



ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD
PRAIRIE SENTINEL
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1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment
Home from Deployment

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ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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Sgt. 1st Class Lina Menichetti, a Combat Veteran known for her intelligence and reliability, retires from the Illinois National Guard after 23 years

Take it From the Top:

Senior Leaders' Corner



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard

On June 14, the United States Army turns 250 years old. Over those two and a half centuries the Army has evolved and changed. It established our nation and generations of Soldiers have since defended America.

When the U.S. Army was born, our victory in the American Revolution was not certain. Colonial militia, today's National Guard, had already fought at Lexington and Concord and seized Fort Ticonderoga before the Continental Army was established on June 14, 1775.

The American Revolution was fought against the British Empire, the superpower of its time. It took eight long years of both victory and defeat to secure our independence. We also received help from our French Allies, the same nation that gave us the Statue of Liberty a century later. Lady Liberty now stands in New York Harbor, a city that was still in British hands when the American Revolution officially ended with the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783.

So why the history lesson?

Because I want you to realize that the U.S. Army's position as the world's premiere land-warfare fighting force is not preordained. The first chapter of the Army's new Field Manual 1, published May 1, 2025, starts by quoting President Ronald Reagan:

"Freedom is a fragile thing. It's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not in our inheritance. It must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation for it only comes once to a people."

Each generation must have people, like you, willing to give their all to defend our freedom. We are the best. You can be proud that we are the best. We have an incredible ability to innovate and adapt to new challenges.

In the American Revolution we had the long rifle, unconventional tactics, and elaborate intelligence networks. In World War II, the Culin hedge cutters on the front of Sherman tanks helped us break out of the hedgerows after D-Day. In Iraq, Soldiers crafted "hilly billy" armor to protect themselves from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) before American industry could send more resistant vehicles. The inventive mind of the American Soldier is like no other and our history is filled with examples of our Soldiers inventing and adapting.

Unfortunately, our enemies have also learned to adapt through our history. The IED is a particularly painful example in the Illinois National Guard's recent history. Our ability to innovate is just a small part of what makes us the best fighting force on earth.

We can be proud of being part of the world's premiere fighting force but let's not let pride turn to hubris. We need to be confident, not cocky, as we face competition from 'near peer' adversaries. Let's keep our eyes wide open as we prepare to defeat new threats.



I'm confident that we will defeat future enemies. My confidence is not based on American innovation. It is based on the American Spirit – the spirit which unites us.

This spirit – this ideal – is expressed eloquently in the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

There is no hardship you will not endure and no sacrifice you will not make when you are fighting for the freedom of your people and for the freedom of future generations. This was true for the Soldiers of the American Revolution as it is true for America's Warriors today.

This we'll defend!

Happy 250th Birthday to the United States Army and to each Soldier who stands as a guardian of freedom.

Always Ready, Always There!

RODNEY C. BOYD
Major General, ILARNG
The Adjutant General

Native of Chicago's Little Village Selected as Illinois National Guard's Director of Joint Staff

Illinois Army National Guard Col. Jorge M. Fonseca, the Chief of Staff at the Defense Intelligence Agency's Middle East and Africa Regional Center, an Illinois State Police sergeant, and an Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, has been selected as the next Illinois National Guard Director of the Joint Staff and will be promoted to brigadier general.

"Jorge Fonseca is an authentic leader of character who has had success leading large, multi-national, joint, dynamic, and complex organizations," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "The complexity of Jorge's leadership assignments and experiences make him more than qualified for the position. His national, international, combatant command, incident command, and law enforcement networks uniquely position him to excel as our next Director of the Joint Staff."

Fonseca will replace Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg, who has been selected for promotion as the next Deputy, Combined Rear Area Coordinator, Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea.

"I am honored to represent my family, my community, and the Illinois National Guard as the Director of the Joint Staff," Fonseca said. "Serving in the U.S. military has opened countless doors for me and my family, shaping our lives in extraordinary ways. I'm deeply honored and grateful for this next challenging assignment, and I look forward to returning to Illinois to continue to serve alongside the incredible Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard."

The Director of the Joint Staff serves as the advisor to the Adjutant General in all joint matters for the over 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen in the Illinois National Guard. This includes all domestic operations including the 5th Civil Support Team and Counterdrug programs as well



Illinois Army National Guard Col. Jorge Fonseca has been selected as the next Illinois National Guard Director of the Joint Staff and will be promoted to brigadier general.

as domestic emergency response and support to civil authorities. The Joint Staff also oversees the Illinois

National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland, and overseas training exercises. The Illinois National Guard's Family, Prevention, Sexual Assault Response, and Equal Opportunity programs as well as Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve coordination also fall under the Joint Staff.

Fonseca was born in Guadalajara Jalisco, Mexico, and is the third oldest of nine children in his family. He was raised in Chicago's Little Village. He was the first in his family to attend college and graduated from Northern Illinois University in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in medical technology.

After five years as a medical technologist with the University of Chicago Hospitals, Fonseca became a law enforcement officer. He served with the Hillside Police Department for five years before becoming an Illinois State Police trooper in February 2002. He has served in various capacities with the Illinois



Col. Jorge M. Fonseca, the commander of United States Army Garrison Poland, receives the colors from Mr. Tommy R. Mize, the director of Installation Management Command-Europe, during an assumption of command ceremony in Camp Kosciuszko, Poland in 2023. (U.S. Army Photo Spc. Anthony X. Sanchez)

State Police as a trooper, special agent, and sergeant while simultaneously moving up the ranks in the Illinois Army National Guard.

He received his Army commission as a Medical Service Corps officer from the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School in 1996, after serving as an enlisted Combat Medic in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1991 to 1995. He transitioned to become a Military Intelligence officer in 2002.

Col. Fonseca has served with distinction in three combat deployments—twice to Afghanistan and once to Iraq—demonstrating unwavering commitment in some of the most challenging environments. Most recently, from 2021 to 2023, he made history as the inaugural Commander of U.S. Army Garrison Poland in Poznań, Poland, where he played a pivotal role in establishing the garrison and strengthening operational readiness for U.S. Army Europe and Africa, as well as V Corps rotational forces. In Afghanistan, Col. Fonseca served alongside Polish forces on both deployments. He served as the Commander of the Bilateral Embedded Support Team (BEST) and Deputy Commander of Task Force White Eagle integrated with Polish forces on Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan from August 2016 to April 2017. From February 2012 to August 2013, he served as the Task Force White Eagle brigade intelligence officer with Polish forces in Ghazni, Afghanistan. From December 2005 until January 2007, he served in Baghdad in the Iraqi Government's National Joint Operations Center as the Joint Senior Liaison Officer with Multi-National Force – Iraq.

As the Chief of Staff at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Middle East and Africa Regional Center (MARC), in Washington, DC, he leads the center's staff, operations



U.S. Army Col. Jorge Fonseca, Area Support Group Poland commander, and U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Aleckna, ASG Poland senior enlisted advisor, render a salute at the 1956 Uprising Monument in Poznań, Poland commemorating the 1956 protests. Fonseca has been selected as the next Illinois National Guard Director of the Joint Staff and will be promoted to brigadier general. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Brandon Bruer)

and integration efforts, ensures synchronization of MARC efforts across DIA, combatant commands, interagency, and foreign partners while also serving as the center's senior military advisor.

Col. Fonseca previously served as the Chief of Intelligence Plans and Readiness at the Europe- Eurasia Regional Center (EERC) at DIA from 2019-2021. He led the plans team in advising the Center Chief on matters involving EERC equities within the Intelligence Community, United States European Command, and other combatant commands. Col. Fonseca is also dual hatted as the Director of Intelligence in Illinois National Guard's Joint Staff.

Other past Illinois Army National Guard assignments include Commander, C Co., 341st Military Intelligence Battalion (Linguist), and Deputy Commander, 129th Regional Training Institute. He has served in numerous staff officer positions at the brigade and tactical levels including the 108th Sustainment Brigade and the 244th Army Liaison Team.

His military awards and

decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, as well as two Bronze Star Medals, Meritorious Service Medals, Army Commendation Medals, and Army Achievement Medals. He also holds the Combat Action Badge and the Gold Medal of the Polish Armed Forces as well as other federal and state service awards and decorations.

He is a graduate of Army's Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he earned a Master of Strategic Studies degree in June 2019.

As an Illinois State Police sergeant with over 28 years of law enforcement experience, he has received a life-saving award, a nomination for Officer of the Year, and in 2018, he was named one of Illinois Governor's Honor 200 Bicentennial military veterans, honoring the work of 200 Illinois veterans whose contributions to their community are above and beyond the call of duty.

He is married to Andrea Fonseca and has three daughters, Sofia, Angelica, and Adrianna.



Capt. Micah Bennett, the Commander of Logistics Advisory Team 6640, and senior Illinois Army National Guard leadership hold the State of Illinois Flag the team will carry overseas with them on the deployment.



Maj. Thomas Kadela, the Commander of Medical Advisory Team (MEDAT) 6630, and senior Illinois Army National Guard leadership hold the State of Illinois Flag the team will carry overseas with them on the deployment.

Rock Island-based Battalion Welcomes Home Team, Deploys Two Others in Combined Ceremony at MTC

The Illinois National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) based at Rock Island Arsenal welcomed home a logistics advisory team after an 8-month deployment and mobilized two other teams during a combined ceremony at the Marseilles Training Area on April 6.

"The SFAB is one of our youngest units, activated in 2020," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General-Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "They're pretty small, but mighty. They've deployed seven teams already, which explains how they are able to combine a welcome home ceremony with a mobilization ceremony."

The ceremony welcomed home five Soldiers of the Logistics Advisory Team (LAT) 6612 who deployed to the Philippines in February 2024 where they worked with the Philippine military to increase interoperability and support security cooperation objectives in the region.

Lt. Col. Matthew Kreiter, commander of 6th Battalion of the SFAB thanked the team for their dedication and professionalism throughout the deployment.

"This was a critical mission in an area of the world that is the utmost importance to our national security in a region containing one of our largest military threats," said Kreiter.

LAT 6612 commander, Maj. Simon Lee thanked the Soldiers' families for their support and raved about his team's performance.

"It makes it easier for us to do our job abroad when you have a family taking care of everything at home," said Lee. "I am proud of my team members, we built relationships, pushed through challenges, and built our professionalism."

Williams thanked LAT 6612 for their performance and dedication.

"The SFAB teams are so good, and well trained, that we can go advise other militaries and build up their military capacity," said Williams.

Approximately 5 Soldiers with the SFAB's Medical Advising Team

(MEDAT) 6630, and approximately 9 Soldiers with the Maintenance and Distribution Team 6640 were mobilized during the ceremony.

Kreiter reminded the teams that while they come from a conventional force, they will be operating in an unconventional manner during their deployments to Djibouti, Africa and Iraq.

"We are operating in an environment where it can quickly turn from competition to crisis," said Kreiter. "You are ready. You were all chosen for a specific purpose."

Williams told the deploying teams they are carrying the Illinois National Guard brand forward.

"You make the complex look simple," said Williams. "These are challenging deployments and unique opportunities."

Maj. Thomas Kadela will lead the MEDAT to Iraq and listed the teams' qualities during the ceremony. "I love the fact this team is disciplined, mature, has sound judgment, and a great work ethic," said Kadela. Team 6630 is the first formal full medical

advising team to deploy from 6th Battalion, perhaps from all the Army's SFABs, Kadela said.

Capt. Micah Bennett will lead the maintenance and distribution team to Africa. He prepared his team for the challenges and opportunities during the deployment. "Make the most of this call to service," said Bennett. "Better yourself, better the organization, build and enrich

relationships."

MEDAT 6630 will perform medical operations for the 54th SFAB headquarters while the Maintenance and Distribution Team will support U.S. Central Command's security cooperation objectives while building Djiboutian military capacity.

The leaders all thanked the families for their support and sacrifice. "It's impossible for our Soldiers to go out

the door without everything in order at home," said Williams.

Kadela told the families the teams will make them proud.

"I confidently say that because of the Soldiers in this unit," said Kadela.

Bennett called the Soldiers' families the real heroes. "You are the ones who truly sacrifice," said Bennett. "We are extremely grateful, and your sacrifice doesn't go unnoticed.



Capt. Micah Bennett, the Commander of Logistics Advisory Team (LAT) 6640, speaks at the mobilization ceremony. The Illinois Army National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) mobilized a maintenance and distribution team, LAT 6640, for a deployment to the Horn of Africa at the Marseilles Training Center April 6.



Maj. Thomas Kadela, the Commander of Medical Advisory Team (MEDAT) 6630, speaks at the mobilization ceremony. The Illinois Army National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) mobilized a medical team, MEDAT 6630, for a deployment to Iraq at the Marseilles Training Center April 6.



LAT 6612 commander, Maj. Simon Lee, speaks at the welcome home ceremony. The Illinois National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) welcomed home Logistics Advisory Team (LAT) 6612 after an 8-month deployment to the Philippines at the Marseilles Training Center April 6.



Soldiers with the 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) watch the mobilization ceremony. The Illinois National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) welcomed home Logistics Advisory Team (LAT) 6612 after an 8-month deployment to the Philippines and mobilized a medical team, MEDAT 6630, for a deployment to Iraq and a maintenance and distribution team, LAT 6640, for a deployment to the Horn of Africa at the Marseilles Training Area on April 6.



Participants in the 2025 Illinois Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition paused for a group photo. Two Soldiers from the Polish military participated in this year's event.

Birtch, Johnson Take Top Honors in Illinois National Guard's Best Warrior Competition

Story by Sgt. Dasianelle Cotton, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Sgt. Luke Birtch of Springfield, a nursing student at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, was named the "Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) of the Year" and Spc. Nathan Johnson of Arlington Heights, an economics major at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was named the "Soldier of the Year" following the Illinois Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition at

Sparta Training Area from April 3-6.

Both Soldiers are now training for the Regional Best Warrior Competition to be held at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, from April 30 to May 4. It was the second year in a row that Johnson has won the state-level Best Warrior Competition.

This year's competition also featured two Polish Territorial Defense Force Soldiers who were invited

to compete as part of the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with the Polish military. The Illinois National Guard and the Polish military have shared a National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program since 1993. The SPP with Poland is among the first to be established and is considered the "gold standard" of these partnerships.

Polish Army Starszy Chorąży



Sgt. Luke Birtch, the Noncommissioned Officer of the Year with Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major.



Spc. Nathan Johnson, the Soldier of the Year with Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major.

(Senior Warrant Officer) Michal Marciszewski placed second in the NCO competition and Polish Army Private Dawid Szuman placed second in the "Soldier of the Year" competition. Both pushed the American Soldiers throughout the multi-day competition.

"They were both physically and mentally tough," said Birtch, a combat medic in the Joint Force Medical Detachment based in Springfield. "Very professional."

Johnson, who represented the Normal-based 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, agreed. "It was super cool having the Polish there and learning about their military. It was great building a friendship with them."

"Competitions like this should happen more often. The Polish and American Soldiers cooperated well during this competition," Szuman said.

Marciszewski said cross-training with American Soldiers helped both allies. "Both U.S. Soldiers and Polish Soldiers had the opportunity to enhance their capabilities of warfighting, weapons systems, communication, and medical training."

The competition tested the skills of the Soldiers and NCOs in a series of tasks that tested their strength, resilience, tactical proficiency, and

leadership skills. The competition included various events to test the competitors, such as physical fitness, marksmanship, and knowledge tests.

This year's competition was held amidst heavy rain and flooding in Sparta. "It was tougher than last year," said Johnson, a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear specialist with the 135th Chemical Co. based in Machesney Park. Both the rain and his fellow competitors added to the challenge this year, he said. "I think I'm better prepared to put up a bigger fight at regionals this year."

Birtch completed the competition's 12-mile road march in 2 hours and 40 seconds. He started training back in December by walking with a 90-pound ruck sack. Then he reduced the weight to 70 pounds and would run a mile. Then he reduced the weight to 60 pounds and would run 4 miles. Finally, he'd run 6 to 7 miles with a 50-pound ruck sack.

He also studied for the competition's board on top of working as a civilian Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) for Abbott EMS and as a nurse technician for Mercy Hospital South's emergency department in St. Louis.

He ran the Chicago Marathon in October and competes in triathlons. His long-term goal is to become an Army trauma surgeon. "I'm very excited for regionals. I'm proud to

represent my unit and my state at the next level."

"You don't become what you wish you're going to be," Birtch said. "You become what you set your lowest standards to be. You'll never reach your dream self until you raise your standards to meet that level."

Johnson's military goal in the Illinois Army National Guard is to become a warrant officer and helicopter pilot, although he has been approached by several commissioned officers encouraging him to earn a commission as a second lieutenant. As a civilian he aspires to become a pilot either with emergency medical evacuation or with the Illinois State Police.

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, the Illinois Army National Guard's State Command Sergeant Major and the host of the 2025 Best Warriors Competition, commended the participants. "I can't say enough how proud I am and what you've done and what you've accomplished. Just the sheer skill set you brought to the table here is outstanding."

The Best Warrior Competition recognizes the top-performing soldiers in the Illinois Army National Guard. It also highlights soldier readiness and inspires others to strive for the same level of excellence.

Other competitors in the NCO of the Year competition included:

- Staff Sgt. Cameron Skaja of Peoria, representing the Normal-based 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.
- Sgt. Tobias James of Deer Park, representing the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade.
- Sgt. Glenn Winchel of Belvidere, representing the Urbana-based 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.
- Sgt. Carlos Rangel of Chicago, representing the Chicago-based 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade.

Other competitors in the Soldier of the Year competition included:

- Pfc. Daniel Dounoulis of Moline, representing the Peoria-based 65th Troop Command Brigade.
- Spc. Orgil Altansukh of Chicago, representing the Chicago-based 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade.



Soldiers from the Polish military compete in the 2025 Illinois Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition in Sparta.



*Photos by
Sgt. Dasianelle Cotton, Spc. Justin Malone,
and Sgt. 1st Class Robert Adams*





Approximately 15 Soldiers from the Springfield-based 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment stand at attention during a mobilization ceremony April 15 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield. The Soldiers will deploy in support of Operation Spartan Shield to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

Springfield-based Engineer Detachment Mobilizes for U.S. Central Command Deployment

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

"It's go time. Go be great."

With those words from Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, approximately 15 Soldiers from the 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment, based in Springfield, were mobilized to deploy to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operation Spartan Shield at a ceremony April 15 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

"Each deployed mission has its own unique requirements, but they all start with the same thing. Soldiers who are willing to leave their loved ones home and to selflessly serve something greater than themselves," he said. "Not everyone is willing to do that."

During this deployment, the 15-member team is expected to provide environmental reporting, short and long-range facility work

plans, and Department of Public Works level facility management in support of U.S. Central Command.

Boyd thanked the families of the deploying Soldiers.

"These amazing Soldiers cannot do what they love to do without your support," he said. "We understand the sacrifice you are making at home to support your Soldier for this mission. Know you have the full force of our organization's support and resources to assist you in any way until they return home and even after. Thank you for supporting these great warriors."

State Sen. Doris Turner told the Soldiers she was excited to be part of their mobilization ceremony, not as an elected official but as an individual with much respect and honor for the men and women who serve this nation.

"My family has a long list of military service, starting with my great grandfather, down to my



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, issues three challenges to the Soldiers of the 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment during the unit's mobilization ceremony April 15 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln.

grandfather, father, brother, cousins, and my nephew, who was the last casualty of Desert Storm,” she said. “I hold each and every one of you in my heart as you leave for your duty.”

The Soldiers have been preparing for the mission for more than a year and Boyd told them the training doesn’t go unnoticed.

“Thank you for all you have done to prepare for and to execute this mission,” he said. “You have already answered the most sacred call which is to serve, protect, and defend our nation and its citizens. Be proud of that because we are proud of you.”

Lt. Col. Darrin Dunsworth, Forward Facilities Detachment Commander, 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment, said it was a privilege to serve alongside the mobilizing Soldiers.

“It has been my privilege to be with these Soldiers in preparation for this mission over this past year,” he said. “From my perspective, going out the door, we accomplished one of the most important missions – we are a team.”

Dunsworth also thanked the families.

“When we wear this uniform, we get recognized. You see it, people say ‘thank you for your service,’” he said. “Sometimes for us it’s awkward because we knew what we were getting into. It’s our job. We need to say that our families serve with us. So, to the families, thank you for your service and sacrifice. Over this past year, we’ve taken a lot of time away from you in preparation for this mobilization. It has allowed us to come together as a team and to me that was job one. We’re a small group and we must be united.”

Dunsworth’s wife, Cyndee, spoke with the Soldiers Sunday to share her perspective.

“For us it’s been 18 years of her service and my service,” Dunsworth said. “My wife told the Soldiers she is there for the families, even if it’s just to talk. She’s there to listen. Your Soldier will leave for a period and things will break or need to be repaired or replaced. Soldiers trust your families. Families trust your network and use your network with one another.”

Boyd told the Soldiers he expected



State Sen. Doris Turner, 48th District, left, and Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, right, present a state of Illinois flag to Lt. Col. Darrin Dunsworth, Forward Facilities Detachment Commander, 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment, to carry with them on their deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

three things from each of them while gone.

“Do more than is asked of you. Seize the opportunity to achieve greatness. Ask yourself what your legacy on this mission will be as an individual,” he said. “To the officers and noncommissioned officers, I ask you to lead. Take care of your Soldiers. Make the hard, right decisions and uphold the standards. These Soldiers and their families deserve your best. Lastly, take care of each other. You are trained. You are ready. You are professionals. Go do outstanding things.”



Lt. Col. Darrin Dunsworth, Forward Facilities Detachment Commander, 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment, thanks the families for their sacrifice as the unit trained for the past year to prepare for the deployment.



Soldiers with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment step off the aircraft at Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) in Rockford, Illinois, on April 11. Approximately 275 Soldiers returned home following a nearly year-long deployment to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility. (U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

Approximately 550 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers Return from Deployment

Story by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Approximately 550 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment and Company B, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB), were greeted with cheers, hugs, and tears from friends and families at welcome home ceremonies April 11 in Rockford and April 12 in Peoria.

Approximately 450 Soldiers from 1-178th, headquartered in Chicago and with companies based in Bartonville, Elgin, and Kankakee, and approximately 100 Soldiers from Company B, 766th Company BEB, based at Marseilles, mobilized in June 2024 in support of Operation Spartan Shield, and deployed to 17 locations across seven countries. Most of the Soldiers were based in the partner nations of Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

"I want to thank the families for being here today to welcome back these great warriors," said Maj. Gen.

Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois, and Commander of the Illinois National Guard during the Rockford ceremony. "Without your support they can't do what we ask of them."

Boyd told families and friends of the approximately 275 Soldiers arriving in Peoria, he gave the Soldiers tasks to complete while they were deployed.

"I told them to take care of each other. They did that because they all came home," he said. "I told them to better themselves. They did that as well. 12 Soldiers completed the Air Assault Course, five completed the Pathfinder course, and seven Soldiers completed their basic leadership course. I told them to make us proud. They did that."

Lt. Col. Andrew Salmo, Commander, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry, told the Soldiers they did a

great job during the deployment.

"You absolutely crushed the deployment," he said. "I'm extremely proud to be a member of your team."

He also thanked the families.

"Thank you for keeping the home fires burning. We love and missed you and can't wait to give you a hug," he said before dismissing the Soldiers.

The approximately 275 Soldiers who flew into Peoria were greeted by families and friends at the 182nd Airlift Wing.

"We are extremely proud of your service," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "You carried forward the legacy of this incredible organization and every veteran who ever served before you."

Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Butte had a message for the Soldiers and families before dismissing the unit.

“Last year you trained to serve across the U.S. Central Command area of operations, accomplishing business time and time again,” he said. “As your Command Sergeant Major, I couldn’t be prouder of the job each of you did. To the families, thank you for all you do. We appreciate it and love you.”

In addition to military courses, 22 Soldiers completed the requirements to be awarded the German Armed Forces Badge of Marksmanship, more than 50 completed the Norwegian Footmarch, three Soldiers graduated from Desert Warfare training in Qatar, and many Soldiers participated in physical and tactical fitness competitions involving coalition partner nations.

Soldiers from the 178th Inf Reg and Co B, 766th BEB received multiple awards, including four Bronze Star Medals, 11 Meritorious Service Medals, 488 Army Commendation Medals, and 72 Army Achievement Medals. In addition, a Meritorious Unit Commendation is pending approval.



Soldiers with the Illinois Army National Guard’s 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment step off the aircraft at Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) in Rockford, Illinois, on April 11. U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)



Soldiers with the Illinois Army National Guard’s 1-178th Infantry Regiment and Company B, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion return to Peoria from deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, April 12, 2025. The units deployed in June 2024 in support of Operation Spartan Shield. (Photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)



U.S. Army Spc. Tanner Lawson, a horizontal construction engineer with Company B, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, Illinois Army National Guard, reunites with his family after returning home from deployment April 12, 2025. The 1-178th Infantry Regiment and Company B, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion deployed in June 2024 in support of Operation Spartan Shield. (Photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)



Capt. Cordelia Grob of the Illinois Army National Guard reunites with her parents at Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) in Rockford, Illinois, on April 11 following her return from deployment. Grob was among approximately 275 Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment who returned home after a successful mission in the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility. (U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)



U.S. Army Sgt. Luke Purcell, a combat engineer with Company B, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, Illinois Army National Guard, reunites with his family in Peoria, Illinois, after returning home from deployment April 12, 2025. (Photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs)



Soldiers with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment gather outside after landing at Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) in Rockford, Illinois, on April 11. The Soldiers, who recently completed a deployment to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility, took time to celebrate their homecoming and reconnect with fellow unit members. (U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)



Soldiers with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment gather outside after landing at Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) in Rockford, Illinois, on April 11. The Soldiers, who recently completed a deployment to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility, took time to celebrate their homecoming and reconnect with fellow unit members. (U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)



Isabelle Mitchell kisses Illinois Army National Guard 1st Lt. Alexander Boudabbous of B Co., 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion at the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, after he returned home from deployment April 12. Boudabbous is an engineer for Rolls Royce as a civilian. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)



Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Joshua Doss disembarks the airplane and greets senior leaders at the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, after returning home from deployment April 12, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)



Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Chase Catt disembarks the airplane and greets senior leaders at the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, after returning home from deployment April 12, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)



Staff Sgt. Scout Savage of the Illinois Army National Guard reunites with his wife at Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) in Rockford, Illinois, on April 11. Savage was among approximately 275 Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment who returned home following a successful deployment to the U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility. (U.S. Army photo by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Joint Force Headquarters - Illinois National Guard)



U.S. Army 1st Sgt. (retired) Randy Johnston puts his hand on the back of his grandson, Sgt. Ethan Johnston-Noel after they were reunited at the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, after Johnston-Noel returned home from deployment April 12, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)



Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Stephon McClain, a U.S. Army combat engineer, hugs his sister, Olivia McClain, after reuniting with his family at the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, after returning home from deployment April 12, 2025. (U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)

Decatur Soldier Hangs Up Uniform after 32-Years of Military Service

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Col. Randy Edwards, of Decatur, former Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard, retired March 11 during a ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

"We've known each other for 20 years, but this last half of our careers has intersected closely," said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "I respect you immensely and I have been the benefactor of some of your hard work. I'm a better officer for having served with you and I know a lot of officers in this room can say that."

Williams said Edwards' success wasn't just his alone. It was also due to the support of Edwards' family.

"Heather, you and your entire family have a lot to be proud of based on the career and accomplishments of one of the finest officers I've ever served with," Williams said. "He couldn't have accomplished all he did without that support structure."

Edwards enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1993 as a Petroleum Supply Specialist with Company A, 634th Forward Support Battalion. He received a direct commission as a Quartermaster Officer in 2002. In 2009, he changed his primary branch to engineer and in 2011 was awarded the Logistics branch.

He served in a variety of assignments throughout his 32 years of military service, including Deputy Director of Construction and Facilities Management Office, Force Integration and Readiness Officer, Future Plans and Readiness Division Chief, Deputy Director of Operations, Plans, and Training directorate, Director of Operations, Plans, and Training directorate, Commander of the 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, Commander, Company A, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, and most



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, presents Col. Randy Edwards, former Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard, with a certificate of retirement during a ceremony March 11 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield. Edwards served more than 32 years in the Illinois Army National Guard.

recently Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard.

"When I describe Randy, I think of three things," Williams said. "First, he has an unwavering work ethic and dedication. He never told anyone he was working hard. He just did it at every step in his career. Second, he has unrelenting candor. If you don't want to know his opinion about something, don't ask him. You will get his opinion in his own descriptive way. Lastly, he has a genuine care for the betterment of the organization. Everything he did throughout his career was making us better as an organization."

Edwards thanked the noncommissioned officers, commissioned officers, and warrant officers who became his mentors.

"Thank you for taking me under your wing to mentor me and give me a chance," he said. "I would not be here today without you. I will miss each of you, but I'm excited for the future."

Edwards said he is leaving with no regrets.

"I left everything on the field," he said. "I made sure with every job I had, every position I held, I did everything I was supposed to do to

the best of my ability.”

Edwards thanked his family, wife Heather, and children, Gable and Cora, for their support throughout his career.

“Heather, you did an amazing job of keeping our home in order and raising our children when I’ve been traveling, away training, or just working late,” he said. “You are my biggest supporter, biggest fan, and best friend. I’m super excited for our next chapter together. Gable and Cora, I’m super proud of you both as I watch you grow into the young adults you are. I’ve missed a lot over the years but am excited to be able to spend more time with each of you.”

Edwards said his parents instilled a sense of hard work, drive, competitiveness, a no quit attitude, and resiliency in him at a young age.

“When I was young, and wanted to quit football, my mother told me we don’t quit anything. She told me finish your commitment, and then you can decide what you want to do,” he said.

Edwards offered advice for his fellow Soldiers with some humor mixed in.

“Stay late at work because you’re trying to accomplish something, not because you think someone is watching,” he said. “Complete your tasks to the best of your ability. Don’t be innovative just because you don’t want to do the work. Don’t be afraid of hard work. As you move up, your assignments and tasks will get harder. Don’t ask your boss if they need anything at the end of the duty day with your bag in hand. If you run through the woods without your tactical gear on, no one will stop you. Lastly, spraying a soda can with a fire extinguisher will not cool them off.”

Edwards said he couldn’t believe it has been 32 years since he joined the Illinois Army National Guard.

“The first 10 years kind of drag on because you don’t have a great deal of responsibility,” he said. “The last 22 years just flew by. It is a blessing to be here and to have served with each of you.”



Col. Randy Edwards, former Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard, thanks friends, family, and fellow Illinois National Guard members, for their support, mentorship, and leadership during his 32 years of service during a retirement ceremony March 11 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.



Col. Randy Edwards, former Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard, receives the ILARNG Staff Eagle denoting his time as the Chief of Staff. Presenting the staff eagle are, from left, Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, Command Warrant Officer, Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major, and Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard.

From Carpenter to Colonel

Smith Retires After 36 Years of Military Service

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

Col. Eric Smith of Springfield, who enlisted as an Army carpenter in 1989, was honored for his 36-year career during a retirement ceremony March 21 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

"We cannot thank you enough for your service," said Maj. Gen. (ret.) Eric Little, who served as the officiant for the ceremony. "Thirty-six years is a long time to give to the U.S. Army."

Little thanked Smith's family for their support and sacrifice throughout his military service.

"Eric could not have asked for a better support system," he said. "That is the only way anyone in the military is successful. Thank you all because you don't get thanked enough. This will be a different chapter for the family as well. Eric's ready but it's going to be different."

Little and Smith first met when each of them joined the Illinois Army National Guard and were assigned to the 744th Engineer Company.

"We have known each other for 36 years," Little said. "Eric and I joined the 744th Engineers in the same month and year in 1989. We were privates together. Now here we are today. We have worked together almost 36 years. During most of his jobs and most of my jobs, we worked together. You have earned retirement. Good luck on your future endeavors."

Smith enlisted as a 51B, carpenter/mason, spending eight years as an enlisted Soldier and noncommissioned officer. He enrolled in Officer Candidate School and in August 1998, he was commissioned as a quartermaster officer.

Smith, who most recently served as Commander (forward), 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade in 2024 during the brigade's deployment to Kuwait, said the 36 years, two months, and three days he served was about 30 years, two months, and 3 days longer than he had anticipated.

"It's part of life," he said. "You don't know where it's going to take you. It's been a long, challenging, frustrating, but also rewarding journey."

Smith said while the ceremony celebrates his career, it's not just for him.

"This ceremony is to recognize all those who have supported and guided me. The NCOs, officers, civilian coworkers, friends, and family, but mostly Lori, Reagan, and Aysa," Smith said. "They have given so much over those years. Now it's time for me to give back as much as I can."

Smith said he was humbled to be recognized for his military service.

"I've experienced a lot of emotions over the last several months as I reflected wearing this uniform for the last day today," he said. "I'm humbled to be standing up here. The single most contributing factor is the unconditional support



Col. Eric Smith, of Springfield, thanks family, friends, and coworkers during a retirement ceremony March 21 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln, Springfield. Smith retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 36 years of military service.

from my family which allowed me to pursue pretty much any endeavor I pursued in this profession."

Smith thanked his family and friends, including his mother, Candy, for their support throughout his career.

"To my mom, Candy, thank you for your constant unwavering support bearing me a work ethic and to never play victim or make excuses for my failures," he said. "You instilled in me the desire to move forward regardless of the circumstances."

"To my friends, my circle is small," Smith said. "You have no idea how much I cherish that circle. So many people have impacted my career. Whether you realize it or not, I observed. I learned and I grew from watching you all."

Smith also thanked his daughters, Reagan and Aysa.

"You are like night and day when it comes to your personalities," he said. "But you are exactly the same when it comes to your drive and determination. I don't know

what I have done to deserve two great young ladies in my life. You both are better human beings than I ever was. I am immeasurably proud of you both."

Smith thanked his wife of 32 years, Lori, for her unconditional support throughout his service.

"You've been with me and endured 34 of the 36 years I've been serving. I owe you so much," he said. "You are the foundation of the family. The appreciation and love I have for you can never be expressed in words. My successes are yours. I owe you everything.

"I've missed more anniversaries and special occasions I can ever count," Smith said. "It probably hasn't hit you yet, but yes, I am with you now 24/7. You three ladies have endured and sacrificed so much over the years. It's time now for me to pay that back."

Smith served in various leadership and staff positions at the company, battalion, and brigade levels, including platoon leader, company executive officer, and company commander. At the battalion level he served as the battalion personnel officer, operations and training officer, logistics officer, executive officer, and commander of the 1144th Transportation Motor Transport Battalion. He served as the 65 Troop Command's operations and training officer, and executive officer, and deputy commander for the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). He recently completed his tour as the forward commander of the 34th IDSB.

Additionally, Smith held positions in the United States Property and Fiscal office, facilities, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, Joint Staff, the 65th Troop Command, and the 129th RTI. He also served as the deputy personnel officer, deputy logistics officer, and prior to being selected for brigade command, served as the Director of Logistics for the Illinois Army National Guard.

Smith said the ceremony marks the final chapter of his military career.

"I could not have scripted the last few years of my military career any better than it mapped out," he said. "From being selected as the Director

of Logistics to being promoted to colonel and then selected for brigade command and deploying with the brigade overseas. Those are marks we etch into our helmets and that we dream about."

Smith, who deployed multiple times throughout his career, shared that during his last deployment, he commanded a team comprised of Soldiers from across the three components, active duty, Army Reserves, and National Guard.

"I can say without a doubt, the Army National Guard, specifically the Illinois Army National Guard is one of the best trained and most ready forces," he said. "It doesn't just happen. It's because of all of you here today. Every assignment I assumed came with its own unique challenges and tested my resolve, but I grew both personally and professionally as a result, which ultimately should be a goal and by-product."

Smith said he has seen a lot over his 36 years of service.

"I have witnessed some amazing and not so amazing things over the past 36 years," he said. "Some made me super proud, and some made me

want to bury my head in the sand. They were all learning moments. It's how we react individually and collectively as an organization which defines us."

Smith shared a letter from a Soldier he served with during the 2024 deployment.

"A Soldier who I served with on deployment sent me a note that I'd like to share. The moments that change us rarely feel extraordinary as they happen. They occur quietly in hallways, through a shared story, or by simply showing up. Their weight only becomes clear in hindsight," Smith said.

"As you begin this new chapter in retirement, I hope you realize that the weight of your impact is not measured in medals or accolades, but on the lives, you have shaped and the example you have set," Smith said. "Leadership like yours does not fade. It creates ripples that endure quietly and profoundly. I am humbled by each one of your family's sacrifices and I am immeasurably honored to have served with each and every one of you."



Col. Paul Metzдорff, Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard, presents Col. Eric Smith with a framed photograph of the Illinois State Military Museum during Smith's retirement ceremony.



A Polish F-35A Lightning II is refueled by an Illinois Air National Guard 126th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 Stratotanker during a training mission over northern Arkansas, March 6, 2025. The Illinois National Guard and Poland have been partners in the State Partnership Program since its inception in 1993. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison, 126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs)

An Illinois State Partnership First

126th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 Stratotanker refuels State Partner Poland's F-35A Lightning II

By Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison, 126th Air Refueling Wing

The 126th Air Refueling Wing took off from Scott Air Force, Illinois for a rendezvous with an aircraft out of Ebbing Air National Guard Base, Fort Smith, Arkansas for a refueling mission, March 6.

On this clear day over Northern Arkansas, Happy 51, a 126th Air Refueling Wing KC-135 Stratotanker, and Wolf 02, an F-35A Lightning II were on their way to an historic first.

This marked the first time a Polish F-35 was refueled by a US air refueling tanker and to make it more historic Poland's state partner the Illinois Air National Guard did the refueling.

"For me being the first Polish F-35 pilot who performed air to air refueling was an honor," said a Polish Student Pilot. "Plus, the fact that I

did this with a tanker from Illinois - a state where there are so many Poles, probably some of them even working at 126th ARW, maybe even supporting this tanker at that day, was just an amazing experience, and makes me feel so proud by doing this."

"It was exciting for us to see," said Lt. Col. Tony Meyers, 108th Air Refueling Squadron, commander and mission aircraft commander. "This has been a sixth-month planning process for us to engage with the Flight Training Unit."

The 126th ARW is now the dedicated tanker wing that trains with the newly activated 57th Fighter Squadron, the squadron training, Polish Air Force F-35 fighter pilots.

The 126th ARW began refueling the

Polish Air Force in 2018.

"Historically, it has been us going over there to provide support for their fighters," said Meyers. "This is the first time we're able to do it, to my knowledge, domestically, in the US; supporting their training requirements from bases here in the US."

Illinois has been a state partner with Poland since 1993. The State Partnership Program was established in 1993. It pairs state's National Guard with international partner's military for cooperation and training.



Illinois Army National Guard recruiters from the Recruiting and Retention Battalion's Northern Region pose during its regional meeting March 7.

Illinois National Guard Recruiting Has Record February

Story by Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion (RRB) commander, Lt. Col. Lance Frail, puts the tag line "love the process and you will succeed!" at the end of every email to his staff.

"We talk a lot about loving the process and that it will lead you to success," said Frail. "If you are doing the small things, always prospecting, you will be successful."

Of the 11 companies in RRB, eight have exceeded their recruiting goals each of the last three months. February was the most productive recruiting month since March of 2019. Four companies doubled their recruiting goal in February.

Company L, based in Mattoon, has met its goal for four consecutive months. Company H, based in Woodstock is on pace to set a record for enlistments in a fiscal year and has met its goal the past five months.

Frail said a team-first mentality has been a key to the recent success.

"You can have individual success but fail as a team, or you can achieve success together," said Frail. "Teams that enjoy each other and support each other, in and out of work, often have the most success."

1st Sgt. Michael Vertucci with Crestwood based Company F, which doubled its enlistment goal in February said Lt. Col. Frail's message is hitting home.

"Our team has bought into the message of coming together and working as a team to accomplish the mission," said Vertucci. "We are noncommissioned officers (NCOs) before we are recruiters and with that mindset we look at each obstacle as a way to grow and become better.

We have good days and character-building days. No bad days."

1st Sgt. Justin Gullion with Company D in Aurora, which more than doubled its February goal said the leaders set the tone in a difficult assignment like recruiting.

"Recruiting is not an easy job. It requires early morning and late nights, a willingness to sacrifice, working on days off to meet with applicants, countless hours building recruiting packets, building partnerships in a multitude of communities, and a hunt for acceptance in a field of rejection," said Gullion.

Gullion said trusting and empowering his recruiters is key.

"At the end of the day, the recruiter must decide what they are willing to put into each day to have success and reach their goals," said Gullion. "The recruiters I have on this team are constant professionals and were due a big month.

Frail said a contributing factor to the recent recruiting boom is a more than 10 percent increase in recruits successfully making it through the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) where applicants' physical health, background, and enlistment packet are reviewed to ensure the applicant is qualified for military service. Frail said his team is the reason for the increased success getting applicants through MEPS.

"The recruiting NCOs, the team leaders, and the first sergeants are consistently communicating with MEPS guidance counselors and the applicants to make sure everything is documented and accurate before the applicant arrives at MEPS," said Frail.

He said there is no magic bullet



Illinois Army National Guard recruiters 1st Sgt. Michael Vertucci and Sgt. 1st Class David Quinn pose during the Recruiting and Retention Battalion's Northern Region meeting March 7. February was the Illinois National Guard experienced best recruiting month since March 2019.

that led to the spike in recruiting.

"Multiple things went into this month's success, however none of it would have been possible without the individual recruiter," said Frail. "Our success has been made through hard work and dedication to the process by our recruiting NCOs."

Company B based in Chicago, Company C in Rockfalls, Company G based in Marseilles, Company K in Springfield, and Company I based in Peoria also exceeded recruiting goals in February.

Illinois National Guard Psychological Health Pros Helping Sustain Mental Fitness

Story by Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

The first line on the Illinois Army National Guard's Behavioral Health Program's information brochure reads "we are here to serve you." The licensed clinical social workers who staff the program are embodying that message, supporting approximately 400 Soldiers.

Amber Marcum, a licensed clinical social worker and the Illinois Army National Guard's Psychological Health Program manager, said Soldiers gain access to psychological health services in one of four ways.

"Soldiers self-report by reaching out to the Psychological Health team directly," said Marcum. "We want them to reach out to us if they notice any changes in their behavior; anxiety symptoms, feeling overwhelmed, difficulty starting or completing tasks, depressive symptoms like difficulty getting up and going to work."

She said any information a Soldier shares with her or her team is kept confidential unless there are immediate concerns about the individual's health or safety, or the issue creates limitations on the individual's ability to perform their duty.

"We do an assessment, ask about their background, gather information about the crisis they may be experiencing," said Marcum. "We gather their preferences on the next steps, give them resource options that match their insurance needs, and then we follow up to make sure they got connected and the resources are meeting their needs."

Capt. Hannah Jordan is a behavioral health officer assigned to Company C, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, and is a licensed clinical social worker who works full time for the Veteran's Administration. She said Soldiers call, text or approach her in person for assistance.

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National Crisis Hotline veteranscrisisline.net
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Military One Source www.militaryonesource.com
(800) 342-9647

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administra-
tion www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment
(800) 662-4357 (24/7)

Veteran Healthcare Administration
<https://www.va.gov/find-locations>

ALWAYS READY, ALWAYS THERE

ALWAYS READY, ALWAYS THERE

"I try to meet them where they are," said Jordan. "If they are reluctant to tell me what's going on and just want resources, I do that. If they want to talk to me, I will help them understand what might be going on that is causing some of the responses they are having."

She said the work doesn't end at drill.

"I'll check on them between drills. They don't have to talk to me, but I'll do everything to make sure they're OK, getting the resources they need, and that the resources are working for them."

The second way Soldiers are referred to behavioral health services is when their commander directs them to seek an evaluation.

"Most commanders know their Soldiers and know them well," said Marcum. "If they notice changes in their behavior or have concerns about the Soldier's safety or functionality at

drill, they will refer the Soldier to us."

Marcum said it's not uncommon for a Soldier to be going through a personal crisis and is not a threat to harm themselves or others and a commander will still refer the Soldier to ensure they get help. She said the information she provides back to the commander after assessing the Soldier is very limited.

"My report doesn't go into details of the assessment and only requires me to notify the commander of potential duty limitations or safety concerns," said Marcum. "At a minimum I confirm the Soldier reached out, I explain my recommendations and a follow-up schedule, and anticipate when the Soldier may be returned to duty."

A third way Soldiers are connected with behavioral health professionals when needed is through Illinois Army National Guard clinical events like the Periodic Health Assessment (PHA) or Soldiers Readiness Process (SRP). Marcum said Soldiers can self-refer or be referred by a clinician supporting the event.

"When a Soldier attends one of these events, the providers will enter in a referral if appropriate. Most events are staffed by a full-time Behavioral Health Program social worker, allowing direct contact and further assessment following the referral."

The fourth way Soldiers are referred to behavioral health is by way of a Serious Incident Report (SIR). An SIR is generated when a Soldier reports suicidal ideations to another service member on or off duty, or any number of other incidents that may warrant checking on the Soldier mental wellbeing.

"We don't provide 24/7 crisis support, so we recommend using the National Crisis Hotline, 988, when

the crisis happens during off duty hours,” said Marcum. “We do receive those SIRs and follow up directly with the unit and the Soldier for further assessment and monitoring.”

Marcum said Soldiers will need to provide documentation of their treatment plan and stability status if they are placed on temporary behavioral health restriction, commonly known as a profile. If a Soldier is not placed on a profile and do not have duty restrictions, Marcum said they do not have to provide documents of their status or treatment plan unless they are mobilizing.

Jordan said the goal of the Behavioral Health Program is to get Soldiers the help they need and return them to duty. She said in most cases Soldiers who are receiving treatment are still able to perform their duty as normal.

“There are always things in life that impact our mental health. Things are going to happen,” said Jordan. “It’s important that we are self-aware of things that impact us that are beyond

our ability to cope. When something is impacting our jobs, education, social functioning, family, or legal issues that’s when it is time to contact behavioral health. If you’re having thoughts of suicide or harming others, get immediate help through the crisis line.”

She said there is a strong connection between physical health and mental health.

“Stressors lead to sleep changes, increase in drug, alcohol or tobacco use, overeating, and high blood pressure,” said Jordan. “I always recommend increasing physical activity, even just taking a walk when someone notices those other changes in themselves.”

Marcum and Jordan both said seeking treatment helps a Soldier’s career and their personal lives.

“It helps Soldiers address their current crisis and gives them tools to manage crisis in the future. It helps them return to normal duty a stronger person,” said Marcum.

“Therapy is a conversation with

someone who is helping you work through your understanding of your stressors and your reaction to those stressors,” said Jordan.

A full-time psychological health professional is assigned to each brigade. Behavioral Health Officers like Jordan function independently of the Psychological Health Program, but they do work together to ensure appropriate care and services are provided.

“While we provide individual services to Soldiers, we also coordinate assistance at the company level to provide support during drill weekends or address any requests the command may have,” said Marcum.

Jordan said their mission is to be available.

“I want Soldiers to know I provide support and commanders to know I can give presentations and conduct training,” said Jordan. “I love going to drills and introducing myself and my role and guiding Soldiers and Commanders to behavioral health resources.”



Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General for the Illinois Army National Guard visits soldiers of the 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (MPAD) during their deployment to the U.S. European Command area of responsibility. His visit is part of the Illinois Army National Guard’s efforts to constantly evaluate its force posture throughout the European theater as a deterrent against enemies of the United States. The 139th MPAD provides public affairs support for U.S. Special Operations Command Europe.

ILARNG's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment Puts Systems Knowledge to the Test

Story by Staff Sgt. Raquel Birk, 5th Armored Brigade

Unmanned aerial system attacks are on the rise around the globe, and First Army has set its sights on the target – Soldier readiness. The 5th Armored Brigade continued to advance their counter-unmanned aerial systems program at mobilization force generation installation Fort Bliss during Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, culminating training exercise Feb. 22-March 5.

Col. Douglas F. Serie, commander of the 5th Armored Brigade, emphasized the brigade's commitment to enhancing C-UAS training for deploying units.

"The 5th AR Brigade continues to develop and provide comprehensive C-UAS training, featuring dynamic threat scenarios, multiple training iterations, and live-fire exercises," he stated. "These pre-deployment exercises instill confidence in mobilized Soldiers, ensuring they are proficient in their systems, tactics, and procedures essential for combat readiness."

Soldiers with the 2-130th Infantry Regiment learned the foundation of Base Defense Operation Centers and the Mobile Low, Slow Unmanned Aircraft Integrated Defense System, to put their knowledge of systems and processes to the test during a Mission Readiness Exercise, culminating in a week-long live-fire engagement to prepare crews for the assumption of the Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve force protection mission at their various outstations in Iraq and Syria in Spring 2025.

"We provide training for the M-LIDs, a dual vehicle solution that provides four different kinetic weapon systems, radar acquisition, and electromagnetic warfare



Staff Sgt. John Cook, right, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, headquartered in Marion, was among the nearly 550 Soldiers from the unit honing their skills in counter UAS (Unmanned Aerial Systems) training at McGregor Range, New Mexico ahead of their deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. (Photo by Spc. Maximilian Weaver, 5th Armored Brigade)

capabilities, which allows Soldiers to perform air defense support," said Brandon C. Haines, M-LIDS

Training and Operations Integrator, PM C-UAS (Astrion). "The drone acquisition comes in, crew cross-



Sgt. Kevin Pacheco, left, and Spc. Blake Hutson, both assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, participate in counter Unmanned Aerial Systems training at McGregor Range, New Mexico, prior to deploying to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. (Photo by Spc. Maximilian Weaver, 5th Armored Brigade)

coordinates, and then they put fire on target. Training normally includes an academic portion, a hands-on portion, and ultimately, the live-fire exercise. They do emplacement drills, weapons acquisition, drone acquisition, and then put it all together to be one cohesive crew before they move into theater."

Observer Controller/Trainers with 3rd Battalion, 362nd Infantry Regiment relay theater-specific lessons learned best practices, successful counter-UAS integration techniques, and quick action drills to better

equip 2-130th Inf. Regt.'s transition into the CJTF-OIR region.

"Through our rotations to theater, bringing back lessons learned from units that have come back from theater, and conducting after-action reviews with them, we understood that individual proficiency on C-UAS capabilities didn't help Soldiers understand how it came together when they worked as a crew," said Lt. Col. Jerome E. Hilliard, 3-362nd Inf. Regt. commander. "We went from computer-based training to more realistic, hands-on training so that force protection crews work collectively to understand how their piece of the pie comes together in C-UAS processes. We use live equipment, radars, C-UAS systems, and drones swarming together, allowing crews to realize firsthand the impact of identifying the threat, mitigating those risks, or not identifying them and realizing the detrimental effect on the unit. We allow the rotational training unit to see and experience things that they may or may not experience downrange but in a controlled environment."

Upon notice of deployment orders, Soldiers with 2-130th Inf. Regt. worked with their partner OC/Ts of 1st Battalion, 335th Infantry Regiment, 157th Infantry Brigade, Division East, out of Camp Atterbury, Indiana, in



Partnering with the 157th Infantry Brigade, the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment Soldiers have been preparing for this Collective Training Event for several months ahead of their deployment in the Middle East. (Photo by Spc. Maximilian Weaver, 5th Armored Brigade)

preparation for their CTE at MFGI Fort Bliss.

"At Camp Atterbury, we provided classroom-based C-UAS training to help us understand the threat, capabilities, and technology," said Staff Sgt. Joseph Watkins, infantry maneuver OC/T with 1-335th Inf. Regt. "What's beneficial about the training we're doing here is our ability

to put into practice and build upon what we've learned this past year. We get to see not only what the drones can do but what they look like, how they operate, and how effective our equipment can be in real time because you can't get that in the classroom. We get to bridge the gap between doctrine and theater-specific counter-UAS operating procedures."

First Army leverages the knowledge of diverse experts to provide a collective learning experience.

"We train on the latest in C-UAS capabilities, such as the Forward Area Air Defense Command and Control and Correlated Defense System of Systems Simulation hands-on training, allowing instructors to test the student's ability to recognize enemy and friendly assets and actively engage," said Haines. "We applied classroom instruction to theater-specific scenarios that replicate air attacks, emulating current enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures to allow for battle drill rehearsals and refinement of processes."

The 2-130th Inf. Regt. force protection crews participated in an M-LIDS live-fire exercise to instill confidence in kinetic systems' capability of shooting down UAS



Along with Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) training, Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment also conducted Quick Response Forces techniques, Tactical Combat Casualty Care and convoy operations. (Photo by Spc. Maximilian Weaver, 5th Armored Brigade)

attacks.

"My favorite part of the training was seeing the role MLIDS play in base defense, scanning for unmanned aerial systems, communication with the Base Defense Operations Center, and seeing how all the pieces fit together when providing security," said Spc. Jack Gregory, an infantryman with Alpha Company, 2-130th Inf. Regt. "One of the biggest worries between me and my fellow Soldiers nowadays is drone warfare, as it's become prevalent in the area that we're deploying to. Especially on social media, many of my fellow Soldiers have seen attacks, and this training provides a morale boost, knowing that we can defend ourselves against this emerging threat."

First Army offers adaptable training to enhance war-fighting capabilities that are not always readily available to all components. Serie highlighted the importance of integrated training among all components of the force to address emerging threats in the CJTF-OIR region.

"Our National Guard and Reserve partners operate under different constraints than their Active-Duty counterparts, making joint training essential to counter evolving drone threats," he stated. "Achieving readiness and lethality in combat requires partnership, trust, and realistic training across both Active and Reserve components to ensure we can fight effectively, side by side."

Our goal is to continuously refine and sustain the most effective C-UAS training strategies."

After countless repetitions and sets leading and developing their crews throughout the training, the RTU moves onto their next step.

"As we conclude our culminating training event, it's evident that the skills honed here are indispensable," said Lt. Col. Edward Worman, 2-130th Inf. Regt. commander. "Recent drone attacks underscore the critical need for this training. By mastering counter-drone techniques, we not only protect ourselves, but also ensure readiness for future threats. Together, we mitigate risks and safeguard our service members' safety and mission success."



Soldiers from 2-130th Infantry Regiment hone their skills in counter UAS (Unmanned Aerial Systems) training at McGregor Range, New Mexico ahead. By using cutting-edge technology and tactical expertise, they stay ahead of emerging threats to ensure war fighting success and national security. Partnering with the 157th Infantry Brigade, the 2-130 Soldiers have been preparing for this Collective Training Event for several months and they are finally putting their skills to the ultimate test before they proceed forward to their deployment in the Middle East. Along with Counter-UAS training, the Soldiers are also conducting Quick Response Forces techniques, Tactical Combat Casualty Care and convoy operations. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Raquel Birk, 5th Armored Brigade)



Leaders Visit Troops Deployed to Poland

The 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade and 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion command teams had the honor of visiting the 725th Transportation Company deployed to Poland.

They received a base tour, an operations brief from the 110th CSSB from the Georgia Army National Guard, and two outstanding Polish meals at the chow hall.

They met with the unit leadership teams and had a phenomenal breakout session with the entire unit (minus those out on mission).

Numerous members of the unit were recognized by the command teams for their excellence on this mission.



ERDC leads demonstration of hydrogen fueled equipment at National Guard site in Illinois

Story and Photo by Sophia Espinosa, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center

The U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center's (ERDC) Construction Engineering Research Laboratory (CERL) is advancing energy resiliency and reliability by using hydrogen as a sustainable, renewable energy source.

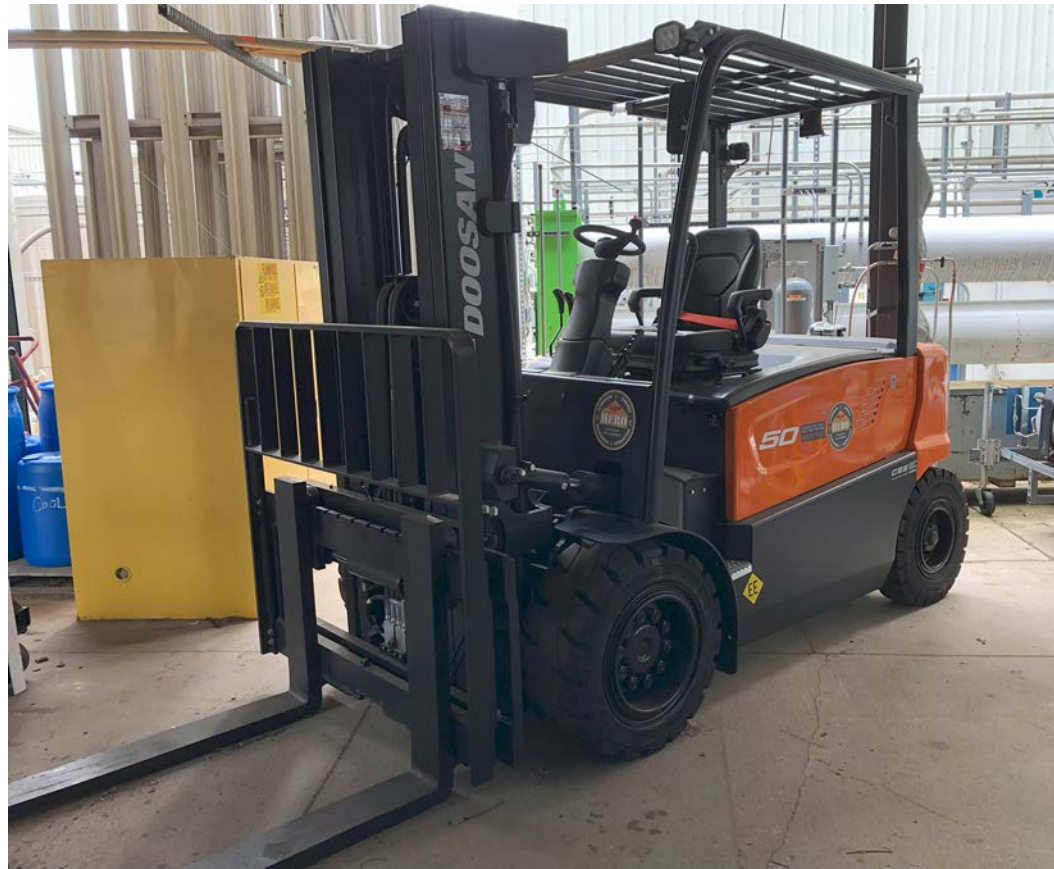
ERDC-CERL is spearheading research and development efforts to integrate hydrogen energy solutions into military operations, aiming to provide clean backup energy systems that enhance the energy independence of Department of Defense (DoD) installations.

One key demonstration includes the hydrogen-powered fuel cell forklift showcased at the North Riverside Illinois Army National Guard (ILARNG) site. This equipment provided personnel with firsthand experience of how hydrogen technology can improve operations by offering a clean, reliable and resilient energy solution for critical tasks.

"The use of hydrogen to power a forklift provides the military another application of a silent, renewable and available fuel source that can be used at installations worldwide," said Carol Bailey, project manager and principal investigator with ERDC-CERL for the demonstration project. "We applaud North Riverside's initiative to become a pilot site for hydrogen equipment on behalf of the DoD."

The research demonstration took place at the North Riverside ILARNG site, a dual-supported installation that serves both state and federal roles, including contingency staging for emergencies. ERDC-CERL is working closely with the North Riverside ILARNG to advance the integration of hydrogen energy solutions into military operations. This partnership aligns with the DoD's ongoing commitment to enhancing energy resilience across its installations.

"The hydrogen-powered forklift has the same capabilities as a standard forklift but has the added benefits of faster fueling, compared to our



Hydrogen-powered fuel cell forklift at the Illinois Army National Guard Armory in North Riverside.

electric-only forklift," said Al Colon, facility manager at ILARNG. "It also has improved air quality due to the lack of exhaust fumes during operation. It's a win-win situation."

ERDC-CERL has partnered with GTI Energy, who is developing hydrogen systems at its Des Plaines, Illinois, research facility. This collaboration led to the creation of a prototype hydrogen-based backup energy system, which contributed to the demonstration of hydrogen-powered equipment at the North Riverside site.

"We are excited to partner with ERDC-CERL on this program's first phase and contribute to the DoD's efforts to enhance energy reliability for critical missions," said Susan Stuver, Director of Defense Energy at GTI Energy. "As we advance our research and development of innovative

energy solutions, we look forward to deepening our collaboration with ERDC-CERL to strengthen energy systems and infrastructure, ensuring they are safe, secure, and reliable."

The ILARNG installation, which spans over 80 years of history, has several buildings that are subject to frequent power outages. Currently, about 80 personnel work full-time at the site, with up to 900 additional Guard members hosting drills on weekends. To maintain operational continuity and ensure the security of critical missions, ERDC-CERL's research program aims to demonstrate a new framework for designing and deploying resilient energy systems that could be replicated across DoD installations nationwide.

"We are excited to see this first piece of hydrogen-fueled equipment demonstrated at the National Guard

site in Illinois. Understanding how fuel cells and hydrogen play a role in modernizing an older installation is important to improving energy resiliency and reliability,” said Bailey.

ERDC-CERL is exploring hydrogen energy solutions to replace outdated heating and power systems. These solutions include integrating hydrogen and hydrogen blends across the energy value chain, from production to delivery, storage, and end-use, ensuring reliable operations even during power interruptions.

The Doosan electric forklift, modified with a hydrogen-powered Plug Power PEM fuel cell, a type of

fuel cell that uses hydrogen to produce electricity, was filled with hydrogen at GTI Energy’s lab and transported to the installation for the demonstration.

As part of ongoing training and education, the demonstration will help ILARNG staff understand the potential benefits of hydrogen-based energy technologies to meet their mission requirements. Information obtained from testing these systems will be used to design a prototype system to be installed at the North Riverside site during the next phase of research to further enhance the site’s energy resilience.

The hydrogen forklift

demonstration at the North Riverside ILARNG site marks a key milestone in the U.S. military’s efforts to modernize its energy infrastructure. This demonstration highlights the potential of hydrogen-based solutions to enhance energy resilience and reliability, ensuring military installations can continue to support critical operations, even during power disruptions or emergencies. As ERDC-CERL advances this research, it paves the way for broader adoption of hydrogen technologies across DoD installations, contributing to long-term energy resiliency and operational readiness.



Bennet Completes Fini Flight

Family and friends of U.S. Air Force Col. Bruce Bennet, commander of the 182nd Maintenance Group, Illinois Air National Guard, greet him after the conclusion of his C-130 Hercules fini flight at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, March 8, 2025. Bennett is a senior evaluator pilot in the C-130 Hercules and began his military career in 1991 by enlisting in the Illinois Air National Guard as an F-16 Fighting Falcon crew chief. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw)





Tallman becomes Senior Enlisted Leader of 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion

The 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion held a change of responsibility ceremony April 13 at the Northwest Armory in Chicago.

During the ceremony, Command Sgt. Maj. Tisha Timan relinquished responsibility as the battalion's senior enlisted leader to Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Tallman.

Timan is the command sergeant major of the Illinois Army National Guard's 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade, based at Rock Island Arsenal.



Above, Command Sgt. Maj. Tisha Timan, the outgoing senior enlisted leader for the 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion, thanks fellow Soldiers for their support during her military service.

At right, Command Sgt. Maj. Matthew Tallman, the incoming senior enlisted leader for the 34th Division Sustainment Troops Battalion, holds the battalion's guidon during the change of responsibility ceremony.



65th Troop Command Brigade Welcomes Baker as New Senior Enlisted Leader

Story and Photos by Master Sgt. Kassidy Snyder, 65th Troop Command Brigade

The 65th Troop Command Brigade (TCB) welcomed Command Sgt. Maj. (CSM) LaCarl Baker of Matteson, Illinois, during a change of responsibility ceremony at the Army Aviation Support Facility #3 in Peoria, Illinois, April 13.

"I have full trust in your ability to be the right-hand man to this brigade and support all of our Soldiers," said Col. Max Casteleyn, 65th TCB commander.

Baker enlisted in December 1993 as a light-wheeled mechanic in Chicago, Illinois. His first duty assignment was with Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery (FA) in Chicago. Baker has served in several leadership roles and was selected as the CSM for the 2nd Battalion, 123rd FA Regiment in 2022. His stateside assignments include 2n Battalion, 122nd FA in Chicago and Crestwood, 555th Engineer Company in Fort Hood, Texas, and 3625th Classification Inspection Company in North Riverside as a first sergeant.

His overseas assignments include the 52nd Aviation in Camp Humphreys, South Korea, and the 2-130 Infantry in Hohenfels, Germany. He has deployed to Germany and Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

"This is a very unique brigade, and we have a variety of combined entities," said Baker. "After analyzing it, I realized that it can be one of the most lethal brigades."

The 65th TCB is comprised of 19 units and approximately 1,200 Soldiers stationed from Chicago to Springfield. The 65th is a multi-functional brigade of combat and combat support services, covering a wide range of missions including artillery, aviation, intelligence, cyber, public affairs, personnel, musicians, maintenance, and transportation.

"To the Soldiers of the 65th, I ask you to continue to master those MOS skills that you have. Create a balance with your basic Soldier tasks and be

prepared for when your unit is called to protect the freedom of this great nation," said Baker. "My number one passion is Soldier care. I challenge the NCOs to inspire your Soldiers and show them that they do matter. I guarantee you will garner great results."

On the civilian side, Baker works for the Cook County Sheriff's Department as a sergeant at Cook County Jail. He is married to his wife, Tawana, and together they have four daughters.

"I'm honored to have this position and want to thank CSM Jones who took me under his wing and mentored me. I think he prepared me to take on this challenge."

Right, Col. Max Casteleyn, Commander of the 65th Troop Command Brigade, passes the brigade's colors to Command Sgt. Maj. LaCarl Baker, signifying the change of responsibility of one enlisted leader to another during a change of responsibility ceremony April 13 in Peoria.



Soldiers from the 65th Troop Command Brigade render a salute during the change of responsibility ceremony in which Command Sgt. Maj. LaCarl Baker assumed responsibility as the brigade's senior enlisted advisor, April 13 in Peoria.

Holman takes command of Chicago-based 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion

The 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion held a change of command ceremony April 13 for Lt. Col. Melinda Weller, outgoing commander, and Maj. (P) Ben Holman, incoming commander at the North Riverside Armory.

Weller is now the commander of the Joint Force Medical Detachment in Springfield.



Top left, Maj. Ben Holman addresses Soldiers in the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion during the change of command ceremony.

Top, Col. Beth Roxworthy, Commander, 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, passes the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion guidon to Maj. Ben Holman, incoming commander.

Left, Maj. Ben Holman, the new commander of the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, takes command of the formation during the ceremony.

126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron wins Department of Defense Supply Chain Excellence Award

The 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron won the Department of Defense Supply Chain Excellence Award.

To celebrate, Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air came by the 126th SCOS to recognize the Squadron and a few of it's members for 2024 Air National Guard Logistics Readiness Individual and Unit Awards.

The 126th SCOS and the 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron won 10 out of the 15 2024 ANG Logistics Readiness Individual and Unit Awards.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, left, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, describes his coin before awarding it to Lt. Col. Gary Jurs, 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Jurs received the coin for winning the General Lew Allen, Jr., Trophy (Logistics Readiness - Officer.)



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Mackenzie Lafore, right, 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron, receives a coin from Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Lafore was recognized for her work as a civilian for winning Outstanding Logistics Readiness Civilian Cat I of the Year.



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Kacy Buckingham, 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron, shakes hands with Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, after receiving a coin for her work in the squadron at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Buckingham was recognized for winning Outstanding AF Logistics Readiness Non-commissioned officer of the Year.



U.S. Air Force Sgt. Ronnell Freeman, right, 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron, receives a coin from Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Freeman received the coin for winning the Outstanding Air Force Logistics Readiness Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year.



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Lindsay Hiltl, 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron, salutes Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, after receiving a coin for excellence at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Hiltl received the coin for being named the General Lew Allen, Jr., Trophy (Logistics Readiness - Enlisted.)

*Illinois Air National Guard
photos by
Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison*

183rd Civil Engineer Squadron Enhances Domestic Operations Capabilities

Story by Senior Airman Alexandria King, 183rd Wing

The 183d Civil Engineer Squadron (183 CES) participated in a critical exercise to strengthen its Domestic Operations (DOMOPS) capabilities, March 18.

This exercise is a vital part of the squadron's ongoing efforts to ensure its readiness to provide emergency response and recovery support during times of crisis, whether caused by natural disasters, public safety emergencies, or other unforeseen events.

The training took place in Ashland, Illinois, in conjunction with the Ashland Volunteer Fire Department and Public Works, where the 183d deployed its Mobile Emergency Operations Center (MEOC) and operated its Debris Clearance Kit. These two essential assets are designed to support the Wing's ability to coordinate operations and rapidly clear debris during large-scale response efforts.

"The National Guard has the ability, equipment and personnel to respond and help during this kind



of exercise. If it was real-world, we would be able to respond to help [Ashland] get back on their feet and get back to where they can operate at a normal level," said Senior Master Sgt. Travis Cave, emergency management superintendent, 183d Civil Engineer Squadron, 183d Wing.

The MEOC, a mobile command center, is equipped with advanced communications and coordination tools that allow the 183 CES to establish a central hub for managing operations. This center plays a crucial role in linking field personnel with key leadership, ensuring that decisions can be made efficiently and that all involved units are aligned with the overall response strategy.

In addition to the MEOC, the Debris Clearance Kit is a specialized set of tools that enables the squadron to clear roads and other essential

infrastructure of debris. Equipped with chainsaws, hand tools, two tracked loaders and a dump truck, the kit is designed to be deployed quickly and effectively.

This exercise is part of the squadron's standard training, which ensures that members remain proficient in their roles and can respond swiftly and effectively to real-world scenarios. The simulation was described by Senior Master Sgt. Cave as a situation where "a tornado went through the city of Ashland. They had a road that they needed open and were outside their scope with work. So, they asked for the state government for help, and we responded with what the National Guard would do to help bolster the village's ability to process those kinds of damages."

Through this training, the 183d Civil Engineer Squadron continues to demonstrate its commitment to service and preparedness. By maintaining these operational capabilities, the squadron enhances its role as a key asset in supporting civil authorities and ensuring the safety and resilience of the communities it serves.



Photos by Master Sgt. Shaun Kerr and Senior Airman Alexandria King, 183rd Wing

Hedges Becomes Senior Enlisted Leader of 183rd Wing During Change of Responsibility Ceremony

Chief Master Sgt. Steven Hedges assumed the role of Command Chief Master Sergeant at the first-ever 183rd Wing Change of Responsibility Ceremony on March 9. This position is tasked with advising the commander

on matters such as health, morale, welfare, training, and professional development for all Airmen on base.

Hedges previously held the position of Senior Enlisted Leader for the 183rd Maintenance Squadron and has served in the Air Force for 33 years.

Hedges accepts the role as Chief Master Sgt. Rebecca Velazquez retires after 27 years of honorable service.

The change of responsibility ceremony is a traditional event rich with symbolism and heritage. The key to the ceremony is the passing of the command's colors. The very soul of a military unit is symbolized in the colors under which it fights, for they represent not only the lineage and honors of the organization, but also the loyalty and unity of its personnel. The custodian of the colors is the command chief of the unit.



Chief Master Sgt. Rebecca Velazquez relinquishes responsibility of the 183rd Wing to Col. Shawn Strahle, Commander, 183rd Wing, Springfield, during a change of responsibility ceremony March 9. Velazquez retires from the Illinois Air National Guard after 27 years of service. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)



Chief Master Sgt. Steven Hedges assumes responsibility as the senior enlisted leader of the 183rd Wing from Col. Shawn Strahle, Commander, 183rd Wing, Springfield, during a change of responsibility ceremony March 9.

Huntley Soldier Assumes Command of 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion

In a ceremony steeped in rich military tradition, Lt. Col. Garrett Dean, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, relinquished command of the Illinois Army National Guard's 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion to Maj. Timothy Heagney, of Huntley, Illinois, during a change of command ceremony March 16 at the Marseilles Training Center, Marseilles.

Under Dean's leadership, the battalion was recognized as having the highest personnel readiness as a battalion, successfully mobilized a unit to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and led the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team with the highest overall individual weapons qualification at the company level during training year 2023. Dean is assigned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mississippi Valley Division, and resides in Vicksburg with his wife Katie, and daughter, Charlie.

Heagney commissioned as a field artillery officer in December 2010 through the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at the University of Illinois at Chicago while attending Loyola University Chicago.



Maj. Keith Stewart, left, and Maj. Ryan Lalone present Lt. Col. Garrett Dean, outgoing commander of the 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, with a gift as a token of appreciation during the change of command ceremony March 16 at Marseilles Training Center. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Patrick Reynolds)



Maj. Timothy Heagney, left, incoming commander of the 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, assumes command as Col. Seth Hible, Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, passes the battalion's guidon during a change of command ceremony March 15 at Marseilles Training Center. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Patrick Reynolds)

While attending ROTC, he participated in the Simultaneous Membership Program and was assigned to the 933rd Military Police Company from February 2008 to December 2010.

Heagney has served in a variety of assignments including Engineer Officer for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Operations Officer for the 123rd Engineer Battalion, Engineer Officer in the 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment, Battalion Fire Direction Officer for 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment, Commander of the 616th Engineer Utilities Detachment, Commander of Battery A, 2-123rd Field Artillery Regiment, Platoon Leader of Batteries A and C, 2-123rd Field Artillery Regiment, Fire Direction Officer of Battery C, 2-123rd Field Artillery

Regiment, and Fire Support Officer of the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment.

Heagney deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait in 2020 with the 1886th Engineer Facilities Detachment in support of Operation Enduring, where he served as the lead project officer for the Department of Public works.

He trained in Poland in 2018 as part of Resolute Castle with the 123rd Engineer Battalion and was activated for State Active Duty for flood response operations in 2019 and in support of the Democratic National Convention in 2024.

In his civilian career, Heagney is a Sergeant with the Huntley Police Department and is assigned as a patrol supervisor. He resides in Huntley with his wife, Samantha.

Student Selected as 2025 Walter Dyett Award Recipient

Dyett Served as Bandmaster for 8th Infantry Regiment Band, Taught 20,000 Students in Chicago Schools During 30-Year Career

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

The life and legacy of Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Walter H. Dyett was celebrated at the school which bears his name, the Walter H. Dyett High School for the Fine Arts in Chicago, with the presentation of the 2025 Captain Walter H. Dyett award, March 19.

The award was created to honor a fine arts student from Walter H. Dyett High School for the Fine Arts who exhibits the same creativity, discipline, and hard work which Capt. Walter Dyett brought to his military career leading the Illinois National Guard's 8th Infantry Band and as a music educator.

"For more than three decades Captain Dyett taught music in Chicago Public Schools in this neighborhood, first at my alma mater, Wendell Phillips High School and then DuSable High School," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "Now we stand in a high school that bears his name and carries on his legacy. It is a legacy of teaching fine arts and inspiring young men and women. The students in this room will lift this world and help make our nation a 'more perfect union'. You are our future leaders."

Capt. Walter Dyett directed the Illinois National Guard 8th Infantry Regiment Band and served as music director and educator within the Chicago Public Schools from 1935-1962 on the South Side of Chicago.

He fostered the growth of jazz and Black musicians in Chicago. He led the Pickford Orchestra, Washington Park summer concerts, the DuSable-ites, the "Hi-Jinks," and many others.

From 1931 to 1962, Dyett taught classical, military, and jazz music to more than 20,000 students at Wendell



Aaliyah Johnson, the 2025 recipient of the Capt. Walter Dyett award, thanks the 8th Infantry Association for presenting her with the award during the third annual Captain Walter H. Dyett award ceremony at Walter H. Dyett High School for the Fine Arts March 19 in Chicago.

Phillips and DuSable High Schools. Jazz greats including Nat "King" Cole, Dorothy Donegan, Joseph Jarman, Dinah Washington, Johnny Griffin, and Mwata Bowden credit Dyett for their early musical training.

"We all know Captain Dyett taught some of the music greats," Boyd said. "But I'd say the 20,000 other students he taught and mentored are more important. The life skills he taught – the mental toughness, the self-respect, the discipline, have inspired thousands to make this nation – our nation – better. His work is not done, but you will carry his mission forward."

Boyd said Dyett was part of a long

line of National Guard leaders who made a positive difference in the community.

"Captain Dyett got his start as the band leader for the 8th Infantry Regiment Band," he said. "Today the Illinois National Guard's 178th Infantry is stationed right at the General Jones Armory, less than a football toss from where Captain Dyett and his students would put on summer concerts in Washington Park."

Illinois National Guard Veterans formed the Illinois National Guard 8th Infantry Association and are keeping the memory of the Fighting 8th alive today.

"Today they are keeping the memory of one of our own alive and celebrating the legacy of Captain Walter Dyett in a way we think he would appreciate – by honoring a student who exhibits the values that he lived by," Boyd said. "These are values that the Army National Guard instills in our Soldiers."

Boyd told the school's band students, "with your talents you should never be stopped at doing what you're doing."

He encouraged the students to look at the Illinois National Guard for resources to attend college. "We have the resources for you," he said. "Don't let money stop you from achieving your dreams."

William Brandan McClellan, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who knew Dyett, called Dyett a very strong man.

"His strength and love of music and more so his students made him great," McClellan said. "When I was in college, he was at a function we had. We were able to talk for a good long time. Up until the time of his death, I would often seek advice from him."

McClellan shared some of his memories of Dyett, fondly referred to

as “Cap”.

“He was known as a band director, but he was a violist as well,” he said. “When he attended VanderCook College of Music in the 1930s, he was one of the only black students. However, his presence and accomplishments while at VanderCook have elevated him to the point he has a room there named after him.”

McClellan told students his own musical philosophies he holds still today are attributed to Dyett.

“As a former band director, and someone who is still learning how to play a trumpet after 65 years, I want to make sure his legacy continues,” McClellan said.

McClellan offered advice to the students.

“Do what you need to do because there is a future for you,” he said. “Some people are afraid to go into the military, but I was a ceremonial bugler at Washington Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. I played in Arlington for generals and every Friday night, I sounded the last Taps. That’s a job. If it’s something you want to do, you have to put that practice in. For example, if you don’t know your

scales, start with one, then two, three and four.

“I was where you are sitting now,” he said. “I remember it well. If you love music, continue with music, don’t let it stop you. You all have a great thing going for you. There’s only two ways to play music – right and perfect. Perfect is an absolute and we can’t achieve it, but we can work at it. Take that attitude and apply it to whatever you do.”

Zaveola Coleman, chairperson of the Illinois National Guard 8th



Aaliyah Johnson, center, the 2025 recipient of the Captain Walter H. Dyett award, is joined by her parents, members of the 8th Infantry Association, school officials from the Walter H. Dyett High School for Fine Arts in Chicago, and Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.

Infantry Association’s Scholarship committee shared Dyett’s motto with the students prior to presenting the award.

“Captain Dyett’s motto was if you think you can, you can. You can be the best. If you want to be the best, you have to more than want to do it. You have to will yourself to do it,” said Coleman in announcing Aaliyah Johnson as the 2025 award recipient. “It is an honor to present you this award honoring this giant of an educator and man.”

Johnson thanked the 8th Infantry Association for the award and for McClellan’s advice.

“Thank you for this honor,” she said. “Thank you for your comments of keep dreaming and stay motivated. There is more after high school. I’m blessed to be in this school. It could have been anyone else, but God put me in this school for a reason.”

Boyd said the National Guard is an integral part of the community and will remain an important part of the south side of Chicago.

“As we turn to the voices and impacts of leaders, I’m proud to stand with you all and raise up Captain Walter Dyett for making his mark and contributing to this chapter of our community’s history, our state’s history, and our nation’s,” he said.



Sgt. Demitri Funnell, from the Illinois Army National Guard’s 144th Army Band, along students with the Walter H. Dyett High School for Fine Arts in Chicago, play a musical selection.

AFRC, ANG Aircrews Plan 11-Aircraft Formation



Two C-130 Hercules aircraft from the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing, based in Peoria, participated in a formation flight at Rosecrans Air National Guard Base in St. Joseph, Missouri, on March 20. The aircraft were part of seven from the 139th Airlift Wing, the 182nd Airlift Wing, and Dobbins Air Reserve Base which participated in a large formation exercise for the C-130H Weapons Instructor Course. The seven aircraft joined four others from Minneapolis for an 11-aircraft formation flight.

Story and photos by Michael Crane, 139th Airlift Wing

In a packed, medium-sized trailer, dozens of Air Force aviators in green flight suits sit shoulder to shoulder. At the front of the room, six Airmen sit at separate tables. Each takes a turn briefing the crowd on a flying mission they meticulously planned over the last 36 hours. These six—experienced instructor pilots and navigators—are students of the C-130H Weapons Instructor Course (WIC) at Rosecrans Air National Guard Base. They are in the middle of a six-month-long, PhD level course that is part of the U.S. Air Force Weapons School.

Their task is to plan, lead, and execute a large-scale formation mission involving 11 C-130H Hercules aircraft. The students are graded on their ability to react to simulated ground and air threats and conduct a mass equipment airdrop.

"This was the first time in the course that we had guest crews as part of the execution of a sortie," said Lt. Col. Jason Riggs, director of

operations for the C-130H WIC. "I believe that this gave the students a unique opportunity where they were able to plan a mission and then give it to crews that had zero idea of what the mission was and then go execute."

Planning for this extensive training event began over three months ago when Maj. Robby "Stone" Walling, the Advanced Tactical Airlift (ATA) phase manager for the WIC, reached out to various units for support. Of the 11 participating aircraft, seven launched from Rosecrans. Those aircraft were flown by the Missouri Air National Guard's (ANG) 139th Airlift Wing, the Illinois ANG's 182nd Airlift Wing, an Air Force Reserve (AFRC) unit from Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia, and the WIC itself.

The remaining four aircraft launched from Minneapolis, representing both Reserve and Guard units from the 934th and 133rd Airlift Wings. This required the students to solve a complex

coordination challenge: synchronizing two formations that launched from separate locations.

Walling praised the students' performance, noting that they successfully joined both formations near Salina, Kansas, within 29 seconds of reaching the same airspace. "They did a really nice job of planning all that," he said.

"[Walling] was able to leverage relationships in the community to build the plan that allowed for the 11-ship flight," said Riggs. "This is a small sample of the great work that is done over here."

The six students from AFRC and ANG completed WIC's first phase, Employment Fundamentals, before tackling their first Advanced Tactical Airlift mission in an 11-ship sortie. This phase runs alongside Integration Fundamentals, leading to the final Weapons School Integration (WSINT) at Nellis AFB, Nevada.

Walling is the ATA phase manager

and this is the second time he has been a WIC instructor. He is a 2022 graduate whose experience in academic training environments is extensive, having served as a cadre member of the Advanced Airlift Tactics Training Center since 2016.

"It's pretty common for squadrons to fly a two-ship, maybe sometimes a four-ship," Walling explained. "It's easy to fly a two-ship because you only have one guy behind you. But how do you go about putting multiple airplanes in the same airspace, and what are the second and third order effects in a dynamic RF and IR threat environment. Those are the kind of problem sets we have the WUGs solve."

Walling highlighted the challenges of formation flying, explaining how a single movement by the lead aircraft or an enemy engagement at the rear can impact the entire formation. The WIC seeks to prepare aircrew for those types of scenarios.

"We're going to measure with a micrometer, but in execution it equates to marking it with a crayon, and then cutting with a chainsaw," Walling said, explaining that they analyze everything—from how the aircraft slow down to altitudes, bank angles, airspeed, deceleration, and acceleration. "You can plan to the yard, but in reality, when you're moving through space and time in a big airplane, you're never going to be able to fly that exact parameter. But we are going in with the most precise argument for execution to allow the variability within execution to still meet the commander's intent while maintaining an acceptable level of risk."

The 11-ship formation included different versions of the C-130H, some equipped with older engines and others with NP 2000 eight-bladed propellers, creating additional problem-solving challenges for the students.

Another critical component of the exercise involved simulated surface-to-air threats. Walling worked with the Kansas ANG's Smoky Hill Range, which employs a joint threat emitter to simulate enemy attacks. "This interacts with our radar warning receivers that allow us to get the



Seven C-130 Hercules aircraft lift off for a formation flight at Rosecrans Air National Guard Base in St. Joseph, Missouri, on March 20. The aircraft included two from the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing and participated in a large formation exercise for the C-130H Weapons Instructor Course. The seven aircraft joined four others from Minneapolis for an 11-aircraft formation flight.

realism of being targeted by surface-based radar missile systems," he explained. The students were graded on their responses to these simulated threats.

The formation also executed airdrops, requiring coordination with a Kansas ANG tactical air control party member at the drop zone. The 139th Logistics Readiness Squadron's air terminal function also played a crucial role by securing and loading the airdrops into the aircraft and

driving from St. Joseph to Salina to retrieve them.

The flight lasted about 3 hours and ultimately served as preparation for the final phase of the WIC during which students will participate in a joint forcible entry operation with an even greater number of aircraft.

"For them to basically plan from cradle to grave, in the course of a day and a half, just really speaks to the acumen and ability of the students we have," said Walling.



Remembrance Ceremony Marks 34th Anniversary of Desert Storm

Approximately 1,370 Illinois Guard Members Were Activated for Overseas Duty

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Michael Barton, of Greenview, was 12 years old when the Persian Gulf War, known as Operation Desert Storm, started in 1991.

"I remember when the conflict broke out, I bought a copy of each edition of newspaper our gas station had," said Barton, who delivered the keynote address during the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs' annual Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony Feb. 28 at the Illinois State Military Museum. "I still have those newspapers today."

February 28 marked the 34th anniversary of the end of the 100-hour ground war, in which coalition forces defeated the Iraqi Army, the fourth largest military in the world, and liberated Kuwait.

Barton, the Illinois Army National Guard's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, said that while 43 days is a small amount of time when compared to other military operations, "Desert Storm demonstrated our vast military strengths, the methods used to build up power in the Persian Gulf region wasn't something quite seen since World War II."

"The rally of the international community to enlist the service of 38 other nations as one united coalition has become the standard we strive for today," he said.

More than 600,000 American service members deployed to Saudi Arabia as part of Operation Desert Shield, including approximately 1,370 Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

"Eleven Army units and Air Wings were sent to support Desert Storm," Barton said. "The fathers of two of my classmates serving in the Illinois National Guard were sent 'over there.' We shared that experience. Then just

five years and one day later, Feb. 29, 1996, I enlisted into the same unit and served with their dads."

Barton said growing up in a rural community in the late 1980s and early 1990s, cable television wasn't as widely available as it is today. As cable television made its way into rural communities, came the advent of the 24-hour news cycle, and the world was able to watch Desert Storm play out on international television.

"I remember my family had just recently gotten cable television," he said. "Living in a rural community at that time, it really wasn't a thing. During that time, the relative new concept of the 24-hour news cycle came to be with networks like CNN broadcasting Desert Storm in real time. The entire world witnessed our strength in action."

Barton said he would come home after school and get the latest updates.

"I would immediately switch on the cable news to receive the latest updates," he said. "My family would eat around the television, just watching. We watched strike after strike, the Patriot missiles intercepting Iraqi SCUD missiles. It consumed my afternoon and evenings until bedtime."

But, Barton said, what was showcased during Desert Storm and continues to be the strength of our military is the people.



Lt. Col. Michael Barton, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Illinois Army National Guard, shares a story of watching Desert Storm unfold on cable television during the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs' Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony Feb. 28 at the Illinois State Military Museum, and how, as a young boy of 12-years-old, he would turn on the cable news immediately after school to receive the latest updates.

"It's the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guard personnel serving that always has been and always will be the strength of our military," he said. "The videos shown of our servicemembers in Desert Storm showcased the level of morale, professionalism, and fitness of our servicemembers. They were ready to engage with the fourth largest Army

in the world, the Iraqi Army.”

Barton said it was watching Desert Storm unfold on television which inspired him to enlist.

“The dedication and eagerness of the men and women serving then to defend freedom and represent the United States against a tyrant and his Army, inspired me and countless others and continues to inspire us today,” he said. “Our forces made quick work of Iraqi forces, and we demonstrated our technological might to the rest of the world.”

Barton said compared to earlier conflicts, the precision targeting used during Desert Storm was considered antiseptic.

“No matter how swift our military actions are, they are never antiseptic,” he said. “War is personal. War is costly. No one prays for peace more than those who serve and those impacted by our service. More than 300 American service members died

during Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield, including 18 service members from Illinois, represented by their dog tags here.”

Barton said as Americans we must continue to celebrate the effort and achievements of those who served and sacrificed to bring liberation and victory during Desert Storm.

“We must honor the families who lost loved ones in service to our nation and whose lives were forever changed,” he said. “It is our duty as President Lincoln prompted us to ‘care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan’.”



Terry Prince, Director, Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, talks about his service in the U.S. Navy during Desert Storm during the IDVA's Operation Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony Feb. 28 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield. Feb. 28 marked the 34th anniversary of the end of Desert Storm, in which 18 Illinois service members would make the ultimate sacrifice.



Rose Connelly, a volunteer with the Illinois State Military Museum, places a yellow rose in remembrance of a service member from Illinois who died during Operation Desert Storm at the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs' annual Operation Desert Storm Remembrance Ceremony Feb. 28 at the museum.

217 Engineering Installation Squadron Trains for Challenging Environments

Members of the 217th Engineering Installation Squadron of the 183rd Wing, Springfield, prepare for a confined space repair while donning

mission oriented protective posture (MOPP) gear during a readiness exercise on March 8. Readiness exercises are aimed at increasing

readiness by training and preparing wing members to conduct regular operations under degraded or challenging environments.



(U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella)



Spurred to Serve following September 11 Terror Attacks, Springfield Airman Retires After 22 Years of Service in Illinois Air Guard

Story and Photos by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella, 183rd Wing

On Sept. 11, 2001, Master Sgt. Melissa Orrill, now a mission manager with the Air Mobility Operations Squadron, 183rd Wing, Springfield, watched the news like so many others, feeling a growing sense of responsibility.

In the days that followed, she couldn't shake the thought that she wanted to do more – something meaningful.

"I was 30 at the time, and I had this moment of reflection," Orrill said. "I hadn't done anything. I started looking at my life and thinking, 'What can I do to give back to my country?'"

She spent a year volunteering, hoping to fill that need, but it wasn't enough.

A neighbor serving in the military suggested she consider joining the Air National Guard. Without a strong family history of military service, she stepped into the unknown, driven by a sense of duty.

Over the next 22 years, Orrill's career took her from Springfield to the center of critical real-world operations.

She deployed to the Middle East for seven months, working in a command center alongside generals and multinational military representatives. She played a key role in managing flights during major operations, including the historic 2021 evacuation of Afghan civilians. She also served on two extended COVID-19 relief tours, ensuring smooth operations during the crisis.

Every time an opportunity arose, Orrill was ready.

"Anytime a real-world mission came up, I was like, 'Yeah, put my name in,'" she said.

That attitude became the foundation of her service. She wasn't in it for recognition or awards. She simply wanted to do the work, step in where she was needed and take care of those around her.

From the moment she joined, Orrill naturally fell into the role of looking



In recognition of her two decades of service in the Illinois Air National Guard, Master Sgt. Melissa Orrill was presented the Meritorious Service Medal.

out for others. As a 30-year-old in basic training, she found herself acting as a mentor to the younger trainees in her flight. That responsibility followed her throughout her career. Whether in a leadership position or as a teammate, she made sure those around her were supported.

"Just take care of each other," she said when asked what she had learned after two decades of service.

Her commitment to service didn't just impact her colleagues – it shaped her family's future. Though she hadn't grown up in a military household, her decision to serve paved the way for the next generation. Today, both her son and niece serve in 183d Wing.

As she prepares for retirement, Orrill reflects on a career filled with meaningful moments – some challenging, some rewarding, but all significant. From managing flights in war zones to assisting with humanitarian efforts, she answered every call.

And if there were ever another opportunity to serve?

"Put my name in."



Master Sgt. Melissa Orrill with her niece and son, both who are serving in the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Wing.



Tech. Sgt. Hayden Howard, 183rd Wing Security Forces Squadron, on duty in Washington, D.C.

183rd Wing Security Forces Squadron plays critical role in ensuring security during 60th Presidential Inauguration

Story by Senior Airman Alexandria King, 183rd Wing

The 183rd Wing Security Forces Squadron (SFS) played a critical role in ensuring the security of the 60th Presidential Inauguration that took place on Jan. 20. These airmen contributed to a larger national security effort to support the safe transition of power in Washington, D.C.

Roughly 8,000 service members from over 40 states and territories were activated to support this event. “Everybody is working towards the same goal of having a peaceful transition of power,” said Master Sgt. Richard Jackson, security forces element leader with the 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard.

The primary mission of the 183rd SFS was to provide security for any situation during the inauguration. They worked alongside federal, state,

and local law enforcement agencies, contributing to crowd management, access control, and the protection of critical infrastructure. Their responsibilities included securing restricted areas, ensuring the safety of personnel, and maintaining order in the midst of large crowds.

“We were there for just a little bit over a week, and we were preparing continuously. Like, here’s where the posts are going to be, here’s your call signs, here’s what we’re going to do if this happens, here are the people who are going to be responsible for that... So the entire time you’re preparing for that final day,”

explained Jackson.

The participation of the 183rd SFS during the 60th Presidential Inauguration highlights the significance of effective planning and coordination in maintaining security during such critical events. Their efforts contributed greatly to the overall success of the inauguration, reinforcing the role of the Air National Guard in safeguarding the nation’s security.



183rd SFS members: 1st Lt. Evan Stevens, Master Sgt. Richard Jackson, Tech. Sgt. Hayden Howard, Tech. Sgt. Tony Garvin, Staff Sgt. Baylee Martin, Senior Airman Anthony South, Airman 1st Class Morgan Kimberly, Airman 1st Class Griffin King, Airman 1st Class Dilyn Brummel, and Airman 1st Class Jakob McQuire.



Capt. Nicholas D. Thompson, region officer in charge of recruiting for the Illinois Army National Guard, updates members of American Legion Post 264 on the Illinois National Guard's state and federal missions.

Thompson Talks to Lake Forest American Legion

Capt. Nicholas D. Thompson, region officer in charge of recruiting for the Illinois Army National Guard, served as the guest speaker at the monthly dinner held at American Legion Post 264 in Lake Forest April 14.

Speaking to an audience of approximately 30 Legion members, Thompson provided updates on recent state and federal missions, highlighted the Guard's role in domestic operations, and reflected on his experience preparing Bravo Battery, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery for deployment in support of Operation Spartan Shield.

"When the Mississippi River flooded, when COVID-19 testing and vaccinations needed to scale — we were there," Thompson said. "And through all of it, our Soldiers still maintained their obligations at home."

The evening also recognized the return of Spc. Ethan Holmes, a Post 264 member and son of Post Commander Jim Holmes, who

recently returned from deployment with the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment.

Following the presentation, Thompson answered questions about mobilization readiness and the Recruit Sustainment Program, which helps

prepare new Soldiers for success at Basic Combat Training and beyond.

He closed by encouraging Legion members to share their stories. "Your experiences can help others make an informed decision about joining the military," Thompson said.



Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Ethan Holmes, center, recently returned home from deployment with 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment.

404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Conducts Chemical Attack Exercise at Sparta

Soldiers from the 445th Chemical Company, 233rd Military Police Company and 661st Engineer Company participate in checkpoint training and a react to chemical attack exercise in Sparta, Illinois, April 5, 2025. The units worked together as part of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's Combined Armed Training Exercise.

Soldiers used flashlights to inspect compartments and trunks before allowing vehicles access through the checkpoint. Once chemical presence was known, they worked together to don their protective masks while maintaining security of the area.



Recruiting and Retention Resource Manager Retires After 31 Years of Service

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Sgt. 1st Class Britt Talley, a resource noncommissioned officer with the Illinois Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Battalion (RRB), was honored during a retirement ceremony April 18 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Joined by family, friends, and colleagues, Talley retired after 31 years of military service. Over the course of his career, he served in a variety of roles, including infantryman, cannon crewmember, nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) instructor, howitzer section chief, squad leader,

"His mother, wife, children, grandchildren and so many others have supported him over the decades. It's amazing to have that kind of love and support, even when his job may have caused him to miss significant life events. It means a lot to our organization when our Soldiers receive that kind of support from their families."

Warrant Officer 1 Kate Durbin, a longtime colleague and friend, also spoke during the ceremony.

"Over the decades, Talley's professionalism, integrity, maturity, and sound judgment earned him the respect and loyalty of those with whom he served," Durbin said.

"He continually set an example for all Soldiers, enlisted and officer alike. His influence will have a lasting effect for years to come and reflects great credit upon himself, the Recruiting and Retention Battalion, the Illinois Army National Guard, and the U.S. Army."

Talley thanked those in attendance for celebrating the milestone.

"When I enlisted in 1991, some of the people in this room weren't even born," Talley joked.

"I'm honored and grateful to have served with such a dedicated team. A friend of mine, Lt. Col. Dodsworth, once told me, 'Surround yourself with smart people and they'll make you look smart.' I took that advice and ran with it. Thank you to the family members, Soldiers, and friends here for your continued support."

Talley reflected on his career, recalling changes in

uniforms, policies, and missions, but stressed that his support from family remained the same.

"What's remained constant is my family," he said. "My wife, children, and their families have been with me the whole time. That support has been the most important thing. My parents were there when I enlisted, and throughout my career, I always tried to prioritize Soldier care and family time."

Talley's son, Warrant Officer 1 Cody Talley, a Black Hawk pilot in the Illinois Army National Guard, was recently appointed as a warrant officer.

"I was able to present my son with his first salute," Talley said. "Now I will salute him one last time before retirement. I'm extremely proud of the man he's become."

"My dad was such a role model for me growing up," said Warrant Officer 1 Cody Talley. "He encouraged me to go after my goals. I'm proud of him, and it feels good that so many look up to my dad just as much as his children do."



Sgt. 1st Class Britt Talley shares a smile while addressing attendees during his retirement ceremony April 18 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.

platoon sergeant, and S3 operations noncommissioned officer.

He also held multiple full-time Active Guard Reserve (AGR) positions, including leave and pay NCO, retirement services NCO, senior human resources NCO, and most recently, the RRB resource manager.

Lt. Col. Lance Frail, commander of the RRB, presented Talley with the Meritorious Service Medal in recognition of his leadership and dedication.

"The amount of time he's spent in service is incredible, and for that we would be remiss not to mention his family," Frail said.



Lt. Col. Lance Frail, commander of the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion, presents Sgt. 1st Class Britt Talley with a certificate of service during Talley's retirement ceremony April 18 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.



232nd CSSB Prepares for Overseas Deployment at Marseilles





The Illinois Army National Guard's 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion conducted pre-mobilization training at the Marseilles Training Area to prepare for an upcoming deployment to Poland.

The unit conducted small team movement drills and Tactical Combat Casualty Care training March 27. (Photos by Dutch Grove, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs)





Illinois Army National Guard Pfc. Cameron Schneider of Rock Falls, Illinois, and Spc. Xander Mezo of Amboy, Illinois, take over an up-armored HUMVEE while playing the opposing force during base defense training for the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion at Marseilles Training Area in Illinois on March 31.



Spc. Jadon Schreck (left) and Sgt. Nicholas Atteberry of Bloomington, Illinois, the Intelligence Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge, look over a map at the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's base camp on March 31.



Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Kevin Schreier and Sgt. Jocelyn Kolthoff man the entrance to the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's base camp.



Sgt. Jocelyn Kolthoff covers her ears as Spc. Xander Mezo, playing the opposing force, fires an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon

Photos by Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Spc. Austin Johnston secures the perimeter of the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion's base camp on March 31 at Marseilles Training Area. The 232nd CSSB conducted training at Marseilles for two weeks in preparation for an upcoming deployment to Poland.





Spc. Quentin Estrada of Alton examines the components of the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) as part of the Illinois Army National Guard's 232nd Combat Support Sustainment Battalion's training on March 30, in Marseilles.



Sgt. Julia Nosky of West Chicago re-assembles the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) as part of the Illinois Army National Guard's 232nd Combat Support Sustainment Battalion's training.



Master Sgt. Alfred Huston of La Harpe works on plans as part of the Illinois Army National Guard's 232nd Combat Support Sustainment Battalion's training in Marseilles. Huston is the Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge of Support Operations for the battalion, which is based on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. In his civilian life, Huston works for Ferrellgas, a propane company.



Maj. Ian Sherpinskas of Chicago works on plans as part of the 232nd Combat Support Sustainment Battalion's training in Marseilles. Sherpinskas is the executive officer for the battalion, which is based on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Stegall Becomes New First Sergeant at 661st Engineer Construction Company

The 661st Engineer Construction Company based in Macomb, Illinois, held a change of responsibility ceremony in Sparta, Illinois, April 5, 2025, during the 404th MEB's Combined Arms Training Exercise.

1st Sgt. Noble Woolard of Auburn, Illinois, relinquished responsibility to 1st Lt. Lacey Jones, the commander of the 661st. Jones then passed responsibility on to 1st Sgt. Jacob Stegall of Rio, Illinois.

During the ceremony, Stegall had a few remarks for his soldiers.

"The military is something I hold dear," said Stegall. "It's been over half of my life now that I've spent in the Illinois National Guard."

Stegall went on to express gratitude for those who helped guide him to this point in his career.

"To 1st Sgt. Woolard — thank you for your mentorship, your guidance, and the leadership you've provided over these past years," he said. "You've helped prepare me for this next step."

As he looked ahead at the company's upcoming deployment, Stegall spoke with confidence and reassurance.

"To the soldiers of the 661st Engineer Company," he said, "I'm here. I'm ready to take the wheel alongside Lieutenant Jones. Together, we will continue to complete missions and exceed standards—just like we always have."

In addition, Stegall urged his soldiers to seek opportunities to learn and grow.

"I expect each of you to never settle," he said. "Strive to gain knowledge, and just as importantly, share the knowledge you have. That's what makes us strong. That's what makes us successful."

Closing his remarks, Stegall expressed his certainty in the leadership team and the company's future.

"Lieutenant Jones and I haven't worked together long, but our communication is already strong. I know we're going to work well together, and I know this unit is going to succeed and achieve great things."



First Sgt. Jacob Stegall addresses Soldiers of the 661st Engineer Construction Company as the new first sergeant.



First Lt. Lacey Jones, Commander, 661st Engineer Construction Company, passes the unit's guidon to new company 1st Sgt. Jacob Stegall during a change of responsibility ceremony at the Sparta Training Area April 5.

129th RTI Leaders Meet with Poland's TDF

Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers with the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) met with representatives from Poland's Territorial Defense Force – Training Center to discuss how the 129th can collaborate with the TDF-TC to expand the TDF's training center.

The Soldiers from TDF-TC learned about the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command formal accreditation process and about the RTI's Common Faculty Development Instructor Course.

Soldiers from Illinois and Poland, which has participated in a State Partnership Program for more than 30 years, discussed what the Illinois National Guard can do to help the JDF-TC meet

the center's objective with its training center.

During the two-day visit at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Maj. Travis

Turner, the Illinois National Guard's Deputy J-5, was presented the Polish Armed Forces Medal - Gold grade.



Eureka Soldier Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel

Jacob Beard, of Eureka, Illinois, was promoted to lieutenant colonel in a ceremony March 15 at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois.

Beard, the officer-in-charge of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB), headquartered in Normal, enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in 2005. After graduating basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, he contracted as a cadet with the Western Illinois University Reserve Officer Training Corps program. In 2006, he transferred to the Illinois Army National Guard's 233rd Military Police Company where he became a platoon leader after commissioning from the WIU ROTC program in 2007.

Beard thanked his family for supporting his 20 years of military service.

"I'm very fortunate to have all my family present. After 20 years in the military, you understand that opportunities to have everyone together aren't as frequent as we would like sometimes," he said. "I would like to recognize my wife, Tiffany, for holding down the fort during all the late nights, drill weekends and my many days and months away from home. You are the true hero who puts up with the military and holds our family together when I wasn't there."

"To my children thank you for understanding it doesn't matter when or where we celebrate birthdays, holidays, or special occasions, it just matters that we celebrate them together when we could," he told his daughters, Mali'a, Kaiona and Lena, and son, Max. "I couldn't be prouder of each of you and the great people you have become."

Beard also had a special message for his parents.

"Looking back on it, giving you about 24 hours-notice I was going to MEPS and joining the military may not have been one of my most tactful moves, but looking back, it may not have been such a bad decision," he said. "Thank you for being so supportive throughout my life, even when I took the paths you didn't necessarily agree with."

Beard has held a variety of staff and leadership assignments throughout the Illinois Army National Guard, including platoon leader and executive officer in the 233rd Military Police Company, Assistant Operations Officer for 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment, during a 2010 deployment to Sanai, Egypt. After returning from the deployment, Beard briefly served as a staff officer in the 33rd Military Police Battalion before being selected as Commander of the 333rd Military Police Company.

Beard served as the Illinois National Guard Provost Marshal until he was selected as the officer-in-charge of the 33rd MP Battalion in 2016. Beard served in a variety of staff roles within the battalion before being selected as the brigade training officer

for the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

While serving as the brigade training officer, Beard coordinated the brigade's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and simultaneous instances of civil unrest. In 2022, Beard deployed with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 404th MEB to Djibouti, Africa where he served as the Deputy Director of Crisis and Future Operations for Combined Joint Task Force- Horn of Africa. Upon his return from his second deployment to Africa, Beard was assigned as Chief of the Assistance and Investigations Branch within the Illinois National Guard's Office of the Inspector General where he served until 2024, when he was selected as the officer-in-charge of the 404th MEB.

Beard said he didn't get to where he is by himself.

"During this adventure, I've had the absolute pleasure of serving alongside some of the most amazing men and women our country has produced, sometimes in some of the worst environments the world has to offer," he said. "I am here today because of subordinates, peers and leaders who have influenced my actions and decisions."

He said one of his squad leaders early in his career put it all in perspective.

"As a very green platoon leader, one of my 'well-seasoned' squad leaders reassured me one day by telling me 'sir, when the bullets start flying, don't you worry. It's my job to keep you alive so that you can keep the rest of us alive'," Beard said. "What a powerful statement. No pressure at all there."

Beard shared some lessons he's learned throughout his military service.

"My first deployment was where I learned that rank doesn't always reflect capability. Although we were deployed as a somewhat organic battalion with two Majors, I worked for the S3 actual, an AGR Captain nicknamed "Captain America" who pretty much ran the battalion," he said. "After deployment, I was hired



Lt. Col. Jacob Beard, officer-in-charge, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, thanks family, friends, and fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers during his promotion ceremony March 15 at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois.

*U.S. Army photos by
Maj. Kanesha Newport*



From left, Lena Beard, Max Beard, Kaiona Weber and Mali'a Weber, children of newly promoted Lt. Col. Jacob Beard, officer-in-charge, 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, pin his new rank on during a promotion ceremony March 15 at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois.

on as a technician and learned from a warrant officer that just because you can do something, doesn't mean that you should do it. That one has really stuck with me and can apply to so many different situations. Be it decisions associated with risk, or quality control, or simply managing turbulence within the organization, such few words can have quite a profound impact."

Beard said the top three things he learned as a company commander was clarity of communication, building a team with your noncommissioned officer, and learning not to take things seriously all the time.

"When clarifying the need to use 'military tactics' during training, be sure to specify what century you are expecting, otherwise during a capture the flag scenario, you very well may witness a civil war reenactment where the troops march out to a drum beat,

the first rank (armed with SAWs) takes a knee and chaos ensues," he said. "Never underestimate the power of your senior NCO as a teammate and a sounding board. Also, it helps to deconflict who will be the 'good cop vs bad cop' before you go into a counseling session. If you both go in as the bad cop, it can get really awkward and escalate quickly. And finally, I learned you must learn to laugh and have fun. You have never truly had an honest assessment of you or your staff's personality quirks until you show up to a company meeting where a bunch of privates have dressed up as their section and platoon leaders.

Beard said he's also learned time is one of the most precious things leaders have.

"It is limited in quantity, so use it wisely," he said. "Ensure you have a plan to accomplish your goals before

your time is up, both in your position, career, and in life."

Beard offered some advice to his fellow Soldiers, which he said, could also apply in all parts of life.

"Be aware of how your actions, and even presence, can impact others," he said. "In the absence of guidance, don't be afraid to make up your own. For the junior officers and NCOs present, never let your rank mentally hold you back from getting the job done."

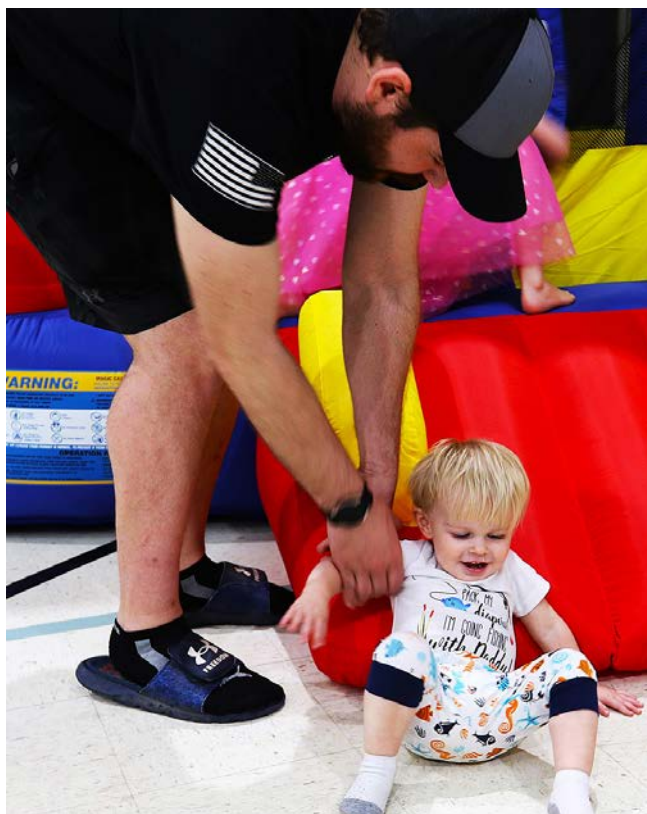
"Always have someone on your staff who will tell you the truth, not just what you want to hear," he said. "Don't be afraid to tactfully share thoughts contrary to that of your boss. Treat your team like family and protect them like your children. Nothing is more powerful than a team based upon trust and shared understanding. Finally, if you do what is right and take care of your people, they will take care of you."



The young son of Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Danielle Bauman of Mount Vernon sits with the Easter Bunny at the Illinois National Guard's Easter Egg Hunt for Military Families. Many of those participating were children of deployed Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment with armories across Southern Illinois, including Mount Vernon.



Two-year-old Ellie Upchurch of Mount Vernon gathers eggs with her great grandmother, Dr. Linda Upchurch. Ellie is the daughter of Spc. Shawn Upchurch of the 631st Engineer Co. based in Sparta.



Mount Vernon Easter Egg Hunt Brings Illinois National Guard Families, and Families of the Fallen Together

The Illinois National Guard's Easter Egg Hunt for Military Families at Mount Vernon Armory was a huge success despite the rain on March 29.

The program, co-sponsored by Survivor Outreach Services of Illinois and the Illinois National Guard Youth Programs, was open to military families and the families of fallen service members.

Events like the Easter Egg Hunt help strengthen the military community. Many of those participating were children of deployed Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment with armories across Southern Illinois, including Mount Vernon.





CERFP Team Conducts External Evaluation to Measure Proficiency on Selected Tasks

Illinois National Guard leaders visited the Sparta Training Area March 27 to view the 5th Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) external evaluation (EXEVAL).

The 5th CERFP conducted a scenario-driven external evaluation to measure the proficiency rating of selected collective tasks when responding to a CBRNE hazard.

The five-day exercise deployed all response elements to a CBRNE

hazard. The training is relevant to develop, assess, and maintain proficiency.

Each CERFP team is evaluated on all tasks and the results are reported to the National Guard Bureau.







182nd Airlift Wing Hosts German Air Transport Wing 62

The 182nd Airlift Wing hosted members of Air Transport Wing 62, German air force, further solidifying the longstanding cooperations between the two air mobility units.

The initiative bolstered the collective readiness of the two allied nations through an exchange of perspectives, competencies and strategic insights to better prepare for a wide range of potential challenges.

The relationship between the Illinois Air National Guard and the German Bundeswehr originated from the 182nd's prosperous collaboration with the German air force in Germany's Air Defender 23, in June 2023, which concluded as the largest deployment exercise of air forces in NATO's history. It continued with Exercise Proptoberfest, an interoperability exercise, hosted in September 2024 by the 182nd Airlift Wing, which included cross-country training in four states.



Inside 126th SCOS: **A Look at Guard and Active Duty Integration**

Story by Staff Sgt. Aaron Rodriguez
126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

At Scott Air Force Base, a unique unit operates within the intricate web of military logistics — the 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron. Senior Master Sgt. Jewell Knight, superintendent of the unit, shared insights into their mission, the challenges they face, and the vital role they play in military supply chains.

The 126th SCOS is a specialized unit of 41 enlisted members and two officers. Created in 2008 as part of a centralized logistics effort, it operates alongside three active duty squadrons, ensuring military aircraft worldwide, receive the parts they need to stay mission-ready.

"We support 256 bases globally and sustain 1.5 thousand mobility and rotary aircraft," Knight explained.

From Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman to the Defense Logistics Agency, the squadron sources parts from a wide range of suppliers to keep operations running smoothly.

Unlike most traditional guard units, the 126th SCOS is fully embedded with active duty personnel, creating a unique working relationship.

"We're a classic association," Knight said, "meaning that while we function as an independent squadron, we work within active duty structures."

However, this setup sometimes causes friction. "Active duty members don't always understand that they don't have administrative control over us," she explained. While operational orders come from active duty, personnel matters — such as

promotions, awards, and disciplinary actions — remain under the Air National Guard's authority.

Despite the challenges, Knight sees the value in this integrated structure. "I've gotten to meet so many different people," she said. "Every few years, there's a new group of active duty personnel coming in, which means continuous learning and mentorship opportunities."

This turnover keeps the environment dynamic, with fresh perspectives and ideas regularly introduced.

Knight's own transition from active duty to the Guard reflects a shift many service members consider. Having deployed multiple times, she noticed a stark contrast between active duty and guard units.

"Every time I deployed, the Guard guys seemed happier," she recalled.

She eventually made the move, navigating the Palace Chase program to transition smoothly into a full-time Guard role. "It took about 90 days," she said, emphasizing the importance of a clean service record for those considering the switch.

One of the biggest differences she noticed in the Guard is the long-term relationships. "In active duty, you move every few years. Here, you build relationships that last decades," she said. Many of her colleagues have



Senior Master Sgt. Jewell Knight
126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron

been in the same unit for 10-15 years, creating a close-knit, family-like environment.

For those in active duty considering a change, Knight encourages exploring the Guard. "A lot of active duty folks don't have a plan when they leave. The Guard offers stability while still being part of the mission," she said, adding that with opportunities for education, career growth, and a better work-life balance, the Guard provides an appealing alternative for those seeking a new path while staying connected to military service.

From maintaining a global supply chain to navigating the complexities of Guard and active duty collaboration, the 126th SCOS stands as a crucial component of military logistics. Through its dedicated personnel and unique structure, it continues to ensure that airpower remains unstoppable, one aircraft part at a time.

Springfield Officer Assumes Command of Illinois Army National Guard Medical Unit

The Illinois Army National Guard is Among the Top States in Medical Readiness

The Joint Force Medical Detachment - a unit vital to maintaining the Illinois Army National Guard's stellar medical readiness rates - got a new commander on April 4 at the unit's headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Lt. Col. Melinda Weller of Springfield assumed command of the Joint Force Medical Detachment from Col. Jayson Coble of Lincoln.

Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff Col. Paul Metzдорff said that Illinois has ranked at the top or near the top of the nation in medical readiness for several years and he thanked the unit's Soldiers for their work contributing to that effort. "Without medical readiness, we could not sustain the war fight," Metzдорff said. "What you do is absolutely vital to the Illinois Army National Guard and to the Army."

Coble, who is now the Illinois Army National Guard's State Surgeon, said a commander works for the Soldiers and not the other way around. "I hope I have not let anyone down over the last five years," he added. "You always try and leave it a little better than when you found it."

Weller, who will be promoted to colonel, returns to the Joint Force

Medical Detachment after serving as the Commander of the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion based in North Riverside.



Lt. Col. Melinda Weller of Springfield assumed command of the Joint Force Medical Detachment from Col. Jayson Coble of Lincoln during an April 4 Change of Command Ceremony on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

She said she is excited to command the Joint Force Medical Detachment after previously serving in the unit for many years.

She has served in various medical officer positions since commissioning in March 1997. From March 2020 to August 2020 she was ordered to State Active Duty as a medical planner playing a key role in the state's COVID-19 response. She was activated again from January 2021 until August 2021 as a COVID-19 vaccination medical planner. As a civilian, Weller is a registered nurse for the State of Illinois.

Coble, who has more than 32 years of service, has commanded three medical detachments in different areas of Illinois. He deployed to Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team from 2008 to 2009. He deployed in 2022 to the Horn of Africa with the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and has supported operations throughout the world including Singapore, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Guyana. He also deployed as part of the Illinois National Guard's Hurricane Katrina response in 2005. As a civilian, he is an emergency medicine physician's assistant within the Hospital Sisters Health System.



Eastridge Visits 404th Training at Sparta

Brig. Gen. Michael J. Eastridge, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois Army National Guard, visited soldiers from the 445th Chemical Company, 233rd Military Police Company and 661st Engineer Company on April 5 in Sparta, Illinois, during the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade's Combined Arms Training Exercise. Commanders from all three units briefed Eastridge on their training plans for the exercise. The 404th MEB commander, Col. Dan Helfrich, also addressed the soldiers, thanking them for their efforts throughout the exercise. Following the briefings, Eastridge and Helfrich observed training conducted by various 404th MEB units around the Sparta Training Area.



Wings Participate in Exercise At Joint Cyber Range

This weekend, members of the 183rd Wing and 182nd Airlift Wing took part in an exercise using the Illinois Air National Guard's Joint Cyber Range.

These exercises are an opportunity for Guardsmen from different units across the state to expand their capabilities in the cyber domain. The 183rd, based in Springfield, hosts the cyber range.

Physically, the range consists of approximately 10 servers, networking equipment, computer terminals, and other information technology infrastructure that can be configured to create a variety of training scenarios.

Lt. Col. Dennis Regan, A6 for

Illinois Joint Force Headquarters, describes this exercise as a "capture the flag exercise."

The exercise tests participants' ability to think along the lines of how a hacker would try to find different information and data within a system. Participants are paired with a partner and tasked with increasingly more difficult challenges as the exercise goes on.

This is the third time this particular type of exercise has been held for members. In September, version two of the exercise will be held, which consists of a different scenario, with a continuing focus on cyber security.

The goal of this training is to equip a larger number of military members

statewide with the skill set to conduct a cyber incidence response if they were called to do so. No prior cyber knowledge is necessary to complete the training, however it is for anyone in any career field with a level of interest. Regan hopes the training will begin to build a skill set for Guardsmen and that some will even develop a passion for cyber security.

Not only that, but the training allows for members to build connections across units and branches.

"For us at JFHQ, it is an opportunity to reach out and learn the people in different squadrons and try to give them the opportunity to do something that isn't their everyday Air Force job," Regan said.



US, Polish Partners Strengthen Interoperability, Modernization

Story by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

About 75 U.S. and Polish Armed Forces personnel strengthened NATO interoperability and defense modernization during a military-to-military workshop Feb. 24-25.



Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge presents Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Cistaro with the Order of Saint Maurice Centurion for his outstanding contributions to the Infantry Corps over a 30-year career in the U.S. Army.

Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, deputy assistant adjutant general, Illinois Army National Guard, said the event identified cost-effective training initiatives, "strengthening NATO's defense and enhancing deterrence against aggression."

The two-day event, hosted by European Command, J5, Office of Defense Cooperation in Poland and the Illinois National Guard State Partnership Program, focused on synchronizing engagements that enhance Poland's capabilities and reinforce the longstanding military partnership.

The Illinois National Guard and Poland have been partners in the Department of Defense National Guard State Partnership Program since its inception in 1993.

Key discussions centered around increasing procedural and technical interoperability, supporting Poland's modernization efforts — including key initiatives like the Apache, Abrams, High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, Patriot and F-35 programs, and bolstering deterrence strategies such as Operation Eastern Shield.

Participants engaged in an "M2M

engagement carousel," where stakeholders reviewed and confirmed upcoming engagements, ensuring alignment between U.S. and Polish objectives. The workshop concluded with a roadmap for fiscal year 2026 military-to-military concept and funding requests to be submitted by March 31.

Command Sgt. Maj. Joseph Cistaro, one of the Soldiers involved in the training, was awarded the Order of Saint Maurice Centurion.

A nominee for the Order of Saint Maurice must serve the infantry community with distinction and demonstrate a significant contribution in support of the infantry branch, representing the highest of standards of integrity, moral character, professional competence and dedication to duty.

Eastridge presented the award to Cistaro for his 30-year contribution to the infantry.

"I have had the honor of knowing Cistaro for 20 years," he said. "It is a privilege to present him with the OSM. His impact on the infantry community has been profound, and this award is truly well deserved."



U.S. and Polish military personnel gather at 1 Baza Lotnictwa Transportowego (1st Airlift Base) in Warsaw, Poland, highlighting continued collaboration in enhancing NATO interoperability.



Aircrew from the 139th Airlift Wing, Missouri Air National Guard, exit a C-130H Hercules aircraft assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, at Rosecrans Air National Guard Base, St. Joseph, Missouri, on Feb. 25, 2025. The aircrew from the 139th were getting certified on the H3 version of the aircraft and receiving certification for the NP2000 eight-bladed propellers. The 139th operates the H2.5 version of the aircraft.

Missouri Aircrew Trains on 8-bladed C-130

182nd Airlift Wing Support Provides Use of C-130H3 As Simulators Undergo Modifications

Story and Photo by Michael Crane, 139th Airlift Wing, Missouri National Guard

Pilots, navigators, and flight engineers from the 139th Airlift Wing, Missouri Air National Guard, are undergoing crucial C-130H3 qualification training to ensure they remain mission-ready. This training is essential as the C-130H2 simulators at Minneapolis and Dobbins undergo modifications, making them temporarily unavailable.

Thanks to the support of the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, the 139th AW has access to an H3 aircraft, allowing them to meet the flight requirements necessary for qualification. A C-130H3 from the Illinois Air National Guard unit arrived at Rosecrans on Feb. 24 and aircrew spent the next week flying it. The 139th AW's fleet is made up of the H2.5 version.

Although the H3 shares similarities with the H2.5, its avionics and cockpit systems have enough differences that aircrew must complete additional training to qualify, said Lt. Col. Jared

Kirk, director of operations for the 180th Airlift squadron.

In addition to H3 qualification, aircrew members will also receive certification on the NP2000 propeller system. The Peoria H3 aircraft is equipped with the NP2000 eight-bladed propellers, providing an opportunity for the 139th AW aircrew to become proficient with the upgraded system.

Approximately 60 aircrew members will need to complete H3 training.

Lt. Col. Chase Bodenhausen, commander of the 139th Operations Support Squadron, has previous experience flying the H3 variant. He flew the H3 during his deployment to Kuwait in 2012 and again during a deployment to Africa last year.

He said he really likes the H3 and says the aircraft currently in use by the 139th AW share many of the same systems and switches as the H3. However, the H3 was designed with

a cleaner, more user-friendly layout, streamlining the placement of systems and switches to improve functionality for pilots and engineers.

"The H3, with the upgraded cockpit design, new propellers, upgraded valve housings and more powerful engines, really does bridge the gap between what we have now and where we'd like to go eventually with J models," said Bodenhausen.

The willingness of the 182nd AW to provide one of their aircraft highlights the strong sense of camaraderie within the Air National Guard.

"It is truly a testament to the family nature of the Air National Guard," said Kirk. "When it comes down to it, we are all willing to take care of each other. Not just within the 139 AW, but across units."

With this training, the 139th AW ensures its aircrew remain mission-ready, reinforcing the strength and cooperation of the Air National Guard.

Founding Member of Elite ILARNG Unit at Rock Island Arsenal Retires after 23 Years of Service

Story by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard Master Sgt. Jennifer Dorsey of Moline, one of the founding members of the Rock Island Arsenal-based 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB), is retiring after 23 years of service.

"Master Sergeant Dorsey was instrumental in establishing the 6th Battalion, 54th SFAB as a new unit in the Illinois Army National Guard," said Lt. Col. Matthew Kreiter, the Commander of the 6-54th SFAB. "She always brought a significant level of experience, professionalism, adaptability, and problem solving that every NCO and Advisor should aspire to. What she helped built will carry on throughout the organization for years to come."

The 6th Battalion, 54th SFAB holds the logistics and medical advisors for the 54th SFAB, the Indiana-based brigade with a mission to "conduct train, advise, assist, support and liaison operations with allied and partner nation foreign security forces worldwide."

When the 6th Battalion was stood up in 2018, it started with four full-time Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Soldiers – Dorsey, Maj. Keri Wolf, 1st Sgt. Kyle Hacker, and Sgt. 1st Class Jake Anderson. Because the unit's mission required experienced elite Soldiers to train foreign militaries, finding and recruiting those seasoned NCOs and officers was its most difficult first hurdle. Dorsey started as the unit's Senior Human Resources NCO in 2018 and tackled that manning problem with a multi-prong approach.

"What a remarkable career and impact Master Sergeant Jen Dorsey has had in the Illinois Army National Guard! Jen is in a league



Master Sgt. Jennifer Dorsey (left) with her daughter, Sgt. Lydia Dorsey at the master sergeant's retirement ceremony. Dorsey, a founding member of 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Battalion, is retiring from the Illinois National Guard after 23 years of service.

of her own," said Wolf, now the 34th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's operations officer who was the original full-time officer-in-charge of the 6-54th SFAB. "Jen and I served together in the 6th Battalion, 54th SFAB. She is one of the best noncommissioned officers I have served with. I learned a lot from her. She is that NCO who makes everyone better."

Dorsey helped man the new unit, putting the right Soldiers in the right jobs. She convinced Soldiers coming off active duty to continue their service in the National Guard, drew some Soldiers from other components, helped convince units in the Illinois Army National Guard to give some of their best and brightest to 6th Battalion for a few years, and helped convince

other Soldiers to stave off retirement to serve in the newly established unit. None of these were easy tasks.

"It was definitely a challenge," Dorsey said. "We were figuring out a whole new organization."

Like the Soldiers she was drawing into the 6th Battalion, 54th SFAB; Dorsey had a lot of experience going into the job. She spent her first 16 years in the Illinois Army National Guard's Galesburg-based 444th Chemical Company including a deployment to the Middle East in 2012. She was a full-time NCO in the chemical company for 14 years, which had the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and high-yield explosive Enhanced Response Force Package (CBRNE) mission.

The CBRNE mission is a domestic

response mission with National Guard troops working closely with local, county, state, and federal emergency response officials to train for and respond to a complex attack against the homeland. The CBRNE brings search and extraction, decontamination, medical triage, and fatality search and recovery capabilities to this mission.

Dorsey spent most of her career as an operations NCO with the 444th, helping to ensure the unit was ready to respond to both its federal Army decontamination mission when deployed and its homeland security mission which included elements such as search and recovery.

Like the 6-54th SFAB, the 444th Chemical mission was complex. "With both units you also had to juggle more than one higher headquarters," Dorsey said.

After spending her first three years with the 6-54th SFAB as the Senior Human Resources NCO, she took another critical position within the battalion, the Headquarters Support Company Readiness NCO. Then in 2023 she became the battalion Operations NCOIC.

From 2023 to 2024, she deployed to Romania with the 6-54th SFAB's Battalion Advisor Team 660. Led by 6th Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Matthew Kreiter, 6-54th SFAB deployed approximately 20 Soldiers to Romania for six months returning in April 2024. The team conducted security cooperation activities with Romania's 2nd Infantry Division strengthening NATO alliances, increasing interoperability, and improving logistics.

The team conducted more than 350 military engagements, provided 26 recommendations to improve the Romanian Traumatic Combat Casualty Care course, supported a two-week intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) academy, taught a noncommissioned officer (NCO) leadership course, facilitated decision-making planning to develop and execute a logistics command post exercise, and presented at the War and Disaster Medicine Conference in Estonia on how physical therapy could expedite Soldiers' return to the battlefield. As the Operations NCOIC,



Master Sgt. Jennifer Dorsey with Lt. Col. Matt Kreiter at the master sergeant's retirement ceremony. Master Sgt. Dorsey retired after more than 23 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard including two deployments. She was vital in the establishment of the Rock Island Arsenal-based 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade.

Dorsey was an integral part of all these accomplishments.

While Master Sgt. Dorsey is retiring, she isn't the last of her family to serve in the Illinois National Guard. Her daughter, Sgt. Lydia Dorsey, is also a Soldier in the 6-54th SFAB and a son, Lincoln Dorsey, is a loadmaster in the Illinois Air National Guard's 182nd Airlift Wing. While her other two children, Kylee and Caleb, are not in the military they are still within recruiting ages. Her husband, Tony Dorsey, is a regional truck driver.

Retiring from the Army is "still a little unreal," Dorsey said. "It's bittersweet. I'm leaving a lot of great friends and colleagues but have a whole lot of new adventures ahead."

Wolf said the Illinois Army National Guard will miss Dorsey. "As the 6-54th SFAB Officer-in-Charge, I leaned on her a lot to help troubleshoot the unique challenges that we first had in establishing the 6-54th. The 6-54th SFAB would not have been as successful without her."

First Sergeant from Streator Retires from ILARNG after 23 Years, 4 Deployments

Story and Photo by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

First Sgt. Aaron Paus of Streator, Illinois, has retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after 23 years and four deployments.

Paus retired as the top enlisted Soldier in the Rock Island Arsenal-based Logistics Advisory Team (LAT) 6612 of the 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade – an elite unit which advises and trains the militaries of U.S. allies.

“First Sergeant Paus has left a legacy both with the Soldiers of the Illinois Army National Guard and with our allies,” said Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army for the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “He has had a positive impact on our organization through more than two decades of service to our state and nation.”

Paus’ last day in uniform was April 6, the day that the National Guard held LAT 6612’s welcome home

ceremony after a deployment to the Philippines, which began in February 2024. They worked with the Philippine military to increase interoperability and support security cooperation objectives in the region.

Paus was first deployed in 2006 to 2007 to Iraq with the 1744th Transportation Co., then based in Marseilles but now based in Crestwood. He returned to Iraq in 2011 with the 1244th Transportation Co. based in North Riverside. The unit helped move U.S. and allied equipment out of Iraq and was among the last U.S. units to leave Iraq during the drawdown. He deployed from 2017 to 2018 to Jordan with the Springfield-based 3637th Maintenance Co., where the unit repaired and maintained U.S. and allied equipment.

A Citizen-Soldier throughout his career, as a civilian Paus is a foreman for a Union Pacific Railroad tie gang responsible for maintaining and replacing railroad ties.



First Sgt. Aaron Paus of Streator, Illinois, the first sergeant of Logistics Advisory Team 6612, talks with Brig. Gen. Michael Eastridge, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois Army National Guard, following the unit’s welcome home ceremony at the Marseilles Training Area on April 6.

Taylor, Stubblefield retire from Illinois Air National Guard



U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jason Sterr, 182nd Maintenance Squadron commander, 182nd Airlift Wing, presents a Meritorious Service Medal to Master Sgt. Andrew Stubblefield, an aerospace propulsion specialist with the 182nd Maintenance Squadron, at his retirement ceremony March 8. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Airman 1st Class Noah Hardin)



U.S. Air Force Col. Bruce Bennet, 182nd Airlift Wing maintenance group commander, and Chief Master Sgt. Patrick Taylor, senior enlisted leader for the 182nd Airlift Wing Maintenance Group, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, stand at attention after Taylor receives a Meritorious Service Medal, March 8. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Noah Hardin)

For Polish Immigrant, Military Service Offers Way to Give Back to Adopted Country

Story by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella

For Lt. Col. Maciej Wiltowski, a tanker planner in the Air Mobility Operations Squadron, 183rd Wing, Springfield, service in the United States Air Force was more than a career choice—it was a calling rooted in gratitude. Born in Poland and immigrating to the U.S. as a child, Wiltowski saw firsthand the opportunities his adoptive country provided. After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he felt a deep obligation to give back.

“I always felt like I owed a debt to the U.S.,” Wiltowski said. “After 9/11, that feeling rose back up again. This was my opportunity to serve.”

A graduate of Southern Illinois University’s aviation program, Wiltowski had long dreamed of flying. He applied for a pilot slot in the U.S. Air Force and was selected for Officer Training School, launching a career that would take him across the globe. Over the years, he piloted multiple aircraft, including the KC-10 Extender and E-4B “Nightwatch”, supporting missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

But beyond the cockpit, Wiltowski



found another way to serve: strengthening ties between the U.S. and Poland through the Illinois National Guard’s State Partnership Program (SPP). His Polish heritage and fluency in the language positioned him uniquely to foster military cooperation between the two nations.

“Being able to communicate in Polish makes a difference,” he said.

“I think it kind of puts people at ease that there’s somebody with their background.”

In 2019, Wiltowski took on a key role as a U.S. Air Force liaison in Warsaw, working closely with Poland’s military leadership. He spent six months in country, assisting in training exercises and strategy discussions. Upon returning to the Illinois National Guard’s 183rd Wing, he remained deeply involved in the SPP, traveling to Poland multiple times each year.

“Using my background to help bridge the Polish-American military relationship has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career,” he said.

Now, as he transitions to the next chapter of his life, Wiltowski reflects on the journey that brought him here. From a young boy chasing the American Dream, to a decorated officer shaping international partnerships, his story is one of dedication and service.

“If you do something you love, you always get back more than you put in,” he said. “And for me, serving in the Air Force and strengthening our ties with Poland has been an incredible reward.”





Lt. Col. Casey Kline, of Chatham, Commander, 33rd Military Police Battalion, with some of the Vietnam Veterans in attendance at the annual Vietnam Veteran Appreciation Dinner March 29 at the Chatham-Auburn Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4763 in Chatham.

Chatham Soldier Joins in Celebrating Vietnam Veterans During Annual Appreciation Dinner

Story and Photos by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. Casey Kline, of Chatham, Commander, 33rd Military Police Battalion, told the approximately 20 Vietnam Veterans they set the example and blazed the trail for future generations of veterans during the annual Vietnam Veterans appreciation dinner at the Chatham-Auburn Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4763 in Chatham, March 29.

"You did the tough jobs, the thankless jobs, and oftentimes the unseen jobs," Kline said. "But you did what needed to be done."

Kline told the veterans to be proud of what they did during their military service.

"The military is a big machine with lots of pieces. Every single individual from the small unit to the large unit is critical," he said. "If they weren't critical, they wouldn't be there."

Kline said many years ago while

attending a veteran's event, he met an individual who was very proud of what he did in the military.

"The veteran told me he was a cook with a rifle company," he said. "That's what he did. He cooked. But every time the guys came in they always had a hot meal waiting for them. I think we can all relate how much a cup of hot coffee or eggs mean."

Kline asked the Vietnam veterans to continue to engage with people out in the community.

"Eleven percent of recruits don't have a military connection," he said. "It's getting to be a little bit of a family business. We've all be in the situation being somewhere wearing something that identifies us as a veteran. A lot of time it starts a conversation with someone who may be considering national service. Help us by continuing to



Lt. Col. Casey Kline, of Chatham, Commander, 33rd Military Police Battalion, thanks Vietnam Veterans for their service during the Vietnam Veterans Appreciation Dinner March 29 at Chatham-Auburn Memorial Post 4763 in Chatham.



Jayson Hoffman, a Iraq veteran of the Illinois Army National Guard, says he gets thanked for his service thanks to Vietnam veterans.

engage those individuals considering service."

Kline thanked the Vietnam veterans for their service.

"Thank you for what you have done, and for what you will continue to do for us in the veteran



Event coordinator Freddy Rocha tells the Vietnam veterans they occupy a special place in his heart.

community," he said.

Jayson Hoffman, a Iraq veteran of the Illinois Army National Guard, who serves as the Department of Illinois Veterans of Foreign Wars' State Judge Advocate, said he was recently in Washington, D.C. and a friend asked what it was like when someone says thank you (for your service) to you.

"No one has ever asked me how it makes me feel. When I was younger, it made me feel weird, like I didn't deserve it," Hoffman said during his welcome remarks. "Then I joined the VFW and made a ton of Vietnam veteran friends. I listened to their stories about their reception when they got home and the work they put in teaching the country they can hate the war, but not hate the warfighter. I get thanked because of you guys."

Hoffman said it doesn't make him feel weird to be thanked for his service now.

"It makes me feel real proud," he said.

Event coordinator Freddy Rocha said he has a special place in his heart for Vietnam veterans.

"I was mentored by a Vietnam veteran without even knowing it," he said. "He told me that I was messing up fast and picking up speed. He's the one who got my life on track."

"Not only did you welcome me home but also my son, who is also a combat veteran," Rocha said. "You welcomed him home the same way I was welcomed home and that makes it very personal to me."



Volunteers with the Illinois Military Museum displayed some of the different gear and weapons used by the U.S. military in the Vietnam War at the annual Vietnam Veteran Appreciation Dinner March 29 at the Chatham-Auburn Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4763 in Chatham.

Frankfort Soldier Takes Command of Infantry Brigade Headquarters Company

Story and photos by Sgt. 1st Class Alicia Collins

Capt. Alexis Filippo of Frankfort, Illinois, assumed command of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team during a ceremony in Urbana, Illinois, April 13.

Filippo previously served as the Executive Officer of HHC. In her civilian career she teaches history and said she draws inspiration from historic military leaders.

"I often look to leaders like General Douglas MacArthur, General George S. Patton, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower for inspiration," she said. "This is an opportunity for me to give back to the State of Illinois and the country."

Filippo said she is excited to take command.

"From my time here, I know we are all professionals and experts," she said. "HHC will accomplish the mission with confidence. I'm looking forward to leading this great group of Soldiers and continuing to build a team that's ready for anything."

Filippo replaced Capt. Derek Funkhouser of Mattoon, Illinois, who served as the HHC Commander since April 2023.

Lt. Col. Paul Sievert, Deputy Brigade Commander of the 33rd IBCT

praised Funkhouser for his contributions.

"He revolutionized the command post operations, setting HHC up for long-term success," Sievert said.

Funkhouser, who concluded his military service with the ceremony, reflected on the adaptability and commitment of the Soldiers he led.

"The Soldiers never back down. They go above and beyond their comfort zone and rise to any challenge," he said.

He described the Soldiers of HHC as guardians and commended their unwavering presence and support to the brigade.

"What we do matters," Funkhouser added. "Don't forget what we're doing and why. Remember why you chose to serve – community, state and country. You are all incredible Soldiers."

Funkhouser was presented with the Army Commendation Medal during the ceremony for his leadership while commanding the HHC.

Following his transition from military service, Funkhouser plans to focus on family and pursue a civilian career in board game design.

Capt. Derek Funkhouser of Mattoon, Illinois, shakes hands with Lt. Col. Paul Sievert, Deputy Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, after being presented with the Army Commendation Medal for his leadership while in command of Headquarters and Headquarters company during a change of command ceremony April 13 in Urbana, Illinois. Funkhouser commanded the unit since April of 2023.



Capt. Alexis Filippo of Frankfort, Illinois, receives the company guidon from Lt. Col. Paul Sievert, Deputy Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assuming command of Headquarters and Headquarters company during a change of command ceremony April 13 in Urbana, Illinois.



Capt. Derek Funkhouser of Mattoon, Illinois, shakes hands with Lt. Col. Paul Sievert, Deputy Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, after being presented with the Army Commendation Medal for his leadership while in command of Headquarters and Headquarters company during a change of command ceremony April 13 in Urbana, Illinois. Funkhouser commanded the unit since April of 2023.

182nd's Air Support Operations Squadrons Redesignate to 182nd Contingency Response Group



Col. Rusty Ballard, Commander, 182nd Airlift Wing, unveils the 182nd Contingency Response Group's guidon flag during the unit's activation ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, May 3.



Col. Rusty Ballard, Commander, 182nd Airlift Wing, passes the 182nd Contingency Response Group's guidon flag to Col. Joelee Sessions, the commander of the 182nd CRG during the unit's activation ceremony in Peoria, Illinois, May 3. The contingency response group is composed of highly-specialized Airmen who are capable of rapidly deploying to quickly open airfields and establish, expand, sustain, and coordinate air mobility operations.



Col. Rusty Ballard, Commander, 182nd Airlift Wing, rolls the 168th Air Support Operations Squadron's guidon flag, held by Master Sgt. Tim Burkhardt, the first sergeant of the 182nd Security Forces Squadron and former member of the 168th ASOS, during the redesignation ceremony of the 182nd Air Support Operations Group to the 182nd Contingency Response Group in Peoria, Illinois, May 3, 2025. The 182nd ASOG and its subordinate units, the 168th and 169th Air Support Operations Squadrons, and their legacy has supported the Illinois Air National Guard for over 50 years. (U.S. Air National Guard Photos by Tech. Sgt. Paul Helmig)



Col. Rusty Ballard, Commander, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, rolls the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron's guidon flag, held by Master Sgt. Jordan Thompson, the first sergeant of the 182nd Civil Engineer Squadron and former member of the 169th ASOS, during the redesignation ceremony.



Col. Rusty Ballard, Commander, 182nd Airlift Wing, rolls the 182nd Air Support Operations Groups's guidon flag, held by Master Sgt. Brandon Little, a radio maintenance technician for the 168th Air Support Operations Squadron, during the redesignation ceremony.



404th MEB Soldiers Compete for Brigade Best Warrior Title



Champaign Soldier Retires from Illinois Army National Guard after 37 Years

Story and Photo by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

The year was 1987. The Simpsons premiered on Fox television, Walk Like an Egyptian by the Bangles sat atop the Billboards, President Ronald Reagan urged Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall, and Anthony Burgstrom enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard.

April 18, a ceremony marked the end of Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Burgstrom's 37-year of service where it all began – the Urbana Armory, Urbana, Illinois.

"Today is a special day, arguably one of the most important days in a service member's career," said Maj. William Troccoli, the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team's administrative and personnel officer. "Sergeant First Class Burgstrom gave up a lot of personal time and weekends to ensure the medical needs were taken care of for the 3,500 Soldiers in the 33rd infantry Brigade Combat Team. You will be missed."

Burgstrom enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard September 1987 as a 68W, Combat Medical Specialist, initially serving with 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment in Urbana.

Burgstrom, the full-time 33rd IBCBT's Medical Dental noncommissioned officer, and as a traditional Guard member, the 33rd's health care noncommissioned officer, served in various capacities throughout his career, serving about 21 years total with the 33rd.

Burgstrom said he has no regrets on any career decision he made.

"I was attending college in Alabama and tried to do an interstate transfer to the Alabama National Guard as a staff sergeant," he said. Ultimately he chose to stay with the Illinois Army National Guard when the Alabama National Guard told him they would only accept his transfer if he was a sergeant. "I would travel from Alabama to Illinois for drill weekends."

Burgstrom and his family, including wife, Ressa, and daughters,



Lt. Col. Nicholas Miller, Officer in Charge, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, presents Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Burgstrom with the Meritorious Service Medal during a retirement ceremony April 18 at Urbana. Burgstrom is retiring from the Illinois Army National Guard after 37 years of service.

Breanna and Danielle, returned to Illinois when he was offered the Active Guard and Reserve position with the 33rd.

After his wife died in 2013, Burgstrom was offered a full-time position at the North Riverside armory in Chicago. He chose to stay in Champaign, turning down the position which could have meant a promotion to master sergeant.

"I could have moved with my daughters to North Riverside, but my support system was in Champaign," he said. "If I needed to be away from my children, I could make one of five phone calls, and they would be taken care of. I wouldn't have that in North Riverside. I could have also lived in Champaign and commuted to North Riverside, but I would have left home

before they got out of bed, and they would have been in bed when I got home. So I decided to stay where I was at and keep my support system intact."

He deployed overseas twice during his service, once to Iraq and once to Afghanistan.

Burgstrom said for him, the timing is right for retirement.

"It's time. My oldest daughter, Danielle, graduates from college next month. It's time for her to start her life and not take care of her younger sister," he said. "My youngest, Breanna, is a junior in high school, and about to be a senior. It won't be long until she starts college, and I want to spend as much time as possible with them before they begin their next chapters of life."

Moline Police Lieutenant, Combat Veteran Retires from Illinois Army National Guard with Top Enlisted Rank, more than 30 Years of Service

Story and Photos by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Genisio of Orion started his career in the Illinois Army National Guard as an “impressively bad” light-wheeled vehicle mechanic, but 30 years later he retired as a top-ranked noncommissioned officer (NCO), Commandant of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), and with the Legion of Merit and a Master Infantry Combat Badge affixed to his uniform.

Genisio, a Moline Police Department lieutenant in his civilian life, joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 1995 as a mechanic in the 135th Chemical Company. “After three years, I realized that I was a terrible mechanic. Like, impressively bad and wanted something more,” Genisio said during his April 26 retirement ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

So, he decided to enlist in the active Army but asked for a new military job. He told the Army recruiter “I wanted to do something as far away from an Army vehicle as I could. That recruiter took my request seriously, and I enlisted in the Army as an Airborne Infantryman.”

He went through Army Basic Training a second time before going through the Infantry School at Fort Benning. After completing Airborne School, he was assigned to the 5th Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment at Fort Kobbe, Panama. There he completed Air Assault School and went through the Army’s Jungle Operation Training Center. In 1999 he joined the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He deployed to Kosovo in 1999 and then to Egypt in 2000.

In 2001 he returned to the Illinois Army National Guard, this time as a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Specialist with the 135th Chemical Co. In 2003 he deployed



Col. Shawn Nokes, Commander of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) pins the Legion of Merit on Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Genisio’s uniform. Genisio retired after more than 30 years of service and as a top-ranked noncommissioned officer (NCO) and Commandant of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute.) Genisio, a Moline Police Department lieutenant in his civilian life, joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 1995.

to Kuwait as a CBRN NCO prior to and during the invasion of Iraq. From January 2005 to June 2006, he deployed to Iraq as a Team Leader with Co. B, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment. While he was not happy about deploying again after only 18 months, “this deployment was one of the best deployments I ever had. We had a clear mission, great leadership, and everything we needed to succeed,” he said. “It’s where I really learned what leadership was about – and how important it is to earn the trust of your Soldiers. As a young sergeant,

I witnessed outstanding leadership at the squad, platoon, company, and battalion levels. I grew up a lot on that deployment, and the actual weight of being a leader hit me.”

After the deployment, he returned to the Galesburg-based 444th Chemical Co. The unit served as the search and extraction element for the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High-Yield Explosive (CBRNE) Enhanced Force Response Package (CERFP) mission, working alongside civilian firefighters and other emergency responders. When Genisio was first sergeant, “the unit

was motivated, and there wasn't anything we couldn't do."

Genisio would rise from an inept mechanic to the command sergeant major of the 44th Chemical Battalion. He served as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Illinois CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Package until he took responsibility for the 129th Regiment (RTI) in April 2023 serving as the Command Sergeant Major and Commandant of the 129th until his retirement. Just prior to his retirement ceremony, he relinquished responsibility of the 129th to Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Carroll, the former Command Sergeant Major of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

Along with the Legion of Merit, Genisio's awards include the Bronze Star Medal, two Meritorious Service Medals, six Army Commendation Medals, four Army Achievement Medals, and an Air Force Achievement Medal. He holds two Combat Infantryman Badges, the Combat Action Badge, the Air Assault Badge, the Airborne Badge, two Drivers and Mechanic Badges, and the Expert Infantryman Badge. During his retirement ceremony, he and the 129th Regiment's Maj. Jared Dudley received the Master Combat Infantry Badge, denoting they are both expert Infantry Soldiers who have engaged the enemy in combat.

Despite his many awards and decorations, unlike his mother, Barb Genisio, Command Sgt. Maj. Genisio has never received a command coin from a general. Barb Genisio received a command coin from The Adjutant General and Commander of the Illinois National Guard – a two-star general – when she was the Family Readiness Group leader for the 444th Chemical Company while her son was the first sergeant of the unit. Barb Genisio was in the FRG for a decade and its leader for five years.

Col. Shawn Nokes, the Commander of the 129th Regiment (RTI), recognized Command Sgt. Maj. Genisio's father, Bob Genisio, for his Navy service as a diesel mechanic aboard a destroyer during the Vietnam War. The elder Genisio was presumably a better mechanic than his son. Nokes also thanked Command Sgt. Maj. Genisio's spouse, Nicole, and

their two children, Hunter and Ava, for supporting the command sergeant major through his decades of military service.

Nokes also presented Command Sgt. Maj. Genisio with his command coin during his retirement ceremony and told him "at least you (now) have a colonel coin and you officially earned it."

The retirement ceremony was good-humored. For example, Nokes teased the command sergeant major about his fear of heights – despite a history of jumping out of both airplanes and helicopters – and the master of ceremonies, Maj. Dudley, referenced the command sergeant major's penchant for 1990s West Coast hip hop.

However, the colonel became serious when talking about the service of his command sergeant major, and friend. "Command sergeant major, you did it the right way – always," Nokes said. "You are beyond humble about all your accomplishments and never take credit for anything you did. You were always about the team, and you were extremely effective building relationships inside and outside the

chain of command."

"Jon, thank you for treating me like a brother from day one," Nokes added. "Thank you for all your years of service. The Army just got weaker today because you're not in it anymore. However, your legacy will live on in all of us. The greatest legacy anyone can leave is to positively impact the lives of others. You have done just that."

Genisio said he will miss watching those he served with develop into future leaders. "Privates I had as a squad leader are now first sergeants leading companies. Platoon leaders, who I had when I was a platoon sergeant, are now battalion commanders. Seeing them step into those leadership roles has been the most rewarding part of my career."

He encouraged the NCOs to take challenging assignments in line units and develop the relationships between NCOs and commissioned officers. "Take promotions that give you opportunities to grow. The relationship between the NCO and the officer is the foundation of every unit in the Army."



Col. Shawn Nokes, Commander of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) presents the Certificate of Retirement to Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Genisio during a ceremony April 26.

Two Oaths, One Journey: The Path to Citizenship Through Service

Chicago Soldier Becomes U.S. Citizen During Ceremony

By Sgt. Luigi Cabantog, Recruiting and Retention Battalion

Pfc. Daniil Grechko, a member of the Illinois Army National Guard, officially became a United States citizen April 29, during a naturalization ceremony at the Everett M. Dirksen U.S. Courthouse in Chicago.

Grechko was one of 98 individuals from 43 different countries who took the Oath of Citizenship in front of a packed courtroom of family members, friends, and supporters. Due to the large turnout, additional seating had to be brought in - highlighting the significance of the occasion.

His path has been defined by two pivotal oaths: the first, taken when he enlisted while still in high school in January 2024; the second, taken during the naturalization ceremony that granted him U.S. citizenship.

Grechko, originally from Ukraine, is a graduate of Niles North High School in Skokie, Illinois. As a permanent resident, he became eligible for naturalization through his honorable military service, a pathway that honors the commitment and contributions of green-card holders who serve in uniform.

"It's an incredible feeling knowing that I have people who have my back and motivate me to keep pushing forward," said Grechko. "I'll always be grateful to those who helped me overcome obstacles and supported me during times of doubt."

Grechko, assigned to Company B, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, reflected on his decision to serve his adopted country.

"Joining was a big step for me, as it is for many others, and I'm truly happy I made the decision to enlist," he said. "It's been a great community,



From left, Judge Michael Y. Scudder, Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, Pfc. Daniil Grechko, of Skokie, Illinois, and Sgt. 1st Class Richard Stadershaw, Company B, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, Illinois Army National Guard. Grechko became a United States citizen during a naturalization ceremony in Chicago April 29, through a program in which military service members can obtain citizenship through his honorable service.

and I've gained so much from being part of it."

Grechko, who came to the United States in 2013, said it's amazing to be a citizen, and is grateful for the support he received in achieving citizenship.

"It feels amazing to now be a citizen of the United States. As a citizen, I can pursue more opportunities than I could as a permanent resident," he said. "I'll always be thankful for the support I received in achieving my citizenship, especially from Sergeant First Class Rosa Lemus and Sergeant First Class Richard Stadershaw of Company B, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, who guided me every step of the way."

The ceremony was presided over by the Honorable Michael Y. Scudder, Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Scudder highlighted the qualities that unite the new citizens.

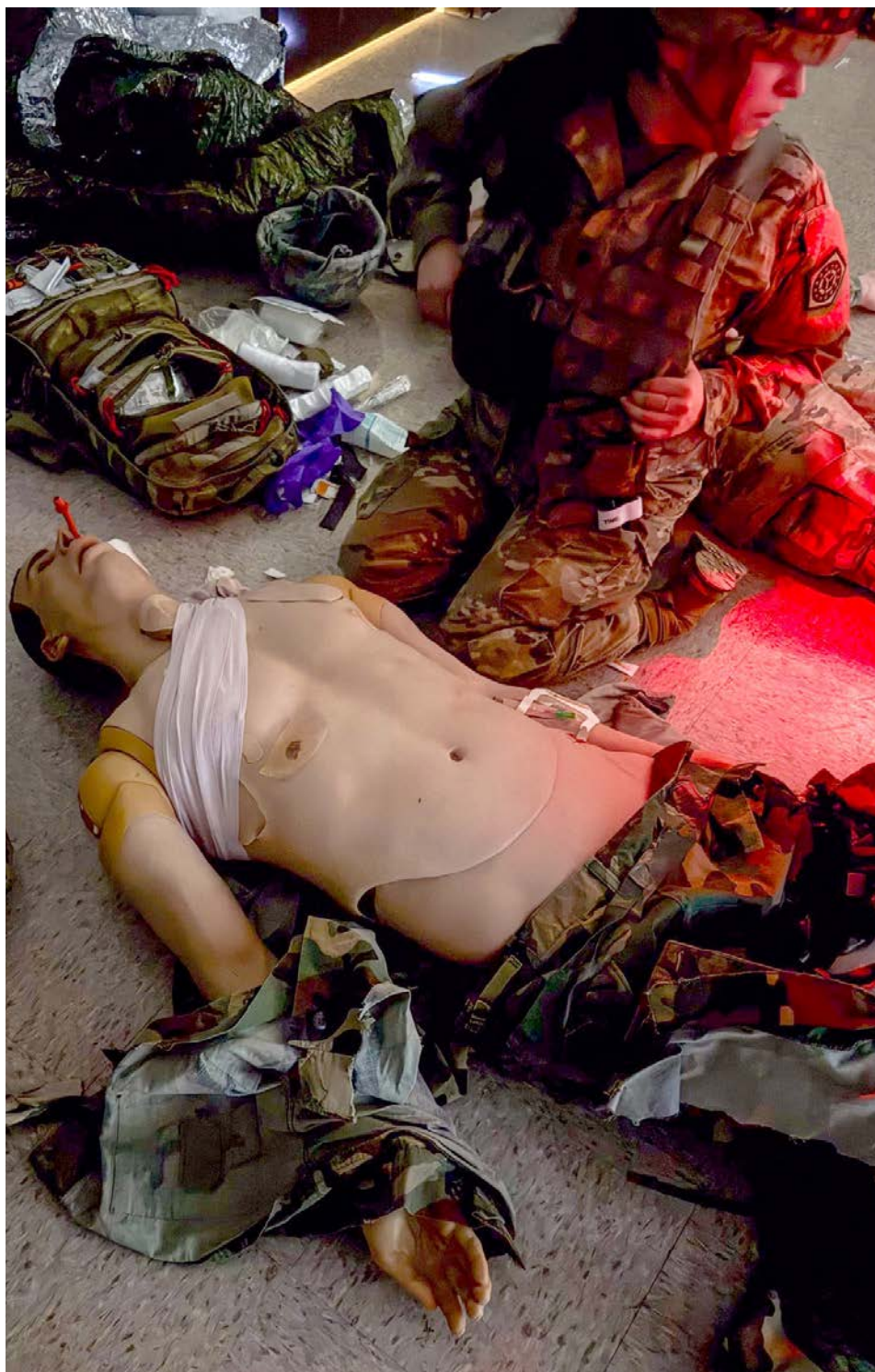
"Each of you sitting before me shares these same traits - perseverance, adaptability, and hope," he said. "The skills that have made America what it is are the very same skills that have made you Americans."

Military naturalization recognizes the sacrifices and dedication of permanent residents who choose to serve. It offers an expedited path to citizenship for those who demonstrate honorable service, good moral character, and adherence to other eligibility standards.

The ceremony concluded with a standing ovation and the Pledge of Allegiance. Grechko said for him as a new U.S. citizen, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance was more than a formality.

"It was a heartfelt affirmation of my belonging and service," he said.

Once Grechko completes advanced individual training this summer, he will be awarded the 19D Cavalry Scout military occupational specialty and assigned to Troop A, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, based in Pontiac, Illinois.



108th MMB Soldiers Sharpen Medical, Trauma Skills during Critical Situations Evaluation

108th Multifunctional Medical Support Battalion Soldiers completed medical and trauma evaluation lanes Feb. 22-23. Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 108th Multifunctional Medical Support Battalion, 708th Medical Company Area Support, 709th Medical Company Area Support, and 710th Medical Company Area Support participated in the training. From combat lifesaving techniques to advanced trauma care, the 108th Multifunctional Medical Support Battalion troops sharpened their skills and reinforced their commitment to protecting and aiding one another in critical situations. (Photo by Spc. Mallory Sinkhorn, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs)

BRRRRR



Master Sgt. Ryan Razo, assigned to the 183rd Security Forces Squadron, 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, participated in a cold-water immersion as part of the Air National Guard's cold weather operations course at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn., Feb. 7. The course taught service members to conduct mission-essential tasking in extreme cold environments.

Two 183rd Security Forces Members Test Limits during Air National Guard Cold Weather Course

Story and photos by Audra Flanagan, 148th Fighter Wing

Master Sgt. Ryan Razo and Senior Master Sgt. Stephen Horcharik, 183d Security Forces Squadron, joined 70 Air National Guard Security Forces members at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn., from Jan. 27 to Feb. 8, 2025, to train and conduct mission-essential tasks in extremely cold temperatures, during the Air National Guard's Cold Weather Operations Course (CWOC).

The class comprised of mostly security forces personnel from 37 wings representing 27 states, also hosted two participants and one instructor from the 3rd Canadian Division's Lake Superior Scottish Regiment, 38th Brigade Group.

Class participants spent the first

phase of the course in a classroom where they studied troop movements, risk management, cold weather injury care, and specialized equipment use. The second phase sent students outdoors to practice over snow movement, Ahkio sled hauling techniques, land navigation, and thermal structure building. The final phase was a six-day, five-night field training exercise where students traversed snow-covered terrain, reacted to leadership challenges, established a patrol base, constructed and slept in thermal or arctic shelters, and provided hypothermia care while enduring Minnesota's winter weather.

The class was divided into six teams who navigated the field training

as a group. The teams rucked over thirty miles with rucks weighting over 70 pounds, while pulling three hundred plus pound Ahkio sleds 183rdfilled with equipment, the first two days, then built self-sustaining camps, and slept in a10-man arctic tents with a small stove for heat.

Thermal shelters were constructed on the third and fourth nights using only supplies in an airmen's pack or found in nature. While some teams created two or three-person "lean to" or A-frame style thermal structures, other teams created 10-person shelters to capitalize on body heat. Class attendees used fire as their only heat source while overnight temperatures were below negative 18 with wind

gusts reaching 30-miles per hour. The course planner, 148th Security Forces Squadron Master Sgt. Heath Parks said, "Sleeping in a thermal shelter in negative temperatures after days of exhausting ruck movements is not for the faint-hearted. Completing multiple nights in extreme field conditions demonstrates our airmen can do anything they put their minds to."

The final day of the field training consisted of one last ruck to Lake Farrell. Upon arriving, teams set up their 10-man arctic tents then participated in a cold-water immersion supervised by the United

States Coast Guard's Training and Rescue Station from Duluth, Minn. During the cold-water immersion, each member had to enter the frozen water and stay in for 2 minutes. This allowed them to feel the beginning effects of hypothermia and then work to mitigate to survive.

"The biggest lesson I learned in this environment was logistics management. When you only have what you can carry on your back, every ounce better be essential, hold multiple purposes and be ready to be employed at a moment's notice." SMSgt Stephen Horcharik

"Ounces equal pounds when it comes to decisions made on what to pack in with you. Choose wisely! The Cold Weather Operations Course was some of the most challenging and rewarding training I have ever attended." MSgt Ryan Razo

This was the second annual CWOC planned and hosted by the Minnesota National Guard's 148th Fighter Wing. Camp Ripley is a 53,000-acre regional training center located near Little Falls, Minn., which features diverse landscapes from heavily forested areas to prairies to lakes and ponds.



Sr. Master Sgt. Stephen Horcharik, assigned to the 183rd Security Forces Squadron, 183rd Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, participated in a cold-water immersion as part of the Air National Guard's cold weather operations course at Camp Ripley Training Center, Minn., Feb. 7. Students participated in a six-day, five-night Field Training Exercise where they traveled on foot in subzero temperatures, using land navigational skills, to build camps featuring either a 10-man Arctic tent or thermal shelters made from materials found in nature.

Legacy of Impact: A Command Chief's Career

183rd Wing's Velazquez Retires After 27 Years of Service

Story and Photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus, 183rd Wing Public Affairs

Imagine a chief master sergeant. Now, imagine a command chief master sergeant.

Command Chief Master Sgt. Rebecca Velazquez, 183d Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, never imagined herself as a command chief. She never imagined promoting to the highest enlisted rank in the Air Force or being among less than 1.5% of the Air Force to hold the rank of chief master sergeant.

Moreover, she never imagined serving as the 183d Wing command chief master sergeant and advising the commander on matters of health, morale, welfare, training and professional development for more than 800 Airmen assigned to the wing. She never even imagined reenlisting after her initial contract.

Velazquez enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1998, just six days after she turned 18 years old. She never considered joining the military until she received a phone call from an Army recruiter the summer after graduating high school. While she did not want to join the Army, the phone call opened the door to her considering the military as a career path and ultimately deciding to join the Air Force.

She recalled, "[My parents] were all for [me joining the military], because they were just excited that I was doing something because I didn't want to go to college. It's amazing when individuals know exactly what they want, and they have that focus. But I didn't. I just wanted to go on an adventure...And I think, in my head, I was going to do six years, and then come home, and then I didn't."

Velazquez entered active duty as a personnelist and was assigned to Holloman Air Force Base, Alamogordo, New Mexico, for her first duty station. She recalled the culture of the Air Force in the late 1990s as one that was not amenable to feedback or input from Airmen. Further, she spoke of her struggles



Col. Shawn Strahle, Commander, 183rd Wing, presents Command Chief Master Sgt. Rebecca Velazquez, with a shadow box denoting her more than two decades of service in the U.S. Air Force and Illinois Air National Guard.

working for leadership that did not take deliberate steps to develop her as an Airman or a personnelist.

"Jobbing it," is how Velazquez

described the culture of the active duty Air Force she grew up in. Airmen were expected to perform and maintain proficiency and excellence in their respective job fields to further the warfighting mission, as they are today, without a culture which promoted deliberate development or an option to up channel concerns.

Velazquez had her first experience working for leadership who she felt took an interest in her professional development and made deliberate attempts to grow her when she was stationed in

Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, after Holloman. Further, she felt her noncommissioned officer cared about her as the person under the uniform, and the woman behind the Airman. This combination of professional development and interpersonal connectedness empowered Velazquez to start developing her own people-first leadership style.

She took both her positive and negative experiences to her next



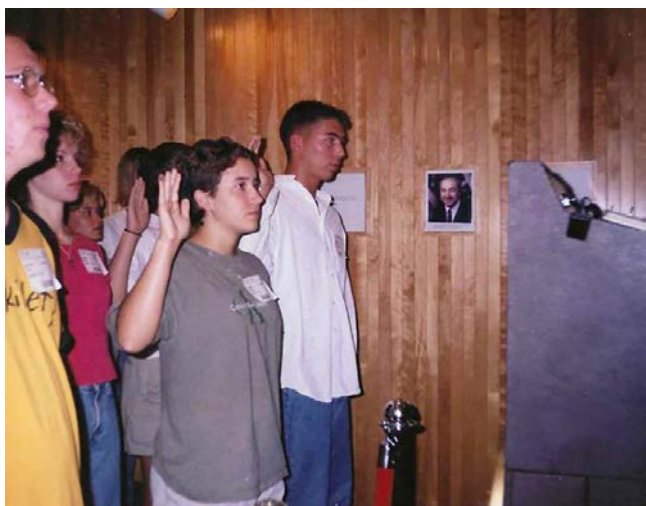
Command Chief Master Sgt. Rebecca Velazquez reflects on 27 years of military service.

duty station, Scott Air Force Base, Belleville, Illinois, as lessons for how she wanted to lead and who she wanted to become as she gained rank. Velazquez deployed to Iraq for five months during her time as an active duty personnelist assigned to Scott. She served as a Personnel Support for Contingency Operations (PERSCO) team member and a casualty representative while deployed.

She recalled, "That was really a turning point for me...I really saw the value of what I did as a PERSCO team member, because I was the first one anyone saw coming off the plane. I gave them all their briefings and had accountability of them. Daily we were getting mortared and there was always incoming, there was always something going on...And then being a casualty representative...When that phone rings, it means one of our service members has gone missing, is injured, ill or deceased. And you don't think about those things really, until you've been in that situation."

Velazquez found an immeasurable sense of purpose in taking care of civilians as well as service members. While she firmly believes in maintaining the standard of readiness and lethality for wartime operations, the humanity she found in the civilians while deployed reminded her of the importance of the humanitarian work the United States military does overseas.

She said, with a bittersweet smile, "It taught me a lesson about humanity.



In 1998, just six days after her 18th birthday, the future 183rd Wing Command Chief Master Sergeant enlists in the U.S. Air Force.

It was amazing to see communities, tribes, that are there trying to save themselves. I had an opportunity to talk to a tribal leader who just couldn't express how appreciative he was of what we were doing over there, and how amazing his tribe was, and how he wished people around the world could see [violence, terrorism] is not what Iraq is. All the different tribes that are there, they're peaceful people, and they're just living their lives."

Velazquez was eight years into her active duty career when she deployed. She transitioned into the Air Force Reserves unit at Scott Air Force Base about a year and a half upon returning from Iraq, after ten years with active duty. Her time in the Air Force Reserves is when Velazquez started to fully develop what turned into her current leadership style.

She was in charge of leading a team of personnelists as a noncommissioned officer, and saw them both as Airmen to be developed and trained deliberately and as people to be cared for and taken care of actively. However, she also struggled to be the leader she thought she was "supposed" to be. When she imagined a leader, she pictured the stoic leadership she had as a young Airman.

Velazquez fought extreme introversion daily as she gave briefings and led taskers. She struggled with anxiety and panic attacks as she put others' needs before her own. She exemplified service before self to an extreme, where taking care of people was causing her to not care for herself. This continued for Velazquez during the five years she spent as a reservist and into her career as a guardsman. She struggled until she realized a second guiding truth of her career: Be yourself.

Now, she works every day, tirelessly, to be the standard which is expected of Airmen and, particularly, of command chiefs. She continues to fight silent



Airman Rebecca Velazquez in basic training.

battles with imposter syndrome and post-traumatic stress disorder. She also still feels deeply uncomfortable in front of crowds, though no one would ever know. Velazquez presents the standard, leads by example and takes care of people because she believes in "jobbing it," as much as she believes in development and connection.

Velazquez takes on the struggles, the hardships and the humanity of every Airman that filters in and out of her office. She shares information and gives a voice to both concerns and opportunities while providing a space for Airmen of any level to find their own voices and up channel ideas, suggestions and feedback directly to her.

She said of deliberate development, empowerment and recognition for Airmen, "Those things are so important, because the nature of what we do can be so dark, you need that light on the other side."

She started an Enlisted Leadership Workshop with two other Airmen. It transformed from a conference of 90 people from one wing to a professional development workshop with over 150 people from seven different wings. Velazquez also encourages all units in the wing to submit their members for awards and started a noncommissioned officer and senior noncommissioned officer

induction ceremony at the 183d to recognize excellence throughout the wing.

When Velazquez began her Guard career at the 183d Wing in 2013, she was a technical sergeant. Three promotions and 12 years later, she sits at the top enlisted rank in the top enlisted position at the 183d Wing. She leads with a people-first style, and to the Airmen she serves, she appears to be the standard itself: Always ready, and always there.

Her parting advice for Airmen is simple, "Take care of people. If your focus is taking care of people, the mission will be done, but we can't do it without them. And be your true self." Command Chief Master Sgt. Velazquez leaves behind a legacy with every Airmen she served. Now, when they imagine a command chief master sergeant, they are empowered to picture themselves.



Command Chief Master Sgt. Rebecca Velazquez, 183rd Wing, Springfield, has served more than 27 years in the U.S. Air Force and Illinois Air National Guard. After spending 15 years on active duty, Velazquez transferred to the Illinois Air National Guard. Twelve years and three promotions later, Velazquez is retiring as the senior enlisted leader of the 183rd Wing.

McConkey Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel

Paul McConkey of Normal, Illinois, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel during a ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield April 5.

McConkey enlisted in the Illinois National Guard in 1999 and was commissioned through the University of Illinois ROTC program in 2007.

McConkey's partner, Kelly, and children Jason and Addison pinned his new rank on him during the ceremony.

"You bore the brunt of the sacrifice for me to serve," McConkey told his family.

During the ceremony he also thanked the many leaders who have mentored him throughout his career.

"I am blessed to be so close to the leaders who have gone so far in this organization," he said.



Jason McConkey, son of newly promoted Lt. Col. Paul McConkey, secures his father's new rank during a promotion ceremony at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield, April 5.

54th SFAB soldiers train for overseas deployment



National Guard soldiers with the 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade conduct an after action review during contact under fire training at Friday, April 25, at Camp Atterbury near Edinburgh, Indiana. For approximately 60 brigade soldiers the training will prepare them for their upcoming overseas deployment to the Middle East.



At right, National Guard soldiers with the 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade care for simulated wounded soldier and establish secure perimeter during training Friday, April 25, at Camp Atterbury near Edinburgh, Indiana.



National Guard soldiers with the 54th Security Force Assistance Brigade carry a simulated wounded soldier, right, and call for medevac helicopter during training Friday, April 25, 2025, at Camp Atterbury near Edinburgh, Indiana. Brigade soldiers who hail from Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Texas and Florida, conduct train, advise, assist, support and liaison operations with allied and partner nation foreign security forces worldwide.



Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville students stand with U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Matt Walden, center, for a picture in front of a KC-135 Stratotanker engine at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 22. The SIUE mechanical engineer students took a tour of the jet propulsion shop.

SIUE Mechanical Engineer Students Tour Jet Propulsion Shop at 126th Air Refueling Wing



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kyle Finsterwalder shows the inside of a starter control valve from a KC-135 Stratotanker engine while students from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville listen to him explain its operation at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 22, 2025. The SIUE, mechanical engineer students took a tour of the jet propulsion shop. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, mechanical engineering student Alex Daiber, left, takes off a starter control valve, while U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Kyle Finsterwalder holds it in place at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 22.

Bloomington Soldier Retires After 38 Years

Story and Photo by Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brian Berry of Bloomington, Company D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, based in Bloomington, was honored for his 38 years of military service in the U.S. Army and Illinois Army National Guard during a retirement ceremony May 2 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois.

"Chief Berry's legacy isn't just in his numerous awards, it is in the countless Soldiers he's mentored, the missions he's led and the loyalty he's earned," said Capt. Allison Johnson, Commander, Company D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion.

Johnson thanked Berry's family, including his parents, Robert and Sally.

"Thank you for raising a leader with integrity and heart," she said.

Johnson also thanked Berry's wife, Jenny, for her support during the past decade.

"Your strength is the kind that doesn't wear a uniform but is carried just as much," she said. "You've held down the house, attended dinners without your husband by your side and stood quietly behind his service with unmatched grace. You didn't just support your Soldier, you served in your own powerful way."

Johnson told Berry's children that their father's service "inspired us all, but you were his proudest role."

Johnson also thanked Berry for his leadership throughout the years.

"Your fingerprints are on every formation you touched," she said. "Your legacy will echo long after today. Your mission is complete and I turn you over to your new commanding officer – your wife, Jenny."

Berry enlisted in the U.S. Army as an ammunition specialist and was assigned to Company A, 407th Supply and Transportation Battalion, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

In 1989, Berry joined the Illinois Army National Guard as a mortarman and was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment.

In 2006, Berry reclassified to human intelligence collector and in 2010



Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brian Berry, Company D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, thanks friends, family, and fellow Illinois National Guard members for their support, mentorship, and leadership during his 38 years of service during a retirement ceremony May 2 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln, Springfield.

attended Warrant Officer Candidate school. Throughout his career, he has attended many military schools.

In 2005, Berry began in the Active Guard and Reserve program as the training noncommissioned officer for Company B, 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment.

He has two combat deployments, including with the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team A-11 to Afghanistan in 2013 and with 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment to Afghanistan in 2019.

Berry said that 38 years sounds like a long time.

"It seems like yesterday when I was standing in line with other Soldiers, being yelled at," he said. "After two years of active duty, 15 years as a traditional Guard member, and more than 20 years in the AGR program, time flies."

Berry said some of his best memories are not of the places he's been.

"Some of my best memories are the people I've had the honor to serve alongside," he said. "Being a warrant officer has been one of the highlights of my career. I will always cherish the partners and friendships I've made in the warrant officer cohort. The Soldiers in Company D have always

made me proud to be a Dawg. It has been an honor and privilege to serve with you."

Berry thanked his family for their support.

"I wouldn't be here today without my family," he said. "My dad taught me to shoot and some of my first road marches were hunting with my dad as a kid."

Berry said when his daughter, Madison, was born in 2007, she gave him the drive in inspiration to be all he could be.

"I couldn't have done it without her support," he said.

He also thanked his wife, Jenny, for her support.

"You have been my rock for the last decade," he said. "Without you things would have been so much harder. I am truly blessed to have the family I have."

Berry offered some words of advice to his fellow Soldiers.

"Work hard. Play hard. Live hard. Love hard," he said. "Don't be afraid to make mistakes. You learn more from your failures than your successes."

During his retirement ceremony, Berry was presented with the Legion of Merit.

Gold Star Mission Awards Scholarships



Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General - Army of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, speaks at the Gold Star Mission scholarship banquet on Saturday, March 22, in Springfield, Illinois. The general spoke about his relationship with the families of those Soldiers in the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery who were killed in action during the 33d Infantry Brigade Combat Team's 2008-2009 deployment to Afghanistan. Williams commanded the battalion. Gold Star Mission has awarded more than \$317,000 in scholarships, each in the name of a fallen Illinois service member. Gold Star Mission was started in 2017 by a group of Illinois National Guard members and retirees as a way of keeping the memory of fallen Illinois service members alive.



Michael Nuding, son of Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Nuding, and Gold Star Mission President Barry Tobias present Connie Robinson with the "Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Nuding Award" for her service as a volunteer for Gold Star Mission. Connie Robinson worked for the Illinois National Guard for decades and continued to serve after retirement for organizations like Gold Star Mission. Command Sgt. Michael A. Nuding served in the Illinois Army National Guard for 40 years retiring in 2012 and continued his service by volunteering for organizations like Gold Star Mission and several veterans organizations for more than a decade. He died in 2022 at the age of 70.



Scholarship recipients and Families of the Fallen pose for a group photo at the Gold Star Mission scholarship banquet on March 22 in Springfield.

126th ARW Kicks Off Illini Thunder 25 in Mississippi

The 126th Maintenance Group is operating deployment for training: Illini Thunder 25 at Combat Readiness Training Center, Gulfport, Mississippi. They are training multiple disciplines to enhance effectiveness and flexibility as multi capable airmen further enhancing lethality in deployed environments.



Tech. Sgt. Ryan Black and Staff Sgt. Mackenzie Bohnert, fuels specialists, perform preflight checklist as Staff Sgt. Travis Thurston, crew chief, observes.



Tech. Sgt. Nate Reeves explains Hydraulic Equipment to Repair and Reclamation Airmen to enhance effectiveness and flexibility as multi capable airmen.



Tech. Sgt. Andrew Janis, Aerospace Ground Equipment, trains on LOPAC Air Compressor at CRTC Gulfport, Mississippi.



Tech. Sgt. Nate Carpenter trains Senior Airman Fletcher on avionics systems at CRTC Gulfport, Mississippi.



126th Maintenance Group at CRTC Gulfport, Mississippi.

Illinois National Guard Join Other States to Mentor Lit-Pol-Ukr Brigade in Tactical Planning for Land Forces

Members of the Illinois Army National Guard, California National Guard, and Pennsylvania National Guard traveled to Lublin, Poland, to mentor the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade in Tactical Planning for Land Forces, a NATO planning process similar to the Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP) used by U.S. forces.

This exercise marks the 10-year anniversary of Brave Band. Representatives from the State Partnership Programs affiliated with each of the LPU Brigade's partner countries also participated.



From Left to Right: Chief Warrant Officer 4 Jonathan Deering (IL), Capt. Daniel Kankiewicz (PA), Col. Matthew Garrison (IL), Chief Warrant Officer 3 Trevor Daily (IL), Lt. Col. Bernadette Bland (IL), Col. Timothy Newman (IL), Maj. aDaniel Beckman (CA), Lt. Col. Jon Christel (IL), Lt. Col. Kyle Berry (PA), Lt. Col. Martin Massey (IL)



Col. Timothy Newman (IL) presents Brig. Gen. Piotr Lisowski with a plaque from the Mentorship team, commemorating our time together and 10 years of the Brave Band Exercise.



Lt. Col. Bernadette Bland (IL) works with her logistics counterpart in the LPU BDE to answer a flurry of questions. Lt. Col. Bland noted the logistics element was tuned in and had a ton of great questions, which aided in their development as a team.



Col. Timothy Newman (IL) kicks off Brave Band 25 academics. The LPU BDE rotates personnel every 3 years. This year is a first-year rotation, with many of the officers being new to the brigade.

126th LRS Takes Top Honors in Air National Guard Logistics Readiness Individual, Unit Awards

The 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron won four awards as part of the 2024 Air National Guard Logistics Readiness Individual and Unit Awards.

The LRS as a unit won the Daedalian Maj Gen Carter Logistics Effectiveness Award and the API Trophy Award: ANG Fuels Management Flight Award.

To celebrate, Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air stopped by the 126th LRS to recognize the Squadron and a few of their Airmen.

The 126th Supply Chain Operations Squadron and the 126th LRS won 10 out of the 15 2024 ANG Logistics Readiness Individual and Unit Awards.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, talks to the 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Doria Holland, right 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, commander, receives a coin from Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Holland received the coin for the unit winning the Daedalian MG Warren R. Carter Logistics Effectiveness Award. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Master Sgt. Brian Ellison)



U.S. Air Force Maj. Bobby Erlinghagen, right 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, Director of Operations, receives a coin from Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Erlinghagen was named Outstanding AF Logistics Readiness Company Grade Office of the Year.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Illinois Air National Guard Assistant Adjutant General-Air, awards a coin to Staff Sgt. Curtis Irons, 126th Logistics Readiness Squadron, at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, March 31, 2025. Irons was recognized as the Outstanding Air Force Logistics Readiness Airman of the Year.

St. Louis Police Officer, Combat Veteran, Retires as Senior Instructor at RTI after 23 Years in the Illinois Army National Guard

When Sean Fortune was a private in the Illinois Army National Guard's "Mighty" 1344th Transportation Company, he introduced himself to his brand-new platoon leader as his "driver."

"He said, 'Stick with me and you'll make captain before you know it. I can't guarantee major, but you'll make captain,'" said the platoon leader, now colonel, Shawn Nokes – the commander of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). That private didn't do so badly either.

A combat deployment and countless 88M (motor vehicle operator) students later, Sgt. 1st Class Sean Fortune is retiring as a senior instructor with the 1st Battalion of the 129th Regiment (RTI) after more than 23 years of military service. As a civilian, he is a St. Louis (Mo.) Police Department Officer and evidence technician.

"My first impression was this guy is as big of a wise ass as me," said Nokes during Fortune's April 26 retirement ceremony in the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. "He had an immediate impact on me. And he has since navigated a military career that has been spectacular. I'm bummed that he decided to retire. I wanted him to be a first sergeant. But he's done his time and now he'll have plenty of time with his family."

But not quite yet. Fortune still has one more 88M course to teach before he officially retires on May 17. Fortune has consistently ranked among the top instructors in the unit.

Nokes presented Fortune with the Meritorious Service Medal for his more than 23 years of dedicated and loyal service to his nation adding to decorations that include the Purple Heart, the Army Commendation Medal, the Iraqi Campaign Medal, the Parachutist Badge, and the Combat Action Badge. He deployed to Iraq in 2004 with the "Rolling Thunder" – the 1644th Transportation Co. Fortune has



Sgt. 1st Class Sean Fortune and 88M (motor vehicle operator) Course Manager Master Sgt. Henry Branham hold his gift from his unit's Soldiers while Fortune's 2-year-old daughter, Savannah, looks at his Disney Princess toy from her seat among the "official party" chairs. Fortune, a St. Louis (Mo.) police officer, will retire from the military on May 17 after 23 years of service. His retirement ceremony was held April 26 at the Illinois Military Academy where he served as a senior instructor with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) in Springfield.

passed on lessons learned from that deployment and several years as a noncommissioned officer to hundreds of new Army motor vehicle operators.

Fortune's spouse, Stefanie, said that she would not mind having her husband at home more to help her manage their young family. Their daughter Savannah, 2, wore a blue dress to match mom's and their 6-year-old son, Maverick, was in a military uniform matching dad.

Savannah took to the stage during the ceremony when Stefanie Fortune was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation from Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George. She took a

seat among the "official party" chairs, at one point showing a flower to her father. Through most presentations, Savannah examined the new toy her father gave her from her seat on stage. Both parents said that their daughter has a lot of energy.

Fortune's speech was brief. He thanked the Soldiers, retirees, and family who traveled to honor his decades of service and then ended his remarks with "Released!" He was known to release Soldiers at the end of the duty day when he was placed in charge – sometimes with his commander's or first sergeant's knowledge.



Above, Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, and below, Maj. Gen. Daniel R. McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air, and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, speak at the 56th annual National Guard Association of Illinois (NGAI) conference in East Peoria, Illinois, April 26. NGAI works to support the Illinois National Guard through legislative action and advocacy.

At right, Illinois State Rep. Dan Swanson (R-Alpha), right, receives the Abraham Lincoln Award - Legislator of the Year at the 56th annual National Guard Association of Illinois (NGAI) conference in East Peoria, Illinois, April 25, 2025. The award honors legislators who have made significant contributions to America's defense at the state or national level. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer and Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)



182nd Airlift Wing Teams with Peoria County Sheriff's Office for Active Shooter Exercise



U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Noah Hackbart, front, Master Sgt. Mark Pickerill, center, and Master Sgt. William Patrick, back, all security forces specialists from the 182nd Security Forces Squadron, clear a room during an active shooter exercise with the Peoria County Sheriff's Office at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, April 24. The exercise evaluated the contingency responses of base functions including security forces, fire department, force support, and the Wing Operations Center.



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Mark Pickerill, left, and Master Sgt. William Patrick, right, both security forces specialists from the 182nd Security Forces Squadron, move a victim to safety during the active shooter exercise.



U.S. Air Force security forces specialists from the 182nd Security Forces Squadron clear the area while a K9 operator from the Peoria County Sheriff's Office responds to the active shooter exercise.



U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Noah Hackbart, front, Master Sgt. Mark Pickerill, center, and Master Sgt. William Patrick, back, all security forces specialists from the 182nd Security Forces Squadron, clear a room during an active shooter exercise.



U.S. Air Force fire protection specialists from the 182nd Civil Engineering Squadron administer first aid during an active shooter exercise with the Peoria County Sheriff's Office at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, April 24.

*Photos by
Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer and
Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus,
182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs*



U.S. Air Force personnel from the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, and officers from the Peoria County Sheriff's Office huddle up prior to K9 operations during an active shooter exercise at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, April 24.



182nd Airlift Wing Hosts Career Day

Students learn more about the Air National Guard security forces career field during a career fair at the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, Illinois, April 15, 2025. The career fair included immersive experiences for local students to learn more about the Central Illinois Air National Guard and provided an opportunity for them to speak with civilian employers in attendance. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)



183rd Wing Conducts Active Shooter Exercise

The 183rd Wing successfully conducted a full-scale Active Shooter Exercise, Feb. 27.

The exercise was designed to enhance readiness and strengthen collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies. This exercise allowed the Wing to test the ability to respond and recover from a critical situation, ensuring that the 183d is always prepared to protect our personnel and community.

The 183rd Wing partnered with vital local agencies, including Sangamon County Police, Springfield Police, Illinois State Police, Springfield Fire Department, Chatham Fire Department, Springfield Airport Police, Secretary of State Police, FBI

Victim Services, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Sangamon County Public Health, Saints Flight, local ambulance services, and area hospitals like Memorial and St. John's.

The collaboration and coordination

among all participating agencies demonstrated a collective commitment to safety, security, and preparedness. This exercise played a crucial role in making sure the 183d Wing can respond swiftly and effectively in any real-world emergency.

Photos by Staff Sgt. Paul Lauricella and Senior Airman Alexandria King, 183rd Wing



Path Takes Newest Commissioned Officer from West Africa to Illinois National Guard Leadership

Story and Photo by Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Bafia is near the center of Cameroon in the tropics of West Africa, some 6,450 miles from Chicagoland.

In 2017, Juliana Nkafu took that journey away from the Snoutfish of the Mbam and Sanaga Rivers to the Bluegill and Largemouth Bass of the Chicago River; away from the African Oil Palm, Moringa and Mangos to the Elms, Oaks, Maples and miles and miles of corn and soybeans of Illinois. Nkafu took a journey to the “land of the free and the home of the brave.”

On April 26, after the playing of our National Anthem, she stood in front of several of her family and friends and dozens of her fellow Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers and took an oath to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” She commissioned as the newest officer in the Illinois Army National Guard and

the U.S. Army. Nkafu graduated from the Accelerated Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a U.S. Army second lieutenant at the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois. She enrolled in OCS in the fall of 2024.

Nkafu, who lives in Evanston, holds a bachelor’s degree in accounting from the University of Buea in Cameroon and a master’s degree in data science from the University of North Dakota. She is branching as a U.S. Army cyber officer.

Lt. Col. Jaime Marlock, the Illinois Army National Guard’s information technology and cyber branch chief, said U.S. Army cyber officers are already engaged with the enemy as criminals, terrorists, and rival nations attempt to steal information or sabotage our vital networks all the time.

“You are entering a branch that

is vital and fast evolving,” Marlock told Nkafu at her commissioning ceremony. Marlock said that the courses ahead of Nkafu are challenging but expressed confidence that she can meet each challenge. “In the cyber domain, the call (to respond) has already been triggered.”

Nkafu’s skills are in high demand in the civilian sector too. She was quickly hired as the digital transformation coach of a grocery store chain when she immigrated.

Although she was thriving in her civilian career, “I felt a deep calling to serve something larger than myself,” she said. In 2020, she enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard. “This was one of the most challenging and rewarding decisions I’ve made. The military’s core values loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage aligned with the principles my parents instilled in me. My time as an enlisted Soldier has given me a deeper understanding of what it means to serve as part of a team committed to a greater purpose.”

As an officer, Nkafu will be assigned to the Illinois Army National Guard’s newest unit, the 234th Electronic Warfare Co., which is still being stood up.

Nkafu excelled in athletics and academics in high school. She continued to excel in academics in college where she was actively involved in leadership roles in student organizations. In her civilian work she guided her team through challenges and fostered an environment of openness and trust.

Still, she said she was a bit out of her element when she began the Accelerated Officer Candidate School. “When I first started, I was ‘that’ kind of candidate,” she told a group of officer candidates at her commissioning ceremony. She encouraged the candidates to remain persistent and keep striving to graduate from the program.

“This started as only a dream to become a U.S. Army officer,” she said. “Today that dream is a reality.”



2nd Lt. Juliana Nkafu returns the salute of Sgt. 1st Class Paul Golladay as part of her commissioning ceremony.

Williams Visits 183rd Wing

Brig. Gen. Lenny Williams, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois Army National Guard, toured the 183rd Wing on April 15, where he received mission briefings and visited key operational facilities.

Accompanying him were Chief Warrant Officer 5 Thomas Black, State Command Chief Warrant Officer, Illinois Army National Guard, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Kelly, State Command Sergeant Major, Illinois Army National Guard.

The visit included stops at the 183rd Maintenance Squadron (183rd MXS) Hush House, 183rd MXS Hangar, 183rd Communications Squadron (183rd CS), and the new Civil Engineering Complex.

During the tour, leadership engaged with Airmen, observed ongoing operations, and gained valuable insight into the Wing's support capabilities and readiness initiatives.



U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Alexandria King



Check In, Get Cleared, Move Out

182nd Airlift Wing Marks Significant Medical Readiness Advancement with Streamlined Check

Story by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Drill weekend marked a significant advancement in medical readiness for the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois, as Airmen engage in a streamlined medical check known as the Physical Health Assessment Quick March 7-9.

Designed to ensure deployment readiness, Airmen are now able to complete essential health assessments in a single, organized event, maximizing both time management and operational effectiveness.

The PHA Quick featured a comprehensive array of stations that included lab work, immunizations, consultations with medical providers, mental health assessments and dental evaluations. Each component was organized to facilitate efficiency and thoroughness, allowing Airmen to

receive essential medical services in a streamlined manner. By integrating these various medical services into a single event, the wing sets a precedent for future medical readiness.

"I believe PHA Quick's effectiveness will lie in the program's ability to give time back to Airmen, both within the medical units for training, as well as other base shops who will work more replete with personnel now that medical appointments have been streamlined," said Lt. Col. Evan Skinner, the commander of Detachment 1, 182nd Medical Group. "As well as ensuring our members are medically ready to deploy."

As the wing continuously evolves to meet emerging challenges, medical readiness is a cornerstone for



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Amanda Eagle, an aerospace medical technician with the 182nd Medical Group, in-processes Senior Airman Adrian Alimi, a security forces specialist with the 182nd Security Force Squadron, at the Periodic Health Assessment (PHA) Quick, March 8. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Tech. Sgt. Paul Helmig)

operational effectiveness. The overall health and well-being of Airmen play a crucial role in their ability to serve effectively. The PHA Quick ensures that Airmen are prepared to respond to any call to action, minimizing health-related disruptions and contributing to mission success.

"This PHA Quick has been a wing wide event, and all the buy-in from the base has been truly appreciated from medical staff because without everyone contributing, we wouldn't be able to do this," said Master Sgt. Monica Moushon, the health systems administration specialist with the 182nd Medical Group.

Over a three-day drill, the 182nd Medical Group processed approximately 700 Airmen with PHA Quick. The wing plans to implement PHA Quick as an annual required readiness event.



Airmen with the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, participate in a Periodic Health Assessment (PHA) Quick event during drill weekend in Peoria, Illinois, March 8, 2025. The purpose of the PHA Quick is to increase the wing's readiness by Airmen accomplishing all medical requirements, including laboratory blood draws, vaccinations, dental examinations, etc., in one drill weekend. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Tech. Sgt. Paul Helmig)



Students from Capital Area Career Center Learn about Careers in Illinois Air National Guard

The 183rd Wing hosted students from the Capital Area Career Center (CACC) on April 23, providing an interactive look at careers in the Air National Guard.

Students engaged with Airmen from across the Wing, learned about potential career paths, and explored future opportunities in the Air National Guard.

The Wing Recruiting staff, led by Master Sgt. Travis Littig, provided lunch for the students while they briefed them on Illinois Air National Guard health and education benefits, pay structure, and incentive bonuses offered for specific career fields.

This is the fourth year the 183rd has hosted CACC students. The goal is to continue this annual tradition.

(U.S. Air National Guard photos by Senior Airman Alexandria King)





Army National Guard Service Members complete the 12-mile foot march and pose for a picture at the National Guard Region IV Best Warrior Competition at Fort McCoy, Wis., May 3, 2025. Soldiers pushed their endurance and stamina to the limit during the 12-mile foot march event, which they had to complete within three hours.

Illinois' Best Warriors Compete in Regionals

Fourteen Army National Guardsmen competed in the 2025 Region IV Best Warrior Competition at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin April 30 - May 3.

Sgt. Luke Birtch, Illinois' Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, and Spc. Nathan Johnson, Illinois' Soldier of the Year, put their Soldier skills to the test for the opportunity to advance to the national level.

The four-day event challenged the Guardsmen, pushing them to their limits while measuring their proficiency in warrior skills, military

procedures, physical fitness, and mental fortitude. To earn a place in the regional competition, each Service Member first competed in and won at their respective state-level competitions.

Participants were evaluated on their proficiency in the Army Combat Fitness Test; M4 rifle, M17 pistol and M249 squad automatic weapon qualification; a weapons assembly during a secret event; an appearance board; day and night land navigation; Army warrior tasks; combat water

survival training; a call-for-fire scenario; a written exam; a confidence course; and a 12-mile foot march.

Birtch, a combat medic NCO with the Illinois Army National Guard's Joint Force Medical Detachment, finished as the runner-up in the NCO competition.





Photos by Spc. Jack Schave, 112th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Wisconsin National Guard, Sgt. Emily Held, 112th MPAD, Sgt. Cesar Salazar Jr., 112th MPAD, and Sgt. 1st Class Sydney Mariette Joint Force Headquarters, Minnesota National Guard

Illinois Army National Guard Scores 63 as Soldiers Reenlist at Chicago Fire Game

Story and Photos by Spc. Justin Malone, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

During halftime at the Chicago Fire game in Soldier Field on May 3, Lt. Col. Linden Allen, commander of the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, led 63 Illinois Army National Guard soldiers onto the field for a special reenlistment ceremony.

In front of thousands of cheering fans, the soldiers proudly raised their right hands and repeated the oath of enlistment, reaffirming their commitment to serve both

state and nation. The energy in the stadium was electric as the crowd stood in support, showing their appreciation for the men and women who continue to answer the call to duty.

This public display of service and sacrifice was more than just a ceremony—it was a reminder of the courage, dedication, and pride that our National Guard members bring to their communities and the country every day.





Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Maggie Gouchenouer, who was a case support analyst with the Illinois National Guard Counterdrug Task Force at the Chicago HIDTA, used her military specific analytical skills to help investigate and eventually disrupt a dark-net drug trafficking operation. Gouchenouer is a 35N, Signals Intelligence Analyst, serving in Company D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion. The task force received a national HIDTA award for "Investigative Collaboration."

Illinois National Guard Soldier Part of Task Force that Earns National Counterdrug Award

An Illinois National Guard Counterdrug Program Soldier was among the Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Counternarcotics and Cryptocurrency Task Force members who received a national award on March 27 in Washington, D.C..

Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Maggie Gouchenouer, who was a case support analyst with the Illinois National Guard Counterdrug Task Force at the Chicago HIDTA, used her military specific analytical skills to help investigate and eventually disrupt a dark-net drug trafficking operation. Gouchenouer is a 35N, Signals Intelligence Analyst, serving in Company D, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion. The task force received a national HIDTA award for "Investigative Collaboration."

According to a White House press release, the Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Counternarcotics and Cryptocurrency Task Force was "created to identify,

disrupt, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations" and "targeted one of the largest, fastest-growing dark net markets in the world – Nemesis Market. This marketplace facilitated drug trafficking, fraud, hacking, and other illicit activities responsible for more than \$20 million in illicit transactions to more than 150,000 registered users around the world. Led by DEA and comprising an array of federal and local partners, CNCTF undertook Operation Keyboard Warrior, which received designation by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF). In March 2024, CNCTF, working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the German Bundescriminalamt, disrupted Nemesis Market by executing simultaneous, multinational search and seizure warrants on critical technological infrastructure. The warrants resulted in nearly \$1 million in frozen and seized cryptocurrency-related assets, 12 computer servers,

various electronic devices, and terabytes of data containing financial records and personal information of more than 1,000 vendors trafficking in drugs and engaging in fraud, hacking, and forgeries on the marketplace. CNCTF leveraged this information to effect arrests and warrants in eight U.S. federal districts and provided investigative leads to foreign law enforcement counterparts in multiple countries using international treaty-based disclosure agreements that were novel to cyber cases."

This kind of collaboration is not new to the Illinois National Guard Counterdrug Program. The Soldiers and Airmen work hand-in-hand with local, state, federal, and even international law enforcement agencies. Last fiscal year, the program supported more than \$409 million in illegal drug seizures, more than 1,230 in illegal weapon seizures, and helped law enforcement gather evidence leading to almost 2,290 arrests.

Illinois Army National Guard Leaders Celebrate Constitution Day alongside Polish representatives

Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, along with Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, the Illinois National Guard's Senior Enlisted Leader, and Capt. Justin Lowe, aide-de-camp to Gen. Boyd, proudly attended the

Polish Constitution Day Parade in Chicago this weekend.

This annual celebration, held on the first Saturday of May, honors the adoption of Poland's Constitution of May 3, 1791 — the first of its kind in Europe and second in the world after the U.S. Constitution. The event is a tribute to Polish heritage and the

vibrant Polish-American community here in Illinois.

More than just a parade, this day is a living celebration of democratic ideals, unity, and cultural pride. We're proud to stand with our Polish-American neighbors in honoring the spirit of freedom and resilience that both our nations share.





*Photos by Spc. Justin Malone and
Lt. Col. Brad Leighton,
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*

Combat Veteran Known for Her Intelligence, Reliability Retires After 23 Years of Service

Sgt. 1st Class Lisa Menichetti of Springfield, who retired May 3 with 23 years of service, joined the Illinois Army National Guard in 2002 only a few months after graduating from Southeast High School and became an Army Automated Logistical Specialist.

She got a different sort of education a couple years later. She deployed with the 3625th Maintenance Co. to Iraq from January 2004 to March 2005. During the deployment she earned the Combat Action Badge, meaning she directly engaged the enemy in combat. After she returned from deployment, Menichetti started as a full-time Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Soldier who consistently learned new skills and jobs to fit the needs of the Illinois Army National Guard.

"She was reliable as a young Soldier and carried that through her career," said Col. Jayson Coble, the Illinois National Guard's State Surgeon. "She showed a willingness to work hard and assume additional responsibilities throughout her career."

She started in logistics but then became a Human Resources Specialist in 2005 when the Illinois Army National Guard's Personnel Service Branch needed a hand. In 2007, she became a qualified Unit Supply Sergeant when G Co., 634th Brigade Support Battalion in Crestwood needed help. In 2008, she filled a vacancy within the State Medical Branch when they needed a Records Custodian. In 2011, she became qualified as a Combat Medic and filled numerous roles in Springfield's Joint Force Medical Detachment including Training NCO, Operations NCO, and Medical Logistics Specialist.

She broadened her horizons even further in 2015, becoming the Readiness NCO for the 144th Army Band and later as the Readiness NCO for the headquarters company of the 65th Troop Command in Peoria. She was promoted to sergeant first class in June 2019 joining the Illinois National Guard's Human Resources Office where she oversaw all retirement services for AGR Soldiers.

She came back to the Joint Force Medical Detachment in 2021 as the Senior Human Resources NCO. There she managed all Army Medical



Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Lisa Menichetti of Springfield accepts her Honorable Discharge after 23 years of military service from Col. Jayson Coble, the Illinois National Guard State Surgeon. Menichetti has served in many positions and roles throughout her career adapting to the needs of the organization.

Department (AMEDD) human resources actions and assisted with medical clinic operations and ancillary services. She also served as the unit's Equal Opportunity Leader and Certified Occupational Hearing Conservationist.

"She lead Soldiers by example," said Coble, who served as the commander of the Joint Force Medical Detachment. "She looked out for her Soldiers and that includes me."

Menichetti has numerous awards and decorations including two Army Commendation Medals, the Army Achievement Medal, and six Army Good Conduct Medals. She has completed numerous military and civilian courses including the AMEDD Senior Leader Course, the Hearing Technician Certification Course, the Retirement Services Training Course, the Unit Readiness Course, the AMEDD Advanced Leadership Course, the Medical Logistics Specialist Course, the Unit Training NCO Course, the Emergency Medical Technician Course, the Unit Supply Specialist Course, the Warrior

Leader Course, the Human Resources Specialist Course and, her first, the Automated Logistical Specialist Course.

She is now pursuing a bachelor of arts degree at Western Illinois University.

"Sergeant First Class Menichetti is intelligent," Coble said. "But, most importantly, she has strong character and is a good person."

"I hope you continue to enjoy the journey through life – and have fun," Coble added.

Menichetti thanked the "love of her life" Mike and daughters, Keira and Blu. Keira, she said, has been with her through "it all." She also thanked her parents, Ron and Sondra Menichetti and Ken and Carlene Bates, brother Brian Menichetti and step-sister Lori Iocca, aunt Margret Giesing and several other family members and friends.

While she served in many capacities and jobs throughout her career, she was glad she could "return home" to the Joint Force Medical Detachment to retire.



Lt. Col. Aaron Boyles retired from the Illinois Air National Guard after 23 years of dedicated military service. As the deputy commander of the 182nd Maintenance Group, his leadership, commitment, and contributions to the Illinois Air National Guard leave a lasting legacy.



The retirement ceremony of Chief Master Sgt. Brian Griswold at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois., May 3, 2025. Griswold served in a multitude of different areas within the 182nd over the course of his 39 year career. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Jay Grabiec)



An Evening of Excellence in Decatur

On April 29 the U.S. Air Force Band's "Airmen of Note" performed at the Kirkland Center in Decatur, delivering a world-class concert that celebrated service, patriotism, and community. Maj. Gen. Daniel McDonough, Assistant Adjutant General - Air and Commander of the Illinois Air National Guard, welcomed the audience and shared opportunities available through service in the Air National Guard. "As the commander of your hometown Air Force, I hope to inspire more young people to join our ranks," McDonough said. "The benefits of service are not only financial—they include teamwork, purpose, and the honor of defending our nation." Thank you to the Airmen of Note for an inspiring performance and for representing the excellence of the United States Air Force.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Micah Newmann, 126th Air Refueling Wing chief of plans and programs, and Staff Sgt. Kimberly Bruning, 108th Air Refueling Squadron plans and scheduling specialist, run to a KC-135 stratotanker during a nuclear response drill on Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 7. The nuclear response drill was the culminating event of the overall nuclear readiness certification course conducted by the 126th Air Refueling Wing.

126th ARW uses total force integration to dominate nuclear response drill certification course

Story and Photos by Senior Airman DeQuan Simmons, 126th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

The 126th Air Refueling Wing led a series of nuclear response drills for a nuclear mission certification course, April 7.

The two-week certification course aimed to ensure aircrews were certified to conduct refueling missions supporting America's nuclear triad.

Maj. Micah Newmann, 126th ARW chief of plans and programs, headed the effort and oversaw the entire certification course for the involved aircrew.

"The training our personnel are going through right now is eye-opening," said Newmann. "It's a firehose of information for these crews that have not been previously exposed to nuclear operations, and it's a lot to take in."

Over 60 total-force personnel from the 126th ARW, 906th Air Refueling Squadron and 108th Air Refueling Squadron participated in the training. Other training phases

included a simulator flight, classroom presentations, and a briefing to the 126th ARW commander.

Building on the earlier phases of instruction and preparation, the training concluded with a high-intensity nuclear response drill that tested the crews' readiness under pressure. The culminating event, the nuclear response drill, saw crews rehearse a nuclear alert call four times. Each time, aircrews sprinted from their vehicles, ascended the ladders into their KC-135s, and immediately started their engines. The pilots then conducted a minimum interval takeoff, with all three KC-135s taking off in twelve to fifteen-second intervals.

This final exercise didn't just test their speed and skill — it pushed the crew to step outside their usual roles and rise to the challenge.

"We're taking personnel beyond their normal responsibilities as a pilot

or a boom operator and making them rise to this occasion to facilitate this mission," said Newmann. "It's a big ask, a big task, and not everyone can do it, but we trust our air crew to get the job done."

Such responsibility underscores the significance of the KC-135's mission and its impact on national defense operations.

The KC-135 plays a vital role by supplying air refueling to key U.S. assets. Without them, airborne command, control operations, and nuclear bombers wouldn't be able to carry out their missions. Tankers are essential, especially since the Secretary of Defense and the President have identified the nuclear mission as the top priority.

"The importance of this mission is nuclear deterrence," said Capt. Craig Schwander, 108th Air Refueling Squadron KC-135 pilot. "If tensions rise to the point where we have to go,

then this is our mission to make sure that we can restore our way of life. This is the last straw of that mission.”

Executing this high-stakes mission requires seamless integration between guard and active duty forces.

“We’re a total force integration unit,” said Airman 1st Class Kylie Navin, 906th ARS boom operator, explaining the force structure of the 906th ARS. “Half of us are guard, and half of us are active duty.”

This training highlights the importance of partnership between the 126th ARW and 375th Air Mobility Wing, which the 906th ARS falls under. The guard wing leads the mission, with active duty members supporting as needed. Together, both teams ensure aircrews are always fully prepared and mission-ready.

That level of coordination and commitment was reflected in the intensity of the training itself. When asked to summarize the training in a single word, Newmann responded, “Intense.”

“Failure is not an option in this mission,” said Newmann. “It is a no-fail mission for a reason, and we trust personnel to rise to that occasion.”



A 126th Air Refueling Wing Airman ascends a ladder during a nuclear response drill on Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, April 7. The drill helped simulate how tanker crews would enable strategic aircraft to complete their missions in a real nuclear conflict.



Jacobs Becomes New Commander of 126th Security Forces Squadron

Capt. Jacob Curtis assumed command of the Illinois Air National Guard’s 126th Security Forces Squadron, based at Scott AFB, May 4.

Curtis enlisted in the Illinois Air National Guard in September, 2001 and was commissioned in November, 2019.

Curtis is a traditional member of the Illinois National Guard and is the Deputy Division Chief, Directorate of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance and Cyber Effects Operations, Air Mobility Command.

He is an Adjunct Professor of Cyber Security at Webster University and is also Vice Chairman of the Board of Scott Credit Union.

At left, Capt. Jacob Curtis, right, salutes Col. Michael Mihalik, Commander, 126th Air Refueling Wing Mission Support Group, after assuming command of the 126th Security Forces Squadron.

Raging Piasa 2025 assesses 126th Air Refueling Wing's Ability to Survive, Operate Proficiently

On May 3-4, Airmen from the 126th Air Refueling Wing, Scott Air Force Base, were pushed to the limit with hands-on Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive readiness, Tactical Combat Casualty Care, and Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear operations.

From suiting up to preserving lives and assets under real-world scenarios, to Task Qualification Training, the success in this exercise proves that the Wing's strength, lies in it's preparedness.



Members of the 126th Comptroller Flight participate in TQT in MOPP 4 at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, May 3, 2025. This weekend, guardsmen participated in hands-on Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive readiness, Tactical Combat Casualty Care, and Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear operations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Ari Freeman)



Members of the 126th Air Refueling Wing cover a forklift at Scott Air Force Base, May 3. Guardsmen participated in hands-on Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive readiness, Tactical Combat Casualty Care, and Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear operations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Vincent Lang)



Members of the 182nd Airlift Wing, Peoria, participate in the annual Sexual Assault Prevention Response awareness one-mile walk/run at the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, May 2. The run was held in conjunction with Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month and sponsored by the 182nd Sexual Assault Response Coordinator. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. Wynndermere Shaw)

Illinois' New Military Reciprocity Policy Creates Pathway for Law Enforcement Certification

Story and Photos by 2nd Lt. Trenton Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

The Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (Police Training Board) announced a major step forward for Illinois National Guard service members transitioning to civilian law enforcement May 7, 2025 in Springfield.

The new military reciprocity policy recognizes prior military training for certification purposes, creating a more efficient pathway into Illinois law enforcement careers.

"Our Illinois Army National Guard Military Police and Air National Guard Security Forces personnel spend a lot of time training and learning law enforcement techniques in our ranks. This program expands the number of military occupational specialties that can translate into civilian careers," said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard.

"Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are great employees who perform well under pressure, possess great integrity, and are professional in everything they do."

This policy change reflects months of collaboration and underscores the state's commitment to supporting veterans and active-duty service members beyond their military service.



Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, speaks during a press event announcing law enforcement certification reciprocity for military personnel, at the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board in Springfield, Illinois, May 7.



Guests listen during the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board event in Springfield, May 7.



Keith A. Calloway, executive director of the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board, delivers opening remarks during a military reciprocity press event in Springfield, May 7. The new policy allows qualifying military specialties to be recognized for civilian law enforcement certification.

State Leaders Learn about Peoria Air Mission



Local leaders, including mayors and state representatives, fly on an orientation flight with the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, during a visit to learn more about the role of the Air Guard in Peoria, April 4.

Pekin Community Leadership School learns about Air National Guard in Peoria



Members of the R. David Tebben Community Leadership Academy learn about the 182nd Airlift Wing's mission and operations during a civic leader tour in Peoria, Illinois, March 20, 2025. The participants visited the installation to learn more about Air National Guard's role in Central Illinois. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer)





Local leaders, including mayors and state representatives, fly on an orientation flight with the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, during a visit to learn more about the role of the Air Guard in Peoria, Illinois, April 4, 2025. The leaders' civic tour included a command briefing from wing commander Col. Rusty Ballard, an orientation flight aboard a C-130H Hercules assigned to the 182nd Airlift Wing and static displays with Airmen from units and career fields across base. (U.S. Air National Guard photos by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)

Peoria Leadership School learns about Illinois Air National Guard



The 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, facilitates a civic engagement tour for the Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce Community Leadership School in Peoria, Illinois, April 2, 2025. The participants visited the installation to learn more about the Air National Guard's role in Central Illinois. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Katherine Jacobus)



Remembering Our Fallen

Sgt. Simone Robinson

MAR 1 2009: Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Simone A. Robinson, 21, of Dixmoor, died March 1 at Brooke Army Medical Center, San Antonio, Texas, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near her security post on Jan. 17 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She was assigned to the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, Crestwood.



Sgt. Robert Weinger

MAR 15 2009: Sgt. Robert M. Weinger, 24, of Round Lake Beach, Ill., died March 15 as a result of wounds sustained in Kot, Afghanistan, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Weinger was transported to Jalabad, Afghanistan, where he later died. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Woodstock.



Spc. Norman Cain III

MAR 15 2009: Spc. Norman L. Cain III, 22, of Mt. Morris, Illinois, died March 15 as a result of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle in Kot, Afghanistan. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock.



Sgt. Christopher Abeyta

MAR 15 2009: Sgt. Christopher P. Abeyta, 23, of Midlothian, died March 15 as a result of wounds sustained in Kot, Afghanistan, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. Abeyta was transported to Jalabad, Afghanistan, where he later died. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock.



Staff Sgt. Ivory Phipps

MAR 17 2004: Illinois Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps, 44, of Chicago, died March 17, in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained from a mortar attack. Sgt. Phipps was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Illinois Army National Guard, Paris.



Staff Sgt. Jacob Frazier

MAR 29 2003: Illinois Air National Guard Staff Sergeant Jacob L. Frazier, 24, of St. Charles, Illinois, assigned to the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron (182d Air-lift Wing) in Peoria, was killed March 29 by suspected former Taliban during an ambush on his reconnaissance convoy at Geresk, in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. He was part of a special operations team that was inspecting a school and hospital being built with American funding.



Sgt. Landis Garrison

APR 29 2004: Army National Guard Sgt. Landis W. Garrison, 23, of Rapids City, Illinois, died April 29 of non-combat related injuries as a result of an accidental shooting in Abu Gharb, Iraq. Sgt. Garrison was assigned to the 333rd Military Police Company, Illinois National Guard, Freeport.



Sgt. Lukasz Saczek

MAY 10 2009: Sgt. Lukasz D. Saczek, 23, of Lake in the Hills, Ill., died May 10 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained from a non-combat related incident. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock.



Sgt. 1st Class William Chaney

MAY 18 2004: Sgt. 1st Class William D. Chaney, 59 of Schaumburg, Ill. died May 18, in Landstuhl, Germany due to a non-combat related injury. Initial reports indicate that Chaney was medically evacuated from Iraq to Germany for surgery due to appendicitis. He died from complications after surgery. Chaney was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, Chicago.



Spc. Jeremy Ridlen

MAY 23 2004: Spc. Jeremy L. Ridlen, 23, of Maroa, Illinois, died May 23 in East Fallujah, Iraq, of wounds sustained from small arms fire after a dump truck on the side of the road was detonated as his military convoy passed by and Ridlen and his fellow Soldiers engaged the enemy. Ridlen was assigned to the 1544 Transportation Company, Paris.



THIS DAY IN ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD HISTORY



Famous Guardsman: John A. Logan



1871: Major General John A. Logan began his first term as an Illinois Senator on March 4, 1871. Born in 1826 in Murphysboro, Illinois, Logan enjoyed a quick ascension in local and state politics prior to enlisting in the Army in 1847. Logan served in the Mexican War as a Second Lieutenant with the 1st Illinois Volunteer Infantry.

As an Illinois Congressman at the very start of the Civil War, the politician turned Soldier immediately fled the capital, commandeered a rifle, and fought in his suit at the First Battle of Bull Run in 1861. Immediately thereafter, he served as a Colonel with the 31st Illinois Infantry. By the end of the war, the Illinoisian had risen to the rank of Major General, and had seen action at Belmont, Vicksburg, and Atlanta. Logan survived grievous wounds at Fort Donelson, and briefly commanded the Army of the Tennessee in 1864. After the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Logan commanded the Grand Review of the Army in Washington. Logan also established Memorial Day in 1866. General order No. 11, designated May 30, "for the purpose of strewing flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion." The Illinois State Military Museum has several items from the Logan family in its collections.

Guardsmen Respond to Prison Riot at Stateville

1931: At 2 p.m., a riot started at the Penitentiary located at Stateville. The warden realized it was beyond the control of the Guards. At 2:22 he called the Military Department for assistance in quelling the disturbance. Four companies of the 129th responded with 13 officers and 205 Soldiers. The state active duty lasted until March 23.



Illinois regiments brought about a tactical Union victory in the Battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana

1864: Having lost the previous day at the Battle of Mansfield, Union forces under Major General Nathaniel P. Banks were viciously attacked by Confederates under Major General Richard Taylor at Pleasant Hill. The furious enemy onslaught through the wooded terrain put a gaping hole in the Union line, forcing the 58th and 119th Illinois Regiments to fall back. The rout of these units would have eventually split the army in half had it not been for the resilience of the 117th Illinois, which counterattacked and sealed the gap. With blood curdling yells the Illinois infantrymen surged forward with fixed bayonets and repulsed the enemy. One of the men leading the attack was Sergeant John Cook of the 119th. Having seen the line falter, he had left his quartermaster post and joined in the rout of the Confederates. He fought fiercely and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.



Soldiers respond to spring floods in Cairo Illinois

1927: On April 16, 1927, the Sheriff of Alexander County and the Mayor of the City of Cairo requested the assistance of the Illinois National Guard. Due to continued excessive amounts of spring rain, Soldiers reinforced the levees, protected life and property, and enforced law and order. Company K, 130th Infantry served the citizens of Cairo from April 16 through April 20.

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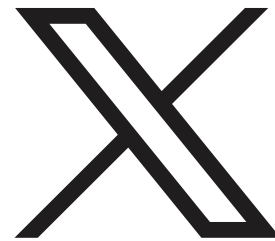
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