

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

# PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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## MISSION ESSENTIAL



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# ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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# Take it From the Top:

## Senior Leaders' Corner

### Mental Health: Overcoming stigma surrounding these challenges begins with early identification, addressing before escalation



**Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard**

A few weeks ago, I issued a memorandum to the Service Members and civilian employees of the Illinois National Guard regarding mental health. The purpose of this memorandum was to communicate some of the actions the U.S. Department of Defense is taking to reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges and to inform our Soldiers, Airmen, civilian employees and their families about some of these changes.

The stigma surrounding mental health challenges is a societal issue, but it is one that directly effects military readiness. Everyone at some point in their lifetime struggles with mental health challenges – it is part of being human. Whether it is depression, anxiety, substance abuse, trauma, compulsion, relationship difficulties, or many other challenges; we all know someone who has needed professional help. Many of us have needed that help ourselves.

Our goal is to overcome or manage those challenges so we can effectively protect our state and nation. The Department of Defense strategy

and the basis for our Integrated Prevention Program is to prevent harmful behaviors from occurring in the first place. The best way to do that is by identifying the problem early and addressing it before it escalates.

Caring for our Airmen and Soldiers is a top priority because it is the right thing to do AND because it directly impacts our ability to accomplish our state and federal missions. It boils down to readiness and unit integrity. Mental health is just as important as staying physically fit or treating an injury. As an organization, we must do more to end the stigma against seeking mental health care. We must ensure we enable individuals to seek counsel, community, and connection within our formations.

The Soldiers and Airmen have shown incredible resilience throughout our history. In the last two decades alone, we've faced terrorism and war, while also responding to domestic emergencies here in Illinois and throughout the United States.

Being in the military is not easy. We are in a serious business, and we are committed to going where others will not. As U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, an Illinois National Guard retiree, said during the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade's deployment ceremony, "for those who serve in uniform, freedom has the flavor that the protected shall never taste." We know the price of freedom like no others.

We know the commitment it takes and the unique stressors that face those in uniform and their families. We need to take care of each other. Leaders need to encourage Soldiers and Airmen to seek help when they need it. It is a sign of strength and resilience.

We also need to be thoughtful and empathetic in our day-to-day interactions. Words have meaning.

Be kind in the words you choose to use. Try to use language that does not stigmatize mental health challenges and health seeking behaviors. Consistent with Deputy Secretary of Defense's "Review of Policies to Eliminate Stigmatizing Language Related to Mental Health," published in November 2022, our organization will continue to make strides in improving how we discuss mental health and help seeking behaviors.

My intent is not to have leaders become vocabulary police. I'm fully aware that Soldiers and Airmen sometimes have their own tough and tumble language that can be more caring, understanding, and authentic in the context of the relationship than "correct" language would be. However, I do expect all written correspondence to eliminate stigmatizing language and for leaders to help educate others on why certain terms and words can be stigmatizing.

It is also important for leaders to help give accurate information to our Service Members and their families. DoDI 5200.02, "DoD Personnel Security Program," states that seeking professional care for mental health concerns will not jeopardize your security clearance. Seeking professional help with a mental health concern is viewed as a positive indication that the security clearance holder recognizes a potential challenge may exist and is taking steps towards addressing the concern.

Most mental health treatment does not need to be reported to your security management office. Only limited, very specific circumstances require reporting. These are identified in Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security memorandum, "Implementation of Security Executive Agent Directive 3, Reporting Requirements for

Personnel with Access to Classified Information or Who Hold a Sensitive Position,” published in November 2022.

Any questioning by your security manager or negative impact on your eligibility or access because of mental health treatment outside of these specific reporting requirements need to be reported to the Illinois National Guard’s Inspector General.

The Brandon Act was signed into law by President Joe Biden on December 27, 2021, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022. The law, named after Petty Officer 3rd Class Brandon Caserta who died by suicide in 2018, states that service members can

initiate a referral process for mental health evaluation through their commanding officer or supervisor who is in a grade of E-6 and above on any basis, at any time, and in any environment. Services members are not required to provide a reason or a basis for the request. The Illinois Air and Army National Guard will fully implement this program once guidance is received from their respective service component headquarters.

There are also many questions that have been raised as to seeking mental health treatment and how it relates to the ability to deploy. There are ever-changing circumstances and medical capabilities in each theater,

so each situation involving mental health and the ability to deploy is unique. However, generally, if an individual has demonstrated stability for at least three months, medications have been unchanged for at least three months, and are also available while deployed, then in most cases involving mental health an individual may deploy.

Leaders must encourage Soldiers, Airmen, and DOD Civilians to seek help for mental health challenges and guide them to the appropriate resources. The well-being of our force and the success of the Illinois National Guard and our national security depend on it.





## Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy Gave Sergeant Major Foundation for Leadership

*By Michael Camacho, Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy Public Affairs*

**RANTOUL, ILL.** – In the early 1990s, Jose Sanchez was a teen hanging with a crowd that had him headed to jail, or worse.

And then he got in trouble with police as a juvenile. “I was terrified. I didn’t know how to tell my parents,” Sanchez said. He was only 15.

Fast-forward nearly three decades later and now Sgt. Maj. Jose Sanchez has 26 years of service, is the top logistics noncommissioned officer in the Illinois Army National Guard and is continuing a successful career as a Cicero (Illinois) Police sergeant. He now leads his department’s Special Operations Division. He’s deployed twice. From 2003 to 2004 he deployed for 16-months with the North Riverside-based 1244th Transportation Co., taking part in the invasion of

Iraq. From 2010 to 2011 he deployed again to Iraq with the 1244th. This time the unit was among the last units out of Iraq as they moved military equipment from Iraq to Kuwait. He’s earned the Bronze Star, three Army Commendation Medals and the Combat Action Badge. He lead and mentored hundreds of Soldiers in the North Riverside-based 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 108th Sustainment Brigade as the unit’s command sergeant major for about two years until being selected as the Illinois Army National Guard headquarter’s G4 (Logistics) sergeant major in October. As the G4 sergeant major, he is the top logistics NCO in the ILARNG.

His rebound from a teenager standing before a juvenile court judge

to an accomplished Army leader and civilian police officer started with Lincoln’s ChalleNGe Academy. He grew up in rough neighborhood in Chicago and then his parents moved the family to Maywood, which he said was just as bad. His parents worked all the time just to put food on the shelves, he said. “And I was lying to them.”

Sanchez said his life could have easily gone in a completely different direction. He blew off his first court appearance. “I was being dumb,” he said. He was summoned to court again and this time he went. “The judge asked me why I missed my first court date and I just kind of shrugged my head,” Sanchez said. “Then he took me back” to the jail cells. “It changed my life completely.”



It was then that Sanchez realized he did not want to go to jail. "I was scared. I thought I knew about things, but I did not."

He got a second chance. This led him to this new quasi-military program that the Illinois National Guard was running called Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy.

"I had heard of it," Sanchez said. "Back then it was a new place that just opened in 1993. Kids would go there to change their lives and get a better direction. I had never really considered anything military, but it was my best option for my future."

Before he entered Lincoln's ChalleNGe, Sanchez said his options seemed limited. "Where I come from, it seemed that everyone either became a gang-banger or a factory worker, and that's what they did their whole life."

But one of the Lincoln's ChalleNGe cadre, a military staff sergeant, saw something in Sanchez. "He said, 'Look kid, just because you are from there, that is not who you are.' He saw how the other cadets gravitated toward me. He told me 'You're a natural born leader.'"

When Sanchez arrived in Rantoul for the academy's 22-week in-residence phase in 1995, he didn't know what to expect. "For a 16-year-old, it was a big step," Sanchez said. "This was the first time I would have been away from home. I spoke with my parents, and this was the path I was going to take."

The military environment took some adjustment.

"It was a total shock at first," Sanchez said. "There were all these different kids from everywhere. There were cadre in their military uniforms yelling at us. For some, it was a hard time to adjust. Once I got used to routine and structure, I knew this was a challenge that I could take on. It wasn't scary anymore."

As the days passed, he learned what he needed to do to graduate. The schedules, discipline, marching, morning physical training – it was all part of a program meant to build resilience and character in these young men and women.

"We'd call the cadences while marching, do the (physical training), and go to school, but one of the things

that really had an effect on me was the cadre," he said. "They were there with us every day. They became our support and foundation."

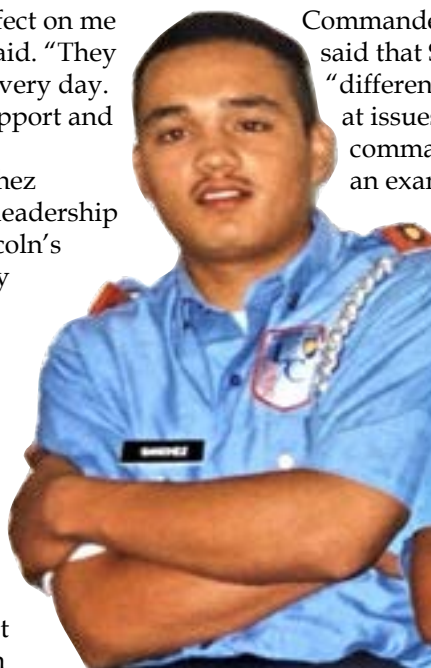
To this day, Sanchez models some of the leadership he learned from Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy cadre. Whenever he visits the battalion's companies, he's known to huddle up with the NCOs to learn firsthand from them. What are their concerns, their complaints, their ideas – how can he better support them as the battalion commander's senior enlisted advisor?

Like the command sergeant major, the Lincoln ChalleNGe cadre start off tough, but the cadets soon learn that they care about each of them. "Those examples of leadership were a turning point. I was successful because my cadre looked out for me and helped me along the way," Sanchez said. "Some days they were tough because they needed to be, but they were there for everyone."

Sanchez graduated from Lincoln's ChalleNGe in January 1996, one of 343 graduates in Class 5. He would become command sergeant major of the 198th CSSB in February 2022. While there was a lot of growth and development between graduating from LCA and becoming a battalion CSM, the academy gave him a good foundation to continue to develop his leadership skills.

Sanchez said that as a sergeant he led by example by being a hard worker. As a staff sergeant and a sergeant first class he was a disciplinarian enforcing the standards. "After E-7, that's when I really learned to become a servant leader. We are here to serve Soldiers, not the other way around," he said. He still enforces the standards and he's learned to listen to Soldiers. "You never know what's going on in a Soldier's life unless you listen and have some empathy."

Lt, Col. Danielle Price, the



Commander of the 198th CSSB, said that Sanchez gave her "different lenses" to look at issues that required her command decisions. She gave an example of an NCO in a subordinate company that was having issues with his military obligations. "He told me that the behavior was uncharacteristic of that NCO." As the command team delved into the problem, they found that the NCO was struggling with personal issues that Price said were "detrimental and, in

fact, catastrophic."

Together they helped get the Soldier the resources needed to assist with the personal issues and the NCO's military performance has improved. "He helped get him on the right track and now he is in much better standing with his unit leadership," Price said. "The Soldier felt that we were not giving up on him and that meant a lot to him and his family."

Price said that Sanchez is humble and willing to share his experiences and his struggles with his Soldiers. During the "Restore Trust" initiative he shared his experiences with counter-productive leadership and mistreatment based on discrimination, Price said. "He's very relatable and willing to step out of his comfort zone. He builds trust with the enlisted Soldiers and NCOs." Sanchez said that graduating from LCA, meeting that challenge, gave him a sense of accomplishment.

"My family was proud of me. I was proud of me," Sanchez said. "After everything I experienced, it gave me a different direction. I decided to join the Illinois Army National Guard." Approximately one year after graduation, Sanchez enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard as a motor transportation specialist.

"Going into Basic Training - everything felt familiar," Sanchez said. "The structure, routine, and

leadership. I felt like this was a natural step for me."

Sanchez served in many positions. He was the first sergeant for the 1744th Transportation Company for more than five years after serving in the 1244th Transportation Company for the first 19 years of his career. But as a sergeant in the 1244th, Sanchez was at a crossroads in his service. "Honestly, I had some crappy leadership. I had some that were telling me not to go to (leadership) schools, that they needed me too much at (annual training). They were setting me up for failure."

Then he met Capt. Shawn Nokes and 1st Sgt. Jeff Sima, the new command team of the 1244th Transportation Company. They changed the whole command climate. Nokes and Sima showed they cared and worked to help advance the careers of their Soldiers. They got Sanchez into the schools he needed and got him promoted to staff sergeant. "That's a big reason I stayed in."

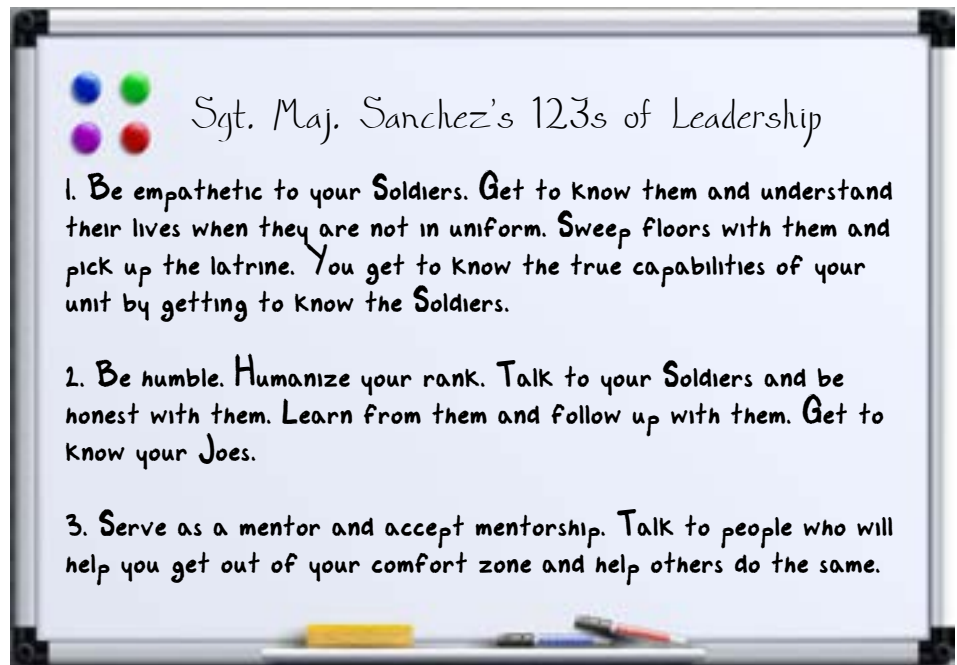
Nokes would later serve as the battalion commander of the 198th CSSB with Sanchez as the command sergeant major. Sima is a brigade command sergeant major.

"When I met Sgt. Maj. Sanchez, he had told me about his experience in the Guard and his background," said Nokes, who is now a colonel and in command of the Springfield-based 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). Nokes said he learned about Sanchez's experience in the academy and how it changed his life's direction.

"His stories about the academy are incredible," Nokes said. "You have this place that works with youth. It brings them in and puts all this effort, guidance, and support to help the next generation. The academy has been around for 30 years and there is a generation who are now leaders in our military and in our communities, all over the nation."

Nokes said Sanchez's experience shows the effect of what leadership, care, and support can produce.

"There are just more than 16,000 graduates from Lincoln's ChalleNGe, even more with their sister academies across the nation," said Nokes. "Sgt. Maj. Sanchez is one of many success



stories from Lincoln's ChalleNGe. The foundation of what he learned there has only been refined by his military service and his other careers."

Nokes said Sanchez continues to pay forward the lessons he learned as a 16-year-old at Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy.

"Leadership is what makes people and units strong and he is a Soldier who uses his experience and growth to continue to inspire young Soldiers and prepare a new generation," Nokes said.

"He's risen to great heights in two careers," said Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Mike Behary, the former State Command Sergeant Major for the Illinois Army National Guard. Behary was the 198th CSSB's command sergeant major when Sanchez was the first sergeant for the Crestwood-based 1744th Transportation Co. "He was very engaged and involved, but he wasn't an attention seeker. He'd talk about what the unit was doing and what his Soldiers were accomplishing. He was humble when it came to his accomplishments – it was all about the team."

Resilience – the ability to bounce back despite adversity – is a skill that Sanchez has developed throughout his career. "Life can be a roller coaster," he said. His first deployment was a prime example. After a year of living in tents with no air conditioning in one of the hottest countries on earth,

running dangerous missions into Iraq, and sometimes not being able shower for close to three weeks at a time, the unit was getting ready to go home. Then, just before the Illinois Soldiers were about to fly that big jetliner back to the states, the unit got extended for six months.

"When I called back home, my parents thought I was joking," Sanchez said. "It was hard." The situation in Fallujah had gotten very bad, very fast, and the truckers were needed to rush supplies to the fight. The Soldiers' morale took a hit, but they steeled themselves and pushed on. "One of the NCOs made a point. He said, 'Soldiers are dying there.'" They needed the 1244th Transportation Company's help.

Sanchez said that he still sometimes struggles with self-doubt despite all he's accomplished in two separate careers. "Never in a million years did I think I'd make command sergeant major. Even when I was scheduled to go to the Sergeants Major Academy, I was thinking I'm not good enough – that all I have is a GED. But I always had someone who believed in me – who would help push me out of my comfort zone."

"I've been blessed with great mentors," he said. "If I had the same effect on others – even if it's just one Soldier – then I can call my career a success."





# Illinois National Guard celebrates 300th Anniversary, Members Continue to Achieve

*By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – May 9,** 2023 marked the Illinois National Guard's 300th Birthday and while the National Guard reflected throughout the year on important dates in the organization's past, the Illinois

National Guard's modern service members continued to make history.

"Your Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen continue to do great things," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of

Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "The reach and scope of Illinois National Guard operations is amazing especially considering that more than 80 percent of our Soldiers and Airmen are part-time traditional Guard members."

During this past federal fiscal year the Illinois National Guard has:

- Deployed almost 1,200 service members to places like Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, East Africa, Peru, Niger, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Germany, Antarctica, Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, the Philippines, Kosovo, Romania, and Poland as well as about 200 Soldiers in a federal status to the U.S. Southwest Border to assist the U.S. Border Patrol.

- The Illinois Air National Guard's 126th Air Refueling Wing, based on Scott Air Force Base, ranked first in the entire Air Force for its KC-135 Mission Capability Rate (86.8 percent) and Aircraft Availability Rate (70.7 percent.)

- The 182nd Airlift Wing based in





Peoria was the recipient of the 2023 Stanley F.H. Newman Award for best Air National Guard Unit in Air Mobility Command.

- Soldiers from the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, based in Kewanee and Dixon, placed first among U.S. Army units in the Gainey Cup competition. The grueling 5-day Gainey Cup pits the best scout squads against each other. The Illinois team was barely edged out from the top overall spot by a team from the Netherlands.

- The Illinois Army National Guard is ranked first nationally in medical readiness and in the top seven in the Strength Health Index.

- In its 30th year, Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy based in Rantoul surpassed its 16,000th graduate this year – that's thousands of local youth put on a positive track in life and



given a hopeful and promising future. The academy continues to expand its offerings helping these young people recover high school credits and graduate high school, pass the GED, move on to higher education, or obtain marketable skills and employment within Illinois' diverse communities.

- In its 30th year, the Illinois

National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland is as active as ever with dozens of engagements each year. In these past three decades we have seen Poland emerge from behind the Iron Curtain to become one of our nation's staunchest NATO allies and a critical partner to the free world's response to Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

- Provided more than \$21 million worth of equipment to

the war fight in Ukraine.

- Supported Illinois law enforcement in seizing more than \$306 million worth of illegal drugs.

- The Illinois Army National Guard Funeral and Honors Program provided military honors at the funerals and burials of 2,695 Army Veterans throughout the state.

- The Illinois Army National Guard has won multiple logistics awards including the 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Sullivan winning an Army Award for Maintenance Excellence and the 725th Transportation Co. based in Machesney Park receiving an Army Supply Excellence Award. The 1644th Transportation Company based in Rock Falls was named the U.S. Army Transportation Corps' Unit of the Year.

- The Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Air Operations Group's 183rd Air Mobility Operations Squadron based in Springfield received the Air Mobility Command Theater Command and Control Officer Performer of the Year and the Theater Command and Control Enlisted Performer of the Year Awards.

- The Illinois Army National Guard's Capt. Anna Zamora of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade based in Chicago received the 2023 LATINA Style Distinguished Military Service Award. It was the second year in a row that an Illinois Army





National Guard Soldier received the LATINA Style award, based from the 34th.

- Contributed 511 man-days helping the City of Chicago with thousands of legal asylum seekers bussed from the nation's Southwest Border.
- Contributed more than 40 man-days to shoring up the state's cyber defenses prior to and during the midterm elections.
- Responded to a call from Hawaii for public information assistance following the deadly Lahaina fire in Maui. A public affairs officer assisted with these efforts for three weeks.

"It has been 300 years, but the spirit of those militia members who first mustered in Kaskaskia on May 9, 1723 is still very much alive in today's Illinois National Guard," Neely said. "To this day we have nearly 13,000 men and women willing to set aside their civilian lives at a moment's notice to protect and defend our communities, state and nation."





# Kevin Jacobs Becomes Chief of Staff, First Black General in the Illinois Air National Guard

*By Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Col. Kevin Jacobs, the newly appointed Illinois Air National Guard Chief of Staff, made history Dec. 2 when he was promoted to brigadier general, making him the first Black general officer in the history of the organization.

“I’m honored to congratulate Air Force Colonel Kevin Jacobs on his promotion to brigadier general and on becoming the highest-ranking Black officer in the Illinois Air National Guard’s history,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Colonel Jacobs’ promotion speaks to the continued progress the Illinois National Guard has made in ensuring historically underrepresented communities are fairly represented within its ranks and given the opportunity to excel at the highest levels of leadership, as Colonel Jacobs has clearly done and will

certainly continue to do.”

“Throughout his career, Kevin Jacobs has taken increasingly challenging command and staff positions and has earned the respect and admiration of those Airmen who have served with him,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and the Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “He is an outstanding officer and I look forward to seeing what he will accomplish as the Illinois Air National Guard’s Chief of Staff.

Jacobs began his career in 1984, as an exterior electrician for the 126th Civil Engineering Squadron. He commissioned in 1994 as a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Academy of Military Science and was assigned to the 217th Engineering and Installation Squadron. Later in 1994,

he was assigned to the 126th Civil Engineering Squadron as the Deputy Base Civil Engineer. Since 1999, he has held various positions in the state and 126th Air Refueling wing, to include Commander of the 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Deputy Commander of the 126th Mission Support Group, Inspector General of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard Director of Staff, 126th Mission Support Group Commander and 126th Air Refueling Wing Commander at Scott Air Force Base.

As the 126th Air Refueling Wing Commander, he led over 900 personnel executing global mobility operations, including both air refueling and airlift, supporting a wide range of conventional and nuclear operation plans.





"This is a significant milestone," said Brig. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, Illinois National Guard. "Jacobs is a proven leader with an extraordinary background. Seeing our Airmen ascend to the top is a great feeling. From our junior enlisted, to our officers, we must continue to grow great leaders."

Jacobs, who lives in O'Fallon, is already federally recognized as a brigadier general and is just awaiting his official ceremony to pin on his first star. He has served in the Guard for nearly 40 years. His career has seen

him climb the ladder from 10 years as an enlisted Airman to various command and staff positions.

"First, I thank God for this tremendous leadership opportunity and for everything he has done for me and my family. It has truly been an honor and a privilege to serve in the Illinois Air National Guard for almost 40 years," Jacobs said. "Developing your career doesn't happen overnight. It takes immense dedication and family support. I attribute this accomplishment, in large part, to the love and support of my devoted wife of 32 years, Michelle, and to our 3

incredible children Darien, Kierra, and Erica. I would not be in the position I am in today if it wasn't for her and for them. Their patience, perseverance, and understanding helped me balance the needs and activities of our family with my military commitments."

Jacobs holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Engineering from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Master of Science degree in Environmental Management from Webster University, completion of the U.S. Northern Command's Dual-Status Commanders Course, and the U.S. Air Force War College.



# Salami Assumes Responsibility as Illinois National Guard Command Senior Enlisted Leader

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – In a ceremony steeped in military tradition, Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe of Carlinville relinquished responsibility as the Illinois National Guard Command Senior Enlisted Leader (CSEL) to Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami of Homewood, Sept. 8, at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

“This transition of responsibility is really significant,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “The Command Senior Enlisted Leader position is extremely unique and has only been used in the last four years that Command Sergeant Major Ballowe has been in the position in Illinois.”

Neely thanked Ballowe for her service and welcomed Salami as the Illinois National Guard’s Senior Enlisted Leader.

“Command Sergeant Major Ballowe, thank you for the amazing work you have done over the years. Thank you for not just being my senior enlisted leader but also a partner in running the state,” Neely said. “A special thank you to Command Sergeant Major Salami for stepping up to this position. I know the amazing record you have as a professional and a noncommissioned officer working through each level of command. I’m looking forward to working with you.”

Neely said Ballowe has worked hard to develop the position.

“Dena has had a lot to do with how this position has developed nationally,” Neely said. “We’re engaging at both the national and international level. It is important

the Command Sergeant Major is in lockstep with me throughout the process. We were able to focus on key leadership and key legislative initiatives nationally.”

Neely said Ballowe stepped up in Illinois and nationally to develop policy.

“We have spent a lot of time with the Soldiers and Airmen especially during domestic operations,” Neely said. “Each of those events is really important to understand what troops had and what the challenges are on

technician, serving with the 801st Combat Support Hospital, a reserve unit at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. He served with the 801st until joining the Illinois Army National Guard in 2008.

Salami has served in a variety of assignments including Command Sergeant Major of the 108th Multi-Medical Battalion and most recently Command Sergeant Major of the 108th Sustainment Brigade. He deployed to Egypt from 2012 to 2013 in support of the Multinational Force and Observer mission, serving as the first sergeant

of the 708th Ground Ambulance Medical Company. Salami is retired from the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Ballowe assumed duties as the CSEL on July 1, 2019. She enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1991 as a material control and accounting specialist. She has held multiple leadership positions throughout her career including Command Sergeant Major of the 232nd Combat Service Support Battalion and Command Sergeant Major of 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade.

Ballowe will retire in October after serving more than 32 years in the Illinois Army National Guard.

“It was a great honor and privilege to serve as the Command Senior Enlisted Leader,” Ballowe said. “It was a new position, so we were treading new ground, but our members demonstrated time and time again a tremendous amount of professionalism.”

Ballowe said she was a little intimidated when she first assumed her duties.

“When you’re a battalion or brigade Command Sergeant Major, you take the Standard Operating



the ground.”

Neely said when Ballowe was selected in 2019, she told him she wasn’t sure if she was the right person for the position.

“When I asked her to step into the position, her first inclination was she may not be the right person for the job,” he said. “She was absolutely the right person. She’s quick to give others credit, quick to step out of the limelight and quick to protect and take care of the Soldiers and Airmen no matter the issue.”

Salami, who was born in Lagos, Nigeria, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1993 as a medical laboratory





husband Donnie. I couldn't have done it without you and it means more than I ever tell you," she said.

As Ballowe prepares for her next chapter, she said she will miss the job and most importantly the people.

"I will miss being in this amazing job," she said. "I will miss being in the midst of our amazing members and all they accomplish

Procedures from the last person and improve on it," she said. "When you're the first, and you have to figure it out on your own. It can be a little daunting."

Ballowe thanked fellow service members for their unwavering support.

"I can't begin to describe the tremendous amount of support I've received both from the Army and Air Guard members," she said. "It has been a great honor working to develop the position. I truly enjoyed every minute."

Ballowe also thanked Neely for the opportunity to serve in the position.

"Sir, I appreciate the opportunity you gave me," she said. "The battle buddy-wingman team has been amazing. From our world travels, the TAG conferences, from floods to COVID, civil unrest, insurgency on the Capitol, the southwest border mission, every bit of it – it may not have been the brightest time in our country but the way the Illinois National Guard responded to it was always a shining moment."

Ballowe also thanked husband, Illinois Air National Guard Master Sgt. Donald Ballowe, for his support throughout her career.

"The absolute best battle buddy – wingman team I could ever ask for is the love and support of my

daily. I will miss watching the plan go from the plan to execution because it's a beautiful thing and they do it amazingly. I will miss working with all our partners. This has truly been the highlight of my career. I only hope I have represented all of you in the most exemplary manner that you wholeheartedly deserve."

Ballowe congratulated Salami on his new position.

"I know the Illinois National Guard is in good hands moving forward and I know you will take it to the next

level," she said.

Salami congratulated Ballowe on her service in the Illinois National Guard.

"Command Sergeant Major Ballowe thank you for being a trailblazer and I look forward to building on the foundation you've laid," he said. "I've spoken with some of the other states' Command Senior Enlisted Leaders around the nation and they have had nothing but good things to say about you."

Salami spoke briefly about his own 30-year career.

"I enlisted as a private E-1 with no idea of what was ahead," he said. "Look at me now. Standing in front of you as the Illinois National Guard's second Command Senior Enlisted Leader."

Salami said it was easy for him to live by the Army's values when he enlisted in 1993, thanks in part to his upbringing.

"My parents raised me with loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage," he said. "I look forward to the challenges ahead and am determined to fulfill the duties of this position without any reservations."

Salami thanked his wife, Juanita, and his family for their unwavering support throughout his career.

"I could not have had this amazing career without your support," he said.



# Maj. Gen. Mark Jackson Retires After 38-Year Career

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Command Sgt. Maj. Phillip Barber, then a squad leader, took a position on a rooftop in the Abu Graib neighborhood of Baghdad in 2005 so he could get a better vantage point on the enemy's attack on his Soldiers.

"Black Hawk Six is in enroute" he heard over his radio. Maj. Gen. Mark Jackson of Frankfort, Illinois, then a lieutenant colonel and his battalion commander, had decided to see the situation firsthand.

"He always led from the front," said Barber, now the Illinois Army National Guard's state command sergeant major. The command sergeant major's career would intersect often with Maj. Gen. Mark Jackson; including the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment's 18-month deployment to Iraq and the general's last assignment as the Deputy Commanding General of Operations of First Army.

Jackson retired in June after more than 38 years of service. Those who knew him best talked about his courage and cool under fire, his off-beat sense of humor dotted with outrageous movie lines, his ability to build teams and relationships, and his genuine caring for his Soldiers and their families.

But, 18 years later, Barber admits that he had mixed emotions when he heard his commander was responding.

"My first thought was 'God damn, the BC is coming out here?'" Barber said. The squad was responding to some insurgents who had fired some rockets into Camp Liberty, a coalition base in Baghdad. When the Soldiers responded, they found that the insurgents had set up improvised explosive devices along the routes leading to the site. A couple of the unit's vehicles had already been hit by IEDs.

Barber said the Soldiers respected their battalion commander and his willingness to share the risk with his Soldiers, but, at the same time, he



didn't want the battalion's leadership to get hurt or killed on his watch. This fear became all too real when a plume of smoke arose from the battalion commander's direction. Jackson's vehicle was hit.

Luckily, the IED, which Barber believes was an explosively formed penetrator, passed right through the vehicle's transmission, but left Jackson and Command Sgt. Maj. Gary Fulk unharmed. Col. (ret.) Glen Peterson, who was the battalion operations officer on the deployment, said Jackson went on patrol a lot – and the vehicles he was in got hit multiple times. However, Jackson wasn't out with the troops because of bravado or just to be seen or heard, Peterson said.

"He was out in sector with the units to get a much deeper understanding of what they were facing and the resources they needed," Peterson said. "A lot of good work gets done over the hood of a Humvee as opposed to a briefing room."

"I just couldn't sit back and ask people to do something that I wasn't willing to do myself," Jackson said. "I always felt most comfortable being

amongst the Soldiers."

Sometimes that comfort bordered on the absurd. Peterson recalled sitting in a Humvee with Jackson enjoying a cold soft drink in the middle of a massive Iraqi Army cordon and search. "The Iraqi Soldiers are running all around us, tracer rounds are going off in the background, and there we are very calmly enjoying a cold soda in the back of a Humvee," Peterson said.

Jackson said that as a leader his job was to provide his Soldiers with resources and overall guidance, and then "step out of the way and let them do their job." Those who worked for Jackson throughout his career appreciated his ability to tell them what needed to be done, but not dictate how to do it.

"He empowered us to make a lot of decisions on our own. He empowered us to be leaders," said Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, the Illinois National Guard's Director of the Joint Staff, who worked under Jackson multiple times. Jackson also served as the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Commander and the Director of the



Joint Staff before Alessia took those same leadership positions. When a subordinate's decision didn't quite work out as expected, Jackson saw it as a learning opportunity. "He'd sit you down and say 'Ok, let's talk through why this happened,'" Alessia said.

Few have ever seen Jackson get agitated. Perhaps this was a skill he cultivated from his decades as an Illinois State Police trooper and being placed in tense and volatile situations daily. Or maybe it is just his nature.

"He's unflappable. He doesn't change his bearing," said Col. (ret.) Clay Kuetemeyer. Jackson was a platoon leader and Kuetemeyer was an ROTC cadet when the two met in 1989. The two worked together off and on for more than 30 years.

He had a way of building relationships, a skill that proved vital in Iraq where the Blackhawks went through seven different transfers of authority and the unit was moved around to shore up different trouble areas, Peterson said. "He built trusting relationships with our multi-national partners, which is really tough to do because the Iraqis had a whole other way of doing things."

Jackson's relationship building, his down-to-earth calm leadership style, and his willingness to share danger with his Soldiers was vital to unit morale when the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry was preparing to go home only to be extended when the fighting in al Anbar Province, particularly Fallujah and Ramadi, intensified.

"That was hard," Barber said. "But there was work still to be done. Our brothers were out there fighting and they needed us." He said that the extension required good leadership across the entire unit starting with Jackson.

It helped that the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry was a closeknit group. Many of the unit's members, including Jackson and Barber, deployed to Kuwait in 2000 for Operation Desert Spring. Then the unit deployed again in 2002, just after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to Germany as part of Task Force Santa Fe.

"He was always Soldier-first," said Alessia, who was on the Kuwait and Task Force Santa Fe deployments.



"He had high standards and he didn't lose sight of the fact that there was a person behind every decision."

Jackson was vital in developing the Tailored Mobilization Plan while at First Army, a program that allows units to do more pre-mobilization requirements at home station prior to activation, giving Soldiers more time at home with their families before they mobilize and deploy overseas.

Army Reserve Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Jurasek, First Army's Deputy Commanding General - Support and Commanding General of U.S. Army Support Command - First Army, worked hand-in-hand with Jackson on Tailored Mobilization Plan and other initiatives to improve training across Army components. The two were both deputy commanding generals at First Army, Jackson in the National Guard and Jurasek in the Army Reserves, working with Lt. Gen. Antonio Aguto, then the First Army Commander. Aguto is now deployed as the Commander of the Security Assistance Group - Ukraine as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve in Germany.

"We were able change the paradigm," Jurasek said. The Tailored Mobilization Plan not only allows Soldiers to spend more time with their families, but it also made the process of mobilizing reserve component

units more streamlined and efficient, Jurasek added.

Jackson cultivated a "free exchange" of ideas between the National Guard, Army Reserve, and the active Army, Jurasek said of his colleague and friend. Their staffs affectionately dubbed them "Step Brothers" after the movie starring Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly.

"We would hang out together and we played off each other," Jurasek said. The climate that they fostered was as productive as it was fun, according to those who worked at First Army during Jackson's tenure. "It really was like a family," Jurasek said.

Jackson has a tremendous depth of knowledge and was "one of the most organized guys I've ever met," Jurasek said. "Everything he needed, he had it in this three-ring binder. If you need the TAG of Idaho's home phone number, he'd just pull it out of that binder...anything."

But even more impressive was the relationships Jackson had built up. "He handled all-things National Guard. He was the point man with all the TAGs of the states and territories. He knew everyone by name. If we needed someone with specialized knowledge, he knew someone," Jurasek said.

Maj. (ret.) Jen Welker worked for Jackson when he commanded the 65th Troop Command from 2009-2012, serving as the brigade's assistant personnel officer (S-1) and later as his executive officer when he was First Army's deputy commanding general for operations from 2021 until his retirement.

Jackson understood the need to balance work with family, said Welker, a mother of four who had a three-hour round-trip commute to First Army headquarters on Rock Island Arsenal and whose husband, Lt. Col. Sean Welker, worked at Illinois National Guard headquarters in the opposite direction. "He was always understanding if we had a sick kid or other emergency. He'd say 'Go take care of your family.' He also knew we gave that time back."

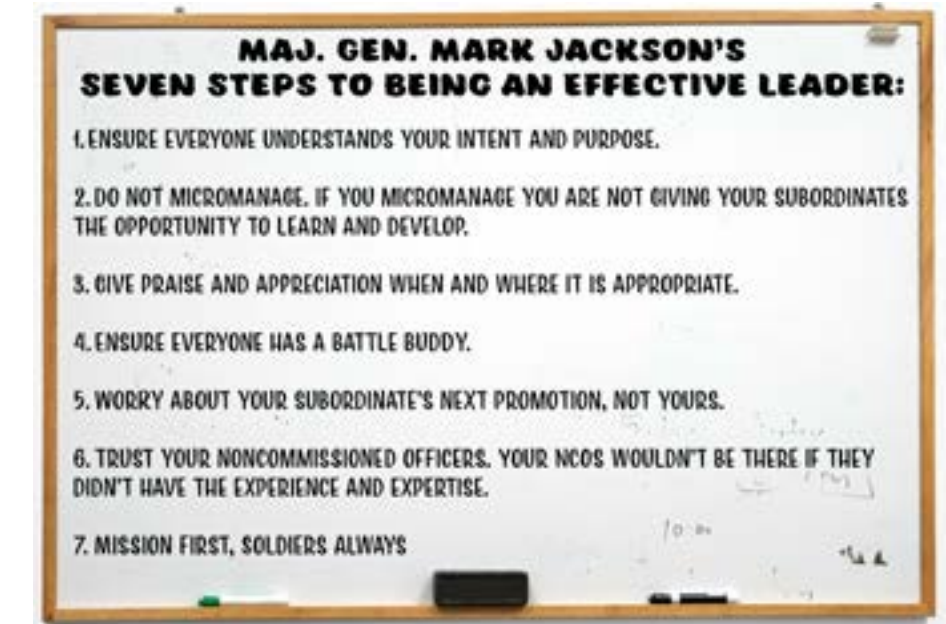
The command climate was fun despite the serious work that needed to be done. Jackson gave each of the staff a nickname from NBC's 'The Office.' Welker was 'Pam.'

"He knows when to be serious, but he also likes to ensure his staff loves being at work," Welker, aka Pam, said. To paraphrase Michael Scott, Steve Carrell's boss character in "The Office," people did say that Jackson was the best boss and that he was hilarious and that he got "the best out of us."

Those who worked with Jackson all encountered his unique brand of humor, often punctuated with one-liners from a long list of wacky movies – Airplane, Fletch, Animal House, Talladega Nights, Young Frankenstein, Meaning of Life, National Lampoon's Vacation, and his all-time favorite, Blazing Saddles.

As the Director of the Joint Staff, Jackson pulled out a Blazing Saddles one-liner during a tense meeting during the Illinois National Guard's COVID-19 response, Alessia said. During a stressful meeting, Jackson said "Mongo only pawn in game of life," using the Blazing Saddles simpleton-brute's voice. It cut the tension, instantly.

"He's got a calm demeanor and the level of seriousness to get the job done, but he does it in a manner that allows people to excel and not be afraid to make mistakes. Mistakes



happen, but he allows you the opportunity to learn from them and move on," Alessia said.

Jackson was the Director of the Joint Staff during the COVID-19 response, multiple domestic disturbance call-ups, and a major flood – all of which had their own unique challenges and gravity. But the general realized that people do not perform as well under constant stress. "He tries to keep things light even during serious operations," Alessia said.

Jackson is quick with one-liners from movie characters and he's a character himself. He loves Rock-n-Roll and sports cars. You'll see him laughing with some tough Soldiers well into the night, with a cigar clenched between his teeth and a glass of fine bourbon in his hand. Then again, you might see him with an easel and paint brush or a guitar or a wrench.

"He's a mental giant," Barber said. "He's got a ton of hobbies." When Jackson mentioned becoming "a life coach as interpreted through modern dance" during his retirement ceremony, there may have been more than a few who believed him.

His most extensive interest is a passionate love affair he's had with a tall blonde for decades – his spouse, Deanna. "Although Deanna couldn't always be there, there was not a day that he didn't talk about her," Welker said. "They have such a loving relationship. Seeing how he always

kept her in mind, I'd get excited from a wife's point of view. Unfortunately, the military has a lot of divorce. They have a relationship to emulate."

The couple have a great love and pride for their adult son, Tyler. Jackson is a devoted father and husband, and he helps his Soldiers balance work and family lives too.

Maj. Glen Mommsen served as Jackson's aide-de-camp at First Army. "He always took care of his people," said Mommsen, adding that the general was "instrumental" as he and his family transitioned from 10 years of active duty to the National Guard with three boys under the age of 5. Mommsen's 4-year-old son, Beau, required treatments at the Mayo Clinic for a non-life threatening condition. "(Jackson) was always understanding."

Mommsen, aka 'Dwight,' and Jackson spent many hours on the road where they got to know each other well, although not everything was copacetic. "Our taste in music was very different. We'd listen to (Jackson's) 1980s hair music for hours on end," Mommsen said. "I like country – Texas country."

Despite their differing tastes in music, Mommsen said he enjoyed getting to know Jackson during their hours and hours of windshield time together.

"He always took care of his people," Mommsen said. "When you take care of your people, they help you achieve the organization's goals."



# Chicago-Based Brigade Undergoes Name Change but Mission Stays Same

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The Illinois Army National Guard's 108th Sustainment Brigade, headquartered in Chicago, has a new name, but the mission will remain the same.

On Sept. 2, the 108th Sustainment Brigade became the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade (DSB), following a force design update by the Army National Guard to convert eight National Guard Sustainment Brigades to Division Sustainment Brigades, including the 108th Sustainment Brigade.

"The update establishes the DSB commander as the 34th Infantry Division's chief of sustainment, responsible for the integration, synchronization, and execution of sustainment operations in the division's area of operations," said Lt. Col. Beth Roxworthy, the 34th DSB's commander. "The 34th DSB employs sustainment capabilities to create desired effects in support of the division commander's objectives".

Operationally, the 34th DSB is aligned with the 34th Infantry Division, a National Guard division based in Minnesota.

"We couldn't be happier to continue our operational alignment with our teammates from the newly dubbed 34th Division Sustainment Brigade," said Maj. Gen. Charles Kemper, Commander, 34th Infantry Division. "The name may be new, but they are proven expert sustainers."

Although the 108th Sustainment Brigade is now the 34th DSB, the Soldiers assigned will retain their current unit patch and the unit will retain its motto - *Sine Qua Non*.

"*Sine Qua Non* means Without Which Cannot Be Done," said Lt. Col. Danielle Price, the 34th's Officer in Charge. "Without sustainment capabilities or logistics support, the fight or combat operations cannot be sustained. A maneuver element always requires a level of logistical

support to expand operational reach and prolonged endurance on the battlefield."

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, said the unit is prepared for future missions.

"The Force Design Update will better prepare the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade for its role in the Army of the future," Boyd said. "The Illinois Army National Guard will continue to train and prepare to remain relevant in that role."

The 108th Sustainment Brigade was organized April 22, 1936 from new and existing units in the Illinois Army National Guard as the 108th Quartermaster Regiment with headquarters in Chicago. The unit became the 108th Sustainment Brigade in 2006.

The 108th Sustainment Brigade received campaign credit for New Guinea and Luzon during World

War II. In addition, Headquarters Company, 108th Sustainment Brigade, has earned campaign credit for participation in the Somme Offensive, Meuse-Argonne offensive, Picardy 1918, and Lorraine 1918 during World War I, and Northern Solomons, Leyte, and Southern Philippines during World War II.

The 108th Sustainment Brigade deployed in 2014 to Kuwait, and in 2018-2019, the 108th deployed to Iraq with two headquarters rotations. Approximately 250 Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 34th Division Sustainment Brigade and approximately 35 Soldiers from the 433rd Signal Company, have received a notice of sourcing of a potential mobilization and deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in early 2024.





## CELEBRATING CONTRIBUTIONS OF VAQUEROS TO AMERICAN CULTURE

In celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, community activist and historian Genovevo (Gene T.) Teodoro Chávez Ortiz, Ed.D. visited the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield Sept. 20 to discuss the history of the Vaqueros and their contribution to American culture.

During his presentation, he explained how American settlers adopted their methods for managing large herds of cattle from Vaquero cowboys.

ILNG members were able to participate in the event, learning how to use ropes which were used by the Vaqueros cowboys.

*U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*







# A NEW DAY DAWNS



## ***Henschel Takes Unique Route to Command 126th Air Refueling Wing***

***By Staff Sgt. Vincent Lang, 126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs***

**SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILL.**  
– Colonel Nicolas Henschel took a unique route to arrive as the new commander of the 126th Air Refueling Wing.

Most of Henschel's youth was enjoyed in Dillon, Montana, a small town with a population of about 1,000 situated just north of Idaho Falls near the border.

"Growing up, it was awesome, and I miss it," Henschel said, talking about the time he lived there. "The mountains, the weather, skiing in the winter and flying little airplanes in the summer... it was a pretty cool way to grow up".

Flying little airplanes meant more than most people think. It wasn't radio-controlled models or drones.

"My dad was a pilot," Henschel said, adding, "it was kind of a family thing."

"We had a Cessna Turbo 210.

Every weekend, we would pile into the airplane, put golf clubs in the back or whatever, and fly to the different places around Montana, Idaho, North Dakota and into the Wyoming-Colorado area. We called them, 'lunch and back.'"

"At the time, my younger brother was the one always sitting up front with my dad, interested in flying and helping him navigate," said Henschel. "I was always in the back sleeping the whole time."

Henschel's flying interests developed later.

"I was a senior in high school. Six months through my senior year I had gotten enough credits to graduate, so I could have graduated early. Instead of doing that, I convinced my principal to let me go to the airport as part of my school curriculum and get my pilot's license. The second half of my senior year was spent out at the

airport flying every day."

This life experience allowed Henschel to pass the test for his pilot's license before graduating high school.

"I was like a hero across the whole high school," said Henschel. "I was 18 years old and flying into the next town over with my girlfriend for lunch and then back. So that was really cool!"

At this point Henschel had flown to many places but still wanted more. He wanted to fly for the U.S. Air Force.

Not long after earning his pilot's license, Henschel began the congressional nomination process to gain entrance into the Air Force Academy.

"I interviewed with the senators and congressmen," said Henschel. One senator was impressed by his interview but didn't have any slots left for the Air Force Academy and offered him a slot at any other military academy.



Henschel did his research and found an alternative that wasn't as well-known but had high academic standards.

"I had never heard of the United States Merchant Marine Academy before, but doing research found out that you could graduate from the Merchant Marine Academy and go into the Air Force," said Henschel. "The end result is still the same line-up."

On its website, the academy states that its graduates control their future and can choose to work as a U.S. Merchant Marine Officer, serve as a reserve officer in the Armed Forces or apply to serve as an officer in any of the nation's active Armed Forces.

With a beautiful campus, located on Long Island, in Kings Point, New York, it was a detour that ended up being the best thing ever.

"The whole experience built into the curriculum of the Merchant Marine Academy teaches you how to be a ship or boat captain," said Henschel. "Six months of your sophomore year and six months of your junior year, you actually go out on ships and sail around the world."

"I was a 19 year old kid going to Hong Kong, and going through the Panama Canal, and the Suez Canal. I was all traveling all over the world,"



said Henschel.

However, being that close to New York City on September 11, 2001, gave him another experience he'll never forget.

"We could see the New York skyline," said Henschel. "We watched through binoculars on campus,

standing on top of our buildings, as the second tower fell and the first tower fell."

"9/11 presented a fundamental shift in our thought process," he said.

The academy shut down normal campus operations to set up a triage center to accept victims and launched its fleet of training boats into New York City to assist with response efforts.

"We were transporting people, first responders, through to the different islands and boroughs in New York City," said Henschel. "Unfortunately, as we know now, we didn't receive any survivors at the Merchant Marine Academy. From that point forward, it was a completely different military."

"Shaping my military career from day one, we were engaged in war. My whole career has been in that type of posture. I haven't been in the military during a peacetime, so I don't know what that's like."

Before graduation, and with his sights set on the Air Force, Henschel planned to enter as an active duty pilot but then discovered he could receive a direct commission into the Air National Guard.

Without a doubt Henschel knew he wanted to fly larger cargo or refueling





airplanes, known as heavies, and while still attending school Henschel began applying at potential units.

"I sent resumes out to all the different heavy units around the United States. I really didn't have a preference in where I ended up," said Henschel. "I just didn't have any desire to fly fighters or anything like that."

"My junior and senior year ended up interviewing with a couple different places," he said.

Henschel had a few selections to choose from and saw that the 126th Air Refueling Wing at Scott Air Force Base would be a good fit.

"I made the decision to come to Scott because the mailing address at the time was on Golf Course Road," said Henschel. "I do like playing golf, so it's just that which brought me here."

"During graduation people are in all the different military service uniforms and swear into that service," he said. "I was in Air Force blues for the first time, when I took the oath of office."



For a while, Henschel did his Air National Guard duty at the 126th, near St. Louis, but lived in California causing him to spend more money on flights to the training weekends.

This brought about a teachable moment early in his career.

Due to an error brought on by how he commissioned into the National Guard, he wasn't getting paid and wasn't sure how to take care of it. He mentioned this to the wing commander at the time, Col. Larry Hammond, who walked with him to the finance office and made sure the problem was fixed.

"That completely resonated with me. Of someone at that level, to look after the Airman and to be able to do things and make decisions like that. So, from that point forward, I wanted to have that type of influence," said Henschel.

Having spent 18 years in the 126th Operations Group working his way up to a flight commander, he believes he is well prepared to lead, partly because his time in the Guard was spent as a drill status Guardsman,

attending monthly drill weekends, performing the additional 15 days of duty each year, and volunteering for even more opportunities beyond that.

"My entire career I have been a drill status Guardsmen," said Henschel. "The overwhelming majority of the Airmen in the 126th are DSGs and that's an important perspective I bring to this position."

Supporting relief efforts during disasters is a big Guard mission, so it's not surprising that Henschel deployed as a citizen soldier in support of Hurricane Katrina.

One of his decorations that he's



most proud of is his Humanitarian Service Medal.

"Helping our citizens with domestics response is what the Guard is all about," said Henschel. "Supporting our community."

In his civilian work, Henschel has been with the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency for 20 years. Before taking leave to be a full-time Guard commander, he managed five divisions and over 250 personnel in a role that included a budget of \$150 million.

As is common in the Guard, his civilian work helps him perform his military duties.

"I am capable of handling large organizations and large budgets," said Henschel. "I bring my experience and skill to this position."

There are many routes to being a commander and there are many components to being successful.

"It's setting the direction of the mission and having the vision," said Henschel.

And he doesn't forget about taking care of the Airman.

"So, if there are any obstacles, let me know and I'll see what I can do to help clear those obstacles for my Airmen, and get after the mission," said Henschel. "That's what I am here to do."

Even with taking an indirect route into the Air Force, 22 years later he's still glad he made that choice.

A father of four, Henschel now enjoys flying with his children just as he did with his dad.





# 182nd Airlift Wing Selected to Receive Eight C-130J Super Hercules to Replace C-130Hs

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**Peoria, Ill.** - The 182nd Airlift Wing, based in Peoria, Illinois, is one of four Air National Guard locations selected by the Department of the Air Force to receive eight C-130J Super Hercules to replace their C-130Hs.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard said that Governor JB Pritzker worked with Illinois' Congressional delegation, including now retired Congresswoman Cheri Bustos, to communicate the attributes of the wing and its importance to the community.

"This will ensure Peoria is well positioned for at least another couple decades," Neely said. "I am most grateful to the Airmen of the 182nd Airlift Wing, whose hard work, dedication and innovation helped pave the way for these modern aircraft. They showed that the 'Peoria way' is the way to lead the nation."

The 182nd Airlift Wing has operated a flying mission in Peoria since its founding in 1947. During its storied 75-year history, the Wing has flown more than a dozen different

airplanes in operations ranging from the Berlin Air Drop to the Global War on Terror. The unit has grown to employ 1,200 members with a payroll of over \$65 million – and is currently assigned the C-130H "Hercules" aircraft – cargo planes that have become a common and celebrated sight flying throughout the community.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the 182nd Airlift Wing has deployed more than 5,000 personnel to over 29 countries. The unit played key roles in supporting Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, Inherent Resolve, Resolute Support, and Freedom's Sentinel. More recently, the Wing flew multiple sorties in support of Operation Allied Refuge, providing key transport to Afghan refugees during the U.S.'s withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

Domestically, the unit helped administer more than eight million COVID-19 vaccinations at 26 Illinois locations during the global pandemic, ensured cyber security for the 2020 national election and 2022 midterm election, and deployed to

the U.S. capitol to support the 2021 presidential inauguration.

Despite its commitments at home and abroad, Peoria Airmen sustained the highest C-130 Hercules mission capable rates in the Air Force, besting the Air National Guard and Air Mobility Command during fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Apart from fiscal year 2022, it has held one or both of these distinctions since 2007.

The Wing is also a 10-time recipient of the Air and Space Outstanding Unit Award for distinguishing itself by exceptionally meritorious service "that clearly sets the unit above and apart from similar units."

Most recently, the unit received the 2023 Major General Stanley F.H. Newman Outstanding Unit Award in which it was recognized as the number one of 40 Air National Guard units in the United States Air Force Air Mobility Command.

The Department of the Air Force will now conduct an environmental impact analysis at each location, which are expected to be completed in fiscal year 2025 before a final decision is made.

# Two Chicago-Based Units Mobilize for U.S. Central Command Mission

By Cpl. Dasianelle Cotton, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

**CHICAGO** – Some 300 Soldiers from the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade and the 433rd Signal Company based in Chicago's northwest side were mobilized for a year-long mission in the Middle East on Saturday, Jan. 27, during a ceremony at the Wintrust Arena in Chicago.

About 1,200 family and friends of the Soldiers were joined by Governor JB Pritzker, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth, U.S Representative Delia Ramirez, and Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"I take special pride in being your commander in chief. Your readiness is second-to-none in the nation. The soldiers here today represent the pinnacle of service to our state and our country. It is a commitment that sets an example for us all," Governor Pritzker said.

"Today, we send over 300 of

Illinois' best overseas to serve our state and our country," Governor Pritzker added. "To the families and loved ones of those departing today: I want you to know that I recognize your sacrifice and your heartache as

well, even as you join me in honoring the strength and dedication shown by our Guard. Our support of you does not end today."

The Governor presented a State of Illinois Flag to the deploying





Soldiers to fly over their overseas headquarters.

Sen. Duckworth, a combat Veteran and Illinois Army National Guard retiree, spoke of our American service members dedication through history and outlined recent events in U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility where the units will deploy. She expressed her thankfulness for the Soldiers' commitment to our nation.

"All of you today are taking on an important responsibility as you answer the call of service and duty," Duckworth said. "We are in awe of your bravery and thankful for your commitment to our country. I know today you're likely feeling a range of emotions, but above all, I hope today you feel proud. Proud that you've chosen this path of service. Proud of the work you have ahead of you. And proud of your country."

U.S. Rep. Ramirez represents the 3rd District of Illinois, which includes the units' armory on the corner of Humboldt Park in Chicago. Many of the deploying Soldiers live and work in the communities around the armory.

"As the representative of IL-03 and Member of the House Veterans' Committee, I know how significant today's mobilization ceremony was for the members of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade and the 433rd Signal Company, their families, and their communities. Today, 300 service members from Illinois, including so many of my very own constituents, demonstrate their devotion to serving our communities," said Congresswoman Ramirez. "I commend their courage, dedication, and passion and wish them and their families safety and fulfillment in this journey."

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd told the Soldiers that they are about to do "extraordinary work" which they have trained hard to do throughout their military careers. He told the Soldiers to keep the "lines of communication open" with their families.

"Check on them. Call them. Listen to them. They need for you to listen,"



General Boyd said. He also told the Soldiers to "trust and respect each other" and to "come back a better person," he added.

"Every now and then you get to do something great for this country... "You're ready. You're ready. Show time!," he said.

Col. Eric Smith, the commander of the 34th Division Sustainment000 Brigade, named each of the command teams that will accompany him and the brigade's command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Heather Blakeman, overseas.

"I introduced them for two reasons. One, so you will know who they are. And, two, to let you know that we are all leaving behind loved ones as well. We feel you. We will bring them back as soon as possible as better Soldiers - as better humans."

Col. Smith thanked the Soldiers and their families. "This is the fourth deployment since 2014 for this brigade, but for many Soldiers, this is the first all-inclusive, paid vacation. For others standing in formation, it's your second, or third deployment and beyond, and I know the Soldiers and the families and friends are a

little excited, but with that excitement also comes apprehension and maybe even a little anger, and that's ok," Col. Smith said.

"For all the friends, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, and even moms and dads in this audience and in formation, pound your chest and be proud - be proud that you answered our nation's call because not everyone is able nor willing to do just that, but you did. I thank you and your families for your continued sacrifice, enduring yet again, months of separation. I will tell you that after 34 years and this being my third deployment, it doesn't get any easier. While we may not have the luxuries of living at home, it's you, all of you moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives, that sacrifice the most. You will now bear the burden of doing it all - taking care of the children, the pets, chores around the house, finances, the list goes on. At times, you will face what seems to be an unsurmountable mountain but do realize that you are not alone, and countless resources are available," he added.



## Soldier Inspired to Serve by Operation Desert Storm Ends Military Career as Illinois National Guard's Senior Enlisted Leader

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – The year was 1990 and a future Illinois National Guard member watched Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm unfold on national television and was inspired to “do something that means something.”

“I had graduated high school and knew I wanted to go to college but didn’t know how I was going to pay for it because my parents couldn’t afford it,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Dena Ballowe of Carlinville, who retired as the Illinois National Guard’s top enlisted service member on Oct. 31 after 32 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard. “I had moved to Indiana to live with my grandmother to see what Indiana had to offer.”

While living in Indiana, Ballowe watched Gen. (ret.) Norman ‘Stormin’

Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of U.S. Central Command, as he mapped out coalition forces’ efforts to force Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

“You can watch all the war movies you want, but when you watch a war unfold on television, that was the turning point. That inspired me,” Ballowe said. “I decided I wanted to go do that. I moved back to Illinois and saw an advertisement in the newspaper about 100 percent college tuition if you join the Illinois National Guard.”

Ballowe said she knew nothing about the National Guard but talked to a local recruiter.

“I had a great honest recruiter,” she said. “He told me there will be moments in the Army that will suck, but you’ll get through it, and you’ll be

fine. He was right.”

Ballowe then talked to her mother, who was not sold on the idea of her daughter enlisting in the military.

“I took her to talk with the recruiter,” she said. “Afterward, she said ‘it’s not a bad deal’. So, I had mom’s approval.”

Ballowe enlisted as a material control account specialist, serving as a traditional National Guard Soldier with the 3637th Maintenance Company based in Springfield. Later she was hired as a military technician in the warehouse before moving to an accounting position in the U.S. Property and Fiscal Office.

“You see this throughout her career,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, who served as the officiant at



Ballowe's retirement ceremony Oct. 14. "She continually progressed to more complex and progressively challenging positions, each one more complex as she is developing her leadership skills."

Ballowe spent much of her early career in the 3637th, rising to sergeant first class before transferring to the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion and pinning on master sergeant rank.

In 2005, Ballowe was selected as first sergeant of the 3637th Maintenance Company and hit the ground running.

"I had one drill as the unit's first sergeant before we left to assist with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina" she said. "Then we were notified we had to transform the unit into a support maintenance company and recruit and fill the company with the positions we needed. And we also began our road to war training."

"It was during that deployment Ballowe learned of the 2007 deployment to Iraq," Neely said.

Once Ballowe returned from the Iraq deployment, she moved into financial services at Joint Forces Headquarters.

In 2012, Ballowe began taking distance learning courses through the Sergeants Major Academy, and at the same time completing classes for an associate degree in real estate. Typically, a two-year distance learning course, Ballowe completed the Sergeants Major Academy course work in one and one-half years, graduating in 2013, and again began gearing up for another deployment – this time to Kuwait with the 108th Sustainment Brigade (now the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade).

In 2016, Ballowe was promoted to Sergeant Major, Support Operations, 108th, followed by a selection in May 2017 as Command Sergeant Major, 232nd Combat Service Support Battalion, overseeing 1,100 Soldiers.

In Sept. 2018, Ballowe was selected to become the Command Sergeant Major, 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB), at Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island,



Illinois. In 2019, Neely selected Ballowe to serve as the first Illinois National Guard Command Senior Enlisted Leader.

"As an Air Force Adjutant General, I wanted an Army Command Sergeant Major," he said. "When I brought her up to meet with me to talk about her in the position, she told me I had the wrong person. I knew I had the right person for the job."

Neely said he gave her broad guidance for the position.

"I told her to build the position, take care of Soldiers and Airmen, and support me in all my different roles," he said. "She did that very well. She did an extraordinary job representing me not only with state partners, but also on a national level. She worked with the Senior Enlisted Advisor for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to develop the CSEL position."

Neely said her representation was most impactful when meeting with eastern European military leaders.

"The noncommissioned officer corps is something they don't yet understand," he said. "We spent a lot of time at the table explaining how the U.S. military has a phenomenal NCO Corps and she was very impactful particularly as a female combat veteran CSEL. When young Soldiers ask how they can be successful, her leadership speaks to the successes she's had throughout her career."

Neely said retirement ceremonies are more about the family and their sacrifices than about the Soldier.

"Thirty-two years of deployments, temporary duty, training, drill weekends, and pop-up events – it all takes a lot of family to help with those commitments," he said. "All of us who wear the uniform know we can't do it without the support of the family, particularly when you have dual military members serving together."

Ballowe agreed.

"I can't thank my family enough," she said. "Thank you for being my rock. When duty called, I was able to step away and I knew the household life would still carry on. It wasn't always easy."

Ballowe said there were times early in her career when she could have just walked away but, is thankful she chose to stick it out.

"My father passed away when I had been in basic training two weeks," she said. "I was a daddy's girl, and this gave me every reason to walk away from it. But I didn't. Mom passed away about 4-5 years after, so early in my career, I had lost both of my parents. Every day, I hope I made them proud."

Ballowe said the family extends to those outside the bloodlines.

"I was surrounded by amazing teams throughout the years," she said. "It's always been about the relationships with those people that made it worthwhile. These bonds are forever. You're my brothers and sisters forever."

Committed. Patient. Passionate. Fair. Those are words which have been used to describe the type of leader Ballowe was throughout her 32 years of service.

"She was a young noncommissioned officer ready to learn and committed to supporting the full-time force," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas R. Black, State Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois National Guard, who first met Ballowe when both were young, enlisted Soldiers around 1994.

"Dena has a heart of gold. She cares for others and is always quick to put others before herself. She always made sure the needs of everybody were met whether they were civilian employees or Soldiers."

Black said Ballowe has a great sense of humor.

"She was always able to come into a room and be able to connect with everyone," he said. "That was the type of personality, leadership and camaraderie she brought to the work environment."

Black said that never changed throughout the past 30 years.

"We were young sergeants together and grew up to master sergeants," he said. "That's when I turned my career to warrant officer. I tried to get her to do the same, but she found her niche as an NCO leader. It's sad to see her move on but I'm happy to have been able to share 30 years in uniform with her."

1st Sgt. Greg Hoffman, Construction Facility Management Office (CFMO) Resource Manager, who first met Ballowe in 2003 while administering a physical training test, said that Ballowe stands out above other people.

"I felt a connection with her when I realized she was a platoon sergeant for the 3637th Maintenance Company," he said. "How she led the platoon and interacted with individual Soldiers solidified her as a leader. During the activation for Katrina, I watched her become the leader she was meant to be."

Hoffman said he owes his own success to Ballowe.

"I didn't think I wanted to become a first sergeant," he said. "When she completed her time as a first sergeant, I knew I wanted to continue through the ranks. She inspired me to continue in my career."

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Nicole Matteson, Deputy Finance Manager, U.S. Property and Fiscal Office, who met Ballowe more than 20 years ago, said Ballowe was passionate about her job and being a great Soldier.

"I remember when she was in USPFO and found out Illinois National



Guard Soldiers weren't getting the same benefits as their active-duty counterparts, just because of the way the National Guard issued orders, she took on the issue with National Guard Bureau as well as the Defense Finance and Accounting Service," Matteson said. "She took on the issue with both entities and was able to correct the issue. It was that tenacity which made her a great leader. She had influence to make change and she was able to get changes made. She's passionate about doing the right thing to take care of Soldiers."

Matteson said that she and Ballowe are fellow Soldiers and coworkers, but also friends.

**"I was surrounded by amazing teams throughout the years. These bonds are forever. You're my brothers and sisters forever."**

"She helped me grow as a leader and supervisor," she said. "She convinced me there is more than one way to do things to ensure the job gets done and correctly. She's a very humble person. She's always passing the accolades down, giving credit where credit is due."

Ballowe said she views herself as someone who is fair.

"I probably have more tolerance and lenience for younger Soldiers who make mistakes than older ones for sure," she said. "We all were young and had to grow and learn from our

mistakes."

Ballowe said if something isn't done up to par, there's usually a driving reason behind it and it's up to leaders to determine the underlying issue and help if possible.

"I try not to knee jerk the situation, but try to find out the reason," she said. "You can't just put a band-aid on the issue without resolving the underlying problem. But sometimes all that's left is the discipline."

Ballowe said she grew up seeing men in uniform, but not so much the women in her family.

"I had several uncles who were in the service," she said. "I remember uncles coming in and out, maybe just stay a day or two before heading out to their next duty station."

She thinks she, and her husband, Illinois Air National

Guard Master Sgt. Donnie Ballowe, had some influence on other family members to serve in the military.

"Our son served in the U.S. Army on active duty," she said. "We have a nephew in the Illinois Air National Guard plus two nephews who served in the Marines, a niece who served in the Illinois National Guard, and a nephew who served on active duty in the Army. I like to think those kids grew up seeing my husband and I in uniform and it influenced their service."

In the 32 years in which Ballowe



wore the cloth of her nation, the National Guard has undergone a major transformation.

"The biggest evolution for the National Guard during my career would have to be the transformation following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001," she said. "We became more operational with more intense training. The U.S. Army realized they needed all components, the active-duty forces, the National Guard, and the Reserve forces."

Ballowe said the broadening of assignments in the National Guard also transformed the Illinois National Guard.

"Those Soldiers who want to challenge themselves in other positions have that mechanism to change units which makes more diverse leaders with a broader knowledge of the military," she said.

Ballowe acknowledges military service is not a good fit for everyone. However, she would offer advice to those who are contemplating military service.

"Enlist. Give me four or six years," she said. "Personally, I believe it'll be the greatest experience of your life. You'll experience things, people, places, and situations that only one percent of the population will experience. The experience will pay for itself and outweigh the bad moments."

For someone who is already serving but is on the fence as to whether they should continue their service, Ballowe advises you to sit and talk about the pros and cons.

"Your family commitments must come first," she said. "If you don't have their support, you probably won't be as happy and unable to give it 100 percent."

Ballowe said at the end of the day, she will miss the people and experiences the most.

"We don't always get it right on paper, but it's the people who are all in, not wanting to see it fail," she said. "You may be totally exhausted, but you're still doing the mission."

Being there when her country needed her was the most meaningful part of Ballowe's service.

"The most meaningful part of my service to me was I was there when

my country needed me," she said. "It takes each one of us. I am thankful I had the drive and ability, the will, and the want to serve. I was proud to be part of the solution regardless of the mission. Someone there to help someone who can't help themselves."

Service doesn't come without sacrifice Ballowe said.

"Sometimes service is a huge sacrifice," she said, recounting a friend from the Nebraska National Guard who was killed in Iraq in 2004 when an improvised explosive device detonated near her convoy vehicle. "I lost a great friend from the Nebraska National Guard, Sergeant 1st Class Linda Tarango-Griess, to an IED. We went to the basic noncommissioned officer course together and scheduled or advanced noncommissioned officer course together. We were like sisters who met at our leadership courses."

Ballowe said it's important for service members to know that sacrifice doesn't just happen to everyone, but it could happen to you.

"Her life was for something," she said. "You have to decide if you want

to be part of that."

Ballowe said there's a mental sacrifice also but asks that civilians not judge the military based on suicide rates.

"It's not the easiest life out there," she said.

Ballowe will continue serving the Illinois National Guard as a federal technician with the Construction Facility Management Office at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

"No one tells you one of the hardest days in the military is the day you leave," she said. "I'll still be at Camp Lincoln at the CFMO because this would be a lot harder if I wasn't still part of the organization."

Ballowe said her military service had a huge impact on her life.

"I was a small-town kid who had the guts to join the military," she said. "The military educated me, showed me the world, put me in contact with people from other countries and different cultures. It grew me as a person. It's the best decision I've made. Thank God I had the guts to do it and stick it out."



## ***Retired Illinois National Guard Colonel Awarded Legion of Merit for command of 65th Troop Command Brigade***

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. - Illinois Army National Guard Col. Jason Osberg of Champaign has been awarded the Legion of Merit.

Osberg, a civilian airline pilot, retired from the Army in August after more than 33 years of service including as an aviation lift company commander in Iraq and as an operations officer in Kosovo. His last assignment was as Commander of the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade. The 65th oversees an artillery battalion, aviation battalion and other aviation companies, a civil support team, a digital liaison detachment, a public affairs detachment, a cyber defense team, military intelligence units, and an Army band. These units are spread throughout Illinois.

Col. Osberg lives in Champaign with his spouse, Hannah, and their son, Wilson.



## ***Eastridge Receives Legion of Merit for Successful Command of 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team during ILNG's COVID-19 response***



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. - Illinois Army National Guard Col. Michael Eastridge, the Chief of the Illinois National Guard's Joint Staff, was awarded the Legion of Merit for his successful command of the National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team from June 2020 through December 2022.

Col. Eastridge helped guide the brigade during the Illinois National Guard's COVID-19 response and helped it maintain its readiness and combat power during the pandemic.

Col. Eastridge was presented the medal by Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, on Dec. 8 at the Illinois National Guard's Senior Leader Engagement at the 183rd Wing in Springfield, Illinois.

Eastridge, a native of Wheaton, Illinois, and resident of Plymouth, Michigan, is a manager of marketing and sales support for Mercedes-Benz as a civilian. He enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1988 and graduated from the ILARNG's Officer Candidate School in 2000. He was commissioned as an infantry second lieutenant. He is the father of three children; Tim, Rachel and Megan.



# Smith, Strahle Presented with Staff Eagles



Two Illinois National Guard senior leaders were presented with the Illinois Army National Guard Staff Eagle by Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, at the Commander's Update Brief Jan. 9 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.

Air Force Col. Shawn Strahle, the Deputy Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Wing, was presented with the Illinois Army National Guard Staff



Eagle for serving as the Illinois National Guard's Director of Information Management from May 2019 to Sept. 2023.

Illinois Army National Guard Col. Eric Smith, the Commander of the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade, was presented with the "Staff Eagle" for serving as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (G4) in the Illinois National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters from July 2022 to September 2023.

## 182nd AW Recognized by Goodwill in Peoria Area



U.S. Air Force Capt. Samantha Norville, center, a logistics readiness officer with the 182nd Logistics Readiness Squadron, Illinois Air National Guard, receives a service award from Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois in Peoria, Ill., Dec. 14, 2023. Norville served on the board of directors from 2021 to 2023.



The Illinois Air National Guard 182nd Airlift Wing's deputy wing commander Col. Asheleigh Gellner, center, and wing command chief Chief Master Sgt. Micheal Price, left, accept the 2023 Goodwill Business Partner of the Year award from CEO Don Johnson at the Goodwill Industries of Central Illinois annual meeting in Peoria, Ill., Dec. 14, 2023. The wing received the award for its members' contributions to Goodwill's community service mission.



# Vietnam Veterans of Quincy Army National Guard Unit Presents Memorial Plaque to Modern Unit

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Vietnam Veterans from the Illinois Army National Guard's 126th Supply and Services Company, presented the modern 126th Quartermaster Company with a plaque with the 180 names of the Soldiers who served in Vietnam with the Illinois Army National Guard's 126th Supply and Services Company of Quincy, Illinois, as part of the unit's family holiday party on Dec. 17.

The plaque will hang for perpetuity in the Illinois Army National Guard's Quincy Armory memorializing the service of the only Illinois Army National Guard unit to deploy to Vietnam. The unit deployed in September 1968 and returned to a parade and celebration in Quincy in August 1969.

The 126th's story began in 1924, when the Medical Detachment, 130th Infantry Regiment was federally recognized in Quincy, Illinois. That unit served in the Pacific theater during WWII and was reorganized and redesignated six times before becoming the 126th Service and Supply Company Feb. 1, 1968 and deploying to Vietnam May 13, 1968. Eventually, the 126th would become the 1844th Transportation Company before becoming the 126th Quartermaster Company.

The unit was re-activated



in November 2016 as the 126 Quartermaster Co.

Jerry Roush of Quincy, Illinois, was one of the men who deployed to Vietnam with the 126th. Roush brought the unit's original guide-on with him and presented the plaque during the unit's drill on Dec. 17.

"The 126th has such a grand history and Quincy is its home," Roush said when the unit was re-activated in 2016. Seeing all these young Soldiers standing here makes me proud," said Roush. "I know that they'll carry on the traditions of the 126th and add to the history."







## Effingham Soldier Promoted to Colonel, Selected as Illinois Army National Guard's Information Operations Officer

*By Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Spreitzer, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Friends, family and colleagues gathered at the Illinois Military Academy to celebrate the promotion of Gregory Settle to the rank of colonel.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, officiated the ceremony. Boyd congratulated Settle on his promotion and thanked Settle's family for their support.

"This is a big deal! Very few officers make to full-bird colonel, so congratulations to you, Greg," said Boyd. "A special thanks to your family. Without your support, Greg couldn't do what he does, and he couldn't have made it here without your support and love, thank you."

With the promotion, Settle was also selected to be the Information Operations Officer (G7) for the Illinois

Army National Guard. Settle thanked those there for attending and said he was grateful for the selection to the new position.

"First, Maj. Gen. Boyd, thank you for trusting me with this position, it is an honor," said Settle. "It means a lot that you all are here, it reminds me I didn't get here alone. Family is the cornerstone of what makes us, and I wouldn't be here without all of you."

Settle's mother, Beverly Hart and his sons, Jackson and Wesley "pinned" him with his new rank.

Settle enlisted in the Illinois National Guard as a cannon crewmember in 1995 with 3rd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment based in Mt. Vernon and commissioned in 2001 as a field artillery officer through Southern

Illinois University at Carbondale's Reserve Officer Training Corps.

In 2006, he switched from field artillery to infantry and transferred to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment. Throughout his career Settle has held a variety of staff and command assignments including Company Commander for D Co. and Headquarters and Headquarters Co., 2/130 Infantry, Officer in Charge for 2/130 Infantry and Brigade Operations Officer for the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Settle has deployed four times, twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-04, 2004-06), once in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from 2008-09 and finally in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in 2020.





## 13 Soldiers Graduate from Illinois Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors State Certification Course

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Thirteen Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers graduated from the Illinois Army National Guard's Military Funeral Honors (MFH) State Certification course Dec. 16 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

During the weeklong course, Soldiers learned how to provide dignified military funeral honors to veterans. At the end of the course, Soldiers were tested on the material.

The Soldiers were awarded the Army National Guard Honor Guard Tab and gold cord to be worn on the

Army Service Uniform in recognition and representation of the Soldier's continued dedication, precision, and commitment to excellence.

"The Military Funeral Honors teams conducted 2,695 funeral services during fiscal year 2023," said Sarah Smith, the Illinois Military Funeral Honors State Coordinator. "Our team refers to funeral services as missions. Veterans helped shape our great country and honoring them is the best thing you can do. This is a no-fail mission. I am very proud of all our Soldiers for their hard work and dedication."

The Soldiers graduating from the MFH State Certification course include:

- Spc. Steven Castaneda of Bradley, Company A, 766th Brigade Engineering Battalion;
- Pfc. Daven Melvin of Marion, Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment;
- Spc. Diego Noguez of Lake Villa, 1244th Transportation Company;
- Spc. Vincent Sauseda of Chicago, 3625th Classification and Inspection Company;

- Sgt. Jack Whitlock of Springfield, 233rd Military Police Company;
- Spc. John Kugler of Chicago, Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment;
- Pfc. Felipe Sotelo of Franklin Park, 1244th Transportation Company;
- Spc. Michael Jimenez of Macomb, 1244th Transportation Company;
- Cpl. Christopher Jones of DeWitt, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment;
- Cadet Flabia Justiniano of Bolingbrook, 933rd Military Police Company;
- Spc. Hannah Hoffman of Decatur, Company E, 634th Brigade Support Battalion;
- Pfc. Jack Gregory of Marion, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment;
- Sgt. Zachary Heath of Mattoon, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

Justiniano was selected as the Honor Graduate for the course.

The ILARNG MFH is actively seeking Soldiers to join the program. Soldiers interested in joining the ILARNG MFH should contact Sgt. Luigi Cabantog at 217-685-4878.





# Soldiers Awarded Meritorious Service Medals for Top U.S. Finish in Army Cavalry Squad Competition

*By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Five Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers received the Meritorious Service Medal on Nov. 16 for their top U.S. finish in the Command Sgt. Maj. William Gainey Cup competition for the best scout squad.

Lt. Gen. Jon Jensen, the Director of the Army National Guard at National Guard Bureau congratulated the 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment Soldiers at the Illinois Army National Guard Commander's Guidance Seminar at the Bank of Springfield Center, Springfield, Illinois. The team placed first among U.S. teams in the May 1-5 competition at Fort Moore, Georgia.

The competition "showcases the competence, physical and mental stamina, and competitive spirit of Cavalry Scout Troopers serving in formations that perform Reconnaissance and Security," according to the U.S. Cavalry and Armor Association. The Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers were barely edged out of the top international finish by a team from the Netherlands in the competition, which is held every two years.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard presented the Meritorious Service Medals to:

- Spc. Jacob Bentle of Barrington, Illinois
- Sgt. Conor Mahoney of Wheaton, Illinois
- Spc. Evan Quinn of Ashton, Illinois
- Spc. William Pitney of Dekalb, Illinois
- 1st Lt. C.J. Hardy of Elmhurst, Illinois

The Meritorious Service Medal is presented by the United States Armed Forces to recognize superior and exceptional non-combat service. It is rare for enlisted Soldiers or officers to earn the medal early in their careers.



# Lt. Governor Stratton Leads Committee Dedicated to Developing Illinois' Military Community

*By Sgt. Trenton Fouché, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The Military Economic Development Committee met Nov. 7, 2023 on Camp Lincoln to discuss issues relating to current and former military installations throughout the state.

Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton leads the Military Economic Development Committee. “As Chair of the Military Economic Development Committee, I know how critical it is to create space where our service members can come together to discuss the issues that impact them the most. Governor Pritzker and I are focused on making Illinois the best place to live, work, and raise a family, and that includes our military families,” Lt. Governor Stratton said.

The committee is a way for the military services in Illinois – active, reserve, and National Guard – to come together to discuss quality-of-life issues for service members in

Illinois as well as look at ways to work together to further develop the state’s military community, said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.

“Part of that is communicating effectively what Illinois has to offer, from tax-exempt military pay, to our incredible logistics networks, to our status as a technology hub in the heart of the nation,” Neely added.

The representation from civilians and service members is crucial to the success of accomplishing the committee’s initiatives, said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

“It is great when we can come together to address the concerns of our service members,” Boyd said. “We want to retain the Soldiers and

Airmen who wear this uniform and help make our organization better.”

Since its inception, the Military Economic Development Committee has focused on new projects and initiatives that lead to the economic development of the military community, as well as growing the state. Community engagement and support efforts have been at the helm of these discussions.

Stratton said as Illinois looks to the future, it’s important that military and government officials address evolving concerns that impact our communities.

“We must continue to listen to the needs of our military communities and ensure they have access to the resources they need. As the daughter of a Veteran, I am deeply grateful for the sacrifice and dedication of our men and women in the military and thank them for their service,” said Stratton.







## Spouses Learn about 182nd AW through Flight

Spouses of members of the 182nd Operations Group, Illinois Air National Guard, participate in an orientation flight on a C-130H3 Hercules aircraft in Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 4.

Spouses were taken on an orientation flight to better familiarize family members with the 182nd Airlift Wing.





# Illinois Army National Guard's 'Top Cook' Retires After More Than 27 Years of Service

**By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 3 Joseph Cook of Lincoln, Illinois, retired with more than 27 years of service on Dec. 3 at the Illinois National Guard's headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Cook was the Illinois Army National Guard's top food service officer. He transferred to Illinois from the California Army National Guard in 2019 and conducted a 100 percent inventory of all of the Illinois Army National Guard's dining facility equipment allowing for accurate future budget projections. He was vital in helping the Illinois Army National Guard stand up field feeding platoons. He assisted the 634th Brigade Support Battalion with winning the Army-wide Philip A. Connelly Award for food service in 2020 and assisted the 1544th Transportation Co. win the regional competition in 2022.

Cook enlisted in the active Army in 1992. In 1993 he deployed as a food service specialist to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Hammer. While on active duty, he competed in the Army's Philip A. Connelly Award Program three times winning first place with the 864th Engineer Battalion and was a runner up the two other times.

After a short break in service, Cook enlisted in the California Army National Guard in 2005 and deployed with the 1114th Transportation Company as a platoon sergeant to Al Asad, Iraq. He became the food operations sergeant upon his return from deployment.

He rose to the rank of sergeant first class before being selected for warrant officer school in 2012. In 2013 he was selected as the California Army National Guard's state food program manager and in 2016 he began guest instructing at the National Guard Professional Education Center's Food Management Course in Little Rock, Arkansas, and joined the National Guard Bureau's list of trusted evaluators for the Philip A. Connelly



Award.

He transferred to the Illinois Army National Guard as the state food program manager in 2019.

He has close to 30 awards and commendations including the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal with four oak leaf clusters, the Southwest Asia Service Medal with Bronze Service Star, the Korean Defense Service Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, and numerous Illinois and California awards.

He lives on his family farm in



Lincoln, Illinois, with his spouse, Claire, and their daughters 11-year-old Sophia and 13-year-old Claire. The couple also has an adult son, Logan.



# Casteleyn Awarded MSM for Work as Commander of 244th DLD

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Illinois Army National Guard Colonel Max Casteleyn of Mundelein, Illinois, was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his work as commander of the Chicago-based 244th Digital Liaison Detachment from January 2022 to August 2023.

Digital Liaison Detachments act as liaisons between military headquarters to allow commanders to integrate military operations in joint, intergovernmental and multinational environments by providing the staff interface, mentoring, support and communication required for partners and allies to accomplish their missions.

Col. Casteleyn, a 27-year Army veteran, now commands the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade, which oversees an artillery battalion, aviation battalion and other aviation companies, a civil support team, a digital liaison detachment, a public affairs detachment, a cyber defense team, military intelligence units, and an Army band. These units are spread throughout Illinois.



Col. Casteleyn has deployed numerous times to the Middle East, South-Central Asia, and to the

Balkans. As a civilian, he is a senior client partner for Franklin Covey.

## Pawnee Soldier Awarded Illinois Military Medal of Merit for Work with SPP

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Crystal Rodrigues, of Pawnee, Illinois, was presented the Illinois Military Medal of Merit Dec. 5 at Joint Force Headquarters, Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

Rodrigues was honored for her work as the Director of the Illinois State Partnership Program.

"Thank you for your efforts in the State Partnership Program," said Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, of Sherman, Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff. "It's not an easy job when dealing with senior leaders but thank you for what you did for the program."

Rodrigues has accepted a full-time job in Hawaii but plans to remain in the Illinois National Guard as a traditional Soldier.





# 933rd Military Police Company Returns Home from Deployment

***Fort Sheridan-based unit conducted security mission for U.S. Southern Command***

More than 110 Soldiers from the 933rd Military Police Co., returned in November from an 11-month deployment in support of U.S. Southern Command.

The unit was led by Capt. Cameron McCreery and 1st Sgt. Michael Watts. Much of the unit's mission and accomplishments cannot be discussed because of combatant command operational security and force protection policies.

However, the unit's Soldiers and leaders performed exceptionally well and greatly improved standard operating procedures at their deployment location. They created emergency action plans that will greatly enhance future readiness.

They also participated in multiple exercises and rehearsals planning for weather-related disasters and movements. They facilitated visits to their deployment location by international organizations. Overall, the unit improved operations during the deployment while conducting Military Police operations. *(Photos by Mr. Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)*











# REMEMBERING ONE OF THEIR OWN

710th MCAS Honors Spc. Nathaniel Jefferson

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs





The Illinois Army National Guard's 710th Medical Company Area Support, based in Chicago, held a memorial ceremony for Spc. Nathaniel Jefferson at the unit's readiness center in Crestwood, Illinois, on Nov. 19. Jefferson died on Aug. 11 after completing the Army Combat Fitness Test while attending the Basic Leader Course on Camp Shelby, Miss.







# Champaign Soldier Promoted to Colonel

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Nearly 22 years after graduating from the Illinois Army National Guard Officer Candidate School, Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Paul Metzдорff, of Bloomington, was promoted to colonel in a ceremony at the Astroth Community Education Center, Heartland Community College, Normal, Illinois, Sept. 8.

“Achieving the rank of colonel is quite an accomplishment in one’s career,” Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, said. “When you achieve that rank, you are asked to do more. Paul has done all we have asked of him and more. That’s why we’re here today to celebrate this well-deserved, well-earned promotion.”

Metzдорff enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1996 as an infantryman, serving with 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment in Bosnia-Herzegovina and at Fort Riley, Kansas. In 2000, he joined the Illinois Army National

Guard as a Simultaneous Membership Program Cadet while attending Illinois State University. In March 2001, he transitioned to the ILARNG OCS and was commissioned as an infantry officer Sept. 10, 2002.

“I’m humbled to stand here,” Metzдорff said. “I joined active duty when I was 17 just to pay for college. When I left active duty to go to school, I had no intention of ever being in the military again. But I missed something when I was going to college. Turns out that something was the people, the camaraderie.”

Throughout his career in the ILARNG, Metzдорff has served in positions of greater responsibility, including assignments in the 66th Infantry Brigade as it transitioned into the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team; 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment; Recruiting and Retention Battalion; and the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade; culminating in his selection as the ILARNG Military Personnel Officer (G-1). From 2017-

2019, Metzдорff served as a branch chief in the Acquisitions and Program Management Office at National Guard Bureau.

“Paul has taken on some tough assignments,” Boyd said. “When Paul took over as commander of recruiting and retention, it was during COVID. He came to work every day, even during the tough times. It’s easy to be a leader when things are going good but when things are not going well, that’s when it’s tough to be a leader.”

Boyd said Metzдорff stepped out of his comfort zone by accepting the assignment at NGB.

“He took a broadening assignment at NGB,” he said. He learned some very valuable lessons and brought that experience back to our organization. Stepping up to take those types of assignments is what makes you competitive when you make colonel.”

Metzдорff thanked ILARNG Col. Ron Bonesz, who Metzдорff succeed as the ILARNG Military Personnel Officer.



"I have huge shoes to fill," Metzdorff said. "But I'm up to the challenge."

He also thanked his family, wife, Alyson, and children, Isabella, 19, Jackson, 17, and Cooper, 11, for their support of his career.

"Without their sacrifices and unwavering support, there is no doubt in my mind I would not be here today, especially without my wife, Alyson," he said.

Metzdorff acknowledged those he served alongside over the years.

"I have served with a variety of people throughout my career, and I've learned from all of them. Thank you for the impact you have had on my career," he said. "This promotion is not just the recognition of my achievements but also the recognition of everyone I've served alongside. It's also a marker of the responsibility for my future endeavors as the challenge for me to continue to grow as a leader, a mentor and as a person. It's an opportunity to serve the Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard. I'm ready to take on that challenge."



## Air Guard Recruiter Awarded Meritorious Service Medal

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Illinois Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Jason Arndt of New Berlin was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal on Oct. 14 at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Brig. Gen. Dan McDonough, the Assistant Adjutant General – Air of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, presented the medal to Arndt for "outstanding achievement" while assigned as the Illinois Air National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Senior Enlisted Leader from September 2019 to September 2022.

During this time, Arndt enlisted more than 750 new Airmen into the Illinois Air National Guard, with 300 of those filling critical needs within the Air Force. He pioneered a first-of-its-kind recruiting storefront in Waukegan, Illinois, enabling the Illinois Air National Guard to increase its recruiting presence in Chicagoland. He revitalized the Illinois Air National Guard's recruiter hiring process bringing on six new recruiters resulting in a 13 percent increase in accessions. He also ensured the Illinois Air National Guard's Joint Qualification System certified within six months.



# Soldier Honored for More Than a Decade of Service

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Staff Sgt. LeAnne Withrow, a platoon sergeant in the Chicago-based 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, medically retired on Sunday, Dec. 3, on Camp Lincoln in Springfield after 13 years of service.

She grew up in Galesburg, Illinois, and now lives in Niantic, Illinois. She enlisted as a food service specialist in 2010 and in 2013 reclassified to public affairs.

She deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 2015. She has also supported multiple domestic responses and overseas exercises including Ulchi Freedom Guardian in Korea, the NATO Summit in Chicago, Hurricane Irma response, Eager Lion in Jordan, Arctic Eagle in Alaska, COVID-19 response and civil disturbance response, among many others. She has earned multiple awards and honors during her 13 years of service.

She will continue working for the Illinois National Guard as the civilian Lead Military Family Readiness Specialist and Disability Program Manager.



## 126th Air Refueling Wing Sharpens Skills During Exercise



**SCOTT AFB, Illinois** – Airmen from the 126th Air Refueling Wing participated in Exercise Raging Piasa Sept. 10, 2023 at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.

U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Theodore Billingsley emergency management journeyman, 126th Civil Engineering Squadron, simulated operating a Joint Chemical Agent Detector while inspecting military air crew members possibly exposed to contaminants during the exercise.

Members of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, conducted this exercise to ensure readiness in the event of a real world incident.



A man in a military uniform is standing at the front of a room, gesturing with his hands as he speaks to a group of people seated in rows of chairs. The room has a blue wall and a whiteboard in the background.

# Command Chief Master Sergeant of Air National Guard Visits 182nd Airlift Wing

U.S. Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Maurice Williams, command chief, Air National Guard, visited the Illinois Air National Guard 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, Nov. 3. Williams and his wife, Gwen, visited the base in order to discuss enlisted matters, learn about future operations and to gain insight on the inner workings and culture of the unit. *(Illinois Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)*







# Warren Retires after 24-Year Military Career in Illinois Army National Guard

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Chief Warrant Officer 2 Peter E. Warren, Jr., of Springfield, a Force Integration Readiness Officer in the Illinois Army National Guard's Plans, Training, and Operations directorate, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 24 years of service Dec. 8 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

Warren enlisted in July 1999 as an electronics repairer and light wheel mechanic, serving in the 3637th Maintenance Company in Springfield. In 2003, he transferred to Joint Force Headquarters where he served as a military pay specialist as a technician. In June 2004, Warren entered the Active Guard and Reserve program in the Department of Information Management, serving as a telecommunications specialist, reaching the rank of sergeant first class.

Warren transferred to the Military Personnel directorate in 2013 as a Human Resources sergeant in the Automation and Automated Record Branch.

He deployed to Afghanistan in 2013 as part of the Bilateral Embedded

Support Team A-17. In 2018, Warren was promoted to master sergeant with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and later that year commissioned as a warrant officer with the Recruiting and Retention Command.

Warren became the Force Integration Readiness Officer in September 2020.

Col. Lenny Williams, Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff, told Warren he has a far reach in the organization.

"There is a lot of people here which is a testament to who you are," Williams said. "Your reach in this organization goes beyond who is here today."

Williams thanked Warren's family, including wife, Ashley and children, Adelyn, Ryker and Tinsley, for their support throughout his career.

"We can't do this without family," Williams said. "This job is hard. We can't do it without family or without a support network."

Williams said there are several things that come to mind when someone talks about Warren.



"Strategic thinker, respect and credibility, and servant leadership are all words which can be used to describe Pete," Williams said. "You have the respect and credibility of senior leaders across the whole organization. You made all of us think more and you made all of us better leaders. Your legacy in the Illinois Army National Guard will last a generation."

Warren thanked those he served



with who helped shape him as a Soldier throughout his career.

"I believe God placed the right people with me throughout my career to help me along the way," he said. "These people made me who I am today."

Warren said he was fortunate to be surrounded by the best leaders, peers, subordinates and family throughout his career.

"As hard as it may be to retire, it makes the choice to want to stay with the organization that much easier," he said. "Looking back at all my assignments, I would not change anything. I've been fortunate to have served with some of the finest leaders in this organization. I'm a better person for it."

Warren thanked his family for their

support throughout his career.

"They are why and how we are able to do this, even though there are times it may not seem like it to the family," he said. "None of this happens or means anything without the support of friends and family."

He shared a special message with his children and wife.

"Kids, I'm proud of the three of you and I look forward to seeing the young adults you are growing into. Find your passion and give it your all," he said. "Ashley, you have made it so easy for me to pursue my passion in serving. This would not be possible without your support."

Warren was presented the Meritorious Service Medal for



his work as the Force Integration Readiness Officer and the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for his volunteer work in his community.

## ***New 183rd Wing Deputy Commander Presented MSM for Work as DoIM***

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Air Force Col. Shawn Strahle, the Deputy Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Wing, received the Meritorious Service Medal for more than four years of service as the Director of Information Management, part of the Illinois Army National Guard's staff.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army for the Illinois National Guard and the Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, presented the medal to Strahle in front of the Illinois Army National Guard staff on January 9 at the Guard's headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Strahle is a resident of Chatham, Illinois, and a native of Dugger, Indiana. He served as the Illinois National Guard's Director of Information Management from May 2019 to September 2023. The medal citation reads "Colonel Strahle demonstrated extraordinary leadership, expertise, and devotion to duty that greatly enhanced the overall readiness regulatory compliance and operational success of the Illinois Army National Guard."



# Pleasant Plains Soldier Retires After 26-Year Career in Illinois Army National Guard

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Chief Warrant Officer 4 Ryan Little, of Pleasant Plains, Illinois, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 26 years of service, Dec. 21, at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

“The Army got weaker today because you’re not in anymore,” said Col. Shawn Nokes, Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Illinois Army National Guard, who officiated the retirement ceremony. “Your legacy will live on in all of us. The greatest legacy anyone leaves behind is to positively impact the lives of others and you have done that.”

Little enlisted in the ILARNG in 1997, serving with the 3637th Maintenance Company, based in Springfield. In 2003, he transferred to the 1644th Transportation Company to mobilize as a motor transport operator in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Little deployed to Iraq as the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion motor sergeant from December 2003 through January 2005.

Little attended Warrant Officer Candidate School, graduating as a warrant officer in 2006. He served in the 3637th Maintenance Company as the Ground Support Equipment Platoon Engineer Equipment Maintenance Warrant Officer from 2007 to 2015.

In 2016, Little transferred to the 232nd CSSB as the Battalion Maintenance Warrant Officer.

Throughout his career, Little has served in a variety of assignments and duties, most recently as the Senior Maintenance Warrant Officer in Joint Force Headquarters as the Maintenance Assistance and Instruction Team Chief.

Foregoing the traditional military retirement ceremony, Little invited friends with whom he had served throughout his career to share stories from their service together.

Lt. Col. Mike Barton, deputy G-4,



congratulated Little on a great career.

“Congratulations on a fantastic career. I don’t think you could have done it any better. You are a consummate professional and someone who gets the people first aspect of about what we do right,” Barton said. “You are a true problem solver. Give him a problem, get out of his way and let him solve it. That’s what you did for us. You are a prime example of why we’re the best Army in the world.”

Nokes, who has known Little for the past 22 years, said no amount of words can be used to describe Little’s impact on the Illinois Army National Guard and it’s Soldiers.

“You have been a friend, mentor and a trusted advisor for me for many years,” Nokes said. “I cannot describe the impact you had on me in becoming the leader I am today. As I made my way through the surface maintenance community, there wasn’t

a big project or policy written that I didn’t confide in you.”

Nokes said when he thinks of Little, he sees a quiet professional.

“He served his career the right way,” he said. “Ryan is beyond humble about his accomplishments and never takes credit for anything he did. For him it’s always about the team. He has been extremely effective in building relationships inside and outside the chain of command.”

Nokes also thanked Little’s family.

“Thank you for allowing us to have him for so long,” he said. “He couldn’t have served without your love and support all these years.”

Little thanked friends and family for attending the ceremony.

“Your attendance here means a lot to me,” he said. “Twenty-six years isn’t that long. It seems like it flew by. At the end of the day it was because of each of you. I couldn’t do any of this without a team.”



For Little, the military has been part of his life since the day he was born, thanks to his father's military service in the Illinois Army National Guard.

"I was always asked if my dad forced me to join the military," Little said. "Our dad always told us to pick something we wanted to do and run with it but give it 100 percent."

Little, whose two older brothers served in the ILARNG, said between his father's and he and his brothers' service, they have more than 120 years of combined service – not counting the next generation of Littles serving in the military.

Little thanked his children, daughters Sammy, Molly, and Kate, for their support and encouraged them to find their passion and "go full throttle".

"Pick something you want to do and go full throttle with it," he said. "Give 100 percent in whatever you do."

Little thanked his wife, Jade, for her support throughout his service.

"Thank you for your support all these years," he said. "I don't know how I'll ever repay you."

Little offered advice to his fellow Soldiers.

"Whatever you do, give it 100 percent, but take care of the Soldiers," he said. "Soldiers are the ones who win the wars. You build trust from



them. Keep them motivated and in the organization. Taking care of them is how you accomplish that."

Little said while his time in the ILARNG ends at the end of December, he will still be supporting the organization as the Facilities

Operations and Program Management Branch Chief with the Construction and Facilities Management Office at Camp Lincoln.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said. "I'll be a freedom fighter with the CFMO."

## Port Byron Soldier Receives MSM for Service as Senior Noncommissioned Officer of 65th Troop Command Bde

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Illinois Army National Guard Command Sgt. Major Greg Jones of Port Byron, Illinois, was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his work as senior noncommissioned officer of the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade.

The 65th Troop Command Brigade oversees an artillery battalion, aviation battalion and other aviation companies, a civil support team, a digital liaison detachment, a public

affairs detachment, a cyber defense team, military intelligence units, and an Army band. These units are spread throughout Illinois.

Under Command Sgt. Maj. Jones' tutelage, the 65th Troop Command's units have maintained among the highest retention rates in the Illinois Army National Guard and the brigade was recognized for its personnel readiness at the Illinois Army National Guard's Commander's Guidance Seminar in November.



# Illinois Army National Guard Commander's Guidance Seminar

## 3-day Conference Features Message from Director of Army National Guard











## East St. Louis-based Unit Returns From Year-Long Southwest Border Mission

The 1844th Transportation Co. based in East St. Louis returned home in November from a year-long deployment to the nation's Southwest Border where they assisted the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The unit, led by Capt. Elizabeth Mead and 1st Sgt. Alfred Huston, deployed about 125 Soldiers to the border to help the U.S. Border Patrol by being the eyes and ears of the federal agents. Because of combatant command operational security and force protection concerns, many of the unit's achievements cannot be publicly discussed.

They detected many thousands of people along the border and contributed to mitigating other threats against the United States. They also saved lives. They were credited with saving the lives of at least five people, two of which were saved from drowning and three more from a structure fire.

The Soldiers of the 1844th Transportation Co. were awarded two Meritorious Service Medals, 34 Army Commendation Medals, 64 Army





Achievement Medals, 40 Military Outstanding Volunteer Awards and one Certificate of Achievement – 141 awards for the 125 Soldiers in the unit. The 1844th Soldiers also achieved 10 Norwegian Foot March bronze badges and the company was awarded a safety streamer. Forty-five Soldiers were promoted during the deployment.

About 90 percent of the unit had never deployed before and the unit had an average age of 22, according to Capt. Mead. "The unit required junior leaders to step-up and take lead on training and leadership positions with minimal oversight and great responsibility," she wrote in her end-of-mission brief to the Illinois Army National Guard leadership. Mead praised her Soldiers for being engaged and enthusiastic throughout the deployment and "producing innovative approaches to complex problems," adding that "They far exceeded and outperformed others in the area of operations."

The company passed its Initial Commander's Inspection with a perfect score, maintained proper accountability for more than \$1.7 million in property, and achieved outstanding scores in the Command Supply Discipline Program.

In addition, the unit conducted more than 50 classes on Soldier and



leader development. Soldiers earned 45 college credits while deployed and nearly 780 certifications. The company had an 85 percent ACFT pass rate and nearly 20 Soldiers were able to attend professional military education classes. The 1844th also supported 120 volunteer events contributing 4,569 volunteer hours. *(Photos by Sgt. Jaylyn Bower, 1844th Transportation Company)*







# Chicago-Based Unit Conducts Overseas Patching Ceremony

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The 633rd Theater Gateway (TG) Personnel Accountability Team (PAT), based in Chicago, conducted a patching ceremony Oct. 5, at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

Over the course of their deployment to the Middle East, Soldiers from the 633rd TG PAT have conducted operations in Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

They will now be able to permanently wear the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade (formerly known as the 108th Sustainment Brigade) patch on their right sleeve, below the American flag. This is commonly known as the combat patch.

The history of wearing the patch of a unit in which a Soldier had previously served in combat is a tradition that dates back to World War II. Soldiers would commonly transfer the patch of a previous unit after they

had been transferred to a new unit as a form of remembrance and to show that they were combat veterans and not fresh replacements. The Department of the Army adopted this tradition in 1945.

The combat patch is one of the few universally awarded and widely recognized Army awards and serves as a mark of dedication and distinction. It makes a Soldier who has deployed in the defense of their country instantly recognizable.

The 633rd TG PAT deployed to the United States Central Command area of responsibility in early 2023 to conduct transportation and personnel accountability operations in theater.





# Illinois Air National Guard Selects 2024 Outstanding Airmen of Year

Nominees for the 2024 Illinois National Guard Outstanding Airman of the Year Award were honored during the 2024 Outstanding Airman of the Year Ceremony at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois, Jan. 6.

The Outstanding Airman of the Year Award recognizes Illinois National Guard Airmen in the airman, non-commissioned officer, senior non-commissioned officer, and first sergeant categories who have accomplished exceptional professional achievement and demonstrated the Air Force

Core Values over the course of the previous year.

- Senior Airman Isabel Wiggins, center, a member of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Outstanding Airman of the Year Award in the airman category

- Technical Sgt. Elise Biggs, center, a member of the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Outstanding Airman of the Year Award in the non-commissioned officer category

- Senior Master Sgt. Donald Henry, center, a member of the 182d Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois,

Outstanding Airman of the Year Award in the senior non-commissioned officer category

- Master Sgt. Kenyatta Williams, center, a member of the 182d Airlift Wing,

Peoria, Illinois, Outstanding Airman of the Year Award in the first sergeant category

*(Illinois Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella, 183rd Wing)*





# Logistical Advisory Team From 54th SFAB Returns From Philippines

Logistical Company Advisor Team (LCAT) 6610, part of A Co., 6th Battalion, 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade returned in October from a nearly 8-month deployment to the Philippines.

The 7-Soldier team, commanded by Maj. John Christel with 1st Sgt. Nathan Shannon, advised the Philippine Army helping to increase its ability to defend the Filipino people and their territory against both external and internal threats. The team also helped the Filipino Soldiers to interoperate with their American friends.

The team conducted dozens of interoperability, institutional, and miscellaneous training engagements throughout the deployment ranging from Air Assault to women's empowerment. LCAT 6610 also created the first joint SFAB/State Partnership Program engagements with Soldiers from the Ohio National Guard and the Philippine state partners in the Guam National Guard.

LCAT 6610 also conducted the first SFAB engagements with the Philippine Army's Service Support Training School, the Philippine Army Artillery Regiment and the Philippine Reserve Forces.

In August, the team engaged with a U.S. Congressional delegation that



included Illinois Army National Guard retiree U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

The team directly trained more than 800 Philippine service members and was involved in four large training events involving more than

4,800 Philippine service members. LCAT 6610 conducted engagements on nearly a dozen different Philippine installations and completed two analysis and assessments on the Philippine Army's interoperability with U.S. forces.









# Remembering the Fallen

## *Illinois National Guard, State officials Join Families to Pay Tribute During Annual Gold Star Tree Lighting Ceremony*

Governor J.B. Pritzker, Maj. Gen. Richard Neely, Illinois National Guard Gold Star families, some Illinois state officials and Lincoln's Challenge Academy cadets all gathered today at the Illinois Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum to remember the fallen.

The ceremony pays tribute to Illinois' veterans, fallen heroes, and their families. Governor Pritzker and Maj. Gen. Neely joined the families in decorating and lighting a tree as a symbol of gratitude and remembrance. The Gold Star families in attendance at the ceremony were able to place a commemorative ornament on the tree in honor of their loved ones.

(Photos by Mr. Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)





# Soldier Shows Leadership in Illinois National Guard, Illinois State Police

By Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Spreitzer, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Illinois State Police Cadet Class 144 graduated from the academy in mid-December, among the class of new troopers were three Illinois National Guard servicemembers, including the class 144's vice president, Jacob Harris.

Harris' graduation as a state trooper is another in a long list of Soldiers that have also been Illinois State Troopers, including the past commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, Maj. Gen. (retired) Michael Zerbonia, who retired as an Illinois State Police colonel, as well as Maj. Gen. Mark Jackson, who retired from the Army as the Deputy Commanding General of Operations for First Army and was a sergeant with the Illinois State Police.

Harris, a central Illinois native, enlisted in the Illinois National Guard in 2019 with the Co. B, 766th Engineer Battalion, based in Decatur, Illinois. Harris said he joined after riding in Gold Star Mission's Gold Star 500 with Col. David Helfrich and retired Lt. Col. Chuck Kitson and said he wanted to do something more and be a "part of something greater than himself."

Harris said the 28-week academy was grueling, and adding Officer Candidate School on top, was a huge challenge.



"It's been grueling," said Harris. "Going from the rigors of the academy with no break rolling directly into a physically demanding weekend at OCS once a month has been a challenge, but the academy has been very accommodating, and I have a great support system in place with my mentors, Colonel Helfrich and Colonel Kitson."

Harris said he plans to branch as an engineer officer after graduating from OCS.

Harris' first assignment as a trooper will be in the Chicago area, but he said he'll continue to press through OCS and stay in the Guard as long as it's still something that brings him some joy.

"I'd really like to stay in for the long-haul," said Harris. "I've got some great mentors that will help me make a career out of the Guard. As long as it doesn't interfere with my professional goals and I'm having a good time doing it, I'll keep at it."

"Who knows? I may even make colonel one day," Harris added.

Those interested in joining the Illinois Army National Guard may visit <https://nationalguard.com/illinois> for more information. Those interested in the Illinois Air National Guard may visit the recruiting sites of the three Illinois Air National Guard wings in Springfield: <https://www.183wg.af.mil/RECRUITING/>, Peoria: <https://www.182aw.af.mil/join/>, or Scott Air Force Base: <https://www.126arw.af.mil/Contact-Us/Questions/Recruiting-Joining-the-126-ARW/>.

Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen interested in pursuing a parallel career in the Illinois State Police may visit <https://isp.illinois.gov/JoinIsp> for more information.



"I like being able to do something different on my drill weekends, something completely unrelated to my civilian job," said Harris. "I like the engineers, so it's one of my top three branch choices, along with infantry."





## Chicago-Based Finance Unit Mobilizes for Overseas Mission

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL. –**

Approximately 25 Soldiers from the 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment, based in Chicago, are preparing to head overseas in support of Operation European Assure, Deter, and Reinforce following a mobilization ceremony at the Northwest Armory in Chicago Jan. 5.

"Every now and then you get to do something great in your life," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army

National Guard. "This is one of those times. I always tell our Soldiers to go and make an impact."

Boyd thanked the families of the unit's Soldiers.

"Because of your support, we can do what we love to do and that's wear this uniform and serve this great nation," he said.

Boyd urged the Soldiers to support each other during the deployment and take care of each other, but to not forget about family back home.

"Stay in contact with your family,"

he said. "Regardless of which theater you deploy to, your families are concerned about you."

Boyd said that although the eyes of the world are not watching them, the Soldiers of the 1863rd represent the Illinois Army National Guard.

"At the end of the day, we are depending on you to go over there and do great things," he said. "Make a name for yourselves as other units before you have. Wear that patch proudly while you're there."

Capt. Cameron Ward, the 1863rd's Commander, said for many of the families, this deployment will be the longest time away from their Soldier.

"Time away from family is the hardest part of a deployment," Ward told the families, urging them to stay in contact with their Soldiers.

The 1863rd is a relatively new unit, having been organized on Sept. 1, 2018 under what was then the 108th Sustainment Brigade and was redesignated this past year as the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade. The 1863rd received its federal recognition on Dec. 18, 2020.

While this is the first overseas mission for the unit, the 1863rd was activated by the state of Illinois in April 2020 to operate community testing sites in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.





# Chicago Southside Native Promoted to Sergeant in Illinois Army National Guard, Deploying to Europe

*By Cpl. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs*

**CHICAGO** – Dejuan Patterson of Chicago was promoted to sergeant in the Illinois Army National Guard just prior to deploying to Europe with the Chicago-based 1863rd Financial Management Support Detachment.

Patterson's promotion followed his unit's mobilization ceremony at the Northwest Armory in Chicago Jan. 5. Patterson serves as the military pay chief in the 1863rd and will be deployed to Europe for about a year.

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard addressed the soldiers, family and friends who were in attendance and expressed the importance of the promotion and the weight of Patterson's new responsibilities.

"The promotion to sergeant, noncommissioned officer, is a lot of responsibility to take on and what better timing than right before a deployment," said Boyd before turning and facing the newly promoted soldier. "My confidence in you as a brand-new NCO, is that you will do well on this deployment."

After the ceremony, Patterson, a native of Chicago's Southside and former active-duty Marine canine handler, was surrounded by his peers, family and leadership as they



congratulated and gave words of encouragement.

"It's a great honor," said Patterson. "I can't wait to lead my soldiers. I've been waiting for this for a while and it feels great to be appreciated."

Patterson expressed his excitement about the promotion and upcoming overseas deployment and his gratitude to his civilian employer, Indiana-based White Lodging, for the company's support of his military service. Patterson is an operations

manager with White Lodging.

"(The deployment) is a great opportunity," Patterson said. "I'm excited to be able to prove myself and it's an opportunity to get real world hands-on experience with the finance detachment."

The 1863rd celebrated the soldier and expressed thanks to all of the members of the unit as they prepare to mobilize in support of Operation European Assure, Deter, and Reinforce.







## Building Esprit de Corps

**The Illinois National Guard held an Organizational Day at Camp Lincoln on Nov. 9 to build esprit de corps. Soldiers, Airmen and civilians who work on Camp Lincoln all joined in to run a 5K, play tug of war, basketball and corn hole.**

**The Illinois National Guard leadership plans to hold more events like this in the future.**





# Krzesinski Promoted in Illinois Army National Guard

*By Cpl. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The Illinois Army National Guard's Nicholas Krzesinski of Chatham was promoted to lieutenant colonel during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield Jan. 4.

Krzesinski's daughter, Madelyn and son, Eliot, removed his major rank and pinned on his new rank, lieutenant colonel, while his wife, Ashley, looked on. After the two children took their seats, Krzesinski expressed gratitude for the many opportunities that he has had in the past and all of the great people he was able to work with.

"I appreciate everyone coming out to support me. I'm super excited to be here," Krzesinski said. "My first thought was to find a dark closet and get the promotion over with but I really wanted family involved. No one stands up here purely on their own merit. I realized that this is an opportunity for me to thank those who have been supportive of me and provided me mentorship along the way."

Krzesinski began his military career when he commissioned from Reserve Officer Training Corps at Illinois State University in 2005 as

a chemical officer. After completing the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Basic Officer Leaders Course, he was assigned as the reconnaissance platoon leader in the Machesney Park-based 135th Chemical Company.

Throughout his career he has held multiple positions including, operations officer of the 135th Chemical Company, officer in charge of the Normal-based 450th Detachment, 44th Chemical Battalion logistics officer, commander of the Shiloh-based 445th Chemical Company, operations officer for the Sullivan-based 634th Brigade Support Battalion and then executive officer of the 634th. He now serves as a staff officer in the Illinois Army National Guard headquarters' Plans, Operations, and Training Directorate (G3).

Krzesinski deployed with the 135th Chemical Co. to Afghanistan in 2008 where the unit conducted

security force missions in and around Kabul. He conducted multinational operations with the Polish Army at exercise Anaconda 16 in Poland, participated in multiple Pacific Pathways exercises in Asia, and supported the 33rd's deployment to Ukraine. In addition, he supported Illinois Army National Guard's COVID-19 response operations in 2020 and 2021.

His next mission will take him back overseas



as the Support Operations Officer with the 34th Division Sustainment Brigade's headquarters when the unit deploys to the Middle East.

"Eliot and Madelyn, I'm proud of you and I want you to know that I love you," Krzesinski told his family. "Ashley, you have shouldered the brunt of me going off when the Army tells me to. I would not be able to be up here without your unwavering support. I love you and appreciate all that you do. Thank you."

# Meissner Earns “Major” Promotion in Illinois Army National Guard, Becomes Field Grade Officer

*By Cpl. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – The Illinois Army National Guard’s Vern Meissner, whose father participated in the “D-Day” invasion of Europe during World War II, was promoted to major Jan. 6 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Meissner enlisted into the active-duty Navy in 1989 as an aviation electronics technician. He then transferred to the Navy Reserve in 1993 and completed his service in 1996. In 2010, Meissner enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard as an infantryman and attended Officer Candidate School, commissioning in 2011. He also served as an infantry officer in the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. In the 33rd IBCT, he commanded Company C and Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment. He served as an operations officer in the 33rd IBCT before becoming the commander of the Illinois Army National Guard’s headquarters company for Joint Force Headquarters – Illinois. Meissner deployed to Afghanistan in 2020 in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel.

His military education includes Officer Candidate School, Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course,



Maneuver Captain’s Career Course, and Ranger School. Meissner has earned several awards including the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal, Ranger Tab, and the Expert Infantryman Badge.

Meissner’s promotion to major marks the transition from being a “company grade” officer to “field grade” officer or senior officer.

“Making major is a huge deal,” said Col. Lenny Williams, Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff. “The expectations completely change and you’re in a different category. So, congratulations on making major and becoming a field grade officer. Do not sleep on that responsibility.”

Meissner expressed gratitude and says he plans to continue learn

and grow within the Illinois Army National Guard. “Everyone needs to continue to grow,” said Meissner, a native of Stafford, Mich. “This is the next stepping stone, I’m looking forward to it and I’m very excited.”

After spending much of his career at the brigade level and below, Meissner is gaining more experience at the higher levels of the Illinois National Guard. “I’ve been learning a lot since I’ve been here. I’ve spent most of my time at the platoon company battalion and brigade levels so now to be at the joint force level is an eye-opening experience.”

Despite the higher level of responsibility and challenges, Meissner welcomes the pressure.

“That’s how life is. You have to be challenged. Sometimes it’s painful but it’s rewarding at the same time.”



*Lieutenant 'Leads the Way'*

# Chicago Business Consultant, Illinois National Guard Soldier Graduates from Ranger School

**CHICAGO** – While Anton Hopkins walks in the Chicago Loop to his civilian job at L.E.K. Consulting, many don't see the "rough" man who stands ready "to do violence" on behalf of the United States so others can "sleep peacefully in their beds" - as the famous quote goes.

But Illinois Army National Guard 1st Lt. Anton Hopkins is a U.S. Army Ranger-qualified infantryman with the military and leadership skills to support and defend the U.S. Constitution and our democracy. Hopkins completed the intense 62-day, three-phase Army Ranger School on Oct. 13 after first attending the National Guard's Ranger Training and Assessment Course in June.

Ranger School starts at Fort Moore in Georgia and includes mountain and swamp training. Less than half of the Soldiers who started the course with Hopkins were able to finish it. And Soldiers are intensely screened just to get into the course.

In uniform, Hopkins is the sniper section and scout platoon leader for the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment based in the General Richard L. Jones Armory on Chicago's South Side.

Are there any parallels between stealthily slipping through neck-deep water in a coastal Florida swamp laden with an M249 machine gun, ammunition, and ruck-sack and helping corporations improve operations and strategy? Hopkins says they are complementary.

"The environments might be different, but there are parts of the military training that are helpful" in the corporate world, he said. "There's how to make decisions under stress, work well with others, and think on your feet."

Hopkins, who just turned 30, is happy to be back to Chicago and his normal job with L.E.K. Consulting. He loves Chicago for its vibrancy. Off duty you might see him running along the lakefront or venturing out camping or hiking.



"Believe it or not, I still look forward to camping after Ranger School," he said. "It will be nice to sleep in a tent, light a campfire - things that would 'violate noise and light discipline' and cause detection at Ranger School."

Hopkins is grateful to the Illinois Army National Guard for the opportunity to go to Ranger School. "I've wanted to do it for a while," he said. He was the oldest Soldier in his squad at the school, "is mostly

attended by Soldiers from the elite 75th Ranger Regiment and recent graduates of the Infantry Basic Officer Leader Course."

Back with the 1-178th, he has two sergeants and a specialist in his platoon who are also Ranger qualified. "These Soldiers set the example for me and our platoon. I am excited to be back with them now as we lead the platoon in good, tough training," he said.



# 404th MEB Plans Officer Promoted to Major

**NORMAL, Ill.** – Illinois Army National Guard Maj. Monica Perez, the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade plans officer (S5), was promoted to major on Nov. 18 at the brigade headquarters on the Heartland Community College campus in Normal, Illinois.

Perez has served as platoon leader and executive officer in the 933rd Military Police Company. In 2017 she deployed to Afghanistan as the Force Protection officer with the Bilateral Embedded Support Team (BEST-A19).

While a BEST team member, Perez was the team leader of Task Force White Eagle Guardian Angel Unit, supporting key leader engagements to members of the National Security Judicial Development and Detachment team. She completed over 50 guardian angel missions during her rotation.

After her tour in Afghanistan Perez was assigned as the logistics (S4) officer-in-charge of the 33rd Military Police Battalion. In March 2019 she took command of the 233rd Military Police Company. During her command time she mobilized with the unit to various state active missions.



## Illinois National Guard Human Resources Soldiers Return From Deployment to U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility

The 633rd Theater Gateway Personnel Accountability Team returned from an 11-month deployment to the Middle East in December.

The 9-Soldier team, led by Capt. Julie Guillebeaux and Sgt 1st Class Michael Mormino, provided reception, staging, and onward movement support into the Central Command area of operations. It coordinated and provided personnel accountability for reception, replacement, return-to-duty, and redeployment operations ensuring every service member and DoD civilian is accounted for as they enter or exit the theater.

The unit supported transportation for more than 80,000 personnel and coordinated and monitored more than



500 transportation missions. The team also modernized the software used to track transportation missions allowing multiple echelons to view live data. The Soldiers also streamlined the inter-theater movement process thus

reducing transportation time and maintained and updated the personnel system databases throughout theater.

Three 633rd Soldiers were also able to complete their Basic Leadership Course while deployed.



# Will County Assistant Public Defender, Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Promoted to Major

By Cpl. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – The Illinois Army National Guard's Andrew Sanchez of Chicago was promoted to major during a ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield on Jan. 6.

"I'm humbled to be here," said Sanchez. "I think it's a testament to everyone who has helped me through my career. I know it's a big transition, from executing and getting things done to making more influential decisions and big picture type missions. It's an honor to be here and I look forward to continuing to do great things."

Lt. Col. Timothy Barnhart, the surface maintenance manager for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics (G4) congratulated the newly promoted major and explained the importance of the milestone.

"You have combat arms experience; you were a commander," Barnhart said. "Now you're stepping into a division level logistics operation. This

is going to be your opportunity to learn what goes on in a logistics operations and how we support that combat arms operation. Prepare yourself both military education wise and the experience that you get here to go back out to the field and someday be a battalion commander at some point."

Barnhart said that Sanchez's hard work has paid off.

"Each step in the officer's career is important," said Barnhart. "The promotion to major is the first field grade opportunity,



you've earned it you've worked hard and now I'm excited to see where you go from here on."

After commissioning into the Illinois Army National Guard in June of 2012, his first assignment was as a platoon leader for Bravo Battery 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery Regiment in Crestwood, Illinois. Post-graduation from the Field Artillery Basic

Officer Course in 2013, Sanchez served as a fire direction officer, platoon leader, brigade assistant fire support officer, battalion fire support officer, logistics officer, and headquarters and headquarters battery commander.

Sanchez has completed assignments with Bravo Battery in Crestwood, Illinois, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Champaign, Illinois, and Headquarters and Headquarters Battery in Chicago. He has trained in Singapore, Turkey, and deployed to Jordan.

On the civilian side, Sanchez works as an assistant public defender representing indigent individuals in the criminal and quasi-criminal procedures in Will County, which encompasses Joliet, Illinois.







# Illinois National Guard Supports Multinational Training Exercise in Egypt

*By Maj. Dutch Grove, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs*

**Mohomad Nagieb Base, Egypt**

- Nearly 40 Illinois National Guard Soldiers participated in Bright Star Exercise 2023 in Egypt Sept. 1-14.

More than 8,000 military personnel from 19 countries participated in the exercise that included maritime, land and air operations.

The Illinois National Guard Soldiers served as the higher command of the training units and facilitated the training by writing detailed scenarios to challenge the subordinate units.

"Bright Star has been a great opportunity to build upon our relationship with our Egyptian counterparts, improve our individual aptitude as staff Soldiers, and demonstrate we can perform at a high level in a fast-paced, joint and





multinational environment,” said Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois Army National Guard, and the Exercise Control Group Director of Bright Star Exercise.

The exercise scenario pitted fictional neighboring nations against one another, creating both a military and humanitarian challenge with the U.S. and Egypt forming a combined joint task force to support the host nation’s response to the aggressor nation.

Maj. Kory Harms of Springfield, Illinois, is a logistics officer assigned to Joint Force Headquarters and served as the host nation government representative in the exercise.

“I have always played a role as a logistician in previous exercises, but here I’ve been playing the role of a civilian-appointed leader – from a local mayor all the way up to the head of state – to facilitate the exercise,” said Harms.

He said the exercise forced him to look at military operations and humanitarian relief from all sides.

“I learned the importance of working with nongovernment organizations like USAID or the International Committee of the Red Cross, and what they bring to bear during military and humanitarian operations, and how we fold that into our mission,” said Harms.

Maj. William Konovsky of Lisle, Illinois, is a military police officer assigned to Joint Force Headquarters. During the Bright Star exercise Konovsky served as the chemical officer, which is something he said he was mostly unfamiliar with,

but thankful his Egyptian military counterpart was well versed.

“My counterpart is a chemical officer and he’s been teaching me a lot,” said Konovsky. “I have been teaching him the staff processes and the flow of work, so I think we’ve both learned a lot while challenging the training audience at the same time.”

Konovsky said multinational training exercises force you to get better.

“Learning how to communicate, to slow down and understand each other, in an operational environment will help me in future joint

role and responsibilities are at this level.”

Watts said it’s important to learn about the Egyptian military and culture.

“Getting to know our counterparts so if we ever needed to conduct real world operations together, we know how each other operates and we can get right down to work,” said Watts.

Chief Warrant Officer 1 Michael Frais, a military intelligence Soldier assigned to Company C., 341st Military Intelligence, and a Chicago resident, has participated in seven multinational exercises previously.

He said he enjoys building rapport with the host nation’s military personnel, socially interacting with them, and learning the intricacies of their culture and language.

“Part of the challenge is learning the personalities of the leaders and international counterparts and molding how we facilitate the exercise accordingly,”



operations.”

Sgt. 1st Class John Watts of Springfield, Illinois, is a human resources noncommissioned officer assigned to Joint Force Headquarters and served as the medical officer during Bright Star exercise.

He said it has been a challenge to learn the role of a medical officer on the fly, but he and his Egyptian counterpart figured it out together quickly and the exercise was smooth for them.

“The lens the U.S. looks at military responsibilities compared to Egypt is very different,” said Watts. “It took a couple of days to get that understanding of exactly what our

said Frias.

Staff Sgt. Mariola Ferenc of Chicago is a linguist assigned to Company C., 341st Military Intelligence. She said her role in the higher command intelligence cell during Bright Star allowed her to learn and experience other aspects of her military occupational specialty. Ferenc said it was interesting working with the Egyptian Army and experiencing a different culture.

“It builds you,” she said. “It brings you outside of your bubble to experience and do other things with other cultures, both professionally and personally.”

# Defenbaugh Promoted to Chief Warrant Officer 5, Becomes One of Nine Serving in Illinois Army Guard

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Brandon Defenbaugh, of Athens, Illinois, the Illinois Army National Guard's safety officer, became one of nine chief warrant officers five in the Illinois Army National Guard during a promotion ceremony Jan. 11 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.

"Brandon is a fire and forget warrant officer," said Col. Lenny Williams, Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard. "You give him something and he's going to attack it and get it done. I want leaders like that."

Williams said Defenbaugh is a servant leader and a candid advisor.

"Brandon is going to tell us like it is," Williams said. "I want leaders like that."

Defenbaugh enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1992, serving with the 3637th Sustainment Maintenance Company. In 2004, he was appointed as a warrant officer with the Illinois Army National Guard as an Electronic Systems Maintenance Technician.

"I'm at a loss for words," Defenbaugh said. "If you would have asked in 1992 if I'd be standing up here on stage, I would have said no. But to ask me if I'd be up here getting promoted to this level, it would

definitely be a no."

Defenbaugh began his federal technician career in 1996 as an electronics mechanic with the Combined Support Maintenance Shop and throughout his career has served as an Electronics Supervisor, deputy CSMS Superintendent, Materiel Readiness Branch Chief and Regional Maintenance Manager-South.

In 2022, he transitioned to the civilian federal technician sector as the first Sexual Violence Prevention Specialist with the Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW). Defenbaugh is the interim Integrated Primary Prevention Officer for the IPPW.

"Brandon leads with empathy and is a great leader in uniform," Williams said. "But just as important is this role he's in when he comes to work everyday as a civilian technician to help our people."

Defenbaugh said he's super motivated where he's at in his full-time position.

"I'm excited to get at some of the corrosive behaviors in the organization and take care of the

people," he said. "Without people you can't fight and win wars."

Defenbaugh holds a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Lincoln Christian University, Lincoln, Illinois, and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a focus on



addiction and recovery from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

He has held a variety of positions in the Illinois Army National Guard throughout his more than 30 years of service, including electronics noncommissioned officer with the 3637th SMC, electronic systems maintenance warrant officer, also with the 3637th, missile maintenance technician while serving with Company B, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, and maintenance warrant officer with Joint Force Headquarters. Defenbaugh deployed with the 3637th from June 2007 to May 2008 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Williams thanked Defenbaugh's family for their support of his career.

"You don't get to this level of service without family," Williams said. "It takes a village to support someone through this many years in their career."

Defenbaugh thanked his family as well.

"I wouldn't be here without my family," he said. "We can't do this without their support."

Defenbaugh, and his wife, Angela, reside in Athens, Illinois. They have two children, son Brandon, and wife Ashley, Defenbaugh, and daughter, Ashley, and husband CJ, Garcia, plus two grandchildren, Braxton and Braelynn Defenbaugh.







Command Sgt. Maj. Nicholaus Fordham, the command sergeant major of the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion and the full-time Illinois Army National Guard logistics sergeant major, presented the coin of Chief Warrant Officer 4 Tollie Yoder, the U.S. Army National Guard food advisor, to Staff Sgt. Justin Hill of Robinson, Illinois; Spc. Jordan Robinson of Danville, Illinois; and Spc. Samantha Vazquez of Norwood, Illinois.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Melissa Downey, the Illinois Army National Guard's food service officer, and Fordham recognized the Soldiers on Nov. 4 for the Illinois National Guard's top four finish in this year's U.S. Army's Phillip A. Connelly Award Program.







## 182nd AW Hosts Center of Influence for Educators to Better Understand Wing's Mission

Illinois Air National Guard 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, hosted Illinois educators during a Center of Influence, Oct. 5.

The wing hosted the event to allow Illinois educators to better understand the mission and opportunities provided by the Illinois Air National Guard. During the event, educators were introduced to the C-130H Hercules, and learned about the Wing's various missions.

*(Illinois Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)*





# ***Mission: Possible***

## **126th Air Refueling Wing Navigates Cyber Frontier**

**By Airman 1st Class Troy Barnes, 126th Air Refueling Wing**

### **SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill.**

— The Department of the Air Force highlighted cybersecurity in October and this year's overarching theme is "Cybersecurity – Every Airman, Every Guardian – Mission Possible!"

Airmen and Guardians play a critical role in maintaining operational security. From practicing a safe online presence, to learning the fundamentals of cybersecurity and understanding what its contribution to the mission is, the 126th Air Refueling Wing's Communications Flight specialists explain the importance of their work.

Staff Sgt. Joshua McCoid, a network operations specialist from the flight, puts it simply.

"We're maintaining functionality of communications, whether it be radio, cyber, or just digital communications. Maintaining those, making sure that we have the capability and the availability. Making sure nobody can mess with that signal as well," said McCoid.

In an age of rapidly advancing technology, the U.S. military adapts accordingly. With every software update or newly released connected device comes new ways for the enemy to puncture our digital defenses, leaving our greatest assets vulnerable. It's the responsibility of our servicemembers to continually adapt their cybersecurity techniques to defend against malicious actors and foreign adversaries.

Airman Maximillian Bremer, an information assurance specialist, has an answer to this. With a background in scripting, Bremer wants to work his way into becoming an ethical hacker. Right now, he's using his skills to identify shortcomings in the Air Force's cyberspace.

"We look for outdated versions of software that shouldn't be on the system that could allow a bad actor to get in," said Bremer. "Anything that a bad actor could use to get into the system, or that someone already in the system could use to exfiltrate data that we don't want to leave the system."

It's extremely important that all guardsmen are up to date on the latest security practices to ensure operational security. Airmen of all ranks are entrusted with sensitive information, which must be shared only with those who require it, making it crucial that proper cybersecurity hygiene is practiced by all individuals, rather than a select few experts of the field.

One of those experts, McCoid, switched from active duty to the Illinois Air National Guard this year.

During some of his time in active duty, he worked as a cyber warfare operations specialist, where he specialized in Windows operating systems. Engaging in cyber warfare among his DoD counterparts, an exercise referred to as a hackathon, McCoid sought out innovation within his field to expand the understanding and ability of the DoD, experimenting boldly and creatively to develop the cyber field.

Thinking about a career after active duty, McCoid sought true mastery in his field and saw the Illinois Air National Guard as an opportunity to hone in on specific skills.

"I think I want to stretch my legs ... I want to be really good at this one thing," said McCoid. "I want to really

focus in on being an event manager, you know, where I'm in charge of making sure all the security logs get to where they're going, or I'm an analyst of some sort."

"I want to be really good at this ... I want to be streamlined and expert in this."

McCoid searched for a more conducive work-life balance by joining the Illinois National Guard and says he has no regrets.

According to Maj. Christopher Kruse, 126th Communications Flight commander, we need to be aware of what good digital conduct looks like, and this month is a time to expand on what we already know about maintaining security.

The Department of the Air Force's focus on cybersecurity expresses a commitment to safeguarding missions and ensuring that every Airman and Guardian is equipped with the knowledge and tools to protect against digital threats.

"Strong cyber security is the foundation of trust in our digital world," said Maj. Christopher Kruse, 126th Communications Flight, commander, "which is important at work and especially at home with the vast Internet of things (IoT)."





# 182 Airlift Wing Rotates Through Poland During Aviation Detachment Rotation 23-4

Members of the 86th Airlift Wing and 435th Air Ground Operations Wing, assigned to Ramstein Air Base, Germany, the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, Peoria, and U.S. Army Soldiers deployed to the 33rd Air Base in Powidz, Poland to support Aviation Detachment Rotation 23-4, Sept. 11-22, 2023.

ADR is a bilateral training exercise with the Polish air force designed to enhance allied interoperability, maintain joint readiness, and assure regional allies and partners of NATO capabilities.

"Every year they host four Aviation Detachment Rotations, with one of them being mobility focused," said U.S. Air Force Capt. Sam Sloan, ADR 23-4 mission commander. "We have been integrating with the Air National Guard, Polish air force and fighter jets while focusing on operating in a contested denied environment."

ADR started with home station units deploying more than 200 total force Airmen and Soldiers to the 33rd AB. The deployment included three U.S. Air Force C-130J Super Hercules aircraft from Ramstein AB and two C-130H Hercules aircraft from Peoria

ANGB.

The exercise scenario consisted of two fictitious nations engaged in a conflict while the U.S. Air Force supported NATO's eastern flank.

Throughout the FTD, the total force Airmen exercised various scenarios including GPS outages on aircraft, degraded communications between ground and aerial teams, providing quick and reliable aircraft maintenance to maximize flying capabilities, and maneuvering enemy

ground attacks to aircraft.

"The scenario for us is setting up and moving to NATO's eastern flank, and continuing to provide tactical airlift, anytime, anywhere," Sloan said. "If you take off and lose communication with your home station or GPS to know where you're going, how do you operate at that point? That is the exercise scenario we are flying in."

According to Sloan, navigating without GPS is a rare skill that many







countries do not practice due to most aircraft being dependent on their advanced GPS technology.

The ADR 23-4 team also set up and operated multiple landing and drop zones throughout Poland. Members of the 435th AGOW and Cross Functional Airlift Support Personnel operated the zones so that they could receive cargo and Polish personnel airdrops.

"It is important to have the ability to operate landing and drop zones because they enable us to get air power, manpower and equipment into any location at any time," Master Sgt. James Supernault, 435th Contingency Response Squadron contingency response airborne air traffic control

flight chief. "With that, we are able to establish a fully operational air base within a very small footprint and then subsequently withdraw all assets quickly to redeploy to another location."

The exercise also included members of the 1st Combat Communications Squadron, who played a role in operations by communicating with aircrew through Link 16. Link 16 provides aircrews with tactical data link capabilities to increase their situational awareness and enhance air picture comprehension.

ADRs have been an annual FTD for Team Ramstein for more than a decade due to a Defense Cooperation

Agreement with Poland. The FTD provides an opportunity for U.S. and Polish forces to integrate and practice timely and coordinated responses during peacetime and crises.

"I think the biggest hurdle with exercises like this is integrating with the host nation, and that's also the best thing about it," Sloan said. "Getting over things like language barriers with Polish army jumpers, or just coordinating airspace in a country that we're unfamiliar with, can be difficult. The Polish have been great and have been a huge help in that area."

The culminating event for ADR 23-4 was members of the 86th AW, 182nd AW and 33rd AB participating in an aviation rodeo, testing their





skills for beam approaches, landing zone operations and engine running offloads. The friendly competition provided an opportunity for the total force, multinational teams to put their lessons learned from the FTD into action, with the 33rd AB bringing home the first place title.

The U.S. military operates from

numerous locations across the European theater. Exercises like ADR 23-4 allow for the U.S., allies and partners to build upon existing relationships, synchronize operations and become a cohesive team should the alliance be called on to respond to peacetime or contingency events.





# Soldier Presented Illinois Military Medal of Merit as Joint Staff Strategic Plans, Policy Officer

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Illinois Army National Guard 1st Lt. Benton Winscott, of Chillicothe, Illinois, was presented the Illinois Military Medal of Merit Dec. 5 at Joint Force Headquarters, Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

Winscott was honored for his work as the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff Strategic Plans and Policy Officer.

“Thank you for your hard work and efforts in the Joint Staff Strategy, Plans and Policy section,” said Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, of Sherman, Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint Staff.

Winscott has been accepted into the Active Guard and Reserve Program and will become a training officer in the Cavalry Squadron.



## Soldiers from LITPOLUKRBRIG Visit Camp Lincoln



**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** - Soldiers from the Grand Hetman Kostiantyn Ostrogski Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG) visited Camp Lincoln in Springfield Oct. 17. While on post, they met with Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and toured the Illinois Military Academy.







# Gold Star Families Hold Panel at CNO/CAO Training

*By Sgt. 1st Class Bryan Spreitzer, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

**SPRINGFIELD, ILL.** – Margie and David Palmatier, parents of fallen Army Spc. Jacob Palmatier, 29, of Springfield, Illinois, joined Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers Jan. 9 at the Illinois Military Academy to speak about their son and their experience with casualty notification and assistance during the Illinois Army National Guard's Casualty Notification and Casualty Assistance Officer (CNO/CAO) certification course.

The training, required for full-time Soldiers in pay grades sergeant first class and above, prepares those assigned for what can be the most difficult jobs in the Army: telling someone their loved will never come home and helping grieving families through process of bringing a fallen Soldier home. The Illinois National Guard's Casualty Assistance Office coordinates the training and usually includes a question-and-answer panel with a Gold Star family or family member that gives students more insight into the importance of the CNO and CAO.

The Palmatiers shared stories about Jacob and the process they went through with their CNO and

CAO to give students a glimpse at how important the role of a CNO/CAO is. Jacob was killed on Feb. 24, 2005, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle in Muqdadiyah, Iraq. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division.

Jean Harris, Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator for the ILARNG and Gold Star family member, also spoke to the students about her experience with CNO/CAOs when

she was notified of the death of her stepson, Illinois National Guard Sgt. Joshua Harris.

Joshua, a Soldier with the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery, was killed on Sept. 17, 2008 when his vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. Also killed was fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldier, Staff Sgt. Jason Vazquez, also of the 2/122nd Field Artillery, and active Army Soldiers Capt. Bruce Hays and 1st Lt. Mohsin Naqvi.







## Garcia Thanks Veterans for Footprints Left Behind



Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. J. Manuel Rojas Garcia of the Springfield-based 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion was the guest speaker at the Clear Lake Township (Illinois) 23rd Annual Veterans Day Remembrance Ceremony on Nov. 5.

Garcia told the Veterans and their supporters that they could be “proud of the footprints that you left behind” for Soldiers like him.





# THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## September

### 5 Sgt. Shawna Morrison and Spc. Charles Lamb

2004: Sgt. Shawna Morrison, 26, of Paris, Illinois, and Spc. Charles Lamb, 23, of Casey, Illinois, died Sept. 5 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained during a mortar attack. Both were assigned to the Army National Guard's 1544th Transportation Company, Paris.



### 17 Sgt. Joshua Harris and Staff Sgt. Jason Vazquez

2008: Sgt. Joshua W. Harris, 21, of Romeoville, Illinois, and Staff Sgt. Jason A. Vazquez, 24, of Chicago, died Sept. 17 in Gerda Seria, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when their vehicle encountered an improvised explosive device. Harris was assigned to the 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard, Robbins, Illinois, and Vazquez was assigned to the 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard, Sycamore, Illinois.



### 29 Breakup of stalemate by Illinois Soldier earned the Medal of Honor

1918: First Sergeant Sydney G. Gumpertz of Company E, 132nd Infantry led a patrol through the Bois-de-Forges in France. Harassing fire from an enemy machine-gun nest halted the advance. Gumpertz went forward with two others to destroy the nest. He charged through enemy artillery fire which took the lives of his two comrades. Gumpertz reached the nest, and captured the machine-gun and rival crew of 9. For selfless courage under fire he received the Medal of Honor.



### 30 Mission Complete: 33rd IBCT Finishes Mobilization

2009: The 33rd IBCT mobilized during the summer of 2008 as Task Force Phoenix VIII in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Soldiers mobilized to assist the emerging government of Afghanistan as the country struggled to recover from nearly 30 years of conflict. The last welcome home ceremony was on Sept. 30, 2009. This was the largest mobilization of Illinois National Guard Soldiers since World War II.



## October

6

### Sgt. Jessica Cawvey

2004: Sgt. Jessica L. Cawvey, 21, of Mahomet, Illinois, died Oct. 6 in Fallujah, Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her convoy vehicle. Cawvey was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Paris, Illinois.



12

### Spc. James T. Grijalva

2005: Spc. James T. Grijalva, 26, of Burbank, Illinois, died in Baghdad, Iraq, on Oct. 12, of a non-combat related injury. Grijalva was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, Urbana, Illinois.



15

### Six Illinois Guard units escorted President Grant in Springfield parade

1874: The unveiling of a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Oak Ridge Cemetery prompted a ceremonial parade. Six Illinois units marched in the procession of President Ulysses S. Grant through downtown Springfield. Forty-thousand enthusiastic people turned out along the two mile parade route to cheer the troops and catch a glimpse of the President. The parade lasted 30 minutes and ended with the dedication ceremony at the Lincoln Tomb. The Illinois units present included: the University Cadets, Militia of the Industrial University of Champaign, Sterling City Guards, Governor's Guard, Sherman's Guards, and the Springfield Zouaves.



27

### Sgt. Kevin Grieco

2008: Sgt. Kevin D. Grieco, 35, of Bartlett, Illinois, died Oct. 27 in Baghlan, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when a suicide bomber detonated explosives as they were preparing to enter a building. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard, Sycamore, Illinois.



28

### Famous Guardsman: Joseph Fifer

1840: Joseph Fifer, the 21st Illinois Governor, is born. Originally from Staunton, Virginia, Fifer entered military service in 1861, as a Private with the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry. He graduated from Wesley University in 1868. His postwar career as a city attorney in Bloomington led to involvement in state politics. Fifer spent one year as Bloomington's Corporate Counsel. He served as McLean County states' attorney from 1872 to 1880 and two terms as an Illinois state Senator, before being elected as the 21st Illinois governor, serving from Jan. 14, 1889 to Jan. 10, 1893. As Governor, he founded the State Historical Library which eventually became the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.



# November

2

## 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas

2003: 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas, 30, Genoa, Illinois, was killed Nov. 2 of wounds sustained when his aircraft was shot down near the town of Fallujah, Iraq. 1st Lt. Slavenas was assigned to Company F, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation in Peoria, Illinois.



3

## Operation Noble Eagle: Nuclear power plants

2001: As part of Operation Noble Eagle, Illinois Governor George Ryan ordered members of the Illinois Army National Guard to provide additional protection for the state's nuclear power plants. One-hundred five Soldiers in Companies C and D of the 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry manned security posts at eight nuclear facilities. Operation Noble Eagle came to a close on May 31st, 2002.

3

## Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Wehrly

2005: Sgt. 1st Class Kyle B. Wehrly, 28, of Galesburg, Illinois, died in Ashraf, Iraq, on Nov. 28, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his HMMWV during patrol operations. Wehrly was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, Macomb, Illinois.



12

## Spc. Ashley Sietsema

2007: Spc. Ashley Sietsema, 20, of River Grove, Illinois, died in Kuwait as a result of injuries suffered in a non-combat single vehicle accident while transporting Soldiers. She was assigned to the 708th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), North Riverside, Illinois.



15

## President George Bush Sr. activates the 108th Medical Battalion for Operation Desert Shield

1990: The 108th Medical Battalion became the third Illinois Guard unit to be activated for Operation Desert Shield. It marked the first time the unit had been called to active duty. Thirty-five members left from Wisconsin a few days later, bound for a ninety day deployment to Saudi Arabia.



# December

6

## Spc. Brian A. Wright

2005: Spc. Brian A. Wright, 19, of Keensburg, Illinois, died in Ramadi, Iraq of wounds sustained when his HMMWV struck a mine during combat operations. Wright was assigned to the 135th Engineer Company, Lawrenceville, Illinois.



8

## Company B, 192nd Tank Battalion received its baptism of fire in the Philippines

1941: Within hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched their invasion of the Philippines. Stationed at Clark Field on Luzon, Company B of the 192nd Tank Battalion found itself directly in the path of the Japanese onslaught. Enemy aircraft strafed the column of tanks lined up on the runway. Days later, the 192nd received word that they were to spearhead the allied counterattack with the 194th Tank Battalion at Lingayen Gulf.



20

## Abraham Lincoln Commissioned a Captain in Illinois' 31st Regiment of Militia

1832: Illinois Governor John Reynolds commissioned Abraham Lincoln a Captain in the 31st Regiment of Militia. In 1860, Lincoln biographer John L. Scripps wrote, "...not since any success in life which gave him so much satisfaction as having served his country as a captain." Lincoln enlisted three times in the Illinois Militia during the Black Hawk War.

28

## Air Guard delivers first U.S. military aid to Iran after deadly earthquake

2003: An Illinois Air National Guard cargo plane that joined an international effort to aid victims of a devastating earthquake, was the first U.S. military flight to Iran since the hostage crisis in 1979. The C-130 Hercules from the 182nd Airlift Wing landed Dec. 28 in Iran, a breakthrough that U.S. officials hope will warm diplomatic relations. The United States severed ties with Iran in 1979 when Iranian militants took 52 Americans hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held them for 444 days. The Hercules touched down at an airport in Kerman, about 120 miles from the ancient city of Bam, where up to 45,000 people were killed in the predawn Dec. 26 quake. Iranian soldiers and the aircraft's crew first broke down five pallets of supplies then formed a human chain to transfer the 20,000 pounds of medical supplies, food, and purified water into a first and then a second waiting truck.

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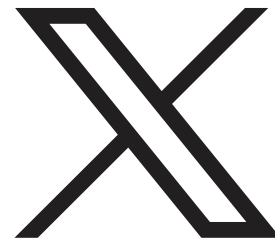
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