



# PELICAN DISPATCH

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE FOR THE LOUISIANA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

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**LOUISIANA SOLDIERS RUN  
AND GUN FOR NATIONAL  
TITLE**

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**GUARD BATTLES BACK-TO-BACK  
STORMS**

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**HONOR GUARD LEAVES LASTING  
IMPRESSION**

**WINTER 2009**



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Louisiana Air National Guardsman Staff Sgt. John Roberts, of the 122nd Air Support Operations Squadron, communicates with the aircrew of a CH-47 "Chinook" helicopter transporting sandbags from a highway in Plaquemines Parish on Sept. 4, 2008. The sandbags are being dropped near the town of Myrtle Grove, La., into a levee breach caused by floodwaters following Hurricane Gustav.

U.S. Air Force Photo: Master Sgt. Daniel Farrell

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# A word from Louisiana's Commander-in-Chief



## Soldiers and Airmen of the Louisiana National Guard:

In September, Louisiana faced many challenges when back-to-back storms crashed into our shores causing neighborhoods to flood and the destruction of homes and critical infrastructure. We learned many lessons from the catastrophic storms of 2005 and that meant having a game plan before the storms arrived and being able to make quick decisions on the ground to help our people. Because of the National Guard, many firsts were achieved that were instrumental in achieving the overall success of the evacuation and ultimately helping to save lives.

Following the storms, we heard many stories of heroes and their efforts. You Guardsmen... you men and women who reinforced levees while storm waters rose, evacuated patients in the middle of the night and risked your personal safety to rescue the stranded; you are the true heroes of our great state.

Although the national media praised Louisiana's preparation and unprecedented evacuation for Gustav, it did not happen without unexpected challenges. You Citizen-Soldiers accepted those challenges head on by providing hundreds of bus drivers in the absence of contracted buses; by evacuating more than 1,000 critical needs patients by air when ambulances did not arrive, completing the largest medical evacuation in our nation's history; and distributing thousands of MREs and other needed supplies to help our people during weeks of power outages.

As I have said in the past and will continue to express, it is an incredible honor to serve with such distinguished men and women who put their lives on the line every day for the protection and service of our beloved state and our nation. You have truly lived up to the name Citizen-Soldier, by continually sacrificing your time and safety during emergencies here at home, and in support of our global war on terrorism.

Please know that the value of your service is tremendous, and its impact on all of our lives, and our state, will live on forever.

**God Bless Louisiana and the United States of America.  
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# JOB CHALLENGE PROGRAM MAKES A DIFFERENCE

*Louisiana National Guard offers job training to at-risk youth*

**By Staff Sgt. Stephanie J. Cross**  
*State Aviation Command Unit Public Affairs Representative*

The Louisiana National Guard not only provides the state a first line of defense in the case of natural disasters and terrorist attacks, but also offers hope and a step in the right direction for teenagers who face many social and educational challenges in today's society.

The LANG's Youth Challenge Program, which started in 1993, is a boot-camp-like program that challenges at-risk teens, ages 16-18, both physically and mentally by instilling self-discipline, leadership and responsibility. Through this program, a select few are given the opportunity to receive valuable job-skill training from the LANG's Job Challenge Program, a 90-day residential training course geared toward helping cadets compete in today's tough job market.

These LANG programs are community-based organizations designed to support the governor and the residents of Louisiana. JCP, which is run under the guidance of the Workforce Development Commission, primarily focuses on preparing cadets for the job market and encourages them to further their education.

"We pick trades that are in high demand based on Department of Labor statistics," said retired Navy Chief Petty Officer Perry J. Whitney, JCP's program coordinator. "They tell us that in the future there might be a shortage in a certain field, and we provide training for that particular skill."

"The Youth Challenge Program, which has graduated more than 12,000 students, is where we pull our cadets from," said Warrant Officer Jerry R. Burns of Carville, La., JCP director.

"More than 80 percent of our graduates are now doing something positive for their communities," Burns added. "They have either joined the military, gone to work or gone to college. If these kids were still on the streets, where would they be? Who knows?"

JCP, which is located at the Gillis W. Long Center in Carville, La., provides a curriculum that combines educational excellence, general equivalency diploma classroom work, ACT preparation, community service opportunity, skill training and individual and team activities. The cadets are also provided job search support from JCP upon graduation.

The program offers eight trade certifications including heavy equipment operation, welding, construction technology, arboriculture, landscape and turf management, fire-fighting and emergency medical technician.

The chance to be certified as an EMT has given 17-year-old Madie C. Denning the opportunity to further her life-long dream of becoming a nurse anesthetist.

"I needed JCP," said Denning. "I wasn't going to go anywhere after YCP, and I needed something under my belt to show I can be something, that I really have it," the Houma, La., native said with determination.

Denning, who was scheduled to graduate from JCP Dec. 19, is studying a curriculum that is intended to prepare her as a medically-competent EMT. The course focuses on areas such as basic life support, enhanced medical terminology and weapons of mass destruction awareness.

"This program is nationally accredited and is a college level course," said EMT instructor Frances R. Kosak. "She can go anywhere in the U.S. and work as a medic."

Kosak, a certified civilian medic, explained that Denning's training through JCP is as intensive as EMT training in the civilian sector.

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*Louisiana National Guard Job Challenge Program cadet, 17-year-old Madie C. Denning of Houma, La., takes her final exam, which includes ambulance operations, gaining access and rescue operations, special operations and EMS response to terrorism, to become a certified emergency medical technician. JCP, which is located at the Gillis W. Long Center in Carville, La., helps at-risk youth get back on track while receiving valuable job-skill training. Emergency medical technician is one of eight trade certifications JCP has to offer. Photo: Staff Sgt. Stephanie J. Cross, State Aviation Command Unit*

# Historic artillery unit holds 170th annual Troop review, retirement ceremony



*Story and photos by Sgt. Michael L. Owens, 241st Mobile Public Affairs Detachment*

The 1st Battalion, 141st Field Artillery Regiment, also known as the Washington Artillery, held its 170th Pass-In-Review at Lafreniere Park in Metairie, La., Oct. 18 and 19.

The celebration began with a retirement ceremony honoring four Soldiers. 1st Sgt. Johnny R. Graves, Sgt. 1st Class Don Wilson, Sgt. 1st Class James H. Alphonso and Sgt. 1st Class Richard R. McSpaddin were recognized for their service and dedication to the battalion and the Louisiana Army National Guard with the entire battalion there to share in the occasion.

Lt. Col. Brian P. Champagne, the battalion commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Edward A. Daigle, senior enlisted adviser for the battalion, presented the retirees and their spouses with a letter of appreciation for their commitment to duty while serving in the historic unit. In accordance with unit tradition, the retirees also received the battalion's Minuteman and Tiger Head awards, which recognize their long and meritorious service to the 1/141.

The rituals continued as the Louisiana National Guard's 156th Army Band began the Pass-in-Review ceremony by playing the traditional military march, "Semper Fidelis," as each battery, led by its commander, marched onto the parade field in unison.

Once the Soldiers were in their places and at attention, the Louisiana National Guard Assistant Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Hunt B. Downer, stepped onto the reviewing stage with Champagne and the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team commander, Col. Jonathan T. Ball, to capture their initial view of the formation they would later inspect.

During the ceremony B Battery was awarded the "Continuous Fire" streamer for being the best firing battery of the year, while A Battery received the "Try Us" streamer for superior overall unit performance.

Nelson Ardoin, president of the Washington Artillery Veterans Association, also presented Spc. Douglas G. Cook of New Orleans with the "Outstanding Enlisted Soldier of the Year" award. Staff Sgt. Michael B. Lacoste of New Orleans was presented with the "Noncommissioned Officer of the Year" award by retired Col. Edward P. Benezech, a WAVA board member.



*Headquarters Battery, 1st Battalion, 141st Field Artillery Regiment marches past the reviewing stand at their 170th annual Pass-In-Review ceremony at Lafreniere Park in Metairie, La., Oct. 19.*

"The military is all about tradition," said Downer, as he addressed the battalion and guests. "As you stand here and honor the service of the Troops of the past, you must understand that the Soldiers of the future will stand in this exact type of formation and honor the service that you are giving today."

Downer also spoke of the battalion giving its selfless service during Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike. "Many of these Soldiers lost their homes, but without thinking twice, they pulled themselves up by their boot straps and served their communities with great pride."

Ball also thanked the unit members for their service during the recent hurricane operations in New Orleans. "Since the battalion performed its duties proficiently, you all helped me pass my first test as brigade commander," said Ball.

Champagne took the time to thank the families of his Soldiers for their sacrifices. He acknowledged that families play an important role in the unit because of the support they give to each member of the battalion. "Without these families standing here, we could not be the effective unit that we are. They sacrifice a lot while we are gone answering the call of duty."

"This training year has been a success. When Gustav passed through the city, you all left your families and performed your mission effectively. Through the ups and downs of this year, we still had one of the highest retention rates in Louisiana," explained Champagne.

"I will remember this day for as long as I live," said 20-year-old New Orleans native Pfc. Derick R. Mendoza of B Battery. Having been in the National Guard for only a year, Mendoza had never seen or been part of a Pass-In-Review. "I felt honored to take part in a military tradition that has been around for centuries."

Once the crowd had been addressed, the reviewing party loaded onto Humvees and began to inspect the formation. As the vehicles drove past the formation, Downer thanked each battery commander for the service given to the Louisiana National Guard.



*Louisiana National Guard Assistant Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Hunt B. Downer salutes Capt. John R. Moore, headquarters battery commander, during 1st Battalion, 141st Field Artillery Regiment's 170th annual Pass-In-Review ceremony at Lafreniere Park in Metairie, La., Oct. 19. (above)*

*Louisiana Army National Guard Lt. Col. Brian P. Champagne, commander of 1st Battalion, 141st Field Artillery Regiment, and members of the Washington Artillery Veterans Association prepare to fire a ceremonial cannon at their 170th annual Pass-In-Review ceremony at Lafreniere Park in Metairie, La., Oct. 10, 2008.*

As the ceremony drew to a close, the band struck up the tune "Washington Post," and the battalion marched past the reviewing stand for a final evaluation. As each battery approached the stand, Downer acknowledged them with a salute. Once the entire formation had marched past, Champagne stood at attention and dismissed them with a "job well done." ■



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# Louisiana Soldiers run and gun for national title

## Guardsmen compete in Winston P. Wilson Matches

Story and photos by 2nd Lt. Angela K. Fry, 528th Engineer Battalion Unit Public Affairs Representative

With a respectable fifth-place finish overall in the Winston P. Wilson Marksmanship Matches in Little Rock, Ark., members of the Louisiana National Guard marksmanship team demonstrated the importance of camaraderie and battle-focused training.

During the competition, held Oct. 13-16, the team showed a significant improvement over their 10th-place finish last year. Approximately 54 teams from across the country competed in the annual competition after selections for the LANG team were made in May. The Adjutant General's annual State Marksmanship Competition held at Camp Beauregard in Pineville decided the team members, which include state marksmanship team coordinator Sgt. 1st Class Tommy E. McGee of Bastrop, La., Sgt. Matthew B. Sellers of Lafayette, La., Staff Sgt. Jamie L. Eppinette of Bastrop, La., and Sgt. Steven R. Moore of Bastrop, La.

Eppinette explained that competitors from some states are able to practice their marksmanship skills during drill each month while the Louisiana competitors drill with the units to which they are assigned. "Our shooters drill in their military specialty, whether they are engineers, mechanics or infantrymen," he added. "We practice on our own time and most of the time at our own expense. That says a lot about our desire and dedication to succeed as a team."

Upon arriving at Camp Robinson for the competition, the Guardsmen competed in the overall team competition and for individual honors in various battle-replicated matches based on match scores.

According to Maj. Gen. William W. Wofford, Arkansas adjutant general, the purpose of the Winston P. Wilson Matches is to be more than a marksmanship competition. "This is also a valid War Fighter Sustainment Training Exercise," he added.

"These marksmen are the best of the best and we are here to make them better."

McGee agreed that the competition provides valuable training for the marksmen who participate. "The matches focus on possible combat scenarios that we could face in battle," he explained. "We shoot from different positions like standing, kneeling, sitting and prone. The ability to load and reload quickly is a must in this type of competition."

One of the more rigorous of the matches instills the need for realistic training and is based on the warrior ethos of never

*Continued on page 16*



Louisiana Army National Guardsmen Sgt. Matthew B. Sellers of Lafayette, La., and Staff Sgt. Jamie L. Eppinette of Bastrop, La., sprint to secure their ammunition during the Machine Gun Prisoner-of-War team competition at the Winston P. Wilson Matches, held at the Marksmanship Training Center at Camp Joseph T. Robinson in Little Rock, Ark., Oct. 13-16. Louisiana finished in fifth place overall in the annual national competition.

# Guard provides selfless service at moment's notice

## Response a success in aftermath of two storms



Photo: 2nd Lt. Angela Fry



By 2nd Lt. Angela K. Fry  
528th Engineer Battalion Unit Public Affairs Representative

The daunting task of alerting, mobilizing and transporting more than 7,000 Soldiers for a pending natural disaster is something most people will never have to contemplate. To complete that task in barely 24 hours is something the Louisiana National Guard has become accustomed to in the past three years.

On Aug. 29, Gov. Bobby Jindal and Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, the adjutant general of Louisiana, activated every available Soldier and Airman from the Louisiana Army and Air National Guard. By the evening of Aug. 30, these Guard members stood poised and ready for the anticipated landfall of Hurricane Gustav somewhere along the coast of South Louisiana. A mere 12 days later, these same Soldiers were gearing up for another bout with a new foe, Hurricane Ike.

The ability to respond quickly, two to three days prior to landfall of a storm, is something that does not happen overnight, according to Col. Jonathan T. Ball, commander of the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Lafayette.

"The brigade already had pre-scripted missions, which included assisting New Orleans and surrounding parishes with evacuation, traffic issues, security and possible search and rescue missions," Ball explained. "The 256th conducted several hurricane exercises prior to hurricane season which also greatly assisted in our preparation."



Photo: Master Sgt. Daniel Farrell



Photo: Sgt. Rebekah Malone

Photo: Staff Sgt. Jerry Rushing



Photo Left: Senior Airman Jeffrey Barone  
Photo Right: Master Sgt. John Nimmo

Ball indicated that another key element in the success of emergency operations missions is the relationships the Guard has forged with local governments.

“My battalion commanders periodically met with their parish Emergency Operations Center representatives throughout the year to discuss their hurricane response plans,” the Pineville resident added. “This was instrumental in our success during Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Working relationships were already established and the 256th had an understanding of what the parish plans were.”

The 256th alone activated approximately 2,000 Soldiers and was responsible for over 1,000 others due to Emergency Management Assistance Compacts with Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Vermont, Florida, Kansas and Missouri. The EMAC is a congressionally ratified organization that provides structure for mutual interstate aid, providing Guardsmen and equipment when needed.

While the Soldiers from the 256th selflessly assisted with the evacuation of over 17,000 residents of New Orleans and security patrols with the New Orleans Police Department, their leadership realized the importance of taking care of families first.

“Our prior planning includes having Soldiers maintain situational awareness and to have a plan to evacuate their families first,” Ball stressed.

As the 256th assisted with evacuations across the southern part of the state and manned “lily pads,” which are areas of dry land providing temporary shelter, food and water to evacuees, Soldiers from the 225th Engineer Brigade, located at Camp Beauregard in Pineville, provided critical infrastructure facility support in the wake of the two storms.

The 225th activated over 2,200 engineers across Louisiana and was responsible for an additional 1,200 Soldiers from the 203rd Engineer Battalion from Missouri, the 224th Engineer Battalion from Iowa and the 216th Engineer Battalion from Ohio. The 225th’s battalions were assigned to four areas of operation, covering the entire southern portion of the state.

“Prior to the storms, the 225th provided engineer teams

to facilitate rapid response in the likely affected areas,” said Maj. Christopher P. Armstrong of Pineville, 225th operations officer. “These consisted of boat teams for potential search and rescue and damage assessment missions to help tailor our response to the most critical areas. We also provided work teams to clear streets and remove debris, especially on major roadways that were needed for first responders.”

According to the 225th, its Soldiers were responsible for clearing almost 5,000 miles of roadways and removing over 22,000 cubic yards of debris. National Guard Soldiers handed out over 14 million bottles of water, 11 million MREs and 12 million pounds of ice at various points of distribution around the state in the aftermath of the two devastating storms, which made landfall on Sept. 1 and Sept. 13.

While the brunt of Hurricane Gustav missed Katrina-scarred New Orleans, the eastern half of the Louisiana coastline was still targeted by the storm. Estimated damages are over \$7 billion, with much of that being in and around the Baton Rouge area.

“Most of the damage from Gustav occurred in the Baton Rouge metro area, as well as Pointe Coupee Parish,” Armstrong explained. “Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes received significant damage as well.”

Armstrong added that the vast majority of the engineers’ response was centered on clearance of roadways and debris removal from the shoulders of main routes, both of which were worked in conjunction with state and local governments. Soldiers from the 225th also assisted with a levee repair mission near Larto Lake in Catahoula Parish and provided security to three evacuation shelter sites. They also supported over a dozen points of distribution and food stamp distribution sites.

The Point Coupee Parish area sustained damages from 91-mile-per-hour winds, as Gustav made landfall as a strong Category 2 storm near the small coastal town of Cocodrie, La. Soldiers from the 225th arrived in the area less than 24 hours later to offer assistance to thousands of residents who were without power. They spent the next two weeks clearing roads,

*Continued on page 20*

**SHREVEPORT**—THE HEADQUARTERS AND HEADQUARTERS COMPANY 2ND SQUADRON, 108TH CAVALRY REGIMENT TROOP COMMANDER, CAPT. JASON WARREN OF BOSSIER CITY, LA., RELINQUISHED COMMAND TO CAPT. MICHAEL A. RUFFIN OF HOUMA, LA., DURING A CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY IN AUGUST.

IN FRONT OF THE TROOP, FAMILY AND FRIENDS; RUFFIN RECEIVED THE TROOP GUIDON, SYMBOLIC OF THE PASSING OF COMMAND FROM THE OUTGOING TO THE INCOMING COMMANDER.

“CAPT. RUFFIN IS AN OUTSTANDING OFFICER AND WILL DO A GREAT JOB LEADING THIS TROOP THROUGH WHATEVER THE FUTURE MAY HOLD,” SAID WARREN.

RUFFIN WAS ASSIGNED TO 2ND INFANTRY, 156TH BATTALION IN ABBEVILLE, LA., AS THE FIELD MEDICAL ADMINISTRATOR IN 2001 AND HE DEPLOYED WITH THAT SAME BATTALION IN SUPPORT OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AS PART OF THE 256TH INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM.

**MONROE**-- THREE GUARDSMEN WITH THE 528TH ENGINEER BATTALION IN MONROE, LA., WERE AWARDED THE COVETED COIN OF EXCELLENCE FROM THE JOINT MULTINATIONAL READINESS CENTER COMMANDER AND COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR ON AUG. 22, IN HOHENFELS, GERMANY.

SGT. WAYNE TIDWELL OF SCHWARTZ, LA., A FULL-TIME MECHANIC WITH THE NATIONAL GUARD, RECEIVED THE AWARD FOR HIS SELFLESS SERVICE WHILE SACRIFICING HIS FREE TIME TO PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION TO SOLDIERS FOR MORALE, WELFARE AND RELAXATION EXCURSIONS INTO THE NEIGHBORING COMMUNITY OF PARSBURG.

PVT. TIMOTHY ROSS OF NEW ORLEANS, WAS RECOGNIZED FOR TRAINING HE PROVIDED IN SURVEYING TO OTHER UNITS AND THE ACTIVE COMPONENT DURING THE THREE-WEEK MISSION. ROSS' CIVILIAN SURVEYING KNOWLEDGE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE COMPLETION OF DIRT WORK FOR THE FOUNDATION TO BE USED AS PART OF THE FUTURE CONSTRUCTION OF A CINDER BLOCK BUILDING IN A MILITARY OPERATIONS IN URBAN TERRAIN (MOUT) TRAINING VILLAGE.

SGT. BRIAN A. LINGEFELT OF OAK GROVE, LA., RECEIVED THE PRESTIGIOUS AWARD FOR THE LOYALTY HE DISPLAYED IN HIS WILLINGNESS TO REPORT TO THE PROJECTS EARLY AND STAY LATE TO ENSURE THE COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENTS. LINGEFELT IS A HEAVY EQUIPMENT OPERATOR WITH DETACHMENT 2, 921ST ENGINEER COMPANY IN OAK GROVE, LA.

**NAPOLEONVILLE**—1ST LT. JEFFREY GIERING OF WATSON, LA., ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE 928TH SAPPER COMPANY OF THE 769TH ENGINEER BATTALION, OCT. 18. HAVING RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A YEAR LONG DEPLOYMENT IN SUPPORT OF OIF AS FUTURE PLANS OFFICER, GIERING BRINGS A FRESH FOCUS ON ENGINEER OPERATIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY OPERATING ENVIRONMENT TO THE SOLDIERS OF THE 928TH.

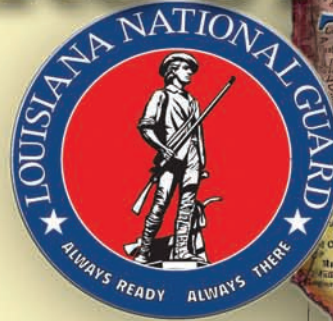
GIERING ASSUMES COMMAND FROM CAPT. WILLIAM W. SAINT OF BATON ROUGE, LA. SAINT SERVED AS 2ND SAPPER PLATOON LEADER DURING THE UNIT'S 18 MONTH DEPLOYMENT TO IRAQ FOR OIF IN 2004-2005 AND ASSUMED COMMAND IN APRIL 2006. SAINT ASSUMES A NEW POSITION AS AN ASSISTANT OPERATIONS OFFICER FOR THE 769TH, 225TH ENGINEER BRIGADE.

THE 928TH IS ONE OF ONLY TWO MECHANIZED COMBAT ENGINEER OR “SAPPER” UNITS IN THE LOUISIANA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD. ITS MISSION IS TO EXECUTE MOBILITY, COUNTERMOBILITY AND SURVIVABILITY TASKS IN SUPPORT OF MANEUVER AND SUPPORT BRIGADES. ITS SOLDIERS SPECIALIZE IN ROUTE CLEARANCE, EXPLOSIVE DEMOLITIONS AND MINEFIELD EMPLACEMENT AND NEUTRALIZATION.

**HAMMOND**—EIGHT SOLDIERS OF THE LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD'S 204TH THEATER AIRFIELD OPERATIONS GROUP BID FAREWELL TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS AT A DEPLOYMENT CEREMONY ON THURSDAY, OCT. 23, AT THE HAMMOND ARMY AVIATION SUPPORT FACILITY IN HAMMOND, LA.

DETACHMENT 38, OPERATIONAL SUPPORT AIRLIFT, FIXED-WING UNIT, LEFT FOR FORT BENNING, GA., ON OCT. 25, TO BEGIN TWO WEEKS OF TRAINING BEFORE THEIR FINAL DEPARTURE TO DJIBOUTI, AFRICA. CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER KEVIN P. DARES OF SLIDELL, LA., WILL BE THE COMMANDING OFFICER DURING THE NINE MONTH DEPLOYMENT IN SUPPORT OF U.S. AFRICA COMMAND.

# AROUND THE STATE



**ALEXANDRIA** – MAJ. DIRK D. ERICKSON ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE 773RD MILITARY POLICE BATTALION, 139TH REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUP DURING A CEREMONY OCT. 19, ON THE PARADE FIELD AT CAMP BEAUREGARD, LA.

ERICKSON, A NATIVE OF GONZALEZ, LA., WILL ASSUME COMMAND FROM LT. COL. KENNETH P. DONNELLY, AN ALEXANDRIA RESIDENT, WHO HAS COMMANDED THE UNIT FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS. DONNELLY WILL BE TAKING A POSITION AS THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER FOR THE 225TH ENGINEERING BRIGADE ON CAMP BEAUREGARD.

“TO THE SOLDIERS OF THE 773RD, THESE ARE MY VOWS,” ERICKSON SAID TO HIS NEW BATTALION. “I HOPE TO ALWAYS GET BACK UP AND KEEP SWINGING. I HOPE TO ALWAYS GIVE YOU CLEAR INTENT AND TO GIVE YOU THE RESOURCES YOU NEED SO THAT YOU CAN BE SUCCESSFUL. THE LAST THING IS, I PROMISE TO PUT YOU BEFORE ME, AND I PROMISE TO BE FAIR AND JUST.”



**OAK GROVE**-- CAPT. JAVIER LEIJA WITH THE 528TH ENGINEER BATTALION, ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE 1023RD VERTICAL ENGINEER COMPANY ON SEPT. 26.

LEIJA, A RESIDENT OF RAYVILLE, LA., JOINED THE NATIONAL GUARD IN 1993. A VETERAN OF OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, HE HAS RECEIVED SEVERAL STATE AND FEDERAL AWARDS DURING HIS PRESTIGIOUS CAREER. LEIJA IS CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AS A STATE TROOPER FOR LOUISIANA STATE POLICE TROOP F. FORMER 1023RD COMPANY COMMANDER, 1ST LT. WILLIAM J. BESSELMAN OF PINEVILLE, LA., HAS BEEN REASSIGNED TO THE S-4 OF THE 528TH IN MONROE, LA.

**HAMMOND**-- COL. BARRY D. KEELING OF PINEVILLE, LA., RELINQUISHED HIS COMMAND OF 204TH TAOG TO LT. COL. WILLIAM S. BRANNAN OF ABITA SPRINGS, LA., ON NOV. 1.

"COL. KEELING, I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR PASSING ON TO ME SUCH A FRAMED, PREPARED ORGANIZATION. I'M VERY FORTUNATE," SAID BRANNAN. "WE HAVE ARGUABLY, THE BEST AIRSPACE/AIRFIELD MANAGERS IN THE ARMY, AND I'M HUMBLLED BY THIS." BRANNAN HAS SERVED OVER 26 YEARS IN THE MILITARY. HE HAS ACCUMULATED OVER 1,700 FLIGHT HOURS AND IS A QUALIFIED HELICOPTER PILOT ON THE OH-58 KIOWA, UH-1 HUEY AND THE UH-60 BLACKHAWK.

"LT. COL. BRANNAN BRINGS A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE TO THIS ORGANIZATION, AND I AM CONFIDENT THE 204TH TAOG WILL CONTINUE ON THE ROAD TO SUCCESS UNDER HIS VERY CAPABLE LEADERSHIP," SAID ADJUTANT GENERAL, MAJ. GEN. BENNETT C. LANDRENEAU.

**PLAQUEMINE**-- MAJ. STUART N. BURRUSS OF CARVILLE, LA., ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE LOUISIANA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD'S 256TH BRIGADE SPECIAL TROOPS BATTALION ON SATURDAY, OCT. 18, IN PLAQUEMINE, LA.

CURRENTLY SERVING AS THE BATTALION'S EXECUTIVE OFFICER, BURRUSS ALREADY HAS A WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNIT'S SOLDIERS. BURRUSS REPLACED LT. COL. ROBERT F. MORRIS, JR., WHO HAS BEEN IN COMMAND SINCE THE BATTALION RETURNED FROM ITS IRAQ DEPLOYMENT IN 2005. MORRIS' NEW POSITION WILL BE THE INFORMATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS BRANCH CHIEF FOR THE LANG JOINT FORCES HEADQUARTERS.

AS A RESULT OF THE ARMY'S BRIGADE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM AND THE REORGANIZATION OF LOUISIANA'S 256TH INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM, MOST OF THE 1088TH ENGINEER BATTALION TRANSFORMED INTO THE 256TH SPECIAL TROOPS BATTALION IN SEPTEMBER 2006. THE BATTALION'S MISSION IS TO PROVIDE TRAINED AND READY COMBAT SUPPORT TO THE BRIGADE WITH MILITARY POLICE, ENGINEERS, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE AND SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS.

**BATON ROUGE**-- MAJ. CINDY H. HAYGOOD ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE LOUISIANA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD'S 769TH ENGINEER BATTALION AT A CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY HELD AT THE UNIT ARMORY IN BATON ROUGE, LA., NOV. 2. "SHE (HAYGOOD) WAS CHOSEN BECAUSE OF HER EXPERIENCE AND GREAT LEADERSHIP," SAID ADJUTANT GENERAL MAJ. GEN. BENNETT C. LANDRENEAU AS HE ADDRESSED THE AUDIENCE. "SHE HAS SHOWN GREAT LEADERSHIP AS THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, AND WE ARE VERY FORTUNATE TO HAVE HER AS A MEMBER OF THIS ORGANIZATION."

"I NEVER ENVISIONED BECOMING THE COMMANDER OF THE UNIT THAT I JOINED BACK IN 1988," EXPLAINED HAYGOOD. "HECK, I ONLY ENLISTED TO RECEIVE MONEY FOR COLLEGE," SHE JOKINGLY TOLD THE CROWD. HAYGOOD ALSO COMMITTED TO CONTINUING THE GREAT SUCCESS THAT WAS ACHIEVED DURING LT. COL. DAMIAN K. WADDELL'S TENURE.

THE UNIT'S OUTGOING COMMANDER, WADDELL, WHO COMMANDED THE BATTALION DURING ITS IRAQ DEPLOYMENT IN 2007 AND OPERATIONS FOR HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA, WILL BECOME THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER FOR THE 225TH ENGINEER BRIGADE REAR DETACHMENT.

**CARVILLE**-- "THANK YOU FOR THE HONOR OF BEING YOUR COMMANDER," LT. COL. GREGORY C. PARKER, OF WINTERHAVEN, FLA., SAID AS HE RELINQUISHED COMMAND OF THE LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD'S 62ND CIVIL SUPPORT TEAM (WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION) TO CAPT. CAMERON L. MAGEE NOV. 2.

MAGEE, A RESIDENT OF BATON ROUGE, LA., TAKES COMMAND AFTER SERVING WITH 61ST TROOP COMPANY AS THE ASSISTANT OPERATIONS OFFICER. HE THANKED THE ADJUTANT GENERAL OF THE LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD, MAJ. GEN. BENNETT C. LANDRENEAU, FOR THE OPPORTUNITY.

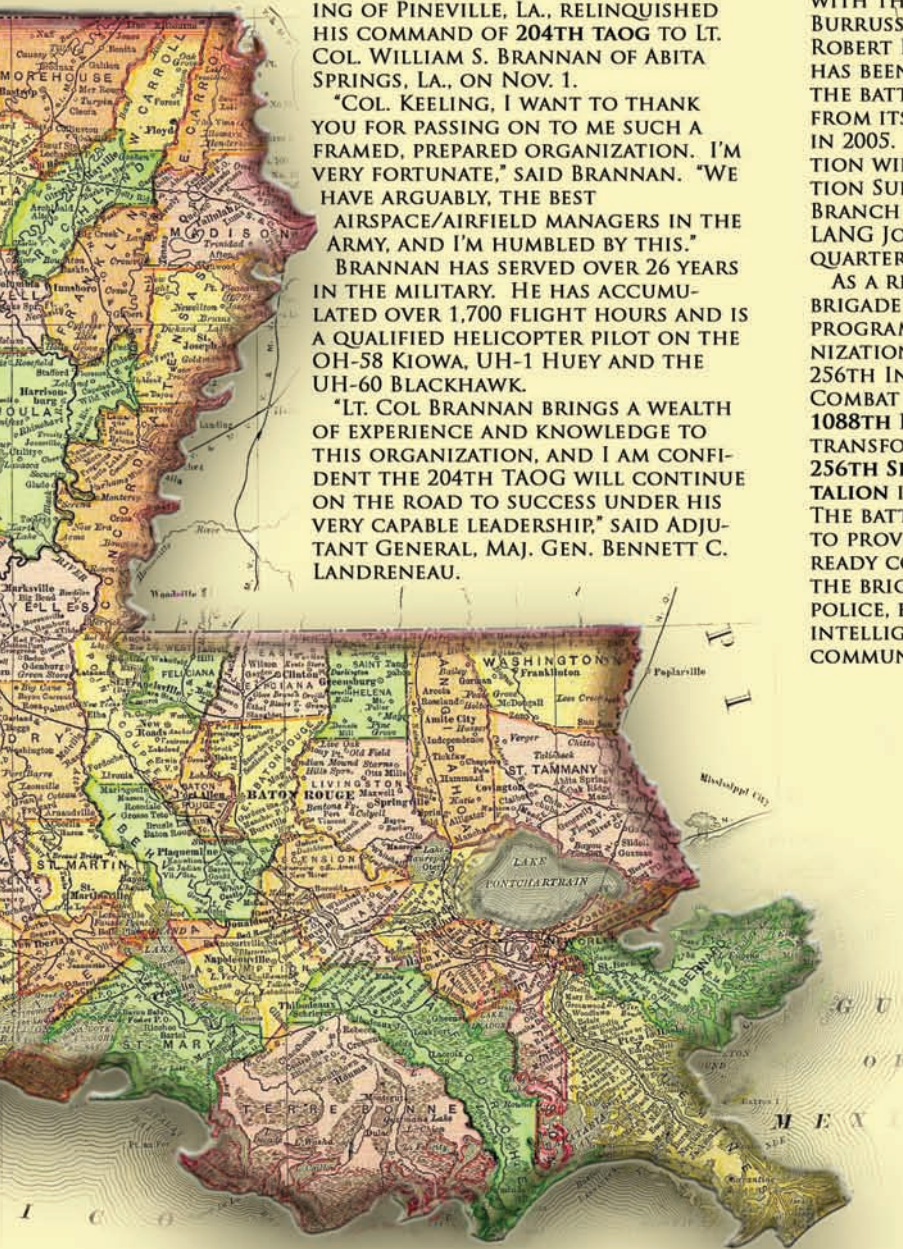
"WE HAVE A BIG JOB AHEAD OF US AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING AT YOUR SIDE," MAGEE TOLD THE SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN IN ATTENDANCE.

THE 62ND CIVIL SUPPORT TEAM ALSO UNVEILED A NEW SHOULDER SLEEVE INSIGNIA DURING THE CEREMONY. THE UNIT'S PATCH CHANGED FROM THE STATE PATCH OF THE LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD TO A PATCH THAT WILL BE UTILIZED BY ALL NATIONAL GUARD CIVIL SUPPORT TEAMS, REGARDLESS OF STATE.

**SHREVEPORT** -- MORE THAN 120 LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIERS SAID FAREWELL TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS AT A MEMORABLE DEPLOYMENT CEREMONY SUNDAY MORNING, OCT. 5, AT SHREVEPORT'S MUNICIPAL MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM. SOLDIERS FROM THE 39TH MILITARY POLICE COMPANY OF THE 773RD MILITARY POLICE BATTALION, COME FROM ALL OVER LOUISIANA AND REFLECT IN THEIR SERVICE A COMMITMENT TO THEIR COMMUNITIES, STATE AND NATION WHICH IS UNIQUE TO CITIZEN-SOLDIERS.

THE COMMANDER OF THE 39TH, CAPT. CALVIN FOREMAN OF GONZALES, LA., SPOKE PROUDLY OF THE READINESS OF HIS COMPANY. "WE TOOK EVERY OPPORTUNITY OF EVERY DAY TO TRAIN LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW," HE SAID.

FOREMAN DESCRIBED THE MISSION OF THE 39TH TO TRAIN, MENTOR AND COACH THE IRAQI POLICE FORCE AS CRITICAL TO THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO ENSURE THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF ITS CITIZENS AS THEY MOVE TOWARDS GREATER AUTONOMY. HE REASSURED HIS SOLDIERS THAT THEIR WELL-BEING WAS UPPERMOST IN HIS MIND. "WE TRAIN TOGETHER; WE SWEAT TOGETHER; WE'RE GOING TO COMBAT TOGETHER, BUT ... MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE'RE COMING HOME TOGETHER."



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**SHELTER SOLUTIONS FOR THE MILITARY AND HOMELAND SECURITY**

# Louisiana female veterans honored; Forum highlights current and new VA benefits

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Stephanie J. Cross,  
State Aviation Command Unit Public Affairs Representative

Women from across the state of Louisiana gathered in early October at the USS Kidd Veterans Memorial and Museum, located in downtown Baton Rouge. The 2008 Louisiana Women Veterans Forum not only honors and celebrates women who have served and are currently serving in the United States Armed Forces, but also informs them of the benefits Veterans Affairs has to offer.

Among some of the great women who received awards for serving their country were Louisiana National Guard Soldiers 1st Lt. Danielle E. Hardee and Staff Sgt. Abigail C. Richard, both of the 769th Engineer Battalion in Baton Rouge. They were each presented with a certificate of appreciation for their hard work, support and dedication to the Women Veterans Forum.

"We are very cognizant of our female Guardsmen because of the increase in numbers the National Guard is experiencing," said Lane Carson, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs. "There is a war going on and we want people to be aware of the females who are serving and contributing."

"Fifteen percent of U.S. Soldiers currently serving in Iraq are women," added Precilla Wilkewitz, Louisiana State Women Veterans Coordinator. "The challenge for a service provider like LDVA is finding women veterans who have been reluctant to participate in assistance programs thus far."

"With so many women choosing to serve the country overseas, the LDVA faces a greater duty to reach out and offer aid and support in every way possible," she continued.

"After my deployment in 2004, I went to apply for my veterans health benefits, and I did not have the slightest idea as to what procedures to take or how to register, because no one explained it to me," said Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran Sgt. Beyonka D. Joseph of Metairie, La.

"I think this was a great opportunity, because not only did it explain the necessary steps to take in order to enroll, but it also enlightened me as to the VA benefits available specifically for me as a female," she added.

"We see the Women Veterans Forum as an ideal opportunity for local women of military service to find out about all of the good we can do for them and to get involved in any programs that suit their needs," said Carson.

Some of the key topics LDVA representatives spoke about were health and wellness, Montgomery G.I. Bill, troops to teachers, business and employment opportunities, and assistance programs for deployed Soldiers.

The military family assistance program is an emergency support group that is specifically geared toward aiding the families of Guardsmen who have been deployed for 30 days or more, according to Carson. The program was formed so that the family member does not have to burden the Soldier called to duty; he or she can file for assistance through the program.



As the Sheraton Conference Center filled with women who have made history in the United States Armed Forces, Camp Beauregard's Youth Challenge Honor Guard presented the colors at the luncheon during the 2008 Louisiana Women Veterans Forum in Baton Rouge in early October.

Louisiana National Guard Soldiers 1st Lt. Danielle E. Hardee and Staff Sgt. Abigail C. Richard, both of the 769th Engineer Battalion, were presented with a certificate of appreciation by Operation Enduring Freedom veteran Mike McNaughton for their hard work, support, and dedication to the 2008 Women Veterans Forum in Baton Rouge in early October.

Throughout the day's events, tribute was paid to the great women who have paved the way for female Soldiers in today's military. Honorees included retired Brig. Gen. Sherian G. Cadoria, the first black female general in the United States Army and the highest ranking female at the time of her retirement in 1990; and WWII veteran Doris P. Parnell, who served in the early 1940's as part of the first wave of females to go to combat under a bill signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

As of Oct. 1, 2008, there were 26,661 women veterans in the state of Louisiana.

Please visit <http://www.dvidshub.net/units/LAANG> for the latest Louisiana National Guard releases, photos and videos.

# Honor Guard strives to leave lasting impression;

## Louisiana National Guardsman is first in state to graduate Honor Guard course

By Sgt. Tresa L. Allemang  
199th Brigade Support Battalion Unit Public Affairs Representative



His look is piercing. His movements are sharp. His skills are among the best. He wears a unique patch on his left shoulder that identifies him as the first National Guard Soldier in the state of Louisiana certified to train others to meet the high standards embodied by a member of the Military Funeral Honors Program.

"It's important that we look our absolute best. For some people, you are the first military impression ... and for some you are the last," said Sgt. Michael A. Huff, the first Louisiana Guardsman to complete the Honor Guard course.

The Shreveport native graduated from the Honor Guard Train the Trainer Course at Camp Robinson, Ark., where his instructors were members of "The Old Guard." Trained by the best, Huff is now a team leader for the Shreveport area Military Funeral Honors Program. With its demand for excellence and precision, the program represents the epitome of perfection as Soldiers exemplify Army traditions and standards.

"The course was both physically and mentally demanding, but the Honor Guard is what a Soldier should be, and our deceased veterans have earned the right for us to be at our best. It's my job to make sure they get the respect they deserve," Huff said.

Huff now trains the Honor Guard teams at various locations around the state. "It is a challenge to take Soldiers who have never done this and get them ready to look their best for a funeral or ceremony," he said.

Though the team is made up of volunteers, only those who are highly-motivated and maintain exceptionally high standards of appearance and conduct are considered to be a member of the Honor Guard.

Huff, who is also a mortar platoon squad leader for B Troop, 2nd Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment, said he was looking for a full-time job when his readiness noncommissioned officer presented the Honor Guard idea to him.

The Military Honors program through the Louisiana Army National Guard started in December 2007 with Command Sgt. Maj. Steven R. Stuckey as the state coordinator. They immediately began looking for good candidates.



Sgt. Michael A. Huff (left) and Sgt. Jesse G. Kennedy (right) remove the American flag from the casket of a veteran during Military Funeral Honors. The flag is then folded by the team and given to the next of kin as an expression of appreciation for the honorable and faithful service rendered by their loved one. Huff is the first certified Honor Guard trainer in the state of Louisiana.

Photo: Spc. Qualan M. Jefferson, 2nd Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment Unit Public Affairs Representative

"Being part of the Military Funeral Honors program is the most important and demanding mission I have had during my 10 years in service," said Stuckey, who is also a former Marine. "It is also the biggest honor."

Huff explained that prior to a funeral he must mentally prepare and focus on the mission at hand. "I am going over everything in my mind. I am going over movements and making sure that I am ready to represent and show that Soldier and his family the respect they deserve."

"The hardest part of this job is knowing that when you go to a funeral people are going to be upset, and they are going to cry. But we must remain professional at all times," said Huff. "I have lost friends in combat and understand how difficult death is to a family, but if I don't find a way to focus and detach, I can't give them the funeral that they deserve ... I can't afford to get emotional then."

Huff said that he tries to incorporate the importance of professionalism into the Honor Guards he trains as well. "It can be



hard ... especially when it's someone we know, but we have to be in that focused mental mind frame before any funeral."

"I've been to five funerals since Command Sgt. Maj. Stuckey started this program. On short notice, the Honor Guards have come together and formed a good team," said Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth R. Wagner, the senior enlisted adviser for the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Their execution is extremely well done and very professional."

"I am proud to have someone as trained and proficient as Sgt. Huff is in the Military Funeral Honors Program," said Stuckey.

"I am proud of my team and what they represent," said Stuckey. "Most people do not understand what they give up. These guys have to be ready at any time. Some of them have families at home and have civilian jobs, but at a moment's notice, with their uniforms maintained to perfection, they are ready to drop their plans and give our veterans the respectful funeral they deserve."

Stuckey said that most families of veterans do not know that the benefit of a military funeral is available to all veterans. Family members should request a military funeral through their funeral home director; otherwise the funeral home will not know the deceased was a veteran and will not make arrangements accordingly.

Stucky also noted that since the program was started through the Louisiana National Guard in 2007, the four teams in eight regions have conducted about 225 funerals.

"It's a benefit that everyone who has served in the military is entitled to, whether they were honorably discharged or retired. It's an honor for us to be able to give them respect as a comrade, and we want the opportunity to do it," Huff said.

Huff said that even though he originally joined the Guard to pay for school, and earned an associates degree in biology, he does not plan on getting out any time soon, but plans on making a career as an Honor Guard.

"I achieved my goal of earning that degree, and that is a great feeling, but I



Shreveport resident Sgt. Michael A. Huff presents the American flag to the next of kin during Military Funeral Honors as an expression of appreciation for the honorable and faithful service rendered by their loved one. Huff is the first Guardsman in the state of Louisiana to graduate from the Honor Guard Train the Trainer course at Camp Robinson, Ark.  
Photo: Spc. Qualan M. Jefferson, 2nd Squadron, 108th Cavalry Regiment Unit Public Affairs Representative

am very proud of my service. I feel like I am supposed to be in the military, and I love what I do," said Huff.

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UNITED CONCORDIA

Louisiana Soldiers run and  
gun for national title *continued from page 7*

leaving a fallen comrade. The Fallen Comrade match begins with an obstacle course that the competitors must complete before engaging in a firefight. After shooting eight targets with M-16s, the team is faced with rescuing a wounded comrade from the battlefield and returning him to the safe zone.

Other matches involve pistol team and individual competitions, the Machine Gun Prisoner-of-War team competition, and the Close Quarter Battle match where the competitors are faced with shooting their targets while wearing chemical protective masks.

Besides the fifth-place finish in the overall team competition, the team and its members received various other awards, including a first-place finish in the War Fighter Rifle team competition, second place in the Rapid Fire Engagement team competition, and third place in the Machine Gun Prisoner-of-War team competition.

Moore, McGee and Eppinette were also named to the Chief's Fifty. The Chief's Fifty is made up of the top 50 National Guard marksmen from across the country.

With a respectable showing at this year's competition, the Louisiana National Guard Marksmanship Team has plans to do even better next year, Eppinette said. With monthly practices and continued support from the state, next year's plans include winning the overall team championship.

"We are not satisfied with a fifth-place finish. Next year we will be gunning for the competition," Eppinette said.



Louisiana Army National Guardsmen Sgt. Matthew B. Sellers of Lafayette, La., Sgt. 1st Class Tommy E. McGee, Sgt. Steven R. Moore and Staff Sgt. Jamie L. Eppinette, all of Bastrop, La., pose after receiving the War Fighter Rifle team competition trophy at the Winston P. Wilson Matches in Little Rock, Ark., Oct. 13-16. The team finished fifth in the overall team competition at the National Guard's annual national competition.

Photo: 2nd Lt. Angela K. Fry, 528th Engineer Battalion Unit Public Affairs Representative

For more information on the WPW Matches, visit [www.arguard.org/mtu/WPW.htm](http://www.arguard.org/mtu/WPW.htm).

Please visit <http://www.dvidshub.net/units/LAANG> for the latest Louisiana National Guard releases, photos and videos. ■



Louisiana Army National Guardsmen Sgt. Matthew B. Sellers of Lafayette, La., fires his M-16 from the kneeling position during the Close Quarter Battle individual competition at the Winston P. Wilson Matches at Camp Joseph T. Robinson in Little Rock, Ark., Oct. 13-16. Sellers and his team finished in fifth place overall in the national team competition. The WPW Matches use battle-replicated matches to focus on combat arms skills.

Photo: 2nd Lt. Angela K. Fry, 528th Engineer Battalion Unit Public Affairs Representative



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# Louisiana Airman of the Year featured on NFL trading card

Chalmette native named Armed Forces 'Fan of the Game'

By Sgt. Tresa L. Allemang, 199th Brigade Support Battalion

Among the Topps 2008 NFL card set are a few new faces, but they are not football players. They are members of the Armed Forces and range from Marines to Soldiers.

New Orleans' own, Gabriel O. Bird, a staff sergeant in the Louisiana Air National Guard, is just one of the 11 new faces found in this 2008 card set. He represents the Armed Forces 'Fan of the Game' for his team, the New Orleans Saints.

According to Clay Luraschi, director of product development, Topps wanted to find a way to pay tribute to the Troops, so they contacted the NFL with the idea of creating the cards featuring local heroes. The NFL, in turn, immediately began asking teams to nominate service members from their respective cities.

"My mom, especially, was very excited," said Bird. "But both of my parents immediately began sending them to family members, neighbors and I think who ever would take them," he said jokingly.

Tech. Sgt. Justin M. Tassin, chief joint terminal attack controller for the 122nd Air Support Operations Squadron de-

scribed Bird as a "fast burner," meaning he has accomplished more than most Airmen during his four years of service.

This exceptional quality is what recently landed the combat veteran of Enduring Freedom the title of Airman of the Year for 2008.

The Airman currently works full time for the Louisiana Air National Guard at the 122nd on Camp Beauregard in Pineville, La., as a joint terminal attack controller, directing air attacks. "This means I work as a liaison between the Army ground commander and the aircraft," Bird explained. "I brief them on how they can use the air assets to help the mission and then call in what they need ranging from dropping bombs to surveillance."

With help from the Louisiana Air Guard's tuition exemption and G.I. Bill, Bird will be graduating from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, La., in January 2009 with a bachelor's degree in political science.

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## Monthly premiums decrease for TRICARE Reserve Select

Effective Jan. 1, 2009, TRICARE will reduce the rates for TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS). Monthly premiums for TRS individual coverage will drop 44% from \$81.00 to \$47.51, and TRS family coverage will drop 29% from \$253.00 to \$180.17.

The 2009 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), section 704, required TRICARE to analyze Reserve Select costs from 2006 and 2007, and set new rates for 2009.

"Now that TRS has been in place for several years, we were able to calculate premiums for 2009 from actual cost data obtained in earlier years," said Army Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, deputy director of TRICARE Management Activity. "It is important to provide high quality and affordable healthcare coverage for our National Guard and Reserve families."

Established in 2005, TRS is a premium-based health plan for National Guard and Reserve personnel available for purchase by members of the Selected Reserve who are not eligible for or enrolled in Federal Employee Health Benefit plans.

TRS provides a health plan option to members of the Selected Reserve and their families when they are not on active duty status. The TRS plan delivers coverage similar to TRICARE Standard and Extra to eligible members who purchase the coverage and pay monthly premiums. TRS also features continuously open enrollment.

"It's an excellent health care option we are proud to offer," Granger said. For more information about TRS visit the TRICARE Web site at: <http://www.tricare.mil>.

## JOB CHALLENGE PROGRAM MAKES A DIFFERENCE

continued from page 3

"This is the person who is going to save your life on the streets," she stressed with enthusiasm. "She is the person who is going to start your baby's heart and save your momma when she is having a heart attack or stroke."

Denning realizes that YCP and JCP have prepared her for a career in which she will hold someone's life in her hands. "I know I have changed," she said. "I feel like I have grown up, like I have been through something. You don't go through this just to throw it all away."

She plans to attend L. E. Fletcher Technical Community College in Houma, La., Nicholls State University in Thibodeaux, La., and eventually Tulane University in New Orleans after completing JCP.

To date, more than 1,200 cadets have graduated from JCP and obtained jobs in fields such as construction, administration and public service-related industries.

For more information about YCP and JCP, please visit [www.ngycp.org](http://www.ngycp.org).



Louisiana National Guard Job Challenge Program cadet, 18-year-old Christian C. Morales of Puerto Rico, practices digging a trench using a backhoe in a remote field at the Gillis W. Long Center in Carville, La. JCP helps at-risk youth get back on track while receiving valuable job-skill training. Heavy equipment operator is one of eight trade certifications JCP has to offer. Photo: Staff Sgt. Stephanie J. Cross, State Aviation Command Unit

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Photo: Staff Sgt. Stephanie Cross



removing debris and passing out food, water and ice in the sweltering South Louisiana heat.

"Fortunately, we have an amazing group of Soldiers and Airmen in the LANG who understand and embody the Citizen-Soldier ethos and are willing to provide assistance to the state and local communities whenever needed," he stressed. "We also had great support from the employers around the state."

As relief efforts slowed in the second week of emergency operations following Gustav, Soldiers looked forward to returning home to families and friends, but the LANG leadership faced the possibility that the state could be in the cross hairs of another storm, as massive Hurricane Ike inched its way west toward the Texas coast.

"I had returned to Monroe with the Forward Support Company after several areas in North Louisiana flooded because of Hurricane Gustav," said Sgt. Wayne Tidwell, a full-time mechanic with the 528th Engineer Battalion in Monroe. "It was difficult to leave my family again, but our concern was for the people of Louisiana."

Despite lacking the comforts of home, the Schwartz resident viewed the chance to provide humanitarian relief as an opportunity to give back to his state. "We understood the commitment we made when we enlisted."

Only two days prior to projected landfall, Soldiers from the Louisiana National Guard were once again at full-force in their assigned areas of operation. While Galveston, Texas, received the brunt of Hurricane Ike, the low-lying west coast of Louisiana, which sustained massive damage from Hurricane Rita in 2005, also fell prey to the third most destruc-

tive storm ever to make landfall in the United States.

Less than 12 hours before the eye of Ike made landfall along the coast of Texas, the fate of hundreds of Cameron Parish residents was in question as they refused to leave their homes. Due to deteriorating weather conditions, the engineer boat teams were not able to go in for rescue missions prior to the storm.

"These people have lived in this area their entire lives and knew what they were getting into," said 528th senior enlisted advisor Command Sgt. Maj. Brent D. Barnett of Chatham. "However, none of us knew how much damage Ike would bring. The LANG Soldiers were more than willing to put themselves in harm's way to help these people."

This possibility for disaster paired the 225th and 256th in search and rescue missions in the isolated town of Hackberry. Soldiers from the 2225th Panel Bridge Company from Marrero launched their Zodiac boats, 15-passenger inflatables used for potential search and rescue missions. Engineer boat teams from the 527th Engineer Battalion in Ruston, the 769th Engineer Battalion in Baton Rouge, the 205th Engineer Battalion in Bogalusa, and the 528th conducted damage assessment missions once weather conditions were safe.

"Cameron Parish sustained a lot of damage from flooding," said Barnett, an Operation Desert Storm and Operation Enduring Freedom veteran. "The main objective was to clear the roads after the water receded. In the small town of Cameron, Troops remained to pump out the water from the courthouse, as it was the main functioning structure for the area. The Guard brought in the pumps, and our Troops cleaned out that facility."

As the 2225th brought residents of Cameron Parish to

dry land, Soldiers from the 256th provided the water-logged evacuees a site for temporary shelter, food and water.

"I had many soldiers tell me this was why they joined the National Guard – to help their neighbors," Ball expressed. "The Soldiers were excited about what they were doing and the residents were extremely grateful for our presence and support."

The LANG also provided aerial assistance to the Corps of Engineers, as National Guard Chinook helicopters dropped 500-pound sandbags into a 300-foot breach of a levee that protected the small town of Myrtle Grove, in Plaquemines Parish, in the aftermath of Gustav. After Ike, the Guard provided two Chinooks to release 3000-pound sandbags to protect a pumping station in Chauvin.

Relief efforts were not limited to human residents of Louisiana, as CH-47 Chinooks airlifted food and water to herds of cattle left isolated due to massive flooding caused by Hurricane Ike.

As time passed, experts indicated that damage from Hurricane Ike could be as high as \$20 billion, with disruption in the oil industry not included in this estimate. With things still far from normal along the coast of South Louisiana, one image holds true – the dedication of Louisiana National Guard Soldiers.

"What an outstanding group of Citizen-Soldiers. I stand in awe of their dedication and commitment to their communities, Louisiana and our nation," Ball added. "There is no other organization in the U.S. military that has the dual role we have in the National Guard. It is a unique and demanding role that is filled by unique and outstanding Soldiers." ■



Photo: Senior Airman Jeffrey Barone

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