

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Helicopter crews help Kansas battle spring grass fires

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Neighbors helping neighbors. It's a philosophy the National Guard has long taken to heart.

The Nebraska Army National Guard had the opportunity to put those words into action in March when it twice deployed a pair of UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and Nebraska Army National Guard crew members to Kansas to aid in fighting an outbreak of wildfires.

The missions came as part of an emergency management assistance compact request from Kansas after dozens of grass fires erupted across the state and grew substantially due to unseasonably dry weather and high winds.

According to a March 17 Facebook post by Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general who also serves as the director of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, Nebraska received a request for assistance from Kansas at approximately 5:42 p.m. on March 16. By 7:59 p.m., the formal EMAC

See **FIREFIGHTING** on 7.

WELCOME HOME



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford
Waiting: A child watches as the plane carrying his father lands at Eppley Airfield in March.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Nebraska Guard Soldiers return from overseas deployment

Family Reunited: A Nebraska Army National Guard's 402nd Military Police Battalion Soldier embraces his two children at Eppley Airfield in Omaha after returning from a nine-month deployment overseas. The 402nd MP homecoming was one of two this spring, joining the 641st Aviation, which returned in February from a mission to Africa.

See stories and photos on 4-5.

New policy focuses on deployability

■ **Mattis:** 'You're either deployable, or you need to find something else to do.'

WASHINGTON (DoD News) – The Defense Department has a "higher expectation" of deployability by its forces, Defense Secretary James Mattis said Feb. 17.

Speaking with reporters on a return flight from Germany to Washington, the secretary said the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness recently defined a problem that initially was brought to his attention by the Army, where "many non-deployables were on their rolls."

Aside from combat-injured personnel who are in a separate category, Mattis said, the issue concerns service members "who are, just for one reason or another, not able to deploy with their units. It was a significant number, and the Army brought their concerns forward. The other services also highlighted (their) concerns."

DoD's office of personnel and readiness has "come out with a policy that if you're

See **POLICY** on 7.

Women sweep Nebraska's Outstanding Airmen competition

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Four Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen made history earlier this year when they were selected as the Nebraska Air National Guard's 2017 Outstanding Airmen of the Year.

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Outstanding Airman of the Year competition program is part of the much larger U.S. Air Force contest designed to recognize Airmen of various ranks who have made outstanding contributions to their units.

Nominated by the various units of the

Nebraska Air National Guard, the state selectees – who will now go on to compete at the National Guard Bureau level – were picked by a team of Nebraska Air National Guard senior noncommissioned officers following interviews and a review of their nomination packets.

While the competition has been around for many years, what made this year's class of selectees particularly noteworthy was the fact that each of the four selectees is a woman. It is believed to be a first in the state competition's history.

"Quite honestly, we didn't even realize that the selectees were all women until

Maj. Gen. (Daryl) Bohac mentioned it in his announcement," said Chief Master Sgt. Tyrone Bingham, Nebraska Air National Guard command chief master sergeant who chaired the three-person State Outstanding Airmen of the Year selection board. "One thing that really stood out about these four Airmen was that they were all really a cut above and that they were all really active within their communities."

"The Airmen selected as the 2017 Nebraska Outstanding Airmen of the Year represented the highest level of performance in their specialty and rank," Bingham said. "Also, they showed a dedication to being

an Air National Guard Citizen Airmen by community involvement and leadership."

Selected were:

Enlisted Airman of the Year: Staff Sgt. Katherine M. Mullins, 170th Group;

Noncommissioned Officer of the Year: Tech. Sgt. Danelle K. Nelson, Joint Force Headquarters;

First Sergeant of the Year: Senior Master Sgt. Jody L. Kouma, 155th Air Refueling Wing;

Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year: Senior Master Sgt. Shea T. Harkness, 155th Medical Group.

See profiles and photos on 6.



Photo by Spc. Lily Baines

Leading The Way: Pfc. Devon Thompson leads a pack of runners after the first lap of the 2-mile run of the Army Physical Fitness Test event, April 12, during the 2018 Best Warrior Competition.

Nebraska's top Soldiers battle nerves, changing weather during state Best Warrior Competition

By Spc. Lily Baines
Staff Photojournalist

Nebraska has long been known as a state where its citizens are able to experience all four seasons.

What the 16 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers – plus one Czech Armed Forces partner – probably didn't expect when they traveled to the Greenleaf Training Site, April 12, to compete in the 2018 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition was that they were going to get to "enjoy" all four seasons during the course of a single three-day weekend.

That definitely wasn't what

Master Sgt. Chris Roemig hoped for when he planned this year's rigorous competition designed to determine the state's top enlisted Soldier and noncommissioned officer.

"The intent was the weather (would) be better," said Roemig, who served as the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the event. "We failed."

According to Roemig, this year's competition was moved from March to April in hopes of more spring-like conditions. Instead, an unseasonable winter storm and blizzard struck on the second day of the competition, causing the Soldiers to complete some of the events in some of the most

See **BEST WARRIOR** on 8.

Government shutdowns impact Guard readiness

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

They may have only lasted a weekend in one case, or a few hours in another, but the two federal government shutdowns that took place earlier this year generated some serious headaches for the Nebraska National Guard.

The first government shutdown occurred at midnight on Jan. 20 when Congress failed to pass a budget to fund the federal government. Although the shutdown occurred on a weekend, thus causing only a few major effects across the federal

See **SHUTDOWN** on 7.

Inside

Nebraska's top culinary specialists compete for national title
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Airmen attend CBRNE refresher training course
See story and photos on 7.



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NEWS DIGEST

■ Defense Department working with states to deploy Guard troops to augment U.S. Customs and Border Patrol efforts

WASHINGTON (DoD News) – President Donald J. Trump has directed the departments of Defense and Homeland Security to work with state governors to deploy National Guard troops to the southern U.S. border, a top official said April 4.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen M. Nielsen said the troops would augment U.S. Customs and Border Protection and provide support where needed to secure the border with Mexico.

Trump issued a proclamation April 4 on the matter, she said.

In a statement, chief Pentagon spokesperson Dana W. White highlighted DoD support for border security efforts.

“We are working with the Department of Homeland Security to enhance the support we provide to the DHS border security mission,” White said. “We look forward to continuing our partnership with DHS to ensure the defense of our nation and security of the American people.”

Nielsen said the deployment is aimed at filling the gaps in border security and stopping illegal activities that pose a threat to the country.

■ Pentagon spokesperson addresses Defense budget, Syria

WASHINGTON (DoD News) – The spending act President Donald J. Trump signed into law in March provides more than \$700 billion to improve military readiness and lethality, and to modernize the force. Now, it is up to everyone in the Defense Department to ensure that money is used wisely, chief Pentagon spokesperson, Dana W. White, told reporters March 29.

The spending bill passed with bipartisan support six months after the beginning of the fiscal year. “We will use the money to rebuild and restore our military to ensure we remain the most lethal force in the world,” White said.

In a March 26 memo, Defense Secretary James N. Mattis tasked every member of the department “to gain full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense.”

Mattis wants all to focus on building a more lethal military, one that will continue to overmatch potential foes now and into the future.

■ CID: Beware of Soldier social media impersonations accounts

QUANTICO, Va. (DoD News) – U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command’s (CID) Computer Crime Investigative Unit (CCIU) is once again warning Soldiers and the Army community to be on the lookout for “social media scams” where cybercriminals impersonate service members by using actual and fictitious information, not just for “trust-based relationship scams,” also known as Romance Scams, but for other impersonation crimes such as sales schemes and advance fee schemes.

“By monitoring your social media identity, you can protect your Army family and

“We continue to see unacceptable levels of illegal drugs, dangerous gang activity, transnational criminal organizations and illegal immigration flow across our border,” she said.

Border security is national security, Nielsen said.

“We do hope that the deployment begins immediately,” she said, adding the troops would support the mission in conjunction of the needs of the specific border state.

The Defense Department has long supported DHS efforts to protect the nation’s borders, Nielsen said, including counter-narcotics missions, infrastructure construction, persistent surveillance operations training and aerial support throughout the Western Hemisphere.

At the White House on April 3, Trump said he wants to use the military to secure the U.S. border with Mexico, in response to gaps in security there. “Until we can have a wall and proper security, we’re going to be guarding our border with the military,” he said.

Previous presidents have deployed National Guard troops to support security along the U.S. southern border; 6,000 were sent under President George W. Bush, and 1,200 under President Barack Obama.

“We are humbled and grateful to the American people for entrusting their hard-earned tax dollars to us,” White said. “We owe it to them to spend their money wisely.”

White also discussed the situation in Syria, where the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has been significantly degraded, but is not yet eliminated. “Important work remains to guarantee the lasting defeat of these violent extremists,” she said. “Our commitment to win must outlast the so-called physical caliphate, and the warped ideas that guide the calculated cruelty of ISIS.”

The spokesperson also addressed reported Turkey’s concerns about Kurdish terrorists on its border with Syria.

“We are working with our NATO ally Turkey to reassure them that we understand their security concerns and will appropriately address them as we fight ISIS together,” White said. “But we must not become distracted and reduce the pressure on ISIS.”

your reputation,” said Special Agent Daniel Andrews, CCIU director. “The criminals will use factual data from official websites and Soldiers’ personal social media sites, then prey on vulnerable people’s trusting nature and willingness to help the Soldier.”

Frequently, CID receives notifications from individuals stating they were scammed online by someone claiming to be a Soldier, but in reality it was an online scammer who has used an unsuspected Soldier’s name and available social media photos to commit a crime.

No one is immune from becoming a victim.

Army National Guard 4.0 to enhance readiness

ARLINGTON, Va. (National Guard News) – The Army National Guard has undergone a shift in its training approach and many Army Guard Soldiers in certain critical units have seen an increase in yearly training days and requirements.

That increase is part of Army National Guard 4.0, an initiative based on changing Army needs and designed to allow the Army Guard to respond quicker and more effectively to a variety of missions worldwide, said Lt. Gen. Timothy Kadavy, the director of the Army Guard.

“Army National Guard 4.0 (means) being ready (to deploy) without notification of a specific, potentially upcoming mission,” he said. “We are implementing this transformation because our country needs us to do so. This is due to the current size of the Total Army and the multiple threats that our country faces from potential adversaries. The Army National Guard must shorten post-mobilization times in order to respond more quickly and effectively to answer the nation’s call.”

The change in training tempo is primarily focused on armored and Stryker brigade combat teams, as well as attack-reconnaissance aviation battalions, said Kadavy.

“Our high-priority units – such as armored brigade combat teams, Stryker brigade combat teams, attack-reconnaissance battalions and critical enablers – must be ready on short notice for unspecified missions,” he said. “We have to maintain the readiness of these units in order to respond to emerging demands.”

Under the previous model, units would be alerted for deployment roughly 18-months in advance and then train for the specific mission, including training time at the mobilization station prior to heading overseas.

With Army Guard 4.0, a multi-year training cycle is used that builds on collective unit tasks to maintain high readiness and prepare units to deploy quickly in response to contingency operations, said Kadavy.

It also means a 30 percent reduction in post-mobilization training time he said, adding that for those high-priority units, the Army Guard 4.0 model culminates in a brigade rotation to either the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, or the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana in the fourth year of the training cycle.

Large-scale training at those locations every four years is new for many Army Guard brigades, which under the earlier model may have done a rotation there 10, 15 or in some cases 20 years ago, said Kadavy.

Increased training days will be needed to prepare for and execute those larger training plans, said Col. Jesse J. Kirch-

meier, chief of strategic plans and policy for the Army National Guard.

“Two of those years in that training cycle will have more than 39 days of training per year,” said Kirchmeier, adding that 39 days represents the long-standing training requirements of one weekend per month and two weeks in the summer.

The total number of additional training days varies based on unit type and the training year, he said, stressing that Army Guard units will maintain a higher level of collective training and proficiency following the fourth year of training.

Additionally, the number of Army Guard brigades slated for rotations to Fort Irwin or Fort Polk has increased from two to four brigades each year.

“We’ll send two of our light (infantry) brigades to Fort Polk and we’ll send two of our heavy (armored or Stryker) brigades to Fort Irwin,” said Kirchmeier.

The new training plan is proof the Army Guard is continuing to adapt to an “ever-evolving military landscape,” said Col. Robert D. Ferguson, commander of the Mississippi Army National Guard’s 155th Armored Brigade Combat Team.

“The robust training schedule we have now allows us a greater opportunity to hone our warfighting skills, as well as set expectations and shared understanding at every echelon throughout the brigade,” he said.

That translates to better-prepared individual Army Guard Soldiers, Ferguson said.

“The training and skill-set required to maintain the readiness that Army National Guard 4.0 demands will make you a better Soldier, better leader and better person in every facet of your life,” he said.

Army Guard 4.0 represents the fourth major evolution of the Army Guard since the establishment of the all-volunteer force in the early-1970s, said Kadavy. The 1980s saw the Army Guard evolve further as part of the Total Army concept, he said, followed by its transition to an operational reserve and larger, more frequent deployments after 9/11.

The new training plan focuses on future Defense Department and Army requirements, rather than past standards, said Kadavy.

“We are shaping the Army National Guard based on what we will have to do over the next 20 to 30 years, not based on what we did in the past 100 years,” he said.

While the plan represents a shift in training for certain units, many Army Guard members will not see additional training above the 39-day requirement, said Kadavy.

However, he added, Soldiers still need to be in the mindset that they could soon deploy.

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Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Double Duty: Spc. Jason Cole stirs hot soup with one hand and hot beef with the other during the 50th Annual Philip A. Connelly Awards Competition for Excellence in Army Food Services, March 17, at the Mead Training Site.

COOKING FOR GOLD

■Nebraska Army Guard's top culinary specialists compete for national title

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Editor

On a dreary St. Patrick's Day holiday, a team of Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, hoped the luck of the Irish was on their side as they prepared a meal worthy of a national title during the 50th Annual Philip A. Connelly Awards Competition for Excellence in Army Food Service at the Mead Training Site.

The competition, essentially the national championship for U.S. Army food service specialists, was judged by U.S. Army evaluators who observed and graded the Nebraska Soldiers as they prepared a multi-course meal in a field environment using their mobile kitchen trailer.

"The hard part's over," said Sgt. 1st Class Katherine Struck, a food service operations sergeant and the noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the Nebraska effort. Now, it's just "waiting to find out if we get that Super Bowl ring."

The Nebraska Army National Guard team competed against the remaining top three teams in the country. The results of the competition will be announced later this year.

The spark for this year's competition began in 2016 when the 110th team won their first national-level Connelly competition. "Once we got the first ball rolling, we had to do this again," said Sgt. Thomas Deall, culinary specialist. "It brought in recognition for Nebraska, recognition to the unit, and people were asking how we did it. We needed to reinforce our practices."

Deall, whose lifelong passion for food service began at home in



Garnish Goose: Sgt. Thomas Deall makes final touches on an apple he shaped into a bird to use as a garnish for the national competition meal.

his Italian family's kitchen, said he's watched the culinary team evolve over the years to become the state and regional champions they are today.

"These are Soldiers who at one point wanted nothing to do with this," Deall said. "It was not something they thought could be attainable. It was hard at first, but once we got that spark of inspiration... it just shot up from there."

Struck and Deall both agree the team never would have made it this far without support from outside of the five trained culinary specialists. In fact, the entire battalion chipped in to ensure the competition went as smoothly as possible.

"We couldn't have done it without the maintenance crew or the 110th Battalion," Deall said. "We have a fully-functional (Forward Operating Base). Anywhere

that we are needed, whether it be Nebraska or anywhere else in the country, we're showing you within two days we can build all of this up."

Deall said the unit maintenance crew, along with the battalion's support, was able to establish the entire area, ready equipment and support other mission requirements to ensure the cooks would only have to focus on meal preparation.

"We all did it together," Deall said. "That's what I enjoyed most and that's the real difference we have – a team."

The competition itself includes much more than just the taste and presentation of the final meal. The judges also evaluated the unit on meal preparation including safety, sanitation and security, which is why having a team greater than five trained culinary specialists is important for competition success.

Gayle Swain, an evaluator for the national-level competition who represented the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, said she noticed the pre-planning the Nebraska Soldiers had completed as soon as she arrived.

"What we found as we got here was that you could tell that this was a totally coordinated team effort," Swain said. "There was a lot of support from command level and there's a lot of thought and detail put into everything from the way the tents are set up, to all the displays that they have, to the way the dining tent is set to motivate (Soldiers) to make good choices."

Swain said all of those items play into the overall evaluation. She added having a plan in place – and working that plan – was the best advice she could give any team competing.

Fortunately, Nebraska's team seemed to be doing just that.

"We noticed that everybody's just jumping in and helping each other. Even command is saying 'Can I get you anything?' that sort of thing," she said. "Overall, a lot of thought went into it and it shows."

Swain said her favorite part of



Icing On The Cake: Spc. Kevin Boyle uses the blade of a knife to spread and smooth chocolate icing over yellow cake while participating with the 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion's entry for the 50th Annual Philip A. Connelly Awards Competition for Excellence in Army Food Services.

the competition is knowing she is helping to shine a light on the culinary specialist career field, especially as an option for military service members.

"The skills that they learn on the military side – if they decide that in the future, say after retirement... they want to go out into the world and maybe switch careers – gives them a really good opportunity to develop their culinary skills, and that can take them into anywhere in the food service industry, from being a chef, to being a salesperson, to training on equipment or managing people," Swain said. "So this is a great jumping point. It's an important career asset."

Swain added she knows Army cooks don't always get the recognition they deserve, especially for field feeding. That's why the foundation has taken an interest in the Connelly competition.

Deall agreed being a cook is sometimes viewed as a – verbally –

thankless job. However, the smiles on Soldiers faces when they are eating makes it all worthwhile.

"You have to look into the perspective of a Soldier," he said. "A meal (in the field) is no different to a meal from home. That's my job as a culinary specialist, to give back to my Soldiers. It's not home, I understand that. It's not how your momma made it, or your grandmother made it, but at the same time, it's hot, it's fresh, it's nutritional and it's also a little bit of that reminder of why you're fighting."

To Deall, hot meals in the field are not only nutritionally necessary, but also mentally necessary. So, he strives to do what he can to bring a smile to every Soldier who eats something he cooks.

"This is 'one team, one fight' as an Army," Deall said. "Why does it have to be with a rifle when it could be something as pleasant as a plate of food?"



Back In Nebraska: A C-12 airplane is guided into its parking spot at the Nebraska Army National Guard Aviation Support Facility No. 1 after carrying Nebraska Soldiers home from a deployment to the Horn of Africa, Feb. 2.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Homecoming Handshake: Lt. Col. Thaddeus Fineran shakes the hand of Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jason Graff shortly after Graff returned to Nebraska after a deployment to the Horn of Africa.

Aviators return from Horn of Africa deployment

Spc. Lisa Crawford
Editor

As the moments counted down to the arrival of a C-12 carrying home members of the Nebraska Army National Guard, Jennifer Gruber stood near a barricade shivering in the brisk Nebraska winter. Unable to wait any longer, she moved out onto the tarmac toward the plane after it landed at the Army Aviation Support Facility in Lincoln, the sound of her high-heels clicking on the concrete as she hurried to reunite with her husband.

"It's always a challenge," she said, referring to the deployment – the second for the Gruber family.

"Having young kids with their dad gone; but we're lucky to have resilient kids and a great support system through the Guard, and through our friends and family here."

Her husband, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Nick Gruber, was one of six Soldiers assigned to the Lincoln-based Detachment 1, Company A, 641st Aviation Regiment, was welcomed home from an overseas deployment to the Horn of Africa, Feb. 2, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln.

The initial deployment began last April and consisted of four Nebraska Soldiers. An additional two Guard aviators rotated into Africa midway through the 10-month deployment.

Jennifer Gruber embraced and kissed her husband as soon as he stepped off the plane, which brought the second rotation of Soldiers home just in time for the ceremony.

"It's a very happy day to get him back," she said. "Just having someone to actually touch and talk to – not through a computer screen – and just share everyday moments



Cheek To Cheek: Jennifer Gruber embraces her husband, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Nick Gruber, Feb. 2, following a deployment homecoming ceremony. This was the second deployment for the Gruber family.

with our kids that he's missed out on."

She said anyone going through a deployment needs to remember they aren't alone, that thousands of others have gone through the same thing and to not let life stop.

"You just have to keep living and prepare for the day they get home, but know that they've never really left," she said. "That they're with you every day. You've just got to keep moving and soon it will be all over."

Nick Gruber said he had a similar mindset throughout his deployment. The biggest key

was keeping busy as much as he could.

While deployed, the Soldiers were responsible for providing aviation support in the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility as part of Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa. As a pilot, Gruber flew the C-12 airplane in and out of nine different countries, transporting cargo and personnel.

Gruber said he was looking forward to spending quality time with his family.

"It's always hard being away from family," he said. "Watching your kids grow and

develop over the phone, essentially. That's the toughest part."

Following the ceremony, the couple planned to pick-up their two young boys from school and surprise them with the unexpected reunion.

"It's definitely worth it to be able to support our country and our state, and to support our family," Jennifer Gruber said. "And our kids are very honored and blessed to have a dad that's a Soldier."

Other family and friends greeted the Soldiers as they returned home, including the family of Sgt. Alexander Barto.

This was the first deployment for the Barto family, but they made the best of the situation.

"There were tears in the beginning, but every day it just gets better," said Cindi Barto, the Soldier's mother. "You just look forward to him coming home."

At 24-years-old, Barto was the youngest member of the crew to deploy to the Horn of Africa, but thanks to technology, the family was able to communicate regularly to know he was happy and safe.

"I think this was a good opportunity for him," said his sister Emalee Barto. "I'm just proud of him for being so young and realizing at an early age how important it is to serve his country."

With Sgt. Barto home, the family is complete again, and they are looking forward to making more memories together. The first item on their list is to open an envelope from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, which they all guess contains Sgt. Barto's college diploma for the degree he finished through online classes while deployed.

"We're very happy he's home," Emalee Barto said.

Six weeks after arriving in Nebraska, military police battalion Soldiers receive their official welcome

Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

They'd been back for roughly six weeks.

On April 15 – exactly one year to the day that they were wished farewell at an Omaha Junior High School before the start of a nine-month deployment that ultimately took them to an island in the Caribbean where they supported U.S. Southern Command's Joint Task Force – the approximately 50 members of the Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion headquarters were finally officially welcomed back to Nebraska and congratulated on the work they accomplished during their mission.

So, why the delay in holding a ceremony that usually takes place on the day a unit arrives home?

In the case of the 402nd Military Police Battalion Soldiers, it was because they arrived home in groups of six or seven aboard commercial airliners over the course of two days, with most of the flights arriving in Omaha on March 1, but others coming back through Lincoln or Kansas City. That made a consolidated welcome home ceremony nearly impossible.

So, officials decided to shift the official welcome home ceremony to the unit's first "Yellow Ribbon" reunification training weekend, which in this case took place on April 15 at a Hilton Hotel in downtown Omaha.

Despite the delay, the ceremony still attracted a number of senior Nebraska officials who came to

"You were down there making sure that those people who want to destroy our way of life are secure, to keep them from doing that. And you did an excellent job."

— Governor Pete Ricketts

thank the Soldiers and their families for the sacrifices they made in support of the important mission.

"We are grateful, as citizens, for your service," said Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts, who visited the unit in Cuba in December and was also on hand at the Omaha airport in March to welcome a number of the groups back to Nebraska. "We also know that you sacrifice beyond them; that when you've been gone... you've sacrificed your time with your families. You missed that baseball game or that dance recital, that holiday party. We appreciate the sacrifices and the time away that you have made with your family to be able to secure our freedoms and our security."

"We also know that the families sacrificed, too," Ricketts added. "That your spouse, your loved ones, they picked up the slack while you were away. In fact, you wouldn't be able to do what you did if they weren't doing what they did here at home, making sure the family life went on. So, thank you to all



Spending Some Time Together: A 402nd Military Police Battalion Soldier plays with her son while waiting for the April 15 welcome home ceremony to begin.

of the families who also sacrificed to make sure that your loved ones were able to protect our country."

Ricketts said he came away from his December visit with a better understanding of exactly how the Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were performing their work.

"Your mission was important down in Guantanamo Bay helping secure the worst of the worst of detainees who we know would take any chance they could to attack us," he said. "You were down there making sure that those people who want to destroy our way of life are secure, to keep them from doing that. And you did an excellent job."



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Commander In Chief: Lt. Col. Eric Hunsberger, commander of the 402nd Military Police Battalion, presents Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts with a flag the unit had flown over their base in honor of Ricketts' December visit to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Ricketts said that feeling was reinforced by his visit with senior leaders in Cuba. "The folks down there had nothing but good things to say about you."

Although the Soldiers have been back for several weeks now, the mission is far from over. In fact, said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, the work they do over the next several weeks is equally as important as that which they completed during their months in Cuba.

"You've spent the last 45 days or so reintegrating; reintegrating at home, reintegrating at work... and reintegrating back into your communities," Bohac said. "But that's not done yet. You have some time to go to finish that process and you need to take the time to do it

right so that in about another 45 days when you return as full-up reintegrated into your lives that you are ready to go. Not to go away, but to go here in Nebraska and do the things that we need to do here, which is to be always ready, always there whenever we're called."

Bohac encouraged the Soldiers to continue to thank those who made the mission's success possible, such as family members, employers and community members.

He also encouraged the Soldiers and their families to continue to keep their fellow Soldiers and Airmen who are currently deployed in their prayers as well.

"God bless each and every one of you. Thank you to the families," he added. "It's really good to have you home."



A Soldier And His Girls: A Soldier with the 402nd Military Police Battalion is reunited with his wife and daughters following a nine-month overseas deployment, March 1, at Omaha's Eppley Airport.



Warm Embrace: With pillow in-hand, a Soldier embraces a family member, March 1, after stepping off a plane at Eppley Airfield in Omaha.

Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Home at last

402nd Military Police Battalion returns home to Nebraska after nine-month overseas deployment

Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

Plane by plane, in groups of six or as small as one, they arrived home. For months, the Omaha Soldiers – members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 402nd Military Police Battalion headquarters – had worked in one of the most intense, publicly visible missions that any of them had ever experienced. Now, just weeks after completing a nine-month deployment in support of the U.S. Southern Command's Joint Task Force Guantanamo, the Soldiers arrived back in Omaha on March 1-2 spread across more than a half-dozen U.S. commercial

airliners. Waiting for the Soldiers were the families – parents, spouses, children – who were equally ready to welcome their Guardsmen home and begin the process of continuing lives that had been put on pause for nearly a year. "I said today we don't have to call daddy on the phone anymore. He won't be living there anymore... he'll be home," said one spouse as she stood outside of a Delta Airlines gate as her two young sons played a game of tag with several other military children, all of whom had traveled to Omaha's Eppley Airport to meet their Soldiers' airplanes. This was the first time that her family had faced an extended

deployment as her husband, a unit master sergeant, served in Cuba. In order to pass the time, she said they created a paper chain, with each link symbolizing a day that remained. "We would talk about it and say, 'Daddy's coming home for good; he's not leaving.'" That morning, she said everyone in the family knew what a momentous day it was. She said that when she woke up one of her sons, she asked what they were doing today. His response: "Going to the airport." Why? she asked. This time his response was even shorter: "Daddy."

Unlike most unit homecomings, where units are welcomed enmasse, the return of the 402nd MP Bn., occurred across two days. That didn't mean the welcomes were any less important, though.

Along with the groups of families who arrived at the airport, almost every group was welcomed home by Gov. Pete Ricketts and Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, who stood outside the gate and shook the hands of each of the often bewildered-looking Soldiers, many whose faces and arms still carried the dark tans they had developed working under a Caribbean sun as they stepped into the Omaha terminal.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Cruickshank, senior battalion noncommissioned officer, the Soldiers appreciated the welcomes.

"Just being home," Cruickshank said when asked about what he appreciated the most about the mission. "As always, most Soldiers will tell you that (they appreciate) the honor of serving your country."



Family Photo: Lt. Col. Eric Hunsberger, 402nd Military Police Battalion commander, poses with his family and the welcome home banner they made in honor of his return from overseas.

"Just the sense of accomplishment... we were given very specific tasks to do there... and across the board every one of our sections exceeded expectations," he added.

Lt. Col. Eric Hunsberger, battalion commander, echoed those comments.

"It feels excellent to be home," said Hunsberger, whose unit served as a brigade headquarters staff during its deployment to Cuba. "We just felt blessed to be part of a team that nested itself so well into the strategic, operational and tactical elements of the mission. It just went way beyond expectations at how well we integrated into the operation."

Both Hunsberger and Cruickshank said the mission was unlike anything they had ever encountered before during other overseas missions. They added they knew, because of the high profile nature of the Guantanamo mission, that many eyes – ranging from the

Department of Defense to the International organization of the Red Cross and the world-wide civilian media – were focused on them.

"We knew we were under the microscope," said Hunsberger.

"The complexity of the mission and just the high profile nature... there was definitely no room for error," said Cruickshank.

Hunsberger said despite that, the Nebraska Soldiers performed exceptionally well, adding that even unexpected twists such as preparing for a hurricane that never hit, didn't seem to faze the Guardsmen. "We were on point the entire time," he said, adding his team, which included Soldiers who had experience from Iraq and Afghanistan or served in civilian law enforcement fields in Nebraska, had a level of expertise that greatly affected the unit's capabilities in Cuba.

"They were always eager to help the Soldiers on the ground or provide commanders with the support and guidance they needed to do their jobs. Staffs can really make or break a mission, and this one performed exceptionally well at multiple levels. They were just awesome."

According to one unit spouse, it's good to finally have the mission in the rear view mirror.

"It's kind of like I can't believe it's finally here," she said. "I think two or three days ago I had a hard time sleeping, but I slept really well last night. And when I woke up this morning, it was like having a weight lifted off of my shoulders."

The unit was formally welcomed back to Nebraska during a ceremony on April 15.

Not knowing what to expect, Soldier's family tackles deployment's challenges

Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes
State Public Affairs Officer

She admits, there were times leading into the 402nd Military Police Battalion headquarters' deployment that she had some doubts. As the wife of a Nebraska Army National Guard master sergeant and mother of two young, rambunctious boys, the woman admitted she wasn't sure how ready she was to tackle the challenges of a nearly yearlong deployment and separation. "I didn't know what to expect, honestly," the woman said, March 1 as she held a handpainted sign outside of a Delta Airlines gate at Omaha's Eppley Airport, waiting to welcome her husband home from his 10-month deployment to Cuba in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. "It was hard, never easy. You just kind of figure out what you need to do to get through the day, the week, the month." "And then you just make it work," she added. "It's how you have to." As the mother of a pair of toddler-aged sons, the woman said she decided to stay home during the deployment as a way to keep some "normalcy" in the family. "(It) was a good thing because with two young kids it would've been super hard for me to keep working and take care of everything." She added that keeping the boys connected to their

father was always an important part of the deployment. They often talked, via Facetime or Skype, "as much as we could, sometimes a couple times a week." They also found creative ways to allow the boys to have fun with dad. "We sent him presents," she said, adding that one son likes little Matchbox cars, "so we sent daddy some of his Matchbox cars. When we would call him on Facetime, he would say, 'Where's your cars?' and then they would play cars together... it was fun." Having completed her first deployment, she has some advice for those preparing for their first separation. The first? Reach out for help. "Sometimes it's hard to reach out to people, but it really helps," she said. "Use your family. Find a church. Do whatever you can to keep connected or stay active yourself. Get out of the house." She said joining social groups, especially military family or military spouse support groups, also helps. "I joined a couple groups... moms who had kids the same ages as me," the woman said. "That definitely helped." The biggest thing, she advised, is staying positive. She added that by the end of the deployment she had surprised herself by what she was capable of doing. "I'm definitely stronger than I ever thought I was going through this," she said, smiling. "I didn't have a clue that I would make it."



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Radke Reunion: With his wife by his side, a member of the 402nd Military Police Battalion headquarters holds his two sons for the first time following a nine-month deployment to Cuba.

Nebraska Air National Guard Outstanding Airmen



Staff Sgt. Katherine M. Mullins
Enlisted Airman of the Year

Staff Sgt. Katherine M. Mullins is an airborne systems engineer assigned to the 170th Group's 238th Combat Training Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base. She was named the Nebraska Air National Guard's Outstanding Enlisted Airman of the Year for 2017.

As part of her nomination packet, which spans the Jan. 1 thru Dec. 31 time period, Mullins was lauded for her work in a variety of critical unit missions, including locating the sources for radio malfunctions and then troubleshooting the issue to find a solution to repair the system.

She also supported the successful completion of 58 flight evaluations while also earning her aircrew qualification six weeks earlier than scheduled.

Mullins was nominated for her academic excellence, which included completing her technical school, crew position qualification and flight training, earning two distinguished honor graduate awards along the way.

Mullins was also recognized for having attained her civilian medical laboratory certification while also earning nine credit hours toward her associate's degree in Medical Laboratory Technology. She additionally earned 20 credit hours toward her bachelor of Science degree in Biotech, maintaining a 3.8 grade point average.

Mullins is a member of Big Iron Powerlifting Team, for which she helped host two charity competitions that raised \$8,000 for Omaha veterans.



Tech. Sgt. Danelle K. Nelson
Noncommissioned Officer of the Year

Tech. Sgt. Danelle Nelson is an administrative sergeant for the Nebraska Air National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters Staff.

As a part of her award package, Nelson was praised for her work during last autumn's multimonth hurricane relief efforts that spanned missions in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Her duties also included organizing commander videoconference briefings with joint directors during the Hurricane Harvey, Irma and Maria relief operations.

Nelson was also credited for having taken the skills she learned during her Joint Operations Course and other major command-level training and applying them to increase the Nebraska Air National Guard's communications and overall domestic operations effectiveness.

Nelson also was responsible for organizing the state command chief master sergeant change of responsibility/retirement ceremonies, assisting in administering the unit's physical fitness tests, while also providing support to the Nebraska National Guard adjutant general, command staff and headquarters unit.

Nelson also received commendations for having coordinating the first military ball for 60 Vietnam and Korean War disabled veterans and families, speaking at various Memorial and Veterans Day events while also serving as a Junior Achievement leader where she helps mentor 4th grade students about entrepreneurship and finances.



Senior Master Sgt. Jody L. Kouma
First Sergeant of the Year

Senior Master Sgt. Jody L. Kouma is the first sergeant for the 155th Air Refueling Wing headquarters and the 155th Operations Group in Lincoln, Nebraska.

As a part of her many assigned duties, Kouma is responsible for providing senior noncommissioned officer leadership for roughly 150 Airmen assigned to her two Lincoln-based units.

In her award nomination, spanning the Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2017 time period, Kouma was lauded for mentoring four new first sergeants, actively collaborating with unit leaders to resolve Airmen's concerns while also advising senior leaders on a variety of topics relating to the health, morale, resources and quality of the force.

Along with having provided significant leadership during the wing change of command ceremony, Kouma participated in the unit's recent speed mentoring event and served as the vice president of the organization's Top 3 committee.

Kouma was also praised for her work in coordinating a morale event for unit chief master sergeants, first sergeants and their spouses that included delivering holiday meals to more than 100 Airmen assigned to the 155th Air Refueling Wing.

In addition to those accomplishments, Kouma was recognized for a number of off-duty efforts that included organizing and putting together more than 4,000 pounds of CrossFit equipment for Nebraska National Guard air base personnel.



Senior Master Sgt. Shea T. Harkness
Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year

Senior Master Sgt. Shea T. Harkness is the superintendent of the Nebraska Air National Guard's Detachment 1, ((Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, high explosive) Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP)), 155th Medical Group. She was honored as the Nebraska Air National Guard's 2017 Senior Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

Among her many 2017 accomplishments, Harkness was recognized for the work she and her team did during their September deployment to Texas in support of the Hurricane Harvey relief efforts, including providing triage treatment and medical care, valued at roughly \$15,000, to more than 180 patients affected by the hurricane. Harkness was also credited for having deployed, on short notice, to an expeditionary air base where she managed medical treatment for more than 40 flyers over a 60-day period. Harkness established a recruiting plan that enabled the detachment to begin enlisting qualified Airmen into several unit vacancies.

Harkness recently completed a 74.5-hour advanced trauma training course, a four-day broadening course in nurse management, and was selected to attend the 155th Air Refueling Wing's Leadership Challenge Program.

Harkness is also currently in her fourth-year of study in a clinical herbalism program, has presented awards to deserving cadets at a local high school and is active in a local women's service organization dedicated to historical preservation, education and patriotism.

Brigade sergeant major honored for decades-long wrestling career

By Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry
Staff Photojournalist

The curiosity was thick enough it could almost be touched.

Ropes dangled from the ceiling of the CenturyLink Center in Omaha and questions hung in the air; underneath, as if to guard the ropes, stood two Soldiers.

School after school was announced and representatives flooded the floor to surround the ropes and Soldiers. Then, an announcer asked members of the audience who had served in the military to stand and be recognized, causing some of the pieces of the puzzle to start falling into place.

The ropes made even more sense once rappellers started down from them, the American flag following close behind. Soon, more Soldiers in dress uniforms took their places under the ropes. These Soldiers were being honored this night of the 2018 Nebraska High School State Wrestling Meet for their service in the military and for their tie to wrestling – the true focus of the night.

Among these Soldiers being honored was Command Sgt. Major Dean Reicks, the command sergeant major for the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. Reicks had been a state wrestling champion over 35 years before.

"I felt honored," Reicks said

about the Feb. 14 ceremony. He was one of three who were honored for both their commitment to wrestling and for their military service. "But I wanted to get people recognized who recently came back from deployment."

His humbleness showed when Nebraska School Activities Association's Ron Higdon asked Reicks to nominate some people to be honored at the State Wrestling Meet with the condition that he needed to be one of them – the condition coming because he probably would not have done it otherwise.

You see, Reicks was honored not only for his rich military career, but also for a history in wrestling that covers the past 40 years.

Wrestling has always been a big part of Reicks' family as his brothers and other family members wrestled. "My cousins," Reicks said, "even some of my second and third cousins in Iowa (wrestled.) We didn't know each other until we got involved with wrestling."

Reicks grew up on a small farm in Petersburg, Nebraska, the second oldest of five boys and a sister. While attending Pope John XXIII Central Catholic High School in Elgin, he wrestled for four years making the State Wrestling Meet his sophomore, junior and senior years. Those final two years, Reicks finished as the state champion in his weight category.

Following high school, Reicks initially joined the U.S. Army Reserves in the summer of 1981 as a way to keep his job at the time. Shortly

after joining, though, he said, he decided to go to college.

He moved to Kearney where he attended college and joined the wrestling team.

Reicks spent a little over a year in the Army Reserve before transferring to the Nebraska Army National Guard after encouragement from his college wrestling coach, retired Maj. Gen. Jack Ramey. Ramey helped Reicks get tuition assistance as well as a scholarship that helped him through his college career, Reicks said.

And what a college career it was. His freshman year he was named All-American and finished eighth nationally. He sat out his sophomore year, but came back his junior year and finished fourth, and finished second his senior year.

Reicks graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Education and then went on to teach. He taught high school Business, Economics, and Physical Education for about 18 years before taking a full-time position with the Nebraska National Guard.

He and his wife of 35 years, Catherine, have three children, Beth, Nate, and Monica. Their son, Nate, wrestled in high school and college, as well, and now serves full-time in the Nebraska Army National Guard like his father.

Even today, Reicks continues to support local school wrestling programs by attending meets and following the current seasons.

He also continues to participate, competing in "old-timers" wrestling



Photo by Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry

Wrestler, Soldier For Life: Dean Reicks, command sergeant major for the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, and his wife Cathy, show some of the awards he earned over a 40-year wrestling career.

among family, friends, former contestants and even the Cornhusker State Games.

"Wrestling, like the Guard, is family," Reicks said, "It's a small group. Every time I meet up with the coaches, we catch up."

Reicks said he enjoys going to the meets to watch the competitors, because, especially as a coach, he likes watching the strategies of the wrestlers – the physical and mental exertion.

Reicks had to give up coaching

when he took a full-time position with the Nebraska National Guard. Going to the meets keeps him connected to the wrestling world. He would have been at the state meet even if they hadn't honored him, he said. It's also a way to socialize for him and his wife.

"Wrestling is like a family," Cathy said. "So you network and you know those people and a lot of the coaches are people you either competed against or you wrestled with (in high school or college.)"



Photos by Staff Sgt. Jason Wilson

Checking The Seal: During a CBRNE refresher training, Nebraska Airmen learn how to properly wear and utilize protective gear in case of a chemical attack, as well as identify possible chemical hazards.

Nebraska Airmen tackle new training requirement

By Staff Sgt. Jason Wilson
Staff Photojournalist

More than 20 members of Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing completed their chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive, or CBRNE, refresher training course, Feb. 4, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln.

The Air Force recently mandated all Airmen be trained on CBRNE every 18 months instead of every three years. The training begins online followed by hands-on experience.

Getting all Airmen up to speed will be challenging, but useful in this era of defense.

"We have until March 31 to get 900 plus members trained," said Staff Sgt. Ryne S. Packett, emergency management journeyman with the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron. He said recent world events have made the training even more important. "With the confirmed chemical attacks (in Syria) and the increase in deployment cycles, we want to make sure that our Airmen know what they are doing and how to use the gear."

To adhere to the new guidance, multiple training events will be offered to get as many people current as possible.



Suit Up: Members of the 155th Civil Engineering Squadron attend a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive refresher training course Feb. 4, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln.

"The process isn't set in stone, but the goal is to get as many Airmen as we can through the class so we can knock the numbers down," Packett said. "We are holding two classes today and will potentially have classes during the upcoming weeks for full-time Guard members. We also have a class of 100 plus members scheduled for April and a bigger one in June."

The two-hour course builds on the online CBRNE computer-based training and provides Airmen

hands-on practice so they can walk away with knowledge of the chemical detection process and their personal protective equipment.

"Students will learn how to read liquid detection points with the M-9 paper to detect any chemicals in the air and how to use the auto injector atropines," Packett said.

"However, the main focus is on Airmen learning how to correctly put on and seal their mask and suit so that they can survive a chemical attack."

POLICY continued from page 1.

not deployable for a year or more, you're going to have to go somewhere else," he said.

As an example, Mattis said, if 10,000 troops out of 100,000 are not deployable, that means 90,000 deploy more often to meet the same deployment standard.

"That's unfair," he said.

The secretary talked about a service member who is on his sixth deployment in 11 years. "When that sort of thing happens, that brings sharply into focus that some people are carrying more than the share of the load that I want them to carry," he said.

"They need time at home," Mattis emphasized. "They need time with their families. We may enlist Soldiers, (but) we re-enlist families. That's the way it is. If you can't keep the family together, then you're either going to lose the family or

you're going to lose the Soldiers, and that's a net loss for our society and for our military. (We) put a lot of training into people nowadays. So that policy is now out."

The secretary said as he reviewed the services' policies, they were already strong enough, "so some of this may simply be more adherence to the current policy that we have; some of it may require an effort within the DoD, the Office of Secretary of Defense policy, that we put out for the department now," he added.

"But the bottom line is, we expect everyone to carry their share of the load," the secretary said, adding, "and sometimes things happen. People bust their legs in training or they're in a car accident. We understand that."

But DoD comprises a deployable military, which is a lethal military

that aligns with its allies and partners, he said. "If you can't go overseas (and) carry a combat load, then obviously someone else has got to go. I want this spread fairly and equitably across the force."

The only exemption is for those who have been injured in combat, he noted.

"If they were wounded in combat, and they want to stay in and they've lost their leg or something like this, and they can't be a paratrooper anymore, then we'll find a place to use them. That's a special category. They've earned that special status," Mattis said.

"Otherwise, you're either deployable, or you need to find something else to do. I'm not going to have some people deploying constantly, and then other people who seem to not pay that price to be in the U.S. military," he said.

FIREFIGHTING continued from page 1.

request had been received and accepted by Nebraska.

The request called for two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, which are able to assist ground firefighters by dropping water onto fires with their "Bambi" buckets, and eight Nebraska Army Guard crewmembers.

One of those contacted for the first mission was 1st Lt. Stephen Graham, a helicopter pilot with Company A, 1-376th Aviation Battalion (Security and Support). One of dozens of Nebraska Army Guard aviators who supported last fall's hurricane response mission in Houston, Texas, Graham said his team was ready for this latest request.

"This is what we do as Army National Guard aviators," said Graham, who served as the deploying team's officer-in-charge. "What made this mission especially great was the fact that we were helping our neighbors in the state to the south. We were ready to go."

Graham said the team assembled at the Nebraska Army Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Lincoln on the morning of March 17. After loading equipment and conducting pre-flight inspections, the helicopters were on the way to Kansas by roughly 11:20 a.m.

"We were told to fly to Salina and be prepared to integrate into their operations," Graham said.

Arriving there, the Nebraska crews received fuel, food and a general overview of the emergency. They were then told to "push out" to Liberal, Kansas, located on the state's southwestern border. Graham said the fire was located north of the city.

"It wasn't as big of a fire as we thought it might be because the Kansas fire crews were really doing a

"I was really proud of our team. We were out the door within two and three hours of arriving at the flight facility and we were fighting fires within a few hours after that."

— 1st Lt. Stephen Graham
1-376th Aviation Battalion (Security and Support)

good job of fighting it," Graham said. "We came in and dumped water where they needed it."

Graham said the crews made a total of 15 bucket drops during the course of the afternoon and evening.

The next day the aerial firefighting mission was suspended as a new weather system entered the state, allowing the crews to return to Nebraska.

Graham said the crews definitely felt a sense of satisfaction in responding to the mission.

"I think it was great," he said. "I was really proud of our team. We were out the door within two or three hours of arriving at the flight facility and we were fighting fires within a few hours after that." "The Soldiers really worked their butts off to make that happen, which is just a sign of what a great team that I've got."

The Nebraska Army National Guard assisted again, March 22-24, when it deployed two UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and crews to Salina, Kansas. While deployed, the helicopters supported firefighting efforts near Dodge City, Kansas.

SHUTDOWN continued from page 1.

government, for members of the Nebraska National Guard, the impacts were substantial.

More than 50 percent of the Nebraska National Guard's units were forced to cancel their Jan. 20-21 drills, which affected roughly 2,050 Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen assigned to units across the state.

"This is a frustrating situation across the board," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general. "We take a lot of pride in being always ready and always there...a government shutdown really hurts in our ability to do this."

"Not only were we unable to complete required training – which will now have to be rescheduled for later in the year – it also impacted our drilling Soldiers and Airmen, their families and their employers," Bohac added at the time.

"The training that we missed this weekend will now have to be scheduled for a later date, which means that these Soldiers and Airmen, their families and employers, will now have to deal with additional unexpected changes to their schedule (that) will most likely mean additional time away from their families and additional time away from their civilian work or college course."

For example, the Nebraska Army National Guard's state logistical staff had planned to hold its annual logistics training at Greenleaf Training Site beginning on Jan. 20, with weekend training designed to help refresh the state's part-time logisticians on a variety of topics including field sanitation and military movement.

The training was to continue on into the next week with five days of training for the state's full-time logistician force.

According to Lt. Col. Andrew Collins, deputy Nebraska Army National Guard state logistics

officer, roughly 150 Nebraska Soldiers were scheduled to attend the training, which had to be cancelled due to the lapse in federal funding.

"It's hard to put the impact into numerical terms," Collins said. "However, whenever you lose the opportunity to train, it has an impact. In some cases, this was the one opportunity for our part-time logisticians to get some exposure to some of the logistical systems and training that they normally don't get during normal drill weekends or during annual training."

"So, it does have an impact," he added.

The shutdown continued until Jan. 23 when the government reopened. That was still long enough to affect part of the Nebraska National Guard's full-time federal technician workforce.

According to Nebraska National Guard Human Relations Office staff members, around 550 full-time federal technicians – the vast majority being uniformed dual-status federal technicians – received furlough notices.

Due to a snowstorm and different work schedules, the total number of technicians who were sent home on Jan. 20 was significantly less than the 550 who received notices.

The impact was still significant for the HRO staff, which had to manage both the furlough notices and then the notices to return to work when the government reopened on Jan. 23.

A second federal government shutdown occurred less than two weeks later after the initial Congressional agreement to fund the government for a limited time ran out at midnight on Feb. 9.

That shutdown was short-lived, however, as President Donald Trump signed the spending bill enacted by Congress a few hours later.

One, Two, Three: Sgt. 1st Class Scottie Davis counts the number of sit-up repetitions a Soldier competing in the Nebraska National Guard's 2018 Best Warrior Competition completes correctly.



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Words Matter: Soldiers competing in the state's 2018 Best Warrior Competition participate in a timed, hand-written essay event.



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

End In Sight: Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell races to the finish of the unknown distance ruck march, April 13, while still wearing a smile on his face.



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Casualty Evaluation: Spc. Antonio Holbrook, Company D, 39th Brigade Support Battalion, assesses the injuries of a mannequin, April 13, during the state's 2018 Best Warrior Competition at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 1.

challenging conditions imaginable.

Roemig said competition planners kept an eye on the changing weather during the days leading up to the competition, which gave them the ability to make changes where possible.

"We were more ahead of schedule than last year, providing us a little more flexibility with the change due to the weather," he said.

Despite the weather conditions, which ranged from sunny skies and temperatures in the 70s, to bitter cold winds, rain, sleet and even blizzard-like snow, this year's competition more than lived up to its goal of providing the competing enlisted Soldiers and noncommissioned officers with opportunities to showcase their warrior skills during a series of physically and mentally challenging events.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, Nebraska Army National Guard state command sergeant major, the annual event "recognizes Soldiers who demonstrate commitment to the Army values, embody the Warrior Ethos and represent the force of the future."

"The rigorous three-day event tested competitors' skills in physical fitness and endurance; written exams and essays; Army warrior tasks and battle drills that simulate situations that they have or will encounter on the battlefield," Baker added after the competition.

For those who participate, the Best Warrior Competition typically leaves a lasting impression.

"The best part about the Best Warrior Competition is that I get to see everyone give it their all," said Sgt. Jesse Schmitt, 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical), who served as a sponsor in this year's enlisted

competition.

Competing in this year's competition were:

NCO Category

- ◆ Staff Sgt. Travis Ayers, Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion;
- ◆ Staff Sgt. Wade Bradley, 754th Chemical Company;
- ◆ Staff Sgt. Stephen Dorsey, 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade;
- ◆ Sgt. Jacob Hartwig, 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical);
- ◆ Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell, 1st Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute);
- ◆ Sgt. Benjamin Reehl, Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry;
- ◆ Sgt. Austin Stenger, Company E, Long Range Surveillance;
- ◆ Sgt. 1st Class Alisha Welch, Joint Force Headquarters;
- ◆ Sgt. Levi White, 734th Brigade Support Battalion.

Enlisted Category

- ◆ Spc. Francisco Guzman-Jimenez, 126th Chemical Battalion;
- ◆ Spc. Antonio Holbrook, Company D, 39th Brigade Support Battalion;
- ◆ Spc. Bryan Kummer, 623rd Engineer Company (Vertical);
- ◆ Spc. Danielle Martin, 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade;
- ◆ Spc. Taylor McKeeman, Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry;
- ◆ Pfc. Devon Thompson, Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry;
- ◆ Pfc. Ryan Van Pelt, 734th Brigade Support Battalion.

Also competing in the noncommissioned officer competition was OR2 (Cpl.) Lukas Mrocek of the Czech Republic Armed Forces, who traveled to Nebraska with two other Czech NCOs as part of the Guard's State Partnership Program.



Photo by Spc. Daniel Balkovic

Shelling Out Fire: Pfc. Ryan Van Pelt, 734th Brigade Support Battalion, fires an M500 Shotgun at clay plates on the Greenleaf Training Site ranges April 13.

The Soldiers who competed in the competition were either chosen or volunteered.

Day 1

Upon arriving at the Greenleaf Training Site, the participating Soldiers quickly learned they were in for an unforgettable competition. Among the tasks that had to be completed — each graded under the ever-watchful eyes of Nebraska Army National Guard evaluators — were height and weight check-ups; the Army Physical Fitness

Test consisting of timed push-ups and sit-ups and a two-mile run; weapons zeroing; a nerve-rattling appearance before a board consisting of the state's senior NCOs; and an online exam.

Master Sgt. Jesse Biltoft from the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, a sponsor to one of the competitors, said the preparations that each Soldier made in the days, weeks and months leading up to the competition were key.

"Studying and memorization is important to have," said Biltoft.

"The Best Warrior Competition is something you just cannot jump into and expect to win."

Day 2

The second day of the Best Warrior Competition started off early Friday morning with an unknown distance ruck march through the inky darkness of the Greenleaf Training Site. Unlike the previous day, by the time the march ended, the temperatures had begun to dip while the wind began to pick

See BEST WARRIOR on 9.

Moving on to Arkansas

2018's Best Warriors overcome weather to earn regional berths

By Spc. Daniel Balkovic
Staff Photojournalist

For three grueling days, 15 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers and one member of the Czech Armed Forces competed in the annual Best Warrior Competition at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Nebraska.

The competitors had to endure not only the physical and emotional challenges of the competition, but also the unpredictable and ever-changing weather of an untypical Nebraska spring. Despite starting on a warm spring day, the majority of the weekend's competition was plagued by high winds, rain and ice.

In spite of these additional factors, one Soldier and one noncommissioned officer distinguished themselves as a cut above the rest.

By the time the dust – or in this case, snow and icy rain – had cleared, Spc. Devon Thompson, Troop, 1-134th Cavalry, and Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), had established themselves atop the medal stand.

According to Thompson, a 2014 Lincoln North Star graduate and Lincoln native, the hardest part of the competition was simply dealing with the difference in experience.

"I was just kind of intimidated; I was a private and I knew that the people I would be going up against would have more knowledge than me," he said.

Fortunately Thompson had an ace up his sleeve. Every Soldier who competes in the Best Warrior competition is aided in their quest



Photos by Spc. Daniel Balkovic

Top Soldiers: The winners of the enlisted Soldier category for Nebraska's 2018 Best Warrior competition were third place to Spc. Taylor McKeeman (left), second place to Spc. Bryan Kummer (right), and first place to Pfc. Devon Thompson (center).

by the help of their sponsor. In the case of Thompson, he had help from one of the best.

Sgt. Calvin Koziol, 23, of Albion, Nebraska, was Thompson's sponsor this year, and he is no stranger to the competition. Koziol is the National Guard's 2016 National Best Warrior title holder. He said he enjoyed helping Thompson gain some insight on what was required to take home the gold from Hastings.

"I like it because I can push that knowledge that I learned from competing onto my competitor," said Koziol. "Private Thompson is an excellent Soldier; I saw it right away (that) maybe he could succeed, maybe he could go farther than I did."

Like Thompson, Knoell, a native of West Point, Nebraska, earned the state noncommissioned officer title in his very first year of competing in the Best Warrior competition.

He said he knew that the contest would be hard fought.

"It really was anyone's ballgame, so I just took it event by event and hoped that I would end up on top," Knoell said.

For anyone who hopes to place first, a lot of preparation and discipline is needed. Both Thompson and Knoell began training both individually and with their respective sponsors months ago. For Thompson, having Koziol as his sponsor made the competition take on a different perspective.

"Other than being told I had to do it by Sergeant Koziol, I just knew it was something I would benefit from. And having Koziol as a sponsor, I knew I had big boots to fill," Thompson said.

"We did a lot of ruck marches and running. We would go to Camp Ashland and work with the weapon systems," he added.



Top Noncommissioned Officers: The winners of the noncommissioned officer category for Nebraska's 2018 Best Warrior competition were third place to Staff Sgt. Wade Bradley (left), second place to Sgt. Levi White (right), and first place to Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell (center).

Having just had the flu recently, it turned out that the hardest part for Thompson was the PT test. "I had recently been sick and the PT test just killed me," Thompson said.

Outside of the physical tests like PT, ruck marches, land navigation, etc., a major component of the state Best Warrior Competition revolves around the academic side of being a Soldier. Knowing drill and ceremony commands, board reviews, and even taking written exams are also just as important, said both winners.

This was definitely the case for Knoell and his sponsor, Staff Sgt. Chris Moulton.

"We started training on and off about three months ago, but really hit it hard in the last month-and-a-half," Knoell said.

"A big thing that we really focused on was the history of the NCO and worked quite a bit on

the board," Knoell added. "I knew it would be one of my weak points."

While the competition is an extremely difficult and arduous task for all of the competitors and their sponsors, it is also fun and exciting, as both of this year's winners pointed out. "It was all fun, honestly everything that we did, the whole competition was just a lot of fun," Knoell said.

"It was just a great experience, a great learning experience, win or lose, everybody came out of this with something," Thompson said, who adding his favorite part was actually night land navigation.

"I was just feeling real good about it."

Moving forward, both Knoell and Thompson headed to Camp Joseph Robinson, Arkansas, to compete in the regional round of the Best Warrior competition, May 14-18.

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 8.

up, foreshadowing the changing weather ahead.

Despite the rapidly deteriorating weather, the Soldiers continued through the morning hours, this time on the Greenleaf marksmanship ranges where they were tested on the M9 Pistol, M320 Grenade Launcher, M500 Shotgun, Combat Life Saver skills, radio assembly and the ability to call in a medevac request.

Following that, the competitors shifted to basic land navigation during the afternoon where each competitor was partnered with a different sponsor and then tested on a variety of navigation and map-reading skills. Complicating the tests was the fact that the weather had now shifted into a near-sideways freezing rain that limited visibility, numbed fingers and hands, and made holding maps nearly impossible.

Once land navigation was complete, the Soldiers were given a break from the elements and moved inside to complete an essay-writing event. The break was short-lived, however, as the Soldiers soon found themselves back out into the darkened and frigid Greenleaf environment to conduct night land navigation.

Sgt. Danielle Martin, 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, was one of two female Soldiers competing at this year's event. She said the competition was definitely testing her skills while also giving her a sense of renewed confidence.

"The competition gives me the feeling of accomplishment," Martin said. "I like the idea (of competing) in the Best Warrior because not everyone wants to."

Day 3

Following the late night competition, the Soldiers awoke for the third day of the competition with a pretty significant surprise and challenge: power to the entire



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

In The Hot Seat: Sgt. 1st Class Alisha Welch, Joint Force Headquarters, sits before a panel of sergeants major for the board event of the state's 2018 Best Warrior Competition.

training site had been cut due to high winds, ice and snow.

Still, the mission continued.

Fortunately, the last two events took place indoors. This time, the Soldiers were tested on their knowledge of drill and ceremony movements and commands, and M16-5.56 MM Rifle assembly and disassembly, with a twist. In this case, the weapons were disassembled on one side of a room, which then had to be reassembled by the Soldiers on the other side of the room, one piece at a time. The entire process was timed to determine the event's winner.

The rest of the day consisted of clean up, while the judges tallied up the points to determine the winners.

"I love the feeling of competition, and when I was given the opportunity to compete in the Best Warrior, I did," said Spc. Francisco Guzman-Jimenez from the 126th Chemical Battalion. He said he loved getting to meet different Soldiers from across Nebraska.

That was music to Roemig's ears.

"The big piece is (developing) the camaraderie for Soldiers from different units, to come together and meet other people outside their unit or battalion; to start meeting people and making those connections," Roemig said. "The Nebraska National Guard is small enough that as people stay in it, they will change units, they will see those people in other roles... (it) becomes very helpful later on."

At the same time, the competition has significant training value.

"We saw it as a training opportunity," Roemig added. "We don't provide a lot of training at the time that the Soldiers are going through that particular event, but there is certainly an opportunity for the Soldiers and the sponsors to discuss how things went and how that individual Soldier did on a particular event."

That, in turn, should help the Soldiers continue to develop and deepen their individual skills,

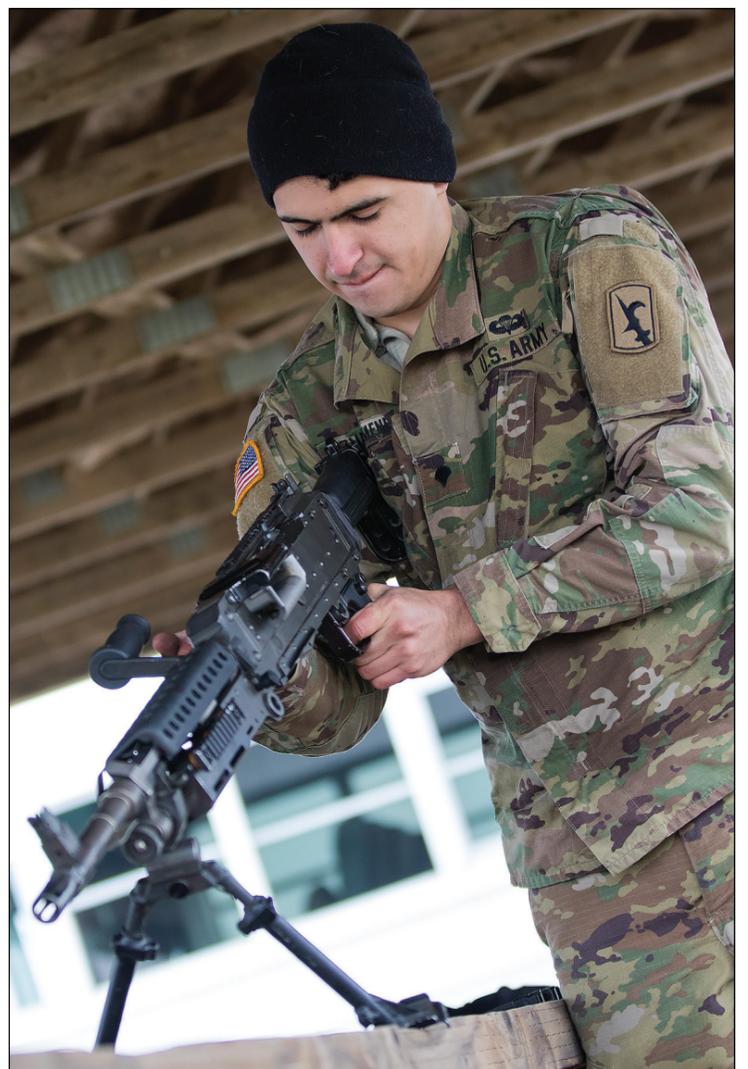


Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Fighting For Function: Spc. Francisco Guzman-Jimenez, 126th Chemical Battalion, handles an assembled M240B machine gun and performs a functions check, April 13, during the state's 2018 Best Warrior Competition.

while also making them a source of expertise within their units.

This year's winners were announced at an award banquet held at the Greenleaf dining facility.

Winning the enlisted category was Pfc. Devon Thompson, while Spc. Bryan Kummer placed second and Spc. Taylor McKeeman took

third place. In the noncommissioned officer category, Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell took first while Sgt. Levi White placed second and Staff Sgt. Wade Bradley, third.

Thompson and Knoell moved move on to May's Regional Best Warrior Competition at Camp Robinson, Arkansas.

Training Czech: Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), explains the capabilities and functions of an M2 .50 caliber machine gun to Czech Armed Forces OR2 (Cpl.) Lukas Mrocek, in preparation for Nebraska's Best Warrior Competition. Mrocek competed alongside 15 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers, placing second overall in the competition—just behind Knoell.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Czech Airman tries his hand at Nebraska's Best Warrior

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Editor

For the second consecutive year, members of the Czech Armed Forces traveled from the Czech Republic to Nebraska to participate in the Nebraska Army National Guard's State Best Warrior Competition.

Competing this year was OR2 (Cpl.) Lukas Mrocek from Strakonice, Czech Republic, accompanied by two other Czech Airmen, OR5 (Sgt. 1st Class) Radek Kulhanek and OR7 (Warrant Officer) Martin Jasek, who acted as Mrocek's sponsors.

"It's definitely a great experience being here," Mrocek said. "People here are just awesome. They are very friendly to us and the guys who teach us really well did a great job with it."

The visit to Nebraska was Mrocek's first time to the United States. While the physical landscape was different from the mountains and hills of the Czech Republic, Nebraska's prairies made for easier running.

"It's a little bit different country," he said. "It's easier to run here when it's flat, but it's a little bit (more) windy than in Czech Republic."

It took nearly 24 hours for the three Czech members to arrive in Nebraska, where they stayed at the Camp Ashland Training Site. There, they worked with instructors from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) training for the upcoming Best Warrior Competition.

For Mrocek, this was the first time he handled American weapons systems, participated in a board or



Photo by Spc. Lily Baines

Photo-Worthy Finish: OR7 (Warrant Officer) Martin Jasek and OR5 (Sgt. 1st Class) Radek Kulhanek, carry the Czech Republic flag as they run to the finish line of the unknown distance ruck march, April 13, at the Greenleaf Training Site.

conducted drill and ceremony.

"They're very smart individuals," said Staff Sgt. Dustin Knoell, a small group leader with the 209th RTI who helped train the Czech members for three days before the start of the April 12-14 competition. "They picked up on our weapon systems very quick when we trained with those."

Knoell was selected to not only compete in the state's Best Warrior competition, he was also tasked with preparing and supporting the Czech Armed Forces members throughout the competition. He worked closely with his competition sponsor, Staff Sgt. Christopher Moulton, to ensure

the Czechs had exposure to every U.S. Army element they could expect in the upcoming competition.

"These guys come here willing to work," said Moulton, another small group leader from 209th RTI. "We pushed them pretty hard and they just kept up. They're super receptive."

Moulton competed in the state's Best Warrior competition last year while simultaneously serving as support for the first Czech partners invited to participate in the event. Moulton said he enjoys working with the Czechs because of their great personalities.

"It was the same way last year,



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Nine Line Notes: Czech Armed Forces OR2 (Cpl.) Lukas Mrocek takes notes before using a radio to call in a nine line medical evacuation request, April 13, during Nebraska's 2018 Best Warrior Competition.

that they didn't really come in bull-headed with ego or pride," he said. "They've been fun to joke around with. And especially with a competition like that, being able to laugh a bunch of stuff off, that's what really helps people go the extra mile when things aren't all that fun sometimes."

Mrocek competed in the grueling three-day event with Jasek and Kulhanek supporting him the entire way. And while they enjoyed the competition, it wasn't always fun.

"Every part of this was quite hard," Mrocek said. "There wasn't a single task that was easy. You are under pressure and stress. The board was something new for me. It wasn't so easy. But I enjoyed the whole competition."

Mrocek said he enjoyed the ruck march, but his favorite part was shooting.

"Practice with the weapons the U.S. Army uses, especially the M320 (grenade launcher)," he said. "That was awesome."

As a corporal, Mrocek was equal to Nebraska's Enlisted Soldier competitors, but he was scored on his own. Still, his score placed second out of all 16 competitors, just behind Knoell who accumulated the most points during the competition and won the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year title.

"I took a lot of stuff away from our Czech partners and learned from them as well," Knoell said. "We kind of bounced ideas off each other and helped each other along the way, and it helped with my experience as far as the Best Warrior is concerned."

Knoell said he was proud of Mrocek's accomplishments.

"Lukas really had a smile on my face the whole time," Knoell said. "He actually came really close to beating me."

Jasek said Mrocek's achievements and the trio's great overall experience was in part due to Knoell and Moulton's training, support and friendship.

"In my opinion, those two guys, very good support from them," Jasek said. "I think without them we would've died somewhere in the middle of nowhere. We are very thankful for them."

Before returning to the Czech

Republic, Knoell and Moulton took their Czech partners to the Nebraska National Guard Museum in Seward, Nebraska. While there, Mrocek decided to donate his dress uniform to the museum in recognition of the 25th anniversary of Nebraska's State Partnership Program with the Czech Republic. The uniform will be prominently displayed in a future exhibit on the partnership with the country.

"It was a great opportunity for us and we enjoyed everything," Kulhanek said of their entire visit to Nebraska.

He said he enjoyed the competition, training, food and shopping, but the most cherished memory he will bring back from the United States was something he has never experienced in the Czech Republic.

"We went to HuHot (Mongolian Grill) and after lunch we met some strange woman and she said, 'Thank you for your service,'" Kulhanek said. "In my life I've never heard something like this from strangers. I almost started to cry a little bit. It was nice."

Once the Airmen return to the Czech Republic, they plan to share their experiences with others, including next year's state partnership competitors.

"We have to do something like lessons learned, to do something for the others who will come next year," Jasek said.

He said the Airmen will sit down with their leaders and colleagues to share the notes they took during the competition. That way, when Nebraska and Texas send U.S. Soldiers and Airmen to the Czech Republic this summer, then they can all compare experiences.

Kulhanek said he hopes Knoell and Moulton can visit the Czech Republic sometime. Jasek said he believes the State Partnership Program is a great thing that everyone definitely enjoys.

As for Mrocek, he would like to visit the United States again one day.

"America has a lot of great people," he said. "Everyone here is very friendly."

"One part of me is glad (the competition) is over, but it would be nice if we could continue," he added.

"But with easier tasks."



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Ready To Launch: For the first time in his life, Czech Armed Forces OR2 (Cpl.) Lukas Mrocek handles an M320 Grenade Launcher. Mrocek said firing American weapons systems – especially the grenade launcher – was his favorite part of his visit to the United States.

■When temperatures plummet, Nebraska National Guard base depends upon select few who can't come in from the cold...

Cold Weather Warriors

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Editor

As the calendar turned from 2017 to 2018, most full-time Soldiers, Airmen and Nebraska Military Department civilian employees were off work enjoying the holidays in the warmth and comfort of their homes. But with temperatures in the state falling below even those in Antarctica, warmth wasn't the case for everyone.

"It hurts," said Staff Sgt. Raymond Sturgeon, a security specialist with the 155th Security Forces Squadron. "It hurts when you breathe. It shouldn't hurt when you breathe."

Several full-time Soldiers, Airmen and civilian employees alike were left working around the clock to keep the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln running over the holidays as cold temperatures plummeted to near record lows.

Sturgeon, considered one of just a few "essential personnel," said the cold began to take a toll after he worked in the brutal temperatures for three days straight conducting vehicle inspections, checking IDs and securing buildings without much help over the New Year holiday.

"My sinuses were so inflamed from breathing the cold air that I was getting a migraine," he said. "It was just painfully cold."

Sgt. Dylan Hergenrader, a full-time UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter mechanic, agreed. He said the cold temperatures were miserable, especially for his first winter home following a year-long deployment last summer to Afghanistan.

"I prefer the cold to the heat, but at least when it's hot out I can feel my fingers when I'm turning a wrench," Hergenrader said.

Fortunately, most of Hergenrader's job can be completed inside the heated hangar of the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation

Support Facility No. 1 on the air base in Lincoln. "We can't leave the aircraft outside very long in the cold like this because the (equipment) will contract and start leaking," Hergenrader said. "We usually do maintenance outside when it's warmer, so now every time we even need to do something little we have to bring the birds in from the cold to work on them."

Spc. Tate Hanzlicek, a full-time petroleum supply specialist at AASF No. 1, isn't as lucky.

"Refueling has to be done outside, and it takes at least 15 minutes to do that," Hanzlicek said.

With temperatures near negative 20 degrees before the wind chills, Hanzlicek said he was spending even more time exposed readying fuel trucks and ensuring they start properly.

"The other day I had a problem with them starting because it was so cold, which always just makes the thing worse," he said.

The AASF No. 1 crew is responsible for all rotary assets at the air base in Lincoln, including snow and ice removal from the flight line attached to the Army hangar. When the cold temperatures of winter hit, the crews take immediate action to tailor both preventative and reactive maintenance plans to the weather's effects on equipment. And even as the weather warms, they will continue to monitor for possible issues.

"Any extreme one way or another is not good for them," Hergenrader said.

"I compare it to being just like your body," Hanzlicek said. "If you're outside for long periods of time, you're more prone to getting sick."

While the Soldiers manage the Army hangar, the majority of the air base is maintained by the 155th Civil Engineer Squadron. The 155th CES is responsible for providing winter salt and shovels to individual buildings, and snow removal from sidewalks, main roads



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

ID Check: Bryan Philippi, a military security specialist with the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, braves temperatures with negative wind chills, Jan. 16, while checking visitor identification and conducting vehicle inspections.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen

Snow Removal: 155th Civil Engineer Squadron and other maintenance crews clean snow from the Nebraska Air National Guard flight line early on Feb. 7 at the air base in Lincoln.

and the 155th Air Refueling Wing's entire flight line, which supports multiple KC-135R Stratotanker refueling planes.

"It's a collective effort," said Janelle Priest, the base facilities maintenance manager. "I'm very fortunate for the people we have in the CES. They go out of their way to help out every craft. Even if they aren't in roads and grounds, they will assist us with snow removal. Everybody helps everybody out."

Priest said the first snow of the season, which came right before the Christmas holiday, was a great

example of how the team comes together when there is a need.

"There's just a lot of sense of pride and ownership in what we do for the entire base," Priest said about the team of Airmen and civilian employees who came in right before the holiday to clear the snow. "You might sacrifice a little now, but that's okay when you take pride in your job."

Keeping warm is the main concern Priest has for her staff, and everyone else working outdoors on the base in the extreme cold. She said she briefs her staff regularly on

wearing proper cold-weather attire and personal protective equipment at all times, as well as limiting exposure by ensuring snow crews take needed breaks and rotate shifts.

"This type of cold isn't very enjoyable," Priest said. "So, unless you absolutely have to be outside, don't."

Sturgeon said the security personnel manning the front gate try to keep a good exposure cycle, but that isn't always possible.

"The main thing that can help us is for people visiting the base to make sure they are ready with their ID when they pull up to the gate," Sturgeon said. "Not being ready just means more time we're all exposed to the elements, so having the appropriate paperwork ready to go helps lessen everybody's exposure."

Sturgeon also encourages everyone coming onto base to be dressed in weather-appropriate attire at all times, as the security forces mission never stops.

"We're here 24/7, 365 days a year, and we still have all our anti-terrorism efforts to meet," Sturgeon said. "Dress for the weather, not your destination, so you don't find yourself randomly selected for a vehicle inspection while you're wearing shorts and flip flops in subzero temperatures."

"Still," Sturgeon added, "fingers crossed this is the coldest weather we'll see this winter."

Airmen brave elements during marksmanship training in February

By Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus
Staff Photojournalist

Nineteen members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Maintenance Group took part in annual weapons qualification training, Feb. 3, at the Nebraska Army National Guard's Greenleaf Training Center, near Hastings, Nebraska.

Airmen with the 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln, Nebraska, must qualify on the M4 carbine every year in order to stay proficient and be prepared for any situation they might encounter at home or abroad.

"Being part of the maintenance squadron, we travel with aircraft, since wherever the aircraft needs to go, is where the people go," said Master Sgt. Lyle Stara, first sergeant for the 155th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. "All the mechanics, all the hydraulics, all the (electrical and environmental) people have to be able to support the mission wherever the airplane and wherever the aircrew is and that can take us into any area, any hostile area. It could take us any place in the world where the airplane needs to go."

The training began with a class on the basics of the rifle. In that class they learned about safety features of the M4, what ammunition is compatible with it, how to take the rifle apart and put it back together, and how to clean it.

They also learned about marksmanship fundamentals as well as how to clear the weapon before and after using it.

Following classroom training, the Airmen moved to the range to apply what they had learned.



Photo by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

Shooting For Perfection: Staff Sgt. Dillon Greenlee, a Combat Arms Training Maintenance firearms instructor with the 155th Security Forces Squadron, instructs Airmen on how to adjust the iron sights on the M4 Carbine rifle during their annual weapons qualification training, Feb. 3, at the Nebraska National Guard's Greenleaf Training Center near Hastings, Neb.

Eight members of the 155th Security Forces Squadron monitored the training, giving instruction on what they needed to adjust or fix in order to qualify with their weapon.

The value of the training was not lost on those being trained.

"I think it puts us at a position where there's one less thing for us to worry about because we can be confident that if the case were to come to a point where we needed

to defend (the aircraft), we have the ability to do so and just protect that mission as a whole," said Senior Airman Timothy Aulner, an aircraft electrical and environmental systems technician with the 155th Maintenance Group. "That can apply to anywhere in the U.S. or overseas as well."

Training like this annually allows these Airmen to build muscle memory that they can fall back on if necessary.

"You can only do so much training," said Potter. "But when a situation arises, you're going to go back to your instincts and having this training basically built into you, constantly doing it year after year, it makes you a lot more confident that you're going to be able to do your job effectively."

Once trained, these Airmen can help security forces maintain safety and security.

"The main importance of why we have to train everyone else is if we don't have enough manning, we call on other squadrons to come on as augmentees and if they're posted with a security forces member they will be armed up in that case," said Staff Sgt. Brent Potter, a Combat Arms Training Maintenance (CATM) firearms instructor with the 155th SFS.

"If the situation arises, they have to be qualified to use the M4. Say someone tries to take over an aircraft and the security forces member or someone of security can't get there fast enough, there's a trained and qualified individual that is with that asset to protect it and make sure it doesn't get taken or damaged," he added.

Airmen must remain ready to deploy by consistently training in every area required in not only their own career field, but in the skills every Airmen should have as a warrior Airmen.

"I think it's pretty important that we are all trained. We're ready, we're willing to do whatever it takes to support the mission," said Stara.

"To support whatever we need to, to make sure that we're ready and willing and able not knowing what could possibly be thrown in our direction."

Exhibits only part of Guard museum's efforts

By Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry
Staff Photojournalist

The outside still looks similar to the National Guard armory it once was – the same brick as many others in the state.

The military vehicles on display outside give the feel that perhaps a drill weekend is ongoing. Once inside, a montage of history appears – old uniforms and medals, books and papers – even a small corner set up so perfectly to represent a field chapel that it seems the chaplain just stepped away.

It is now a museum and this arrangement didn't just happen. The hard work, dedication, and donations to create an exhibit comes together behind the scenes so that patrons don't know it happened until they go to the dedication ceremony.

The historian and curator of the Nebraska National Guard Museum at Seward, Nebraska, know and understand this as they are the ones who do most of that work.

"The purpose of the museum is to preserve the history of the Nebraska National Guard first and foremost," said Capt. Cody Cade, the curator of the museum and assistant state historian, "and then to educate the public about what the Nebraska National Guard has done and to honor the memories of the service men and women who have come before us and, in some cases, have made the ultimate sacrifice."

"We are telling a largely untold story," said retired Col. Gerald "Jerry" Meyer, the state historian for Nebraska.

The exhibits these two create tell those stories, but Cade and Meyer also maintain the artifacts in the archives at the museum, and bring people to the museum through events and ceremonies throughout the year.

"(The museum) has typical stuff in the case displays," said Cade.

"Typical artifacts" such as old medals, photographs, and uniforms from WWI and II, equipment of Soldiers that is now obsolete, and many other historical items.

They also have more interactive displays such as a WWI simulated trench that Cade helped design and build. They are currently working on bringing in touch-screen TVs, he said.

They attempt to represent most of the Nebraska Guard, so they have displays for Army and Air Guard, as well as some for active duty status since most Guardsmen see active duty at some point in their careers. They tell the history of all of the wars that the Nebraska men and women served in, as well.

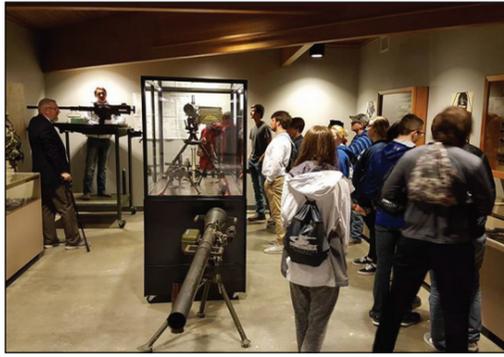


Photo courtesy of Jerry Meyer

Giving A Tour: Retired Col. Gerald "Jerry" Meyer gives a tour of the Nebraska National Guard Museum to a group of students. Student outreach and educational events are one of several major focal points of the museum's efforts.

for, the medical and physical requirements, and what the National Guard can give people.

It will all start with a simulation of a drill sergeant shouting at patrons as they walk into the room, said Meyer.

In their climate control storage room downstairs, they house the old State Arsenal Museum artifacts as well as other artifacts that have been donated.

Cade said they have armored vehicles, assorted small arms from different war eras, uniforms from WWI to modern, field gear and equipment, patches, pins, insignias, flags, guide-ons, and books.

"A little of everything," Cade said of the storage room.

These artifacts are authenticated, catalogued and stored properly to be used in exhibits in the future. Exhibits such as the "I am the Guard," mentioned earlier, "Cornrows to Hedgerows," an exhibit about Nebraskans during World War II, and "Women in the Guard."

In addition to new exhibits the museum is always planning something that helps educate visitors about the past, so they also do fundraisers and other events. Events such as the "Run to St. Lo Memorial," an annual fundraiser in June, and "Airborne Day," an event to honor the heritage of the Seward armory whose previous unit was parachute packers.

The museum isn't fully operational and is only open Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., but they are pushing hard to educate the public about the Nebraska National Guard and to preserve that history.

It is largely behind the scenes that work is being done and it is that hard work that goes into building the exhibits, both inside and out, and in promoting the museum as a place to visit.

"(During a storm,) what is the most calming thing you can hear?" Meyer said, "They are going to call the Guard up. ... They are going to bring you something to relieve your suffering ... We use that term, always ready, always there. You know we're always ready, always here. But sometimes we're overlooked."

But that is what the museum is for. They are there to help keep the National Guard story alive through the exhibits, the artifacts, and the events they have throughout the year. The museum helps the National Guard to be always ready and always there.

Retiree Council hosts Spring Social at National Guard Museum, May 5

Welcome to spring, finally! This has been one very long winter and I feel for the snowbirds who returned from warmer climates expecting nice weather. Nebraska definitely has had some surprises for you.

On May 5, 44 members of the NMRC attended the spring social at the Nebraska National Guard Museum in Seward. What an awesome event and venue.

If you haven't had a chance to visit or been there for some time, put it on your bucket list. Jerry Meyer and his team have done a great job of showcasing Nebraska National Guard history. You might see your face in one of the exhibits.

We awarded our Founders Award this year to retired Senior Master Sgt. Peggy Brown for her outstanding support to the NMRC. Peggy was secretary for a number of years and streamlined the membership recording process and email lists.

Thanks, Peggy, for your outstanding support and efforts.

After hearing a very spirited presentation on the museum and the exhibits from Jerry Meyer, the NMRC presented the museum a check for \$2,500 to provide banners to be displayed outside the museum during events.

Your NMRC council members on the executive committee team meet quarterly to discuss ways to better serve our members. We also reach out to retirees who are not NMRC members to ensure they receive notices of retirement related issues.

With the advent of electronic media, it's easier for us to spread the word via email. But, we do have a number of retirees who do not use computers, so we still mail hard copy information on a regular basis.

■ New Retirement Services Sergeant

We welcome a new Retirements Services Noncommissioned Officer to the fold. Sgt. 1st Class Erick Singaas has been reassigned to the Regional Training Institute (RTI) as a Senior Group Leader. Many thanks, Sgt. 1st Class Singaas for your work the past year.

Our new point of contact is Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Hartman. He comes to us from the RTI and is looking forward to working with retirees.

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) 309-8192/8168/8156;
- ♦ "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.

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., Lincoln Highway Diner, 320 Rodeo Road, North Platte.
- ♦ Kearney area retirees: BattleGrind Coffee group meets

every Saturday at various locations. Contact Garth Scism for more information.

- ♦ Omaha retirees: Meeting on the **Second** Wednesday of February, April, June, August, October and December at 5:30 p.m., VFW Club, 5083 S. 136th Street.

If any other towns have retiree breakfasts, coffee gatherings, or evening meals and want to share that information, please let us know and we'll add you to the list so others can join you.

■ Got Questions?

Got questions and don't know who to contact? Call or email us and we'll get you to the right office to assist. 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.

■ From the Retirement Services Sergeant:

Greetings! I look forward to working with all Nebraska Guard

retirees and spouses.

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 any way 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 dennis.j.hartman.mil@mail.mil. Thank you for your service and a BIG thank you to the family members who gave their support.

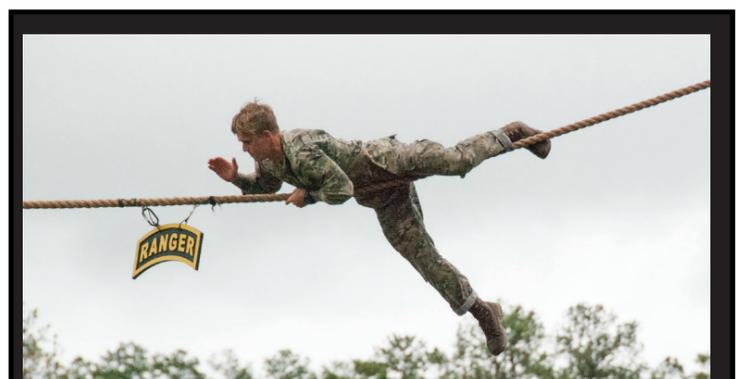


Photo by 1st Sgt. Steve Brewev

Nebraskans compete in rigorous Best Ranger Championships in April

Staff Sgt. Luke Katz, Nebraska Army National Guard, pulls himself toward his Ranger Goal during the Darby Queen obstacle course. Katz and Staff Sgt. Jose Torres-Garcia both competed in the Army's prestigious Best Ranger Competition, April 13-15.

See their story and photos in the next issue of the Prairie Soldier.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Longtime Guard Soldier, high school running coach honored

Retired Nebraska Army National Guard 1st Sgt. John Snoozy was surprised, March 30, by Brig. Gen. Kevin Lyons, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Teresa Domeier and Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker.

The command team traveled to Lincoln Northeast High School to present Snoozy with a certificate naming him an admiral in the Great Navy of the State of Nebraska in honor of his service to the Nebraska Army National Guard and as a long-time coach at Lincoln Northeast High School.

Snoozy was presented the award during a Lincoln Northeast High School student assembly.



Guard Family NEWS

You Can Use



2018 TRICARE Reserve Select changes, highlights

Here are some of the changes and highlights of Tricare Reserve Select for 2018.

Did you know?

- TRICARE Meets the minimum essential coverage requirement under the Affordable Care Act;
- You can talk to a registered nurse 24/7;
- More access to urgent care;
- Expanded hours;
- You can nominate your doctor into the network provider directory;
- Expanded mental health – www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth;
- Mail order prescriptions-www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE.

If you are activated:

- National Guard and Reserve members who receive active duty delayed effective-date orders for more than 30 days in support of a contingency operation (pre-activation/early eligibility), are automatically covered by TRICARE Prime, but without an assigned primary care manager (PCM).
- National Guard and Reserve members may enroll in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Prime Overseas with a PCM if near a military treatment facility.
- TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR) and TRICARE Prime Remote Overseas aren't available for service members during pre-activation or early eligibility period.
- Eligible family members may enroll in TRICARE Prime or TPR for active duty family members stateside or overseas.
- Once reporting to a final duty station, National Guard and Reserve members must follow command guidance on enrolling in

TRICARE is Changing, Take Command of Your Health.

1-844-866-9378
www.tricare-west.com
tricare.mil

T R I C A R E®

TriCare Rep: MSG Cecil Roman
 402-309-8167
cecilio.t.roman.mil@mail.mil

SSG Rosalba Amezcua
 402.309.8181
rosalba.amezcua.mil@mail.mil

TRICARE Prime.

When deactivated:

- Selected Reserve members may qualify for TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) and TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR) members may qualify for TRICARE Retired Reserve, if they are not eligible for or enrolled in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program. Here are some other considerations:
- With TRS or TRR, you can see any TRICARE-authorized provider (network or non-network).
- With TRS or TRR, no referrals are necessary, but some services

require prior authorization.

Transitional Coverage:

- National Guard and Reserve members are eligible for the Transitional Assistance Management Program (TAMP) if called or ordered to active service for more than 30 days in support of a contingency operation.
- TAMP begins the day after separating from active duty and provides:
- 180 days of transitional health care benefits (it's based on days, not months);
- Coverage for service members and their families as active duty family members;
- You can re-enroll in TRI-

CARE Prime any time prior to the expiration of your TAMP period.

- If you're not eligible for TAMP or once your TAMP period ends and you qualify, you may elect to **re-enroll** in TRICARE Reserve Select if you have **90 days** from last date on active duty to re-enroll in Tricare Reserve Select

Health Plan costs will be based on what group you are in:

- Starting Jan. 1, 2018, costs for TRICARE benefits will be charged by calendar year (January-December) instead of fiscal year (October through September).
- You will fall into one of two groups based on when you or your sponsor entered the military.

•Each group will have different enrollment fees and out-of-pocket costs.

- Group A: If you or your sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurred before Jan. 1, 2018, you are in Group A;
 - Group B: If you or your sponsor's initial enlistment or appointment occurs on or after Jan. 1, 2018, you are in Group B.
- Note: Effective Jan. 1, enrollees in Tricare Reserve Select, Tricare Retired Reserve, Tricare Young Adult and CHCBP have Group B cost-shares, regardless of when the sponsor first joined the military.

How do I know if I am in the right plan?

- Updating your contact information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System for you and your family:
- Go to www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect;
- Call 1-800-538-9552 (TTY/TDD: 1-866-363-2883);
- Fax updates to 1-831-655-8317;
- Signing up for eCorrespondence in milConnect.
- Log in to www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect and update your profile.
- Visiting the TRICARE website-www.tricare.mil
- Go to www.tricare.mil/changes;
- Sign up for email alerts about the changes to get an email anytime this page is updated.

For more information:

Contact the Nebraska National Guard representative: Master Sgt. Cecilio Roman (402) 309-8167 or cecilio.t.roman.mil@mail.mil

Military Family Moments



Photo by Sgt. Charlie Wilkins

Month of the Military Child

April was the Month of the Military Child and the Nebraska National Guard began the celebration with a visit to the State Capitol, April 2, for a Proclamation signing ceremony with Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts. About a dozen Nebraska Guard children attended this signing.

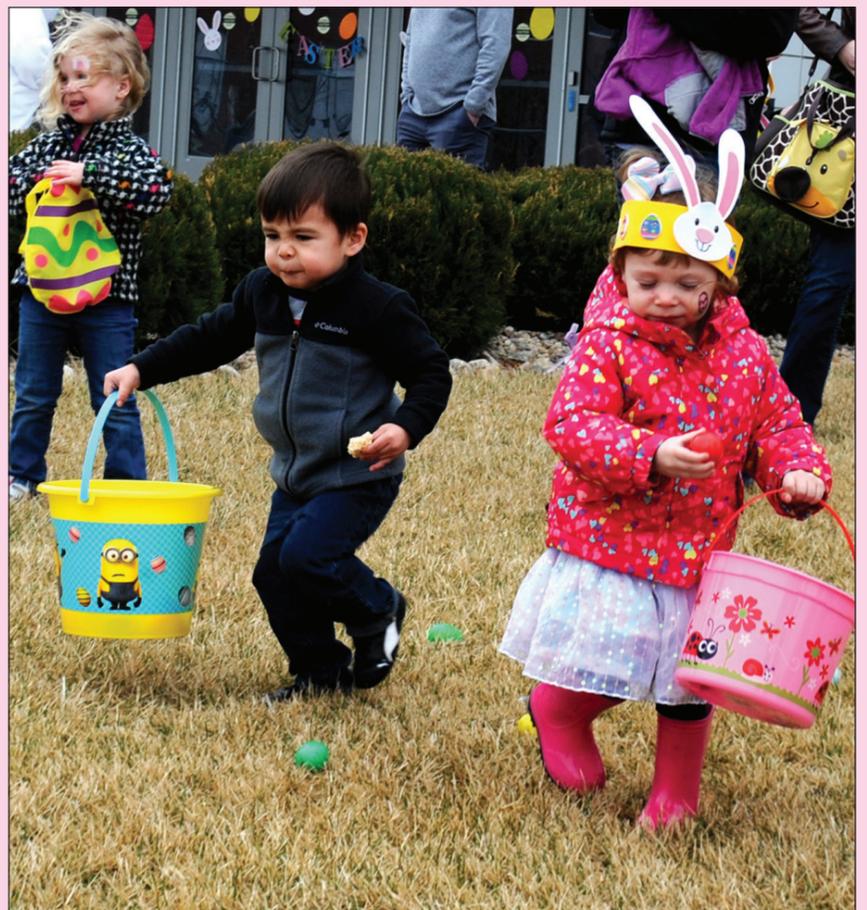


Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

Operation: Hidden Egg

Military kids were out in force on a chilly March 24 when they participated in the annual "Operation Hidden Egg" family activity at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln. The event included a number of hands-on activities including games and crafts. Probably the most anticipated part of the afternoon came when the kids moved outdoors and were turned loose to find dozens of brightly colored plastic eggs that were filled with a variety of treats.

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard

Lieutenant Colonel

Shane P. Varcjeka

Major

Derrick T. Antoniak
Nathaniel C. Krilek
Andrew J. Linnaus

Captain

Matthew M. Boring
Jeremy P. Ham
Robert M. Hooper
Seth P. Roskens

First Lieutenant

Katherine A. Bloom

Chief Warrant Officer 4

Torrey J. Baker
Brent A. Brozovsky
Michael T. Maides
Troy V. Montanez

Chief Warrant Officer 3

Dustin E. Guenther
Brandon M. Hill
Jennifer J. Kramer
Michael P. Shottenkirk
Marla M. Stephan

Sergeant Major

Benjamin J. Radke

Master Sergeant

Michael K. Benorden
Heather R. Davey
James G. Dinville
Jeremy W. Hartwell
Adam C. Junck
James F. Roark
Maren C. Stewart

Sergeant First Class

Timothy A. Cusatis Jr.
Tony T. Franklin
Lucas L. Geyer
Kirk R. Jensen
Nathan J. Ledden
Jason R. McCarthy
Kevin K. O'Brien
Nicole A. Tefft
Ty S. Tucker
Alisha K. Welch
Jason J. Winer

Staff Sergeant

Michael D. Boyle
Lucas C. Brigman
Jonathan E. Dickey
Lynda L. James
Alexander F. King
Samantha J. Kraft
Mark A. Marta
Braxton C. Sawyerkociemba
Anastasia B. Schorfheide
Anthony D. Smotherman
James J. Sykes
Troy D. Thielke
Alex M. Topil
Adam R. Wolsmann

Sergeant

Kayla B. Ambrose
Kevin A. Blanch
Joshua K. Brown
Kyle E. Cartwright
Jerromy A. Cissell
Andrew J. Duhamel
William J. Erickson
Robert J. Fitzgerald
Tyler G. Harris
Jacob C. Helsel
Ryan L. Hoffmann

Damian R. Hort
Joshua D. Inman
Aaron J. Johnson
Jacob N. Kamphaus
Dallas J. Kimminau
Danielle M. Martin
Andrew T. Oxtoby
Alec J. Rockford
Daniel A. Roland
Brandon L. Sedoris
Zachery L. Sehnert
Emma J. Smith
Hunter L. Smith
Brittany M. Spath
Alexander J. Stang
Nathan L. Sturges
Robert B. Taylor
Andrew A. Thomas
Jose A. Torres
Matthew H. Veit
Taylor L. Vonknorring
William F. Wiseman

Specialist

Senam A. Atitsogbui
Pascal Bambara
Daniel Barriosvilla
Wayne L. Belew
Trystin M. Boie
Makayla L. Brooks
Paul J. Calvert Jr.
Victor M. Corrales
Braydon M. Cox
Matthew J. Deckert
Collin M. Dirks
Collin S. Donahue
Colin M. Donohue
Lorenzo A. Duenas Jr.
Andrew L. Evans
Darius D. Flessner
Carson M. Fuchser
Lucie Guigma
Derek L. Hanis
Brendon M. Hoeke
Antonio R. Holbrook
Scott S. Honnens
Parker J. James
Chase M. Johnson
Abel F. Juan
Jon N. Kadlec
Ryan M. Kimball
Colin D. Kitt
Jesse O. Knight
Masi S. Lapointe
Matthew N. McConnell
Shelley A. Metzger
Alexander M. Miller
Kayne G. Munson
Ryan M. Odell
Richard N. Piper
Justin P. Prohaska
Armando Rodriguezleon Jr.
Larry F. Santillan
Igor Sprinz
Cameron J. Stickley
Dylan R. Stolzer
Michael T. Stuft
Logan S. Taylor
Preston C. Tibbetts
Tyler R. Tikalsky
Mason G. Ulmer
Kyle J. Ward
Colby A. Wemhoff
Bo B. Whaley
Andrew R. Zach

Private First Class

Jeffery H. Anderson
Bryan S. Applegarth
Jake A. Bach
Jacob M. Barna
Reme K. Brown
Destiny M. Campos
Britt N. Carr

Adrian I. Castro
Alexa T. Clark
Dylan J. Cramer
Garrett D. Fields
Jayda M. Furtado
Tlali M. Garcia
Mireya Garciahebaunek
Nycaann M. Gaskill
Alexis M. Goebel
Tanner W. Griggs
Bryan J. Halsted Jr.
Nathaniel L. Hartwell
Josie M. Heatley
Jesus J. Huerta
Steven R. Keiser
Brayden M. Kiser
Nathan K. Leach
Alexis R. Mann
Jasmine O. Martinez
Nash J. Meyer
Mason A. Motter
Ryley B. Nelson
Benjamin Y. Nevzorov
Justin M. Pettit
Dante Robertson
Darrell D. Russell
Jarrod E. Salazar
Juan C. Sanchez
Marcus A. Skopec
Dalton J. Sobotka
Ethan P. Thomas
Zachary W. Timmermans
Christopher M. Turner
Christopher D. Wheeler
Zachery M. White
Jacob H. Willard
Keiron J. Williams

Private

Lane T. Campbell
Rhett M. Dye
Carlos Guerra IV
Dillon R. Haney
Travis A. Hasbrouck
Ross L. Novotny
Joseph P. Oconnor
Alex T. Osmon
Matthew C. Painter Jr.
Ulysses S. Rooney
Drew M. Schultz
Jacob A. Sunday
Trevor C. Vater

Air National Guard

Brigadier General

James R. Stevenson Jr.

Colonel

James L. Dalton
David A. Preisman
John D. Williams

Lieutenant Colonel

Harley R. Barmore
Barry R. Vein

Major

David J. Dalmann
Cody S. Hollist

Captain

Christopher X. Castle
Mark T. Durant
Joshua A. Stevenson
Matthew A. Trummer

First Lieutenant

Tyler M. Klingemann

Second Lieutenant

Andrew D. Nystrom

Chief Master Sergeant

Scott M. Montegode

Donna M. Wagner

Senior Master Sergeant

Christopher A. Higgins
Thomas R. Lannin
Craig K. Moseman
Jarrod A. Tisthammer

Master Sergeant

Ryan P. Cain
Chaz R. Jensby
Brandy L. Myers
Dustin R. Sabatka
Bryan J. Schuka
Lyle R. Stara
Christine L. Tewes
Benjamin R. Wilkins

Technical Sergeant

Brittany A. Bedor
Steven M. Bik
Bradley W. Bouc
Madison M. Brower
Brittani N. Cain
Nicholas J. Grossi
Robert T. Markve
Ryan D. Parks
Sawyer R. Ritz
Michelle L. Tidmore
Cody J. Wyatt

Staff Sergeant

Leilani M. Beal
Wesley A. Boggs
David R. Coffin II
Steven J. Dethlefs
Robert A. Glantz
Jeffrey S. Hadley Jr.
Dillon C. Kruckman
Katherine M. Mullins
Austin R. Nelson
Zachary C. Piatt
Brent M. Potter
Katherine T. Welsh
Kyle A. Winkenwerder

Senior Airman

Nathan M. Dunning
Mildred W. Essien
Cydny J. Howell
Benjamin B. Hudson
Brian D. Jacobson
Joshua A. Masin
Jewel L. Newsome
Shaun P. Sullivan
Zania N. Thomas
Alaytra A. Wendt
Jordan M. Wright

Airman First Class

Juliana R. Brehm
Frank S. Cui
Kreyton L. Deger
Christopher A. Dornbusch
Samuel L. Felix
Sara A. Holling
Laura C. Milburn
Jemael F. Nzihou
Lucille E. Welsh

Airman

Austin P. Abell
Ciera L. Morris
Colette I. Thorell

Airman Basic

Grant A. Campbell
Gage M. Garman
Noah F. Hagge
Kalen L. Leget
Levi J. Miller
Tanner J. Pinyan
Tucker I. Pinyan
Jonah T. Schmitt
Alexander R. Winters

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Randall Ames
Lt. Col. William Prusia
Maj. Ryan Earleywine
Maj. Carlos Van Nurdern
Capt. Justin R. Portenier
Sgt. Maj. Diane Lewis
1st Sgt. James Gross
Sgt. 1st Class Owen Kramer
Sgt. 1st Class Jessie Matlock
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Simms
Staff Sgt. Sara Bowie
Staff Sgt. Corey A. Hackbart
Staff Sgt. Monte Haugen
Staff Sgt. DJ Johnson
Staff Sgt. Damian Kelly
Staff Sgt. Tyler D. Powell
Staff Sgt. Jeremy Rinehart

Army Commendation Medal

Maj. Fletcher Shires
Capt. Trevor Bellows
Capt. Amanda L. Homes
Capt. Charles McGreer
Capt. Trent Wilson
1st Lt. Jason Byers
1st Lt. Brett R. Seifert
2nd Lt. Rachel Hofstra
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Fredrick Focken
Chief Warrant Officer 1 Steven Bails

Legion of Merit

Sgt. Maj. Curtis Koehler
Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Preister
Master Sgt. William Buettner
Master Sgt. Robert Johnson
Master Sgt. Scott Kennec
Master Sgt. Rachel Stafford
Sgt. 1st Class William J. Becker
Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Bruning
Sgt. 1st Class Lillie Chambers
Sgt. 1st Class Robert L. Colms
Sgt. 1st Class Chad Couillard
Sgt. 1st Class DJ Johnson
Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Strack
Staff Sgt. Joshua Birkel
Staff Sgt. Tyler Hayes
Staff Sgt. Joshua Kushen

Staff Sgt. Shawn Lane
Staff Sgt. Candice Lyon
Staff Sgt. Zeb Noyd
Staff Sgt. Rachell Rowley
Staff Sgt. Charles Sachs
Staff Sgt. William Schlote
Staff Sgt. Andrew Singsaas
Sgt. Jordan Hopwood
Sgt. Christopher Reagan
Sgt. Kathy H. Reyes
Sgt. Nicolai T. Sawyer
Sgt. Bryan M. Stroyek
Spc. Raven Hill

Army Achievement Medal

2nd Lt. Jade Perry
2nd Lt. Christopher Waldron
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jennifer Kramer
Chief Warrant Officer 1 Timothy Beckmann
Staff Sgt. Justin Eickmeier
Staff Sgt. Kimberly Smith
Sgt. David M. Foley
Sgt. Brent Hellbusch
Sgt. Joel Hying
Sgt. Austin L. Stenger
Sgt. Dustin L. Stoner
Spc. Paul M. Ferguson
Spc. Corey E. Lamb
Spc. Zachary Rief

Nebraska National Guard

Command Sgt. Maj. William Bieber
Master Sgt. John Snoozy

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal
Maj. Jonathan Wymer
Capt. Joshua Metcalf
Chief Warrant Officer 1 Ryan A. Pella
Sgt. 1st Class Lillie Chambers
Sgt. 1st Class Ty S. Tucker
Staff Sgt. Zachary Roth
Staff Sgt. Nicholas Sasada

Staff Sgt. Leslie L. Suhr
Staff Sgt. Carlos Valdez
Sgt. James Burklund
Sgt. Kevin G. Nelson
Sgt. Anastasia Whisenhunt
Spc. Julia Anderson
Spc. Jason Camp
Spc. Kyle E. Cartwright
Spc. Michael Lange
Spc. Danielle Martin

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal

Lt. Col. Spencer W. Giles
Capt. Trevor Ocken
1st Sgt. Gerald Bouska
Master Sgt. Landen Koopman
Sgt. 1st Class Lillie Chambers
Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Hartman
Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Hytrek
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Mitchell
Staff Sgt. Luke E. Katz
Staff Sgt. Andrew Liss
Staff Sgt. Rachell Rowley
Staff Sgt. Freeman S. Sandquist
Sgt. Lara Andres
Sgt. Lucas S. Lias
Spc. Eduard Y. Bursuk
Spc. David N. Mueller
Spc. Jose A. Torres
Pfc. Moses S. Francis

Air National Guard

Meritorious Service Medal

Col. Donald M. Neff
Lt. Col. Michael A. Hoskins
Lt. Col. Brian M. Palmer
Chief Master Sgt. Leighton C. Michaelson

Air Force Commendation

Medal

Capt. Adam R. Cassidy
Tech. Sgt. Danelle K. Nelson
Staff Sgt. Samuel G. Chavez
Staff Sgt. Nicholas F. Rice

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Col. Curtis L. Abendroth
Col. Kevin L. Hittle
Lt. Col. John S. Berry
Chief Warrant Officer 5 Carrie L. Hancock
First Sgt. Steven L. Barnes
First Sgt. James L. Gross
First Sgt. John A. Snoozy
Master Sgt. Maritza J. Pearl
Sgt. 1st Class William J. Becker
Sgt. 1st Class Anthony J. Bloebaum
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew J. Rouse
Sgt. 1st Class Ethan B. Schreurs
Sgt. 1st Class Daniel J. Walford
Staff Sgt. Monte M. Haugen
Staff Sgt. William J. Jones
Staff Sgt. Joseph L. McMurtrey

Sgt. James S. Kordik

Air National Guard

Brig. Gen. Ketih Schell
Col. Mark Hopson
Col. Donald Neff
Col. David Zwart
Lt. Col. Michael Hoskins
Lt. Col. Sheryl Wohleb
Capt. Alex Salmon
Chief Master Sgt. Douglas Lierz
Senior Master Sgt. Cole Foster
Master Sgt. Thomas Sears
Tech. Sgt. Jesse Hraban

TAPS

Col. Kirk Slaughter
1st Sgt. Joel A. Bean
Sgt. 1st Class Samuel A. Malone
Staff Sgt. Matthew Bauer

Staff Sgt. Christopher M. Kruger
Sgt. Joshua A. Arocho
Spc. Ashley Chinana

Shorttakes

Former Air Guard assistant adjutant general retires after 37-year career

■ Past 155th Air Refueling Wing commander, long-time pilot had served in Nebraska Air Guard since June 1981

By 2nd Lt. Andrew Nystrom

Staff Photojournalist

Brig. Gen. Keith A. Schell, most recently the Nebraska Air National Guard assistant adjutant general, retired after 37 years of distinguished military service during a ceremony conducted at the Nebraska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters, Feb. 4.

As the assistant adjutant general for Air, Schell was responsible for the organization, training and equipage of the Nebraska Air National Guard, which includes the 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln and the 170th Group at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

Prior to his most recent assignment, Schell served as chief of staff within the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln. Before that, he served as the commander of the 155th Air Re-

fueling Wing.

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, presided over the ceremony and spoke, at length of Schell's dedication to his country, his state and teammates.

"Keith served admirably in a variety of positions in the Nebraska National Guard," Bohac said. "Without fail he engaged in everything I asked him to do and engaged in areas where he didn't need to be told to."

"I am grateful for your service. On behalf of the Airmen of the Nebraska Air National Guard, thanks for what you have done,"



Photo by 2nd Lt. Andrew Nystrom

Honored Service: Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, pins the Legion of Merit medal onto Brig. Gen. Keith Schell's uniform during his Feb. 4 retirement ceremony. Schell retired after 37 years of military service.

Bohac said.

Schell began his career in June 1981 after enlisting in the Nebraska Air National Guard as a photo processor specialist.

After graduating from the Academy of Military Science in December 1986, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant.

Following his graduation from undergraduate pilot training, he attended RF-4C Replacement

Training Unit in Boise, Idaho and, upon completion, was assigned as an RF-4C aircraft commander in the 173rd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. In that squadron,

he served as intelligence officer.

Following his upgrade to instructor pilot in the RF-4C, he was temporarily assigned to Torrejon Air Force Base, Madrid, Spain and later to Choo Won Air Base, South Korea where he instructed Spanish and South Korean RF-4 pilots on the Navigational Weapons Delivery System.

Schell converted to the KC-135R in June of 1994 and served in various positions in the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, Air Refueling Wing, Lincoln, Nebraska, including the flying training officer, deputy chief of current operations, evaluator pilot, chief of standardization and evaluation, and as the squadron director of operations.

While assigned to the 173rd ARS, Schell served as the Air National Guard's lead KC-135R instructor pilot in charge of the planning, development and implementation of the Global Air Transportation Management System modification.

He was next assigned as the 155th Air Refueling Wing executive officer and from 2006 until May 2012, he served as the 155th Maintenance Group commander before taking charge of the entire wing.

Schell was a command pilot with more than 4,500 hours flown in the KC-135R, RF-4C, AT-38, T-38, F-15D, F-18, T-37 and T-41.

Street Talk

Twenty years ago in the April 1998 edition of the *Prairie Soldier* newspaper we asked the following question with some interesting responses. Today, we're asking it again to see how people's thoughts have changed.

"What is the biggest threat or problem facing the United States today?"



Master Sgt. Jon Quissell
155th Security Forces Squadron
"Complacency of the U.S. population to the world around them."



Airman 1st Class Terron McClean
155th Civil Engineering Squadron
"Our biggest threat is war and what follows war; money problems, family loss and time away from loved ones."



Sgt. Taylor Vanknorring
195th Forward Support Company
"As a medic, I would say the condition of the people in our states. Exercise has kind of been pushed to the way side. That's going to start leading to more problems for us in the future if we don't start taking care of ourselves now."



Airman 1st Class Timothy Mendick
155th Security Forces Squadron
"Lack of respect for military and our current operations."



Staff Sgt. Leilani Beal
173rd Aerial Refueling Squadron
"Determining policy on whether or not to grant citizenship to children of illegal immigrants."



Master Sgt. Blane Buckley
155th Civil Engineering Squadron
"Our biggest threat/problem now is gun control, keeping our kids safe and not creating further problems."

Standing Ready

Our Minuteman legacy requires us all to remain prepared for whenever call comes

The Minuteman, the symbol of our militia, represents the virtue that there are men and women who stand ready to answer the call of their nation or state.

Taking a stand, being ready and answering the call may be becoming a more rare virtue in our society, but I believe it is still admired and part of the American psyche.

My evidence? The successes of last year's movie, *Dunkirk*, and this year's *Darkest Hour*. Both demonstrate how dedication to service and duty are still virtues that people admire and want to watch.

If you've seen the movies or studied the history, you know that in May 1940 the Germans invaded Belgium and France, having previously conquered Czechoslovakia and Poland. It took just 11 days for the Germans to corner 400,000 British and French soldiers at Dunkirk with their backs against the English Channel.

It was a crisis point at which WWII could have ended with a Nazi victory across Europe, changing the course of history.

Newly-elected British Prime Minister Winston Churchill faced the daunting task of leading and convincing a government and people to stand up to tyranny, to never lose hope and to fight on, rather than seek terms of surrender or peace with Hitler.

The rescue of the British and French forces at Dunkirk became Operation Dynamo.

Another Voice

Brigadier General

Bob Stevenson



'As Guard men and women we have each taken a stand through our oaths of service and we have the obligation to stay ready to answer whenever it may come.'

Now primarily, the British Navy did the heavy lifting of this rescue but the unique element of the story is of a "militia" answering the call, as a group of civilian vessels, some crewed by civilians and some by military members, became known as the "little ships."

The "little ships" became a flotilla of volunteers made up of pleasure craft, fishing vessels and ferries; a militia Navy to rescue their only hope.

Churchill knew that the only thing Operation Dynamo would do was allow the British to fight again another day, which extended the conflict until, in his words, "other

great powers will come to their senses."

Churchill saw the threat for what it was to freedom on this planet, but the rest of the world outside Europe was reticent to acknowledge the threat.

They needed time and that's what Operation Dynamo provided.

Operation Dynamo was a crisis response logistical victory in the form of a successful retreat from a military defeat. But retreating is better than complete capture or destruction.

This unique element of Dunkirk was the "little ships" responded to the call to rescue the military from defeat. And while their proportional contribution may have been small, the risks they took were exactly the same. It unified them as a nation.

Crisis always draws Americans together. As first or second responders, we stand ready to band together before the crisis. Our Minuteman symbol is standing and ready.

As Guard men and women we have each taken a stand through our oaths of service and we have the obligation to stay ready to answer the call whenever it may come.

The virtues of service before self, of answering a call to duty and doing what is needed are exactly the values we live by in the National Guard.

Whether federal mobilization or response to a weather event or fire or civil disturbance, we stand ready to answer that call.

Take preparedness efforts seriously

As hard as it is to believe, we have actually arrived at a new training year as Soldiers and Airmen conduct annual training exercises and prepare for potential deployments.

If last year taught us anything – and I personally believe that it taught us a lot – it's that along with our projected missions other unpredictable emergencies will continue to come at us with little or no notice, making readiness all the more important for both the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard.

That's why I don't think it should come as any surprise that the subject of military readiness has been one of intense interest this year, ranging from new policies emanating from Defense Secretary James Mattis, to the Army National Guard's shift to new training models, called Army National Guard 4.0 by Lt. Gen. Timothy Kadavy, to new state initiatives to increase Nebraska's recruiting and retention. For members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, the subject of readiness can often mean many different things, depending upon the conversation.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines readiness as a noun meaning "at the ready, ready for immediate use."

For a Nebraska Guard Soldier or Airman, readiness is a far more nuanced problem.

It can mean that you're trained to successfully do your individual and collective military skill or mission. It can also mean that your unit is properly staffed, equipped, trained and prepared to deploy on little notice to accomplish either a federal or state mission. It can mean that you have the proper medical or physical fitness assessments accomplished.

Readiness also means personal

My Turn

State Public Affairs Officer

Kevin J. Hynes



Readiness: 'Do whatever you can to make yourself better at your job and your unit better at accomplishing its mission.'

readiness as well.

Is your family prepared and have the proper plans in place if you suddenly receive notice of a short-notice deployment? How about your civilian employers or collegiate professors... are they aware that you may sometimes be called upon to deploy – such as occurred frequently last fall during the hurricane response missions – with little or no notice? Do you or they have contingency plans in place?

These are all important things that we should be asking ourselves right now before the call to duty comes and time slips quickly out of our grasp.

Fortunately, we've been here before. If the Nebraska National Guard has learned anything over the past decades since the sudden mobilizations for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm of 1990-91 and all of the federal and state missions that have come since, it's how to deploy and accomplish a mission, no matter what the mission is or where it's located at.

Still, this is no time to sit on our laurels. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to ourselves, our units, our families, our employers and, if students, to our educational pursuits. We must think about readiness and take whatever actions we need to in

order to maintain our personal readiness.

And in many ways that needs to start right now.

When we're at drill or annual training, we should take the training seriously... pull every morsel of information out of it that we can. Do whatever you can to make yourself better at your job and your unit better at accomplishing its mission.

Also, make sure that you keep an eye on your personal medical readiness as well as your family's ability to function if you're called away.

The same goes with your college professors or civilian employers. Talk with them about your National Guard job and find out what you can do to ensure your sudden absence won't cause you or them any unforeseen problems.

As last year's hurricanes showed us in dramatic fashion, the United States is depending upon its Army and Air National Guard like never before. Emergencies taking place far away from the borders of Nebraska may still very well call upon us to serve, sometimes with very little notice.

The National Guard takes a lot of pride in its motto: Always Ready, Always There.

If we're going to continue to live up to this motto, we need to make sure that we really are always ready. And the time to improve and maintain our readiness is now, not when the call comes.

Our nation literally is depending upon us.



Lacing Up: Purple shoes were a must-buy for Staff Sgt. Patti Lee-Smith, an avid runner and ambassador for the Project Purple program, which seeks to find a cure for pancreatic cancer.



Soldier Running Strong: Staff Sgt. Patti Lee-Smith shows off her Project Purple Team jersey from the Lincoln National Guard Marathon. Lee-Smith believes in service to others and does so through philanthropic running and her Nebraska Army National Guard military service.

Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

Soldier: Running is journey, not race

By Spc. Lisa Crawford
Editor

Running is as much a part of being a Soldier as wearing boots or learning to shoot. And while every Soldier spends significant time maintaining physical fitness, few maintain quite the rigorous physical training schedule that Nebraska Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Patti Lee-Smith does.

A full-time Nebraska Army National Guard contract specialist, Lee-Smith works out six days a week, often running with her dog on long stretches of the dusty, gravel road that winds past her home in David City, Nebraska, or looping through the dimly lit Joint Force Headquarters atrium in Lincoln and climbing stairs long before most of the building's other employees arrive.

Whether in sunshine, rain or even brown, sloppysnow, Lee-Smith continuously laces up her purple and pink tennis shoes and sticks to her dedicated training schedule to not only meet the fitness standards of the Army National Guard, but also fulfill her personal call to service.

"I believe strongly in service to your community and service to others," Lee-Smith said.

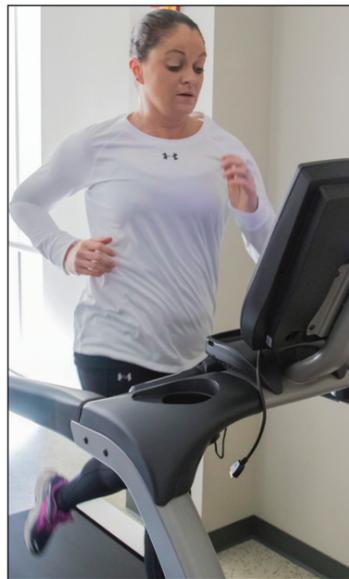
That calling stretches back to her childhood, where her grandfather, a 25-year Coast Guard veteran, always focused his grandchildren toward military service.

With his encouragement ringing in her ears, Lee-Smith made contact with an Army National Guard recruiter in 2010, just short of her 35th birthday, and enlisted.

"It's now or never," Lee-Smith recalled saying to her grandfather when she called him to discuss her options.

With a post-secondary degree, an established career and a full family, Lee-Smith said she knew her experiences were going to be different from the younger enlistees, but her call to duty was the same.

Following her 2011 enlistment, Lee-Smith completed basic combat training and advanced individual training. Because of her age, she was often forced into leadership roles, which she now believes helped mold her into the noncommissioned officer she is today. It's also what



Dedicated To Mileage: Staff. Sgt. Patti Lee-Smith runs on a treadmill at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln where she works as a contract specialist. While preparing for upcoming races, Lee-Smith exercises six days a week, getting in mileage wherever she can.

continues to drive her to excel in the Nebraska Army National Guard.

"I was taught very early on in life to never ask for anything," Lee-Smith said. "I was taught that if you want something bad enough, you will work for it. I live that principle every day in the military and have the utmost respect for those in leadership positions who do the same."

Which leads back to Lee-Smith's passion for running and physical fitness. Lee-Smith admitted she has been a pretty inconsistent runner her entire life. She ran track in high school, but didn't begin running regularly until she joined the Army National Guard. When she ran her first half-marathon with her sister-in-law in 2012, she found she had a passion for the sport.

"I started and I never stopped," Lee-Smith said.

Lee-Smith said she's come a long way since that first race where she walked the entire eighth mile of the half-marathon, reevaluating where she was at, how much further she had to go and her plan to get there. But with her sister-in-law by her side, pressing on together, it was

"Running is my release, because it's just me and the road."

then that she realized the race wasn't about crossing the finish line for yourself, and so she kept going. She recently trained for her 25th half-marathon, May 6, at the Lincoln National Guard Marathon and Half-Marathon in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Her passion for running only intensified as she met other enthusiastic runners. In 2014 she began running with Sgt. 1st Class Kyla (Triplet) Robbins when they served together in the Nebraska Army National Guard's 734th Transportation Battalion. When Lee-Smith first came to the unit, she expressed interest in becoming a better runner, Robbins said.

"Patti always strived to better herself and help others," Robbins said.

The pair began running together and later completed what Lee-Smith still claims to be her favorite half-marathon, the Rock 'n' Roll Half, in Nashville, Tennessee. Lee-Smith credits the mentorship and support she received from Robbins and Sgt. 1st Class Tarissa Batenhorst, both strong runners and past members of the Nebraska National Guard Marathon Team, as being instrumental in her development as a runner and as a Soldier.

"They allowed me to grow as a leader, as an NCO and pushed me in PT," Lee-Smith said. "I think that's why physical health is so important to me right now, because they really pushed me to do better and to be better."

Running, she said, is now much more than completing a specific race. It's about the journey, itself.

"Running is my release, because it's just me and the road," she said.

It's something that allows her to further connect to her community and find new ways to harness her passion for service her grandfather awoke in her years ago. Four years ago, after her uncle lost his battle with cancer and a high school friend was diagnosed with pancreatic

cancer, Lee-Smith joined the Project Purple Nebraska marathon and half marathon teams.

"I reached out to them, and I just kept running really to advocate funds for cancer research," she said. "It's really why I keep running."

It's a passion that continues to drive and push her, especially on those occasional days when things are less than optimal. For example, a few months ago while running along the rolling country roads of her small, rural community following a heavy snowfall, the first car of the day flew past, causing her to throw herself into the cold, icy ditch to avoid being hit. About a mile later, another car sped past, this time splashing her with cold, brown roadside slush.

It was a frustrating situation to say the least.

"I kept running, but the whole time I was thinking negative thoughts," she said.

But that perspective changed when she got home. As she sat down and began to remove her wet socks and purple shoes – the negativity dripping away like so much muddy water – things just didn't seem quite so bad.

"They pushed you into a ditch and you were soaked, but when that water hit your feet, you're able to feel it, so you need to be grateful," Lee-Smith recalled thinking. "When you're out there you're still able to take a breath, so be grateful that you can breathe; that you have that air to breathe; that you have the lung capacity to do it; that your legs are allowing you to move forward."

Running, she said she realized, was really about simply being in the moment, pushing through adversity and coming out the other side with a better perspective about what's truly important in life.

"It is a gift," she added. "I can get up every morning, I can take a deep breath and use my two legs to run, and I am not going to take that for granted. I have a lot of gratitude for even having that ability."

Lee-Smith now serves as an ambassador for the Project Purple program, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for cancer research, early detection clinics and patient care support. She said it's a program that has the potential to create significant

good for those who need it the most.

"Runners are super competitive most times, but we are the most non-judgmental, high-fiving, supportive group of people you will meet in your life, and I didn't know that until I started truly running to the extent that I do now."

Lee-Smith said it's common to meet a stranger out running who will give a high-five and verbal words of encouragement.

"I appreciate that about running," she said.

She said she found that same friendly camaraderie with Robbins and Batenhorst, two mentors who have been instrumental in her development. Lee-Smith said it's what pushes her to provide similar mentorship to others, especially her two daughters and others in her community. She even manages a private, online running and fitness-related support group on Facebook for others on their own journey.

"I am very proud of her in all her accomplishments," Robbins said. "She is a great role model (who) is reaching her goals mid-life, and showing that anything is possible."

Lee-Smith and Robbins both said serving in the National Guard and being an avid runner share many similarities.

"The Guard and running both provide opportunity, and in both you can learn and grow if you're willing to put forth the time and the effort," Lee-Smith said. "Being a Citizen-Soldier is serving your community and upholding the oath that you took."

"Her values show that she is committed to helping her local community and country, just as a Citizen-Soldier should," Robbins added.

Lee-Smith said she hopes she's living up to that ideal each and every day, both in her military service and in her contributions to the community.

"I just really hope that my work with Project Purple or the work that I do in the Guard – I just hope that in the long run it helps someone, and that it pushes somebody to be better and to do more for people around them," she said.

"I think we need to get back to making service to our country, our community and each other a priority."