran Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine cry, I believe I shed one, too, though I can’t really articulate why – other than empathy towards a time I gratefully didn’t live through. My career – no matter how long it will be – will never be remotely similar to that of the Vietnam veterans, and that’s a good thing. These heroes went through so much pain and fear – on the battlefields overseas and at home.

And while it might be a struggle to listen to their words and watch the pain leave their eyes, it’s that other twinkle – the pride and honor they collectively share – that’s worth it all, and needs to be released. So I want to listen to our veterans’ stories, and I encourage everyone to reach out with a quiet ear to hear what they all have to say, about themselves or others, even through their tears.

Because heroes cry too, and that – to me – will always be okay.

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel
Brett E. Petit

Major

Fletcher J. Shires

Captain

Moses M. Deutsch
Sean C. Polson

First Lieutenant

Sarah C. Filiaggi
Jacob J. Rogers

Chief Warrant Officer 5

Jason L. Graff

Chief Warrant Officer 4

Joseph M. Dolton
Steven W. Helmandollar
Jeffrey R. Thomas
Todd A. Wagner

Chief Warrant Officer 3

Gregory L. Nun
Matthew J. Svoboda
Robert A. Woita

Sergeant Major

Thomas C. Ortiz

Master Sergeant

Brock E. Domeier
David Godoy
Samuel A. Malone

Sergeant First Class

Robert H. Hague
Russell E. Reynolds
Matthew w. Teinert

Staff Sergeant

William S. Cornish
Patricia H. Leesmith
Joshua E.C. Sladky
Dustin D. Stroh
Kevin J. Weyers Jr.

Sergeant

Stuart J. Ajac
Ethan E. Bergt
Kyle S. Block
Andrew J. Buller
Steven M. Farrell
Erika L. Grim
Craig A. Landholm
Jeffrey M. Landholt
John M. O’Connell
Lyle B. Powell
Brandon L. Walker

Specialist

Ayotomiwa E. Adesina

Nicholas J. Aschoff
Hunter J. Baumann
Dylan T. Bludorn
Cody W. Bravebirdbeck
Marisela Castellonegrete
Kyoung H. Chu
Jared S. Czarnikow
Jeffrey MM. Degarmo
Thomas M. Dunning
Kadin J. Ellers
Benjamin J. Guthard
Joseph K. Hamilton
Jesse D. Hansz
Quinton R. Hobbs
Kevin A. Jurgensen
Payton S.A. Koivisto
Daniel J. Krawczyk
Travis B. Kujath
Michael A. Lange
Dustin L. Leeper
Gerrick D. Malizzi
Jacob J. Mason
Hadley A. McDaniel
Oslay A. Molina
Jeysel J. Olmos
Marlena G. Orourke
Douglas J. Reiss
Luis M. Rocha Jr.
Levi D. Rosenquist
Xavier R. Sagaste
Dillon L. Scheil
Hanah L. Schmall
Michael L. Schmidt
Matthew H. Veit
Nicholas A. Wimmer
Terrance W. Wurdeman

Private First Class

Zachariah T. Amick
Dylan z. Andelt
Riley A. Butts
Sesilia Y. Campos
Braydon Michael Cox
Matthew J. Deckert
Collin M. Dirks
Lorenzo A. Duenas Jr.
Brandon W. Dunlap
Frank G. Gomez
Antonio R. Holbrook
Nikki R. Laufenberg
Matthew N. McConnell
Jake R. McMahon
Mark E. Mueller
Edgar A. Oliván
Seth W. Olson
Justin P. Prohaska
Eric K. Soe
Michael T. Stuft
Logan S. Taylor
Devon E. Thompson
Preston C. Tibbetts
Hayden K. Waller
Colby A. Wemhoff

Private Two

Colton L. Alexander
Brady L. Grafton
Tyler W. Hanson
Clarissa E. Hunt
Austin W. Jankowski
Brendan L. Kouma
Kevin J. Molina
Ian A. Wehrwein
Keenan J. White

Air National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel
Karl F. Duerk
Wendy J. Squarcia
Brad C. Winter

Major

Wallace C. Lowell III
Troy M. Martin
Eric D. Morse

Captain

Kyle J. Linden
Lance G. Parra

First Lieutenant

Evan E. Littrell
Scott E. Shaw

Second Lieutenant

Tyler M. Klingemann

Chief Master Sergeant

Bradley J. Freeman

Senior Master Sergeant

Steve R. Fisher
Steven J. Fusco

Master Sergeant

Mandy R. Denhardt
Maureen F. Dreith
Elizabeth A. Kraatz
Phillip R. Lauer
Steven M. Smith

Technical Sergeant

Anthony L. Lindsey
Lorenzo P. McMorris
Jared T. Subbendeck

Staff Sergeant

Jonathan A. Bliss
John J. Brunk
Brett A. Thorne

Senior Airman

Tell A. Jones
Amanda M. Kinglsan
Michael A. Miller
Tarrah Q. Montgomery
Amy J. Wahlmeier

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Legion of Merit

Lt. Col. James Murphy
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Timothy G. Gragert
1st Sgt. Steven R. Gavre

Military Outstanding Volunteer

Service Medal
Maj. Jonathan Wymer

Meritorious Service Medal

Col Curtis Abendroth
Lt. Col. Jan Behn
Lt. Col. Leslie Durr
Lt. Col. Spencer Giles
Lt. Col. Thomas Golden
Lt. Col. Jeffery Searcey
Lt. Col. David Stevenson
Maj. Christopher J. Hansen
Maj. Jocelyn Kuta
Maj. Zachary Labrayere
Maj. Brett Petit
Maj. Dustin Wilkie
Capt. Joshua Metcalf
Capt. Brent Wiese
Command Sgt. Maj. Bradly Andersen
Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Winn
Master Sgt. Steven A. Bonk
Master Sgt. David Hild
Master Sgt. Thomas C. Ortiz
1st Sgt. Jonathan C. Panipinto
1st Sgt. Christopher C. Roemig
Sgt. 1st Class Jason Delancey
Sgt. 1st Class Amber Engleman
Sgt. 1st Class Adam Kosch
Sgt. 1st Class Courtney M. Westerhold
Staff Sgt. Nicholas Brand
Staff Sgt. Jay Minis
Staff Sgt. Michael Oehm
Sgt. Richard Shearer
Sgt. Parry Siebenaler

Army Commendation Medal

Capt. Greg S Beran
1st Lt. Cody Cade
1st Lt. Travis Kirchner
Master Sgt. Jason Drager
Master Sgt. Landen Koopman
1st Sgt. Leonard D. Bergantzel

Sgt. 1st Class Jeramey Anderson
Sgt. 1st Class Jason Douglas
Sgt. 1st Class Bo Feltz
Sgt. 1st Class Robert Hague
Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Malone
Sgt. 1st Class Jason Parks
Sgt. 1st Class Chad E. Sample
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Smith
Staff Sgt. Amber Grahleer
Staff Sgt. Gregory Horner
Staff Sgt. Amy Jacobson
Staff Sgt. Phillip Kapsa
Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Menagh
Staff Sgt. Jeremy Nelson
Staff Sgt. Joseph G. Serkiz
Staff Sgt. Jason J. Winer
Sgt. Trent A. Bottolfsen
Sgt. Ryan L. Capman
Spc. Jacob Greenrod

Army Achievement Medal

Capt. David Easterday
Sgt. 1st Class Kyla Boersma
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Lamb
Sgt. Cole Ratkovec
Spc. Joshua Brown
Spc. Jason Camp
Spc. Joshua Hawley

Nebraska National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal
Maj. Kristen L. Auge

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal

Capt. Joshua Metcalf
Sgt. 1st Class Ryan Barrett
Staff Sgt. Justin McKenna
Staff Sgt. John C. Moore
Staff Sgt. Daniel J. Wardyn
Sgt. Alex C. Ernst
Sgt. Corey Handley
Sgt. Nicholas Juett
Sgt. Stephen Laboy
Sgt. Austin McKeone
Sgt. Kevin G. Nelson
Sgt. Rashaw Sides
Sgt. Troy Thielke
Sgt. David Vicich

Sgt. Andrew White
Spc. Harry Endrulat
Spc. Ryan L. Hoffman
Spc. Andrew A. Thomas
Pfc. Wyatt Brauckmuller
Pfc. Audrey Novotny

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal

Lt. Col. Judd M. Allen
Capt. Cody B. Kennedy
Capt. Jennifer M. Myers
Capt. Natasha M. Preston
1st Lt. Kelly Emmanlena
1st Lt. Sarah Filiaggi
Master Sgt. Gerald Bouska
Master Sgt. Landen Koopman
1st Sgt. Jason Sharp
Sgt. 1st Class David Godoy
Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Hartman
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Mitchell
Sgt. 1st Class Michelle M. Reed
Staff Sgt. Jamie Bartholowmew
Staff Sgt. James Carlson
Staff Sgt. Jennifer L. Good
Staff Sgt. Craig D. Hoppes
Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy
Sgt. Paige Larson
Sgt. Kelly Oliver
Spc. Eduard Bursuk
Spc. Jordan Funk
Spc. Dien Le
Spc. Michael Lindgren
Spc. Mohamed Musa

Air National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Maj. Clayburn Holland III
Maj. Christian Landon
Maj. Eric Morse

Joint Service Achievement Medal

Master Sgt. Jesse Arant
Master Sgt. Adam Dytrych
Master Sgt. Michael Smith

Air Force Commendation Medal

Capt. Kevin Lindsey
Chief Master Sgt. Bradley Freeman
Senior Master Sgt. Phillip Lauer

Air Force Achievement Medal

Lt. Col. Mary Mild
Tech. Sgt. James Kenning
Senior Airman Connor Comstock
Senior Airman Jacob Kimberly

TAPS

Col. Kirk R. Slaughter
Sgt. 1st Class Samuel A. Malone
Staff Sgt. Christopher Kruger

Shortakes

Martin assumes command at regional training institute

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes

State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard’s primary military educational organization saw a new leader take the helm, June 3, when Col. Shane Martin assumed command of the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) from Col. Curtis Abendroth.

Abendroth had served as commander of the Camp Ashland-based educational complex since April 2014.

Brig. Gen. Kevin Lyons, Nebraska Army National Guard land component commander who proceeded Abendroth as the 209th RTI commander, lauded the outgoing leader for his “outstanding” efforts.

“The one thing that I said to him (three years ago) was that there are opportunities out here,” said Lyons, who served as the presiding officer for the change of command ceremony held near the banks of the Platte River. “As any commander... you want to make this place relevant. You want to do what is right for not only the Nebraska National Guard, but for the United States Army.”

“He took that challenge and this place is much better than it was three years ago,” Lyons said. “And that’s a testament to Colonel Abendroth.”

The 209th RTI serves as the headquarters organization for three separate educational efforts. Along with providing 88M truck driver training for Army National Guard, U.S. Army Reserve and active Army Soldiers, the RTI also hosts several noncommissioned officer leadership schools as well as the officer candidate and warrant officer candidate school programs.

“I have a lot of love for the 209th. It’s Camp



Martin



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

End Of A Tour: Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Keck passes the colors of the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) to outgoing commander, Col. Curtis Abendroth, during the June 3 change of command ceremony at the Camp Ashland Training Site.

Ashland. It’s the oldest post. There’s just something right about being out here today with those Soldiers out in front,” Abendroth said following the ceremony, pointing to a combined formation of active, reserve and Guard students. “I can’t tell you what a pleasure it is to be a commander of a school house.”

“It’s truly a joy,” he added.

Abendroth is a native of Pender , Nebraska, who graduated from Bancroft-Rosalie Public School in 1986 and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1992, where he received a bachelor’s degree in Construction Management.

Abendroth’s military career began in the U.S. Army Reserves where he served as a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 5th Brigade (Training). Following his commission from the Reserve Officer Training Corps, Abendroth served as an armor officer until transferring to the Nebraska Army

National Guard in 2000 with the 168th Quartermaster Battalion in Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

He has served in numerous leadership and staff positions during the course of his career, including a deployment with the 867th Corps Support Battalion to Iraq in January 2008 where he served as the assistant inspector general. Following the deployment, he served as commander of the 209th RTI’s 1st Battalion in 2010 before assuming command of the Guard’s 734th Transportation Bn. in Kearney in 2012.

Abendroth also worked full-time for the Nebraska National Guard for more than 10 years within the Guard’s Construction and Facility Management Office. He currently works for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as an assistant director for Facility Maintenance of Housing.

Martin, who currently works full-time for the Nebraska Army National Guard as the

state construction and facility management officer, received his commission through the Guard’s state OCS program in 1993. A graduate of the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where he received his bachelor’s degree in Business with an emphasis in finance and real estate, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he earned a master’s degree in Business Administration, Martin has held numerous leadership and staff positions during his military career.

Initially joining the Nebraska Army National Guard as a petroleum supply specialist, following his commission Martin served in the 1-195th Armor Bn. before transitioning with the battalion as a staff officer within the 734th Transportation Bn. Martin also served as a training officer within the federal OCS program at Fort Benning, Georgia, before returning to Nebraska where he served in a number of positions.

He deployed to Iraq with the Guard’s 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade as the chief of operations and then was subsequently detailed to be the executive officer of the 325th Military Intelligence Bn.

His most recent commands include stints at the Nebraska Training Center Command and the Recruiting and Region Command.

According to Lyons, Martin is the right person for the 209th RTI.

“Shane... I know what he is capable of doing. I also know that he can use some assistance from his fulltime job to make things relevant (here) as well,” Lyons said.

Martin said he’s thrilled by the opportunity.

“What an outstanding opportunity to give back educationally,” he said. “The educational opportunities I got from the RTI were outstanding and now I get to share those educational opportunities with future leaders.

“I sure am glad that I’ve had the opportunities I’ve gotten during my career and now I get to share them.”



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Andrew Nystrom
On The Trail: National Guard athletes from New Mexico and Kentucky join with other runners in pacing themselves toward the finish line of the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon, May 6, in Lincoln.

Chasing That Yellow Jacket

National Guard Soldiers, Airmen from across nation compete for prestigious All Guard Marathon Team

By Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus
Staff Photojournalist

After a long, hot 26.2-mile race, Army and Air National Guard marathon runners from across the nation gathered in the Embassy Suites in downtown Lincoln, Nebraska, May 7, for an award ceremony honoring the National Guard winners of the 40th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half-Marathon.

The crowd was eager to hear the marathon results and learn who had earned a spot on the elite All Guard Marathon Team. Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Sterns, National Guard Marathon coordinator, announced each first, second and third place winner by age group, followed by the names of each member joining the 2017 All Guard Marathon Team.

Out of about 13,500 total runners who participated in the marathon and half-marathon, 150 were National Guardsmen who represented 39 states and two territories. Along with the individual races, Guard runners also sought spots on the prestigious All Guard Marathon Team, which consists of 60 to 65 runners: 40 males, 15 females and five masters runners, aged 40-years-old or older.



Highlighter Smiles: New York National Guard runners pose for a team photo wearing the All Guard Marathon Team's coveted yellow jacket before the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

In order to qualify for the All Guard team, males must run a marathon with a time of 4 hours or below, while females must have a run time of 4 hours and 30 minutes or below within 12 months of the Lincoln marathon.

According to Sterns, the individual Soldiers and Airmen are extremely motivated to make the All Guard.

"For the runners, it's very prestigious; they love the yellow jacket," said Sterns, referring to the yellow windbreaker only members of the elite All Guard Marathon Team wear. "One guy is retired and wants

to buy one of them, that's how important it is to them to be on the All Guard team and to get that yellow jacket."

The All Guard Marathon Team participates in races across the country, while also helping with National Guard recruitment and promoting physical fitness awareness.

"We go all over the United States," Sterns said. "Last year we had 10 different races. We went to Hawaii, Rhode Island, North Dakota, Kansas, Missouri; we go all over the place. The way we pick our races is we take a snapshot in the middle of the year of how recruiting is nationwide and then we usually pick the bottom 10."

At each race, the National Guard will have a recruiting booth set up allowing All Guard Marathon Team runners to talk to potential recruits about the National Guard Marathon Team and the National Guard in general.

"Our overall purpose is recruiting and retention," Sterns said. "The other thing that we do is health and fitness welfare. So, one of the things we require if you're on the team is in your local state, you go to colleges and high schools and you talk about the health and fitness of the Guard and why they run, while they recruit."

Nebraska Team takes on 40th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom
Staff Photojournalist

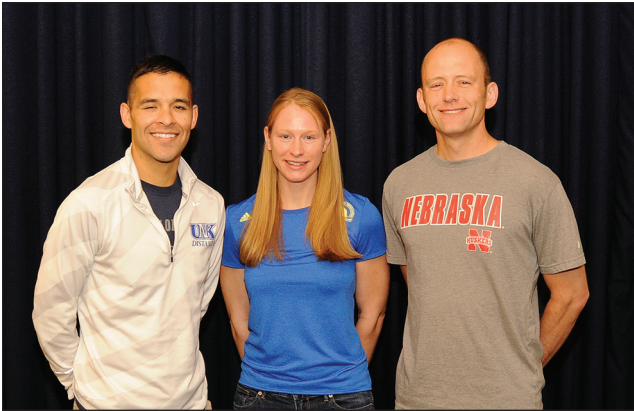
Nearly 14,000 people of all ages and walks-of-life took to the streets, trails, parks and, eventually, Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Nebraska on Sunday, May 7, to compete in the 40th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

Among the runners, who faced warm temperatures and strong breezes along the 26.2 mile course, were 150 members of the Air and Army National Guard, representing 39 states and two territories, including three members of the Nebraska National Guard marathon team.

Capt. Amanda Homes of Gretna, 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner of Omaha, and 1st Lt. Joe Kumor of Bellevue made up the Nebraska National Guard marathon team and took ninth place out of the participating Guard teams, with an average time of three hours 28 minutes and 40 seconds.

For Homes, originally a Lincoln-native and currently a survey team leader with the 72nd Civil Support Team, participation in this event holds a special place in her heart.

"This is a very special race for me," Homes said. "It was my first half-marathon; first full marathon; and first Boston Marathon qualifying race. To come back every year and run with fellow Guard members makes it so



Representing The Cornhusker State: (From left) 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner, Capt. Amanda Homes and 1st Lt. Joe Kumor pose for a team photo in Lincoln before the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon on May 7. The three Soldiers represented Nebraska during the annual National Guard Marathon Team trials.

meaningful for me. The spirit and comradery among the team members on the course, particularly the second half, provides so much motivation when you need it the most."

Kirchner, who is originally from Ogallala, Nebraska and is assigned to the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, is a former University of Nebraska-Kearney cross country team member. For him, running is more

than just a hobby as evidenced by this event marking his ninth marathon completion.

"I enjoy running because I can control every aspect," Kirchner said. "I can control the pace, the distance and it is a way to free my mind."

While the first two runners were relatively experienced, Kumor, the final member of the 2017 Nebraska team, was competing in his



Photo by Capt. Alex Salmon
Hydrate Right: 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner pours water on himself during the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

first-ever full-marathon.

"I ran because I wanted to see if I could do it," said Kumor, a chaplain assigned to the 126th Chemical Battalion. "Kirchner talked me into it and I think others should try it because it is great physical and mental training in discipline and perseverance."

The Nebraska National Guard Marathon team, as the host state, is looking to recruit more runners to build upon their team and, according to Homes, it is a worthwhile endeavor to try.

"This race is such a unique opportunity for members of the Nebraska National Guard Team," Homes said. "We get to show our fellow Guard members who come to race how awesome our community is and how much they support us. At the same time, we get to show off some of the many talented Guard members we have serving throughout the country in diverse roles in both their military and civilian capacities."

Homes finished as the third place female for her age group. Homes and Kirchner's times in the Lincoln National Guard Marathon earned them a spot on the All Guard Marathon Team for 2017.

If interested in running for the Nebraska National Guard marathon team, contact Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Sterns, National Guard Marathon coordinator, at 402-309-8313.



Photo by Capt. Alex Salmon
First Steps In Effort To Honor Heroes: A group of Nebraska National Guard Soldiers, Airmen and a civilian partner, begin the first steps of a 13.1-mile road march in honor of fallen members of the Nebraska National Guard.

Nebraskans march 13.1 miles during annual Guard Marathon to honor heroes

By Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry
Staff Photojournalist

In the tradition of former Nebraska State Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela and Command Chief Master Sgt. Mark Forster, Nebraska National Guard service members chose to ruck, rather than run, 13.1 miles of the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half Marathon on May 7.

Nebraska Army Guard Staff Sgt. Sara Bowie threw on a 30-pound rucksack and marched alongside fellow Soldiers, Airmen, friends and family to help honor fallen members of the Nebraska National Guard.

Bowie, who will retire this year after a combined 21 years of service in the Air Force and Army National Guard, said she wanted to overcome one last hurdle before hanging up her boots for good.

"We are doing it for the fallen Soldiers," Bowie said before the half marathon. "It brings awareness to how many people we do lose, and not just in combat."

Bowie's colleague, Staff Sgt. Rosalba Amezcua, also chose to march the half-marathon alongside Bowie and about a dozen others who included Valenzuela, other Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, and Bowie's sister, Amy Bodfield, a civilian.

Amezcua said she was inspired to join Bowie after she and her mother viewed a display in the Lincoln Capitol of Nebraska's fallen service members.

"I think that a lot of people don't realize how many people have died," Amezcua said. "With every step I take I want to remind people of the sacrifice they've made. I want to remind them that freedom does not come without a price. It takes people like our heroes whom made the ultimate sacrifice for us to be able to be free."

"I want them to know that they are not forgotten," she added.

To prepare for the expected rigors of the road march, both Bowie and Amezcua placed 30-40 pounds in their rucksacks and started walking as often as possible, usually around the track on the Lincoln Air Base. And while both admit they didn't train as much as they should have, it was all worth it in the end.

"Coming across the finish line to have the adjutant general standing there and say, 'I'm proud of you,' was the perfect finish imaginable," Bowie said.

"The entire race was incredibly overwhelming, but it didn't feel as long as it was, because of the constant cheers, thanking us for our service and pats on the

See RUCK MARCH on 20.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

On Your Mark, Get Set...: Runners competing in the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon, May 7, await the sound of the starting gun before starting their 26.2-mile journey through Lincoln.

Pennsylvania, District of Columbia runners dominate Guard Marathon

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Photojournalist

The Pennsylvania National Guard Marathon Team successfully defended its national title – its third title in four years – while National Guard runners from the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania cruised to individual victories during the 40th Annual Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

The Pennsylvania National Guard Marathon Team – including qualifying runners Troy Harrison, Matthew Stern and Emily Shertzer – won its second consecutive team crown with a combined average time of two hours, 54.01 seconds, barely defeating National Guard runners from Puerto Rico, which registered a combined average time of 2:54:50 over the 26.2-mile Lincoln, Nebraska, course. The Indiana National Guard Marathon Team finished third with a combined average time of 2:57:17.

Finishing first in the National Guard men’s division and eighth overall with a time of 2:42:47 was 1st Lt. Kenneth Rayner, commander of the District of Columbia’s Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 74th Troop Command.



Photo by Sgt. Jason Drager

Heading For A Title: Staff Sgt. Emily Shertzer, Pennsylvania Air National Guard, paces herself through downtown Lincoln enroute to a time of 2:55:24, which earned her a third National Guard women’s race title.

“I am really excited about running on the All Guard Team again this year,” said Rayner who secured a position on the team for the fourth time. “I was hoping for cooler temps, but I’m used to this weather,” he

said citing similar weather at the Boston Marathon he competed in three weeks prior.

Staff Sgt. Javier Torres Rolon from the Puerto Rico Army National Guard finished second in the National Guard men’s division and 12th overall in 2:47:23.

Winning the individual Guard women’s title and finishing third in the Lincoln Marathon’s overall women’s division was Staff Sgt. Emily Shertzer. An instrumentalist with the Air National Guard Band of the Northeast, Shertzer’s time of 2:55:24 put her well ahead of the second place finisher, 1st Lt. Meg Landymore from the Maryland Army National Guard, who finished with a time of 3:11:28 and 10th overall in the women’s category.

“I did better than I thought,” said Shertzer, who made history in 2014 by becoming the first female Guard member to win the overall women’s division. “I actually thought I was running the half (marathon) when I came out, but my team guilted me into running the full. I feel good now that I am done. Normally I don’t like running in the wind, but this year it actually helped.”

More than 13,500 marathoners registered for this year’s marathon making it the largest yet in its 40-year existence. Among those



Photo by Capt. Alex Salmon

Trying To Beat The Heat: 1st Lt. Kenneth Rayner, commander of the District of Columbia’s Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 74th Troop Command, splashes some water over his head while approaching the final few miles of the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon.

athletes, 150 marathoners from the Army and Air National Guard representing 40 states and two U.S. territories pounded the pavement for 26.2 miles in 80-degree weather to compete for one of the 61 positions on the All Guard Marathon Team.

The Lincoln National Guard Marathon has a long history of Guard and local community coop-

eration, said Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, the adjutant general of the Nebraska National Guard.

“It’s a good opportunity for the Guard to interact with the community and get our brand out there,” Bohac said. “It’s pretty amazing when you think about it. It has grown from a handful of runners in 1978 to over 13,000 today. That’s an amazing journey to be on.”



Photo by Capt. Alex Salmon

Honoring Fallen Heroes: Staff Sgt. Sara Bowie carries names and photographs of fallen Nebraska National Guard members on the back of her ruck sack while marching 13.1 miles during the 2017 Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half Marathon.



Photo by Spc. Daniel Balkovic

RUCK MARCH continued from page 19.

back from the public with every step we took.”

“I think that’s what made me finish,” Amezcua said. “All the people who were so supportive along the way. It was a really rewarding experience.”

Bowie said it was an emotional experience, especially when she came across families belonging to some of the names and pictures she was carrying on her pack.

“I think it reinforces the importance of the military when you see their support, to know we’re appreciated especially at a time outside of a standard military holiday,” Bowie said. “And it’s an opportunity for us as military members to show the community our own appreciation for our fallen service members.”

Many of the Nebraska National Guard half marathon ruck marchers carried banners with names and photos honoring Nebraska National Guard members lost over

the past few decades, though not all the names were combat casualties.

“It’s not really about statistics, but it is about facts,” Bowie said. “Suicide awareness, homelessness, illnesses suffered while still serving or as Veterans. It’s just so important to remember those who have passed. Everyone. They may not have lost their lives on the battlefield, but they still served.”

Bowie and Amezcua both said they hope this year’s display will encourage others to march in the future.

“I’ve already heard a few others say they want to do it next year,” Amezcua said. “It’s good to know that what I did was actually worth it, and I am glad I did it.”

(Editor’s Note: Spc. Lisa Crawford contributed to this article.)