

# Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

## Nebraska Guard takes on Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria Hurricane Alley Huskers

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

After a long, hot summer of annual training exercises, overseas deployments and welcome home ceremonies, Mother Nature suddenly had the Nebraska National Guard's eyes focusing south as members of the organization mobilized and deployed for not just one, but three separate hurricane relief and recovery operations in the course of less than two months.

The missions included helicopter rescues and medical treatment support in Houston, Texas for Hurricane Harvey; aviation support in northern and central Florida for Hurricane Irma; and in October command and control activities in the U.S. Virgin Islands, which were battered by Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria.

"Your Nebraska National Guard has been pretty busy in the homeland," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general during his October "TAG Talks" video segment.

The stats recorded over the period definitely bear that out.

Beginning on Aug. 26 with the Hurricane Harvey response, nearly 300 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen would find themselves serving along the American Gulf Coast or in the Caribbean Sea area where they helped rescue people from flooded homes, delivered precious cargo and personnel, treated sick and injured people, conducted damage assessment missions, and provided command and control activities in a



Photo by Sgt. Anna Pongo

**Rescued From The Floods:** 1st Sgt. Ron Schroeder, a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Lincoln-based Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, helps rescue a woman and her dogs in Orange, Texas, Aug. 31, after flooding in the area caused by Hurricane Harvey.

theater of operations that stretched from east central Texas through northern Florida to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

And along the way, the Nebraskans added a number of new

laurels to an organization that is no stranger to hurricane relief operations, stretching back to Hurricanes Katrina, Gustav and Ike in the mid-2000s.

"While we never wish for anyone

to be faced with a disaster, we are always ready to assist, whether here in Nebraska or elsewhere in the U.S.," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska National Guard adjutant general in announcing the Aug. 22

activation of UH-60 Blackhawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopter crews from Lincoln and Grand Island for duty in Texas as Hurricane Harvey deluged the Houston area with record-setting rains and swamped significant portions of America's fourth-largest city and a region that is home to millions.

"It's what we train for. It's who we are: America's military first responders whenever or wherever we are needed," Bohac said in the announcement.

Over the course of the next two months, Soldiers and Airmen from the Nebraska National Guard responded to multiple calls for assistance. These included:

• Additional UH-60 and UH-72 Lakota helicopter crews from Lincoln and Grand Island who conducted aerial rescues in the Houston and Beaumont areas while also transporting personnel, cargo and equipment into the disaster zones caused by Hurricane Harvey.

During the course of their deployment, the aviation teams rescued nearly 300 people, including pregnant women, infants and the wheelchair bound. The Nebraska National Guard crews also rescued 44 animals. Crews also transported more than 142,000 pounds of cargo including hundreds of cases of water, 3,000 pounds of MREs and 500 pounds of blood.

• A 44-person medical team from Lincoln made up primarily of members of the 155th Medical Group and several Army National Guard medical professionals from the Nebraska National Guard's CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological

See HURRICANES on 13.

## New Nebraska Army Guard engineer unit activates in Columbus

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard officially unveiled its newest force structure, July 22, when the newly organized 128th Engineer Battalion was formally activated during a ceremony at its headquarters in Columbus, Nebraska.

The engineer battalion – which draws its lineage to a similar Nebraska Army National Guard engineer battalion that was part of the state's force structure in the late 1940s and 1950s – is part of the state-wide reorganization of roughly one-third of Nebraska Army National Guard units brought about by the transformation of the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade into the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

The battalion is now part of the new 67th MEB and includes around 300 Soldiers assigned to either the 623rd Engineer Company in Wahoo and York, the battalion's field service company located in Hastings, and the 181st and 317th Firefighting Teams in Norfolk.

"Soldiers of the 128th Engineer Battalion, remember this day," said Col. Craig Strong, 67th MEB commander, after formally unfurling the battalion's bright red flag during a ceremony in front of the assembled units and visiting military and civilian dignitaries. "You're at the dawn of a new history, a new chapter for the United States Army and the

See ENGINEERS on 4.

## Czechs travel in large numbers to join forces with Nebraskans during annual training season

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

Over the past 24 years that the Czech Republic has been matched with the Nebraska and Texas National Guard through the State Partnership Program, there have been numerous accomplishments as the relationship between the Czechs and their American teammates has matured and deepened.

However, there have been few summers like 2017.

**Annual Training 2017**

This past summer the Nebraska Army National Guard hosted a total of 55 Czech service members at three separate two-week annual training sites in the United States. This marked the single-largest engagement of Czech-Nebraska Soldiers since the start of the partnership in July 1994.

According to Lt. Col. Mary Mangels, Nebraska SPP coordinator, this year's annual training event is part of a continu-

See STATE PARTNERSHIP on 3.



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**International Teamwork:** A team of Soldiers from the 754th Chemical Company and the Czech Republic work together to maneuver through an obstacle course at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. Fifty-five Czech service members trained with the Nebraska National Guard over the summer, the largest such Czech group to travel to the United States since the start of the State Partnership Program.

Inside

**Nebraska Soldiers welcomed home from first deployment**  
See story and photos on 7.



**Alaska training prepares Airmen for real world challenges**  
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# NEWS DIGEST

## ■ Engineer chief: Puerto Rican power restoration may take year

WASHINGTON (DoD News) — The Army Corps of Engineers is installing up to 500 temporary generators until Puerto Rico's old and deteriorating power grid can be made operational again, but long-term total power restoration could take nearly a year, the Corps' chief of engineers told reporters at the Pentagon, Oct. 20.

The Corps is starting with public facilities and it faces power restoration to 3.4 million houses on the U.S. territory, some of which are in remote areas, Army Lt. Gen. Todd T. Semonite said. Semonite said the island governor's immediate goals are to restore power to 30 percent of Puerto Rico by the end of October and to 50 percent by the end of November, which the general said he considers a challenge.

The Corps is responding to the effects of four major hurricanes that struck the U.S.

mainland, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands within a six-week span. Puerto Rico remains a challenge in part because it is an island, making it difficult to receive supplies, such as the 62,000 utility poles needed for power restoration.

"Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands is a completely different paradigm," he said. "People have asked me in the last several weeks ... 'Why don't you do in Puerto Rico what you could have done in Florida?' Because it is an island and it is very, very hard to just drive hundreds of pole trucks ... down into the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico."

The Corps also needs about 338 utility towers, Semonite said, noting that each one is 75 feet long and must be flown in. "And then we need an awful lot of connectors and cable, as well. But the whole goal is to get the transmission up and running," he added.

## ■ Defense Department official announces two new policies; will affect how foreign nationals can enter into U.S. military service

WASHINGTON (DoD News) — The Defense Department is releasing two policies that will affect foreign nationals entering the military or who are already in the military, Stephanie Miller, DoD's director of accessions, said Oct. 13.

The changes will affect personnel accessed under the MAVNI Pilot Program — the acronym stands for Military Accessions Vital to National Interest — and Lawful Permanent Residents (also known as green card holders). A green card is a permanent residency document for the United States.

The changes recognize that "while the department recognizes the value of expedited U.S. citizenship achieved through military service, it is in the national interest to ensure all current and prospective service members complete security and suitability screening prior to naturalization," Miller said.

One policy change is to the initial secu-

rity and suitability screening for green card holders.

"Effective immediately, all green card holders must complete a background investigation and receive a favorable military security suitability determination prior to entering any component of the armed forces," Miller said in an interview.

Previously, green card holders could ship to basic military training as long as background investigations were initiated. Green card holders go through the same check as American citizens.

The change will mean that green card holders entering the military may be in the delayed entry or training program longer than in the past, due to a backlog for security clearances at the Office of Personnel Management.

The clearance procedure could take up to a year.

## ■ Mattis discusses Niger, asks media to stop second-guessing

WASHINGTON (DoD News) — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said the Defense Department will make a report on the recent deaths of U.S. Soldiers in Niger when it is appropriate and asked the media to not second-guess the leaders of the operation on the ground.

Mattis, speaking just before a meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, expressed his condolences to the families of the four soldiers.

"I just say we honor the troops, every one of them," he said Oct. 19. "Every life is critical. These young people look past the hot political rhetoric and sign up, volunteer for the armed forces. They're part of the 1 percent that are willing to do so in our country, these young men and women."

The secretary said the United States has been working to improve the combat capabilities and capacities of nations in West Africa to defeat the terrorist threats represented by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and other terror groups who "foment instability and

murder and mayhem."

The United States has about 1,000 troops in the region who work with about 4,000 French service members.

"We're providing refueling support, intelligence support, surveillance support," he said. "But also we have troops on the ground. Their job is to help the people in the region learn how to defend themselves. We call it foreign internal defense training, and we actually do these kinds of missions by, with and through our allies."

Mattis said the Soldiers' deaths are under investigation. "We in the Department of Defense like to know what we're talking about before we talk, and so we do not have all the accurate information yet," he said. "We will release it as rapidly as we get it because we are very proud of our troops."

The department investigates whenever there is a death or serious accident.

"At the same time, war is war, and these terrorists are conducting war on innocent

## Taking in a rare event



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Rooftop Views:** Staff Sgt. Alisha Welch (right) and other Soldiers sit on the roof of the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters building in Lincoln, Aug. 21, to watch the total solar eclipse. Lincoln experienced two minutes and 38 seconds of complete totality during the celestial event.

## Nebraska Guard mostly pauses to experience eclipse



**Solar Smile:** Capt. Aloma Moncrief views the 2017 total solar eclipse that took place Aug. 21 over Lincoln from outside Nebraska's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1.



**Eclipse Monitoring:** While some Nebraska National Guard members observed the Great American Solar Eclipse of 2017 outside, others watched from inside the state's Joint Operations Center, which was on standby in-case an emergency would arise.

## Nebraska Soldiers help Seward overcome water problems during solar eclipse event

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

Recently, while much of the nation and state paused and gathered to watch the total solar eclipse, the citizens of Seward, Nebraska, were left without clean drinking water after a major late summer thunderstorm caused damage to their city's water system.

The city issued a water emergency update on Aug. 20 at 9 p.m. Greg Butcher, Seward city administrator, said city leaders notified the affected public through the CodeRed Emergency system, which sends out a recorded message or a text message to the 2,000 users signed up. They also used National Weather Service, TV, radio, newsprint, and their social media.

"Our community was proud of all the employees," said Butcher. "Especially the Water Department (employees) who worked extremely long hours to get the problems solved. We also want to thank (the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency) and the Nebraska National



Photo by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

**Eclipse Support:** Spc. Alex Peterson and Sgt. Caleb Dewey watch the solar eclipse, Aug. 21, after delivering drinking water to Seward following a water shortage emergency.

Guard for their help and assistance in our time of need."

Following the storm and subsequent flooding, Seward was without drinking water for three days. Complicating the problem was the fact that the city expected hundreds of additional people to be in Seward to view the solar eclipse.

Companies had extra shipments of water brought into Pac-N-Save

and Wal-Mart for purchase.

Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers also stepped up to the plate to help. Sgt. Caleb Dewey, 402nd Military Police Battalion, and Spc. Alex Peterson, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, delivered a 400 gallon water buffalo from Lincoln to the Nebraska National Guard Museum in Seward where a water point was set up. Both Soldiers are mechanics at Field Maintenance Shop #1, but were brought on

State Active Duty to help the town of Seward.

Sharon Mayland, a nine-year resident of Seward, was the first customer to get water from the buffalo. She said she only had about a half of a bottle of water left in her house before getting water from the water point.

"It's what we do," said Peterson. "That is what the Guard is here for."

people of all religions," the secretary said. "They're conducting war on innocent people who have no way to defend themselves. And I would just tell you that in this specific case, contact was considered unlikely."

The possibility of contact with the enemy is a consideration when training allied troops, the secretary said. "It is often dangerous; we recognize that," he said. "We have been unapologetic about standing by our allies and certainly, the French, with 4,000 troops (in the region), have been engaged down there for years and have lost many, many more troops."

Mattis only recommends placing troops in

such situations if it is in the best interests of the American people.

"One point I would make having seen some of the news reports — the U.S. military does not leave its troops behind, and I would just ask that you not question the actions of the troops who were caught in the firefight and (not) question whether or not they did everything they could in order to bring everyone out at once," the secretary said.

"And I would also ask — don't confuse your need for accurate information with our ability to provide it immediately in a situation like this."

## Prairie Soldier

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Letters, articles, notices of events, photographs and art are welcome, but may be edited for clarity or brevity. Publication of any submission is at the discretion of the editor. Submissions can also be emailed to kevin.j.hynes.mil@mail.mil. All photos must be high resolution and include complete caption information.

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Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**On The Way:** A member of the Czech Armed Forces' 7th Mechanized Brigade takes to the air while participating in a helocast waterdrop into Milford Lake near Fort Riley, Kan., June 9, with members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry. The exercise, which involved dropping from a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter and then swimming to a rubber raft, involved a total of 26 Soldiers from the Czech Republic who were training with the Nebraska cavalry Soldiers at Fort Riley.

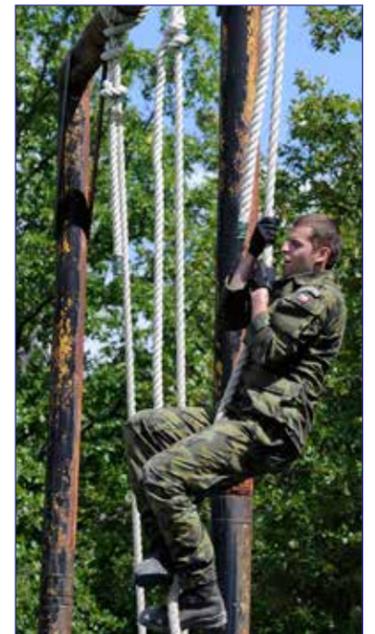


Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Czech Climbs:** A Czech Republic Soldier attempts to climb a rope while completing an obstacle course at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., during annual training with the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

## STATE PARTNERSHIP continued from page 1.

ing growth of annual engagements between the Czechs and Guardsmen from Nebraska and Texas. Still, this year's number was pretty astounding.

"To have as large a group as this train with us at three separate annual training sites...this is the first time that it has happened," said Mangels.

During the month of June – which served as the primary annual training period for the Nebraska Army National Guard– the Czech Republic sent 19 members of the 601st Czech Special Force Group to Camp Bullis, Texas, where they trained with members of Nebraska's Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company (Special Forces) (Airborne); 15 members of the Czech's 31st Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Regiment to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to train with Nebraskans from the 126th Chemical Battalion and the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade; and 26 Soldiers from the 7th Mechanized Brigade to Fort Riley, Kansas, where they trained with members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry.

To put this into perspective, Mangels said that when she first became Nebraska SPP coordinator in 2013, there were typically four to five formal exchanges per year. Now, she said, the partners are conducting roughly 20-30 events annually.

According to Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, this shows how important the SPP relationship has become for each of the partner organizations. "The strategic value of having greater participation by members of the Czech Armed Forces and members of the Nebraska National Guard in mutually beneficial training cannot be over-stated," Bohac said.

"The better we know each other today means the better we will integrate tomorrow when asked to serve together in contested environments. It means that as allies who have trained together we will be better prepared to defend our mutual interests whenever they are threatened by those who want to eliminate our democratic way of life and governance," Bohac added. "Against those threats we must



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Helping Hand:** Spc. Travis Williams, a chemical specialist with the 754th Chemical Company, lends a hand to help up a Czech Republic teammate while finishing an obstacle course at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., during annual training this summer.

be vigilant and we are stronger together in our vigilance against those threats."

The exchanges have definitely become reciprocal in their importance.

"(It's been) outstanding," said Lt. Col. Tom Golden, commander of Nebraska's 1-134th Cavalry during this year's annual training. According to Golden, his unit made a conscientious effort to integrate teams of Czechs throughout 1-134th Cavalry and include them in their crew-served weapons qualification training, conducting maintenance on vehicles, manning the squadron's gun trucks and participating in dismounted reconnaissance missions.

Many of the Czechs even had the opportunity to participate in a

unique helocast training exercise that saw them jumping from the rear of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter into Fort Riley's Milford Lake, where they then swam to awaiting Zodiac rafts for a ride back to shore.

According to Maj. Jan Kominek, his Czech Soldiers enjoyed training with the Nebraska Cavalrymen during their time at Fort Riley, Kansas.

"All of us have a great times here," he wrote in an email to Mangels. "U.S. and Czech soldiers really enjoy to work together. It makes the exercise attractive."

Kominek added that it didn't take long for some friendly competition to develop during the training, either. "(Lieutenant Colonel Golden) motivated A and B boys to

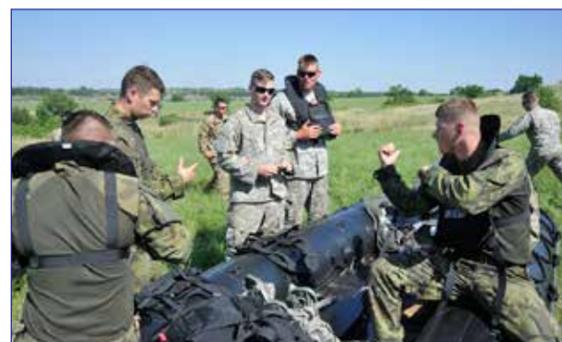


Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**Getting Things Straight:** Czech Republic and Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers discuss their raft procedures before a helocast drop into a lake near Fort Riley, Kan., June 9.



Photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Robert Bogle

**Hanging On:** A Czech Republic firefighter trains with members of the Nebraska Air National Guard Fire Department at Fort Smith, Ark., Aug. 17. The training was designed to help enhance urban search and rescue operations.

beat Czechs in shooting, because one of our crews is winning all tables," he wrote in his email.

Golden said the Czech seemed to enjoy the opportunity to train with the Nebraska cavalry and infantry Soldiers, adding that he was told the Czech didn't feel like visitors to Fort Riley, but were rather part of the Army Guard squadron. "They have become part of the squadron," Golden said. "They are doing P.T. with us. They're eating with us. It's great."

Mangels said that sentiment was common among the Nebraska Soldiers who interacted with the Czechs during this year's annual

training season. This was especially true during the 126th Chemical Battalion's annual training where the Czechs actually gave classes to the Nebraskans and talked about NATO and their individual experiences.

"I think initially the American Soldiers thought they would be doing a lot of training for the Czech, but what happened was it was more reciprocal than they had imagined."

Mangels added that she envisions the program continuing to deepen and grow in the years ahead.

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

**Honored:** Bill and Evonne Williams (center) receive the National Guard Association of the United States' 2017 Patrick Henry Award during NGAUS' national conference in September.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Doug Carlson

## Nebraska couple honored for 'amazing' dedication to military

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom  
Staff Photojournalist

Nebraskans Bill and Evonne Williams have been named recipients of the National Guard Association of the United States' 2017 Patrick Henry Award for their extended selfless dedication to honoring and remembering Americans who have served their nation in the armed forces.

The couple were nominated for the award by the National Guard Association of Nebraska and Nebraska's adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac.

The national-level honor, first awarded in 1989, is designed to provide recognition to local civilian officials and civic leaders, who have distinguished themselves with outstanding and exceptional service to the Armed Forces of the United States, the National Guard or NGAUS.

"If any two people are deserving of this award, it is Bill and Evonne Williams," said Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts.

"The Williams' are an amazing couple who have taken it upon themselves to give back to their fellow Nebraskans and Americans — particularly our state's and our nation's military service members. Their efforts have touched thousands of veterans and enabled us as Nebraskans and as Americans to honor them and their families,

and to thank them for their service and their sacrifices."

Since 2008, the Williams' raised more than \$3.3 million enabling more than 3,300 veterans — from conflicts spanning World War II, Korea and Vietnam — to take 11 different all-expenses-paid Honor Flight trips to Washington D.C.

The latest Honor Flight event, accomplished in May, allowed 650 Vietnam veterans to visit numerous national memorials, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and provide closure as more than 7,000 well-wishers welcomed the returning veterans home.

In 2010, the Williams were inspired, with the assistance of like-minded sponsors, to create the mobile "Remembering Our Fallen" memorial with the aim to honor the men and women of Nebraska who have paid the ultimate sacrifice since Sept. 11, 2001.

What began as a Nebraska-only memorial, has now grown to include 19 completed traveling state memorials representing about 60-percent of the fallen.

In September, a national "Remembering Our Fallen" memorial, displaying the name of every fallen service member since 9/11, was unveiled in Washington D.C. before starting a nationwide tour.

The official presentation of the award took place Sept. 10 during the national NGAUS conference in Louisville, Kentucky.



Photo by Capt. Doug Carlson

**Tops In The Nation:** Col. Bob Stevenson (left, center) holds the Curtis N. Rusty Metcalf Trophy for the Air National Guard airlift or air refueling unit that demonstrates the highest standards of mission accomplishment. Also pictured are (from left), Lt. Gen. Scott Rice, director of the Air National Guard, Stevenson, Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, and Maj. Gen. Donald P. Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general.

## Nebraska's 155th Air Refueling Wing named tops in Air National Guard

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom  
Staff Photojournalist

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing has been awarded the National Guard Bureau Curtis N. "Rusty" Metcalf Trophy for 2017.

The annual honor goes to the airlift or air refueling flying squadron that demonstrates the highest standards of mission accomplishment in the Air National Guard. The award is named for a former deputy chief of plans and operations at the NGB.

"Congratulations to the men and women of the 155th Air Refueling Wing, and the families and civilian employers who support them," said Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts.

"An award of this magnitude doesn't simply happen, it takes a to-

tal team dedicated to providing outstanding service," Ricketts added. "This award simply confirms what we as Nebraskans already know, that our Nebraska Air National Guard is a world-class military flying organization, ready and capable of doing its mission whenever and wherever it is needed, and doing it in an extraordinary manner."

"Once again, the Nebraska National Guard team has proven to be engaged, ready and able," said Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, Nebraska National Guard adjutant general. "Everyone in the wing can take pride in winning the Metcalf Trophy. Every flight, squadron and group contributed in some way to the accomplishments that earned this prestigious award."

Nominated units are evaluated in the areas of exercises and deployments, human resources, accident rate history, accident prevention and significant accomplishments

during the award period.

During award period, the 155th ARW deployed more than 500 unit personnel world-wide while executing more than 6,000 mishap-free flying hours and offloading 1.5 million gallons of fuel while supporting these missions.

"The 155th has had year full of exercises, airshows and multiple deployments," said Col. Bob Stevenson, who served as the 155th ARW commander during the period covered by the award.

"In every instance and with every tasking, our Airmen have performed with professionalism, dedication, perseverance and a great attitude, which has reflected well on the Nebraska National Guard and the state." The award was presented to the unit during the National Guard Association of the United States national conference in Louisville, Kentucky, on Sept. 10.



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**New Colors, Outgoing Commander:** Col. Craig Strong, 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade commander, accepts the 128th Engineer Battalion's newly activated colors from Lt. Col. Todd Stevens, July 14, as Stevens steps down as commander of the newly activated Nebraska Army National Guard engineer battalion.

## ENGINEERS continued from page 1.

Nebraska National Guard."

Strong encouraged the Soldiers to take pride in their new organization and the Army Corps of Engineers heritage they now join.

"You are Army engineers," Strong said. "You may count yourself a part of a proud history; a force that dates back to our nation's founding. It's a force that not only fights to defend the nation, but a force that is credited for actually building this nation."

"Soldiers, hold your heads up high, always knowing that you are a force with a proud distinction," he added. "You are first in and last

out. You embody service before self."

According to Col. Todd Stevens, who served as commander of the battalion during its initial stand-up stages and was promoted to colonel during a ceremony following the activation and change of command activities, the organization accomplished much over the past 18 months. Among those achievements was raising the organization's military occupational specialty training rate from 49 to nearly 80 percent, successfully bringing in new equipment and conducting the organization's first exercises as an engineer battalion.

Stevens said he knew he had a big job in front of him when he accepted command of the new battalion.

"To stand up a brand new battalion from nothing, you don't have the opportunity to blame the previous commander," Stevens said, laughing. "So, you kind of shoulder the entire burden... you step into it, you develop a plan and you keep moving forward."

Part of that plan included making sure that the Soldiers already assigned to the battalion received the necessary training in their new engineer specialties and appropriate levels of noncommissioned officer leadership education.



**Standing Tall:** Soldiers of the newly-activated 128th Engineer Battalion stand at attention during the July 14 activation and change of command ceremonies at the Columbus Armed Forces Readiness Center.

Stevens said he believes the new organization, now under the command of Lt. Col. Peter Gierasch, is poised to become a major resource for Nebraska.

"I think that over time the state of Nebraska is going to realize how much of an asset having an engineering battalion will be for them," he said.

# Hargens takes command at 155th Air Refueling Wing

By Staff Sgt. Jason Wilson  
Staff Photojournalist

Col. Robert E. Hargens became the new commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing during the change of command ceremonies held Aug. 5 at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Brig. Gen. Keith A. Schell, assistant adjutant general, Air, presided over the ceremony that saw Col. James R. Stevenson Jr. relinquish command after serving as the commander of the 155th ARW since August 2014.

"During your time as the wing commander, you have successfully guided the wing through some of the highest operation tempo that this wing has ever seen," said Schell.

Schell said Stevenson, who will go on to serve as the Nebraska Air National Guard director of operations, set the bar high during his time as commander. Schell added that he knows Hargens will raise the bar even higher.

"I can't think of a greater privilege in my 30-plus years of service than the one I have been given today," said Hargens. "It is truly an honor to serve as your commander." Hargens most recently served as



Photos by Senior Airman Jamie Titus

**New Commander:** Col. Robert E. Hargens speaks to his unit after becoming the commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing during an Aug. 6 change of command ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln. He replaced outgoing commander, Col. Bob Stevenson.

the vice wing commander and previously served as commander of the 155th Maintenance Group. He has deployed in support of operations



**Welcoming The New Commander:** Members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing stand in formation in the unit's main hangar during the Aug. 6 change of command ceremony. Col. Bob Hargens succeeded Col. Bob Stevenson as commander of the largest Air National Guard unit in Nebraska.

Joint Forge, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, as well as a number of other contingency,

humanitarian, and domestic operations. He has also been commander of the Civil Engineering Squadron

and the Air Refueling Squadron. He is a command pilot with more than 4000 flying hours.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**Time To Reflect, Time To Laugh:** Retiring Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons laughs while listening to Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy talk about Lyons' service as the acting director of the Army National Guard during Lyons' Aug. 5 retirement ceremony at Camp Ashland, Neb.

## Former adjutant general retires after 37-year military career

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska National Guard's 32nd adjutant general who went on to serve tours as the deputy director and acting director of the Army National Guard returned back to Nebraska on Saturday, Aug. 5, to retire on the very same floor that he took his commission some 35 years earlier.

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, who served as Nebraska's adjutant general from August 2009 – July 2013, was honored during his retirement ceremony that took place at the Nebraska Army National Guard's Memorial Hall at Camp Ashland. It was the same building that Lyons received his commission after graduating from the Guard's Officer Candidate School in May 1983.

"I think it's fitting that you are going to have your retirement here where your commissioned service began," said Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, the current Nebraska adjutant general who succeeded Lyons in July 2013 after Lyons was selected to become the deputy director of the Army National Guard in Washington, D.C.

During the course of the retirement ceremony, Lyons was honored for the work he did as

the Nebraska adjutant general, the deputy director of the Army National Guard and then as the acting director of the Army National Guard from January 2014 to March 2015.

According to Bohac, Lyons played a pivotal role both in Nebraska and nationally. Lyons' predecessor as adjutant general agreed with that assessment.

"We sincerely appreciate all of the things that General Lyons has done over the past four years," said Lt. Gen. Tim Kadavy, the 31st Nebraska adjutant general and current director of the Army National Guard. "It was a very difficult time. We were just lucky that we had your broad shoulders on which to rely."

Following Lyons' assignment at the Army National Guard headquarters, he went on to serve as the military deputy to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from June 2015-2017 before serving as the special assistant to the Vice Chief of National Guard Bureau.

In recognition of the retiring general's service – which began on March 20, 1980, when he enlisted into the Army National Guard in Omaha as an infantryman – Lyons was presented with the U.S. Army's Distinguished Service Medal and the Department of Defense Super-

rior Service Medal.

Lyons said he is proud to continue to call himself a Nebraska National Guardsman.

"Many folks have lifted me up on their shoulders as I have tried to be the best leader and teammate that I can be here in Nebraska, at the National Guard Bureau and at the State Department," Lyons said as he thanked his family and friends for the advice and assistance they gave him over his military career.

He added he was especially thankful to be ending his career at Camp Ashland.

"In 1983 I got my commission in this very room. We stood in a circle and everyone got pinned," Lyons said. "My mom and dad were here with me. While they aren't here with me today, physically, they are here spiritually."

Lyons credited his success to the generations of military service members, Nebraska Military Department civilian employees and others he worked with.

"Any success that I have had is directly due to the folks that I have served with," he said.

Lyons will now serve as a member of the senior executive service with assignment as the director of Defense Personnel and Family Support Center, Department of Defense Human Resource Agency.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**New Assignment:** Lt. Col. Robert Ford accepts the 1-134th Cavalry colors from Col. Eric Teegerstrom during a July 15 change of command ceremony.

## Golden hands off reins to Army Guard's cavalry squadron

By Spc. Lisa Crawford  
Editor

Standing before a full formation that included many Stetson-wearing Soldiers, Lt. Col. Thomas Golden bid farewell to the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron during a July 15 change of command ceremony at the Mead Atlas Readiness Center.

A former English teacher, Golden quoted the poem "There was a Child went Forth," by one of his favorite poets, Walt Whitman, to commemorate the occasion. He noted how the subject of the poem becomes whatever is around that influences him most.

"We all have had things in our lives who have made us who we are; the people who have influenced us," Golden said after reading the quote. "I have learned heavily on you as I have executed my duties and I will carry you with me in my heart as I go forward to my next assignment. Thank you for your unfaltering influence, especially senior leaders and command groups."

Golden also praised the 1-134th Cavalry's noncommissioned officers for their understanding and "instinct beyond that of a parent," and the Soldiers for "listening to your NCOs and respecting each other." "Act hungry," Golden said. "Use

that hunger to become leaders. You are the future of our beloved Nebraska Army National Guard and will be called upon to lead. It will happen, so be ready."

Golden relinquished command after more than two years in the position to Lt. Col. Robert Ford, who returned to Nebraska after seven years in Washington D.C., where he served at National Guard Bureau, the U.S. State Department, Marine Corps Command and General Staff College.

"It's an absolute honor to stand here today," Ford said. "Thirty years ago, Private Ford stood in the back of a formation with the 1-134th mechanized infantry, which means I am taking command of the unit I enlisted into 30 years ago, and it is beyond my words to say how proud I am to do so."

Col. Eric Teegerstrom, 92nd Troop Command commander, presided over the ceremony and spoke highly of both outgoing and incoming commanders.

"I always joke there are three types of people in the Guard," Teegerstrom said. "Doers, talkers and hiders. Tom Golden is recognized as being a doer. Tom is a phenomenal commander. He is a man of eloquent words and a man of actions, and we appreciate him for what he does."

Teegerstrom continued, stating he knows Ford "will bring a spirit and enthusiasm to the Cav that will be quite infectious."

"He will do great things to carry this squadron forward into the future," he said.



Golden

**Welcome Back to Nebraska:** Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts greets Airmen from the 155th Air Refueling Wing returning home from an overseas deployment, Aug. 26, at the Nebraska National Guard air base, in Lincoln. While deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of operations, the Airmen were responsible for providing support to Operation Inherent Resolve.



## Welcome Home

### Nebraska Airmen return from overseas missions to thanks from governor, senior Guard leaders

By Staff Sgt. Jason Wilson  
Staff Photojournalist

A group of Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen from the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing were welcomed home to Nebraska after an overseas deployment on Saturday, Aug. 26, at the Nebraska Air National Guard's air base.

The 51 Airmen are members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's operations squadron, maintenance squadron, logistic readiness squadron and medical squadron. While deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of operations, the Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen were responsible for providing support to Operation Inherent Resolve.

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, Col. Bob Hargens, commander of

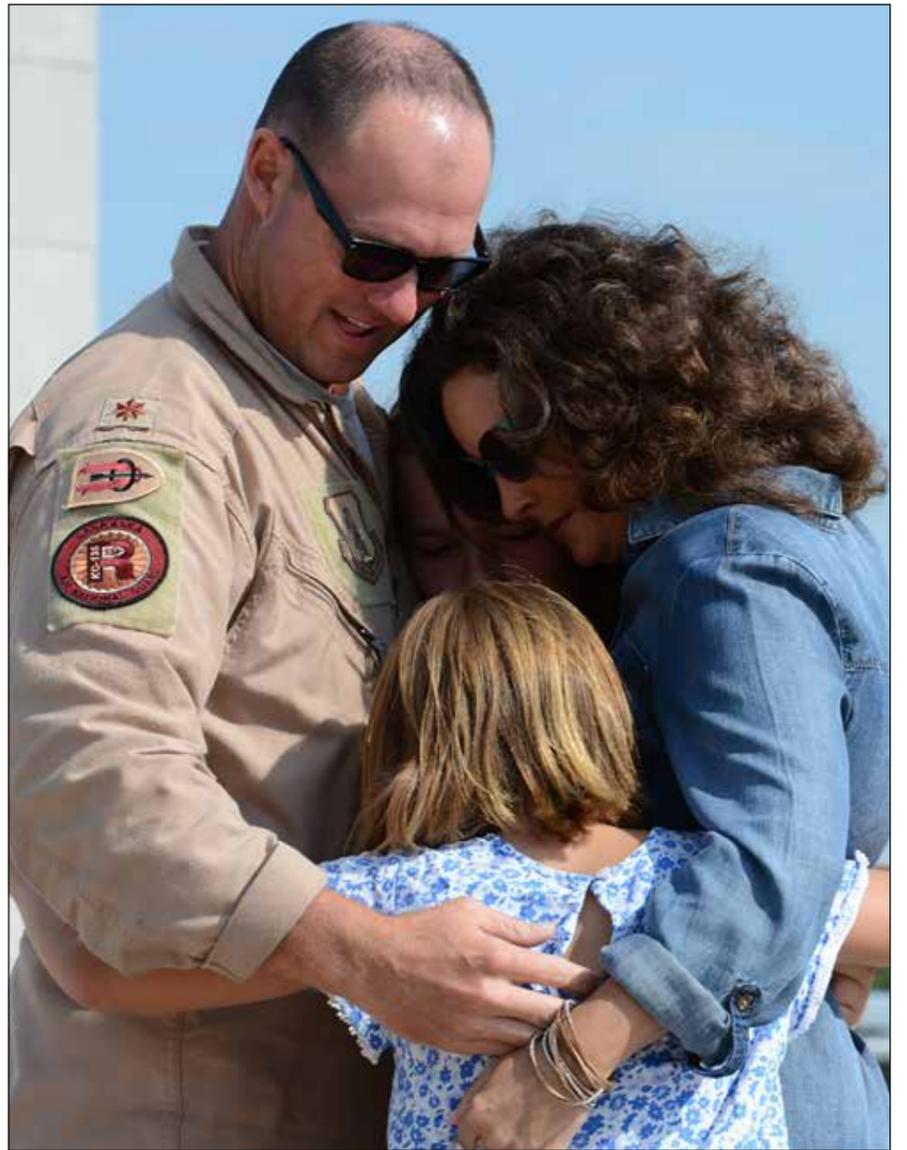
the 155th ARW, and family members were on hand to welcome Airmen home.

"We are so grateful for your service and so pleased to have you back here in the good life," Ricketts said. "You all have demonstrated courage. Not only during the 40 combat missions that you flew, but by volunteering to be a part of the Nebraska Air National Guard."

Probably even more amazing, the 155th Air Refueling Wing has had Airmen deployed every day except for three since 9/11, said Ricketts. "You are doing outstanding work."

"This wing has been busy," Bohac added. "Last year you flew close to 6,000 hours and set flying hour records for the past five years. You did that with 70 percent of you being traditional part-time members. You are a group of dedicated Airmen and I am humbled to serve with you."

"Thank you for all that you do," said Ricketts. "We appreciate your service to our state and to our country."



Photos by Staff Sgt. Jason Milson

**Warm Embraces:** Maj. Michael Piening, 155th Air Refueling Wing, hugs his family after returning home from a deployment, Aug. 26, at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln. Piening deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.

## Airline delay makes greeting sweeter for Guard contracting team

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

After nine months of separation, a last-minute delay seemed like an eternity for the families and friends of four Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers returning to Nebraska, June 24, after an overseas deployment to the Middle East.

What was supposed to be a 4 p.m. homecoming at the Guard's Joint Force Headquarters soon turned into an unexpected delay of more than an hour, forcing the families and friends who had traveled to Lincoln to welcome the four-person 1969th Contingency Contracting Team to pass the time in whatever way they could. Some gathered in small groups to reminisce about the milestones of the deployment. Others, mostly children and a few teenagers, chose to spend the time fidgeting or engaging in a spirited game of tag on the steps of the JFHQ or the grassy areas that bordered them.

Finally, as the families and friends gathered on the street, the van carrying the team from the Omaha airport suddenly appeared on the viaduct leading into the Nebraska National Guard air base, causing the crowd to burst into cheers, flag waving and more than a few tears.

The Soldiers, finally, were home. "I'm just so glad he's home," said Lindsey Rodysill as she hugged her husband, Sgt. 1st Class Chris Rodysill, shortly after the arrival. This marked the third time that Rodysill, herself a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard, had seen her husband deploy overseas going back to when they were first dating.

This was the Rodysills' first separation as parents to a three-year-old, however. "This is the shortest one so far, I think," said Lindsey. "But it felt longer having a three-year-old."

"I'm just really excited right now to get home," said Chris Rodysill, who had actually just completed his fourth deployment overall. "It



**Sweet Welcome:** Sgt. 1st Class Chris Rodysill receives smiles as he holds his son, Blake, while his wife, Lindsey, looks on with a grin after their Soldier returned to Nebraska after a deployment to the Middle East.

was a great deployment; great team, great deployment. We got a lot done. We left them better than when we got there."

While serving in Kuwait, the four-person Nebraska Army National Guard contracting team was responsible for providing administrative oversight for a wide variety of contracts that literally had significant impacts on the United States' ability to conduct military operations throughout the Middle East.

According to the team's commander, Capt. Dustin Young, the Soldiers were responsible for \$3 billion of contracts that ranged from providing transportation support for the entire Arabian Peninsula, to logistical and base life support services to U.S. bases in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, to managing the United States' largest prepositioned military equipment base in the world.

"What we accomplished this last nine months was a lot," said Young. "We fundamentally changed how contracting is managed overseas."

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, echoed those

thoughts. Having visited the team earlier in the year, Bohac said the scope of work the four Nebraskans were engaged in was "amazing."

"Without the things that these Soldiers did, there were things that others needed to do for our nation's security interests that wouldn't have gotten done," Bohac said during his welcome remarks to the Soldiers and their families. "In my book, and I think that in every family member's book who is here today, you are all heroes."

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts agreed. "I am so proud of all of our members of the Nebraska National Guard because when you sign up for the Nebraska National Guard, you know that you will be deployed to fight terrorism overseas. And we are incredibly grateful for your service," Ricketts said.

Ricketts also thanked the assembled family members for their service. "We know that the Nebraska National Guard could not do what they do if it wasn't for the love and support of the folks back home," he said. "As the families, you are required to make sure that the kids continue to get to the baseball



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**What A Moment:** Staff Sgt. Jarod Epp hugs his son, Jaden, June 24, after returning back to Lincoln from an overseas deployment as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1969th Contingency Contracting Team.

practice, dance recitals; that your loved ones not there for that holiday or that birthday. So, we are grateful for the sacrifices that you make and what you do to make sure your loved one can continue to protect us."

According to Staff Sgt. Jarod Epp, the homecoming – while delayed approximately 90 minutes due to aircraft travel problems – was indeed something he would remember for a long time.

"Super excited," Epp said. "Very

happy. Pretty overwhelming to see everybody."

Ditto, added Chris Rodysill. "The best part is just the smiles on everybody's faces," he said. "Just seeing my family... it's just so good to see them. I missed them just so much over that time."

He added that his son Blake had grown a lot during the separation. "It's kind of shocking," he said, smiling. "Three-year-olds change a lot in nine months."



Photo by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

**Hero, Best Friend, Son:** Spc. Eric Roe hugs his mom after stepping off the bus from the MCPD deployment.



**First Kiss, Best Kiss:** Spc. Jeremy Scarf is welcomed home with a kiss from his girlfriend after being away from home for nine months.

# Families pull out stops to welcome Soldiers home from maiden deployment

By Spc. Lisa Crawford

Editor

With just two days' notice, Mark and Tish Roland drove 24 hours straight from Florida to guarantee they would be in Nebraska for a Nebraska Army National Guard July 13 homecoming ceremony. Mark, who turned 59 years old that day, said the impromptu trip meant he would receive the "best birthday gift" ever: his son home safely.

"This is as good as it gets," Mark said.

The Florida couple are parents to Cpl. Dan Roland, a supply specialist with the 1st Infantry Division's Main Command Post—Operational Detachment. More commonly called a MCPD, the detachment is a new type of unit that is designed to augment and enhance an active Army division headquarters staff during mobilizations.

Dan was one of around 90 Soldiers assigned to the Lincoln-based detachment who were welcomed home from their nine-month deployment to Iraq during a ceremony at Haymarket Park in Lincoln. The unit consists of Soldiers who are specialists in such areas as intelligence, legal affairs, infantry, artillery, aviation, signal, administration, military police, engineers, chemical, logistics and public affairs.

First formed in the spring of 2016, the MCPD Soldiers participated in several major training exercises with their active Army counterparts at Fort Riley, Kansas, before being mobilized August 2016.

"We're very proud of him," Mark said as they waited for the buses to arrive. "He always wanted to do this, and I'm glad he fulfilled a dream he has always had."

According to his parents, Corporal Roland was fortunate to receive a full-time position with the Nebraska National Guard shortly after graduating from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In that position, he helped prepare the unit's supply operations for deployment—something he always wanted to do.

"The military has never treated us wrong," said Mark, himself a U.S.



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Moments To Remember:** A boy uses his cell phone to record video of the two buses carrying Nebraska Soldiers home from their first-ever deployment.

Air Force veteran. "I know this was a good experience for him, and he will have a good future here."

Tish tried to put into words what the day meant to her, but found she could only mutter the word "Emotional," before taking a deep breath, tears falling from her eyes.

"The best thing is with social media we could actually see him and talk to him...and it just made it so much better," Tish said. "When Mark was in the military we could never keep track of him, and now we have Danny and can keep track of his life, which made it so much easier."

The Rolands were just one of dozens of individual stories that unfolded in front of Haymarket Park as each of the deployed Soldiers were welcomed to Nebraska after arriving from Fort Riley via chartered buses. For example, as Sgt. Adam Pierce stepped off one of the two buses shuttling the MCPD Soldiers to Haymarket Park for the homecoming ceremony, he was immediately greeted by his wife Cori, his 9-year-old son, Blake, and a large sign that read: "Welcome Home Coach."

"The year's finally over," Cori said with a large smile of relief as she continued to cling to her husband and son. "He's home!"

Adam said he was glad the mission was over so he can get back to doing everyday activities with his family. One of those activities is coaching for East Butler Public Schools where his son attends.

This was the first deployment for the Pierce family and Blake said it felt good to have his dad home. He added that he was particularly excited to finally be able to play baseball with him. In fact, his entire team, other family members and friends who had been supporting Adam throughout his deployment, were waiting for him to return home, signs of their own in hand.

Cori said she spent about two months making her sign for the welcome home ceremony, but it wasn't just from her and her son.

"It was pretty much from the whole community," Cori said.

In officially welcoming the MCPD Soldiers back home, Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts quoted Civil War Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's thoughts on courage.

"Courage - a perfect sensibility of the measure of danger, and a mental willingness to endure it," Ricketts said. "Thank you for your courage to put on that uniform. Thank you for the courage to go face our enemies overseas. Thank you for the courage to stand up for our country."

Ricketts noted that courage and sacrifice are not limited to those in uniform.

"Every one of the members of the families for our National Guard Soldiers makes that sacrifice and has that courage," Ricketts said. "In fact, your sacrifices allow your loved one to go overseas. They could not make that commitment if it was not for you. If the families weren't



**Huge Hugs:** Lt. Col. Troy Sedam receives a big welcome home embrace after stepping off a bus, July 13, following a nine-month deployment to Iraq with Nebraska's MCPD.



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**The Beginning Of Many Firsts:** Sgt. James White finally gets to hold his newborn son after the long wait. White's son was born during the nine-month deployment.

holding together the home front; making sure the kid made it to that baseball game, or that dance recital; keeping the family together at the holidays; their Soldier wouldn't be able to do that. Wouldn't be able to defend us."

"So, thank you for the sacrifices you make," Ricketts added. "On behalf of the people of Nebraska, we are so proud of all of you for what you do to keep us safe at home."

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, began his speech by summarizing the MCPD's maiden deployment by highlighting the most important factors: "Ninety left. Ninety came home, and that's a pretty good day," Bohac said.

"Job well done," he added. "Recognize that this unit didn't really exist 18 months ago. That in 18 months, we built it, stood it up and delivered a ready force to integrate with the 1st Infantry Division. That's a huge achievement and it couldn't have been done without many, many

others, but it wouldn't have been done, couldn't have been achieved, without the commitment by the Soldiers of the MCPD."

Because of the MCPD's unique unit make-up and mission, the Soldiers were spread out, serving at 14 different locations across three countries. According to Lt. Col. Darin Huss, MCPD commander, the Soldiers were often given assignments they never imagined they would do.

"But they learned the job, executed the mission and surpassed all expectations," Huss said. "They worked hand-in-hand with coalition partners from over 20 different countries and all branches of the service. The results of their efforts facilitated the direct enablement of Iraqi/British partners in the fight against Daesh across the battlefields."

"They proved the Nebraska National Guard can do any mission assigned and will not accept anything less than victory."



**Javelin In Action:** A Soldier with the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron fires a Javelin missile, June 14, during annual training at Fort Riley, Kan.

## Nebraska cavalymen fire up ranges during training in Kansas

By Spc. Lisa Crawford  
Editor

Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry Squadron spent their 2017 annual training, June 4-17, on the ranges at Fort Riley, Kansas, firing advanced weapon systems for the first time in more than a decade.

"We've gotten a lot of training done," said Lt. Col. Thomas Golden, squadron commander. "We've pushed (the Soldiers) hard. They packed so much training into just these days that we're down here, I don't think they've stopped."

On June 13, Nebraska National Guard Soldiers fired four Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) anti-tank missiles from a mounted Humvee, and four Javelins – more portable, shoulder-mounted anti-tank missile systems. This was the first time in over a decade the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron had fired TOW missiles, and about five years since the last firing of Javelin missiles as well.

Golden said it's the uniqueness of the training that kept the Soldiers in high spirits and the "one team, one fight" mentality that surrounded every event.

"The helocast with deputy commander Frank was a significant event for us," said Command Sgt. Maj. Bruce Nakai, the squadron's senior noncommissioned officer. On June 9, Brig. Gen. Patrick Frank, the deputy commanding general of



**Target Set-Up:** A Nebraska Soldier takes aim with an FGM-148 Javelin. The FGM-148 Javelin is a "fire-and-forget" missile. Soldiers lock onto their target before launch and rely on the automatic self-guidance system to reach its intended destination.

the 1st Infantry Division, accompanied a team of 60 Soldiers from the Nebraska National Guard's Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, Nebraska Army National Guard, as they jumped out of a CH-47 Chinook into Milford Lake on Fort Riley. Also jumping from the helicopter were Nebraska's Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac and Command Sgt. Maj.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Fire Power:** Soldiers from the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron fire a Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (TOW) anti-tank missile, June 14, from a mounted Humvee during annual training at Fort Riley, Kan. This was the first time in over a decade the cavalry has fired TOW missiles.

Marty Baker.

"Being the first time we've ever done that as a troop, that was awesome," Nakai added.

Because of the training requirements unique to an infantry brigade combat team cavalry squadron, the 1-134th is helping to build a strong relationship between the Nebraska National Guard and the active duty base which is home to the 1st Infantry Division.

"We have a great relationship with Fort Riley and the 1st Infantry Division," Nakai said. "And we have a great relationship with range control. They've gone out of their way to make us feel comfortable while we're down here."

Other training events conducted at Fort Riley with the 1-134th Cavalry included multiple weapons qualifications, live grenade throws, individually structured training for the units snipers, mounted .50-calibre turret machine gun training aboard moving Humvees and more.

"Everyone's been pleased with the amount of time they've had behind the trigger," Nakai said.

Joining the 1-134th Cavalry's team this year was Company D, 39th Brigade Support Battalion, which stood up earlier this year as part of the Nebraska Army National



**Missile In Tow:** Nebraska Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Nicholas Driggs, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, readies a TOW missile, June 14, during annual training at Fort Riley, Kan.

Guard's statewide transformation. Nakai said this newest - and much appreciated - addition contributed greatly to smoother workflow processes, high morale and keeping efficient mission schedules by having skilled individuals readily available to support the rest of the squadron's Soldiers.

Nakai said he feels this year's annual training was just the start

of a great partnership with Fort Riley. By the end of the two-week mission, the 1st Infantry Division had put in personal requests for additional weapons systems for the Nebraska Soldiers, and facilitated planning for more training events on the base in the future.

"We couldn't ask for a better relationship than what we have with this post right here," Nakai said.



Photo by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

**Holding Their Breath:** Soldiers from the 126th Chemical Battalion emerge from a gas chamber, designed to build trust in their chemical protective equipment. Every Soldier goes through the gas chamber as a part of Army basic training, but the chemical battalion had the opportunity to do it again during annual training.

## Brigade's Missouri training first since transformation

By Spc. Lisa Crawford  
Editor

Nearly 300 Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade conveyed from various Nebraska armories to occupy a tactical training base at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for annual training, June 10-23. This was the brigade's first annual training exercise since the state's Army National Guard transformation deactivated the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade in exchange for the 67th MEB in November 2016.

"As a new brigade headquarters, we're really just trying to train the Soldiers," said Command Sgt. Maj. Shawn Griffith, the brigade's senior noncommissioned officer. "We have a lot of Soldiers trying to get requalified in their (Military Occupational Specialties) so they can learn their individual skills."

One-third of the brigade participated in a week-long simulation exercise, which allowed the Soldiers to practice in their respective skillsets and job duties in a simulated, real-world training environment at the U.S. Army Fort Leonard Wood Maneuver Support Center of Excellence Digital Training Facility.

Griffith said for a first-time annual training for the brigade as a whole, he and 67th MEB Commander Col. Craig Strong were very pleased with what they saw.

"Leaders are leading Soldiers, morale is high and the Soldiers are enjoying their training," Griffith said.

Nearly 300 Soldiers from the brigade trained on the ground at Fort Leonard Wood, taking advantage of the facilities the active-duty base had to offer.

Soldiers from the 126th Chemical Battalion went through the gas chamber to experience a controlled concentration of CS (orto-chlorobenzylidene-malononitrile) gas, maneuvered as teams through a confidence obstacle course and conducted land navigation training. Additionally, Soldiers with the 754th Chemical Company also experienced live nerve agent while training in the CBRN Defense Training Facility.

"It's good," said Spc. Travis Williams, a chemical specialist



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Brace For Blast:** Nebraska Army National Guard firefighters brace together while demonstrating the use of a fire hose for Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac in a parking lot on Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

with the 754th Chem. Co. "It's been a lot of high-speed training that gets people excited. Even when we hate it, we all love it."

Soldiers from the 192nd Military Police Company conducted riot training and other law enforcement training using digital training systems currently unavailable in Nebraska. Their training also included ride-a-longs with Ft. Leonardwood's Military Police.

Nebraska National Guard firefighters with the 181st and 317th Engineer Detachment Fire Fighting Teams conducted both day and night live burns, firetruck driving and other MOS-specific training.

Other brigade elements, including parts of the 128th Engineer Battalion and the 734th Brigade Support Battalion, conducted home station training back in Nebraska at the Greenleaf Training Site and in Kearney. In total, more than 500 Soldiers from the brigade trained for the first time since its transformation from a battlefield surveillance to maneuver enhancement brigade.



Photos by Sgt. 1st Class Casey Lindsay

**Leading The Way:** A group of Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers prepare to board a Swedish Air Force C-130 before an airborne exercise in Sweden. Soldiers from the 134th Infantry Regiment participate in Sweden's largest military exercise in more than 20 years.

## Aurora 2017

### Nebraska Airborne Soldiers join forces with Swedish troops during European exercise

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's Company E (Long-Range Surveillance), 134th Infantry Regiment, had the opportunity to train in some pretty unique terrain, Sept. 8-30, when they participated in the Swedish armed forces' largest military exercise in more than 20 years.

The two-week exercise, Aurora 2017, took place in some of the wet, swampy areas of Sweden located around the cities of Mälardalen, Stockholm, Gotland and Gothenburg.

The exercise had over 20,000 participants from nine different countries including Denmark, Finland, France and Norway. Sweden is not a NATO country, but other countries participating in Aurora 2017 were NATO members.

Over 60 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers were included in



**Sweden Wings:** An airborne Soldier holds the Swedish jump wings he received for participating in a Swedish jump.

the exercise along with Soldiers from the Kentucky and Minnesota Army National Guard. The exercise also included active duty Soldiers, Marines and Sailors.

The main mission for the Nebraska Guard Soldiers was to provide long-range surveillance over watch and gather battlefield intelligence for the Swedish and other forces participating in Aurora

2017. The first half of the mission was spent working with the Swedish armed forces, while the second half of the exercise was spent serving as opposing forces against the Swedish troops.

"Getting to integrate with Sweden, a non-NATO country, is pretty awesome," said Staff Sgt. Luke Katz, Co. E (LRS), 134th Infantry. "A lot of people don't actually get to go to (overseas deployment training) like this and get to jump with other countries."

"Doing this opens a door for the Nebraska National Guard as a whole and gives us a good name for ourselves. Sweden said that they had a great time working with the Nebraska National Guard," Katz added.

The Nebraska Soldiers also had another unique opportunity: earning Swedish jump wings. Among airborne units, Soldiers can be awarded jump wings of a foreign country after the Soldier completes a jump within the country or



**Välkommen:** Swedish leaders present Nebraska National Guard Soldiers from Company E (Long-Range Surveillance), 134th Infantry Regiment, with their Swedish jump wings following a parachute exercise. The jump was one of many experiences the Nebraska Soldiers gained during Aurora 2017.

under a foreign jumpmaster. The Nebraska Guardsmen who participated in this exercise received their Sweden foreign jump wings after they completed one or two jumps using Swedish parachutes.

"Sweden usually doesn't give the wings out," Katz said. "Earning those jump wings was a big step forward for those Soldiers who were

willing to stay with the LRS until it is disbanded."

The Swedish exercise actually marked an addition to the unit's annual training this year. Earlier, the Soldiers worked alongside members of 2nd Brigade, Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, in February.



### Soldiers take high-flying dip into Kansas lake during annual training



Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry had the opportunity to make a big splash during their annual training when they participated in a helocast exercise, June 9, at Fort Riley, Kan. The Nebraska Soldiers, who were joined by Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Command Sgt. Maj. Marty Baker, the assistant 1st Infantry Division commander Brig. Gen. Patrick Frank, and a number of visiting Czech Soldiers, practiced jumping from a CH-47 Chinook helicopter into Milford Lake and then swimming to nearby inflatable rafts for their insertion into the Fort Riley training areas.

**Demolition Training:** Combat engineers of the 128th Engineer Battalion construct a confidence charge attaching C-4 explosives to a ring of detonation cord simulating how to clear a breaching lane in a minefield during demolition training at Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 19.



**Eliminating Battlefield Obstacles:** A Combat engineer from the 128th Engineer Battalion detonates a confidence charge while participating in demolition training at Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 19. During real-world operations, combat engineers are the first in to create a breach in an obstacle that restricts maneuverability on a battlefield.

## Annual training explosive for new engineers

■ Guard Soldiers put newly-learned demolition skills to test during first annual training

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton  
Staff Photojournalist

Soldiers from the newly-formed 128th Engineer Battalion put some newly-learned skills to the test this summer when they took part in breaching operations for urban environments during their annual training at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Nebraska, June 19.

The exercise was designed to help the new Army Guard engineers hone their battlefield breaching skills by giving them the opportunity to practice placing and then setting off confidence charges and door breaches at a demolition range at the training site. The goal, say unit leaders, is to reinforce skillsets the Soldiers are required to have as engineers.

"In a combat situation, the men and women training today would be the first to breach an obstacle on the battlefield that restricts maneuverability," said Capt. Luke Ritz, 128th Eng. Bn. staff officer. "These combat engineers would go in and eliminate the obstacle so the maneuver elements can move through the field."

Soldiers created charges using C-4 explosives and detonating cord to simulate clearing breaching lanes.

"It's a good practice of a real-world training element that can be applied here, said Master Sgt. Christine Raftery, 128th Eng. Bn. operations noncommissioned officer. She explained that confidence charges are what are used to clear anti-tank mines on a battlefield or IED in an urban environment.

The combat engineers also practiced building C-charges, which are used to breach locked doors.

"In a real world situation where a locked door needs to be breached with minimal damage to the frame, our engineers can place a C-charge, detonate and breach a locked door at close proximity in very little time, allowing Soldiers to enter the building," said Raftery.



**Boom!** Combat engineers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's newly organized 128th Engineer Battalion take cover as they detonate a C-charge to a door during demolition training at Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 19. Soldiers took part in breaching operations for urban environments in their first annual training since the formation of the Battalion in September 2016.

The annual training was the first for the battalion since it came into existence in September 2016 when the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade transformed into the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, affecting nearly one-in-three Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers. "For many members of the 128th, today was their first time with hands-on demolition experience since formal training they received in combat engineer school," said Lt. Col. Todd Stevens, 128th Engineer Battalion commander, which is headquartered in Columbus. "A lot of people want to try something different and the engineer mission is a pretty fun mission to have as a Soldier, he said."

"I love this unit and it's a lot of fun," said Spc. Tyrell Turner, a California National Guard transfer who came to Nebraska to wrestle for Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln. "We've been doing a lot

of new things and I've been able to see and be involved in the big picture more and not just what happens at the company level."

The engineer battalion also brings back a new element into the Nebraska Army National Guard that has been absent for decades.

"We are the first engineering battalion Nebraska has had in a long time and the transformation process is going well," Stevens said. "Of course we have had a few bumps, but strength-wise, we are sitting well. We are working our way through some individual readiness issues and getting people duty-qualified and to the right schools at the right time."

"Right now, we are in the first training year, so we have about four more years before we would be "ready" per the way the training guidance is rolled out," said Stevens. "We prefer to be ready a little earlier than that, which is pretty realistic."



Photos by Tech Sgt. Jason Melton

**Combat Engineers:** Spc. Tyrell Turner and Staff Sgt. Bret Liermann of the 128th Engineer Battalion attach a C-charge to a door during demolition training at Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., June 19. Soldiers took part in breaching operations for urban environments in their first annual training since the formation of the battalion in September 2016.

## Nebraskans take wing in Wisconsin

By Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom  
Staff Photojournalist

Nebraska Army National Guardsmen traveled to America's Dairyland - Wisconsin - to participate in exercise PATRIOT North 2017, which culminated in a three-day field exercise July 18-21 in-and-around Volk Field.

The annual domestic operations exercise gives Nebraska Citizen Soldiers opportunities to coordinate and train for a disaster or state emergency with Army and Air National Guardsmen from across the country as well as regional civilian disaster-response teams.

Nebraska-based helicopters — including CH-47 Chinooks, UH-60 Blackhawks and UH-72 Lakotas — and their associated crews and support Soldiers responded to numerous simulated natural disasters while synchronizing and integrating with their civilian counterparts.

Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general visited the exercise area of operations to see first-hand the training his fellow Guardsmen were receiving and the results they were producing.

The general, the senior-most officer in the Nebraska National Guard, took numerous opportunities

to speak with as many Soldiers as were available and impressed upon them the requirement for them to be ready "off-the-shelf" with little or no prior warning or spin-up time.

Man-made or natural disasters — including tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding and severe winter weather — are, by their very nature, unpredictable and can strike at any time.

According to exercise officials, PATRIOT North 2017 is a valuable tool for the various participants — both military and civilian — to familiarize themselves with each other's processes; to learning about each other's capabilities and capacities; and, perhaps most critical, understand how to communicate with each other.

In addition to the disaster-related vignettes, the Nebraskans leveraged the training opportunity to accomplish Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training; weapons familiarization including a .50 caliber machine-gun qualification course; and individual military upgrade training items.

PATRIOT North 2017 spanned 10 days total including the field exercise and brought together more than 900 civilian and military personnel from more than 40 National Guard units and other disaster-response-oriented organizations.

**Husker Pride:** An Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter passes over a red Nebraska flag attached to the fence near the tactical operations center for the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation (Security and Support). The Nebraska aviation battalion was participating in the July 18-21 Patriot North 2017 exercise at Volk Field, Wisc.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Drew Nystrom



**A Mighty Push:** Airman 1st Class Bret Foulton helps push a pallet of cargo onto an aircraft at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

## Nebraska Airmen expand military skills while training at German base

By Capt. Alex Salmon  
Staff Photojournalist

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, GERMANY – Nearly 30 members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing traveled from Lincoln, Nebraska, to Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany, to work and train with their active duty counterparts during a May 13-26 annual training.

The team of 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron Airmen included air transportation specialists – also known as '2T2s' – vehicle operation and maintenance technicians, and a new logistics readiness officer joined a few members of the Lincoln base's finance section during the training mission.

### 2T2s

For 17 members of the 155th LRS, a trip to Ramstein means having the opportunity to train in an air terminal that can process hundreds of thousands of passengers yearly and is the largest cargo processing aerial port in Europe. The Nebraska Air Guardsmen got a chance to work with programs and equipment they simply don't have access to in Lincoln.

Tech. Sgt. Tyler Kleinschmit, 155th LRS non-commissioned officer-in-charge of ramp, said he wanted to get his newer Airmen much-needed experience on as many pieces of equipment possible. The Nebraskans were exposed to larger aircraft and larger equipment used to 'upload' and 'download' cargo.

"We don't get heavy airframes in Lincoln, Nebraska, like an active duty port would," Kleinschmit said. "So, C-5s, C-17s, C-130s – those are really what the Air Force uses to move cargo from the states to any deployed location throughout the world."

"They can see things that we just won't see at home," he added. "Yeah, we can put cargo on our aircraft, but we only have one 25K (loader) and a standard forklift, whereas they have a dozen 60K (Tunner Loaders) and several 10K forklifts. So it's great to see the size and scope of what they do here."

For several aerial port specialists, the Germany trip was their first annual training experience. This meant their eyes were definitely opened as they learned the full scope of their job duties.

"It gives you a much bigger appreciation for the job," said Airman 1st Class Julie Fricke, a 155th LRS ramp services specialist who was experiencing her first annual training



**Tightening The Bundle:** Staff Sgt. Dale Dowling, a Nebraska Air National Guard air transportation specialist from the 155th Air Refueling Wing, inspects nets on a pallet while training at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Dowling was one of 30 members of the Nebraska Air Guard who traveled to Germany for their May 13-26 annual training.

trip. "We don't get to see all these pallets go off...so it's pretty cool to see all that and it helps you realize how important our role is."

Ultimately, the goal is simple: become more proficient in the job to be as prepared as possible in the case of a future deployment.

"The scope of what we actually do is really important," said Kleinschmit. "Without the aerial port, a lot of places would be in trouble – troops down range, humanitarian relief and things like that – so, we have a really important mission."

"The biggest reason (for this training) would be for a deployment," said Fricke. "So, we'd be ready to go when we get deployed."

Airman 1st Class Patrick Hynes, an air



Photos by Capt. Alex Salmon

**Learning A Critical Skill:** Second Lt. Evan Littrell, a recently minted logistics readiness officer, learns how to take a jet fuel sample under the watchful eyes of a 86th Logistics Readiness Squadron Airman while training at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.



**Up Close And Personal:** Airman 1st Class Dominick Maldonado inspects rolling stock during training at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

transportation specialist with the 155th LRS, worked primarily in the passenger terminal during his first temporary duty AT. He said he didn't know what to expect when he got to the active duty base.

"Before coming here I was pretty nervous because I knew I didn't know that much compared to these people who do it every day – I do it two days a month," he said. "But after getting through a couple passengers I started getting the hang of it. I think just being able to get out here and do it has helped a lot with my knowledge...so, I think I'm a lot more confident."

Despite being new, the importance of the training and the mission was not lost on Hynes.

"It's important because at the base we get a couple missions every now and then, but not enough to be completely proficient," he said. "Here, we have the opportunity to process a ton of people and cargo, so that's been really a great experience."

Staff Sgt. Damion Cruell, a 155th LRS ramp services specialist, is not new to TDYs or ATs. Still the mission to Germany was a chance to step up and work as a team chief for the first time during the uploading and downloading of cargo.

"That was an eye-opener for me because it's easier to sit back and observe, but then when you're actually given those reins and they say, 'Here you go, take charge,' then you're running the show," said Cruell. "It gives me the opportunity first-hand to be a team chief where if I'm ever deployed that's a function they'll expect me to know...knowing the ins and outs of the ramp, that's really key."

"Proficiency is number one," he added. "I

just want to make sure I'm proficient in my career field, not only in ramp, but in the 2T2 world in general. It's one thing to see it from our perspective in Lincoln, Nebraska...but it's also nice to see how it's done every day in a bigger hub like this."

Senior Airman Patrick Stevens, a 155th LRS air transportation specialist, worked several days in an area of cargo known as 'Special Handling,' where cargo requiring extra care is processed. He said he got more training accomplished in a few days than he could have ever imagined. "Some of these things we don't have the opportunity to do at our base," Stevens said. "We don't have as many pallets that come in, we don't have as many people and we don't have any special handling cargo at all that comes in. So, I actually get to do my job so if I get deployed...I can be ready to go at a moment's notice knowing that I can do the job successfully."

Staff Sgt. Dale Dowling, a 155th LRS air transportation craftsman, also worked in special handling and appreciated how fast-paced the Ramstein operation was. "I hate sitting still...here, they don't sit still much," Dowling said. "There's always something to do, so this to me is worth everything because that's where you learn, when you're moving and doing stuff."

"We're just staying busy here," he added. "In Lincoln, we might be busy a little while and then be sitting a while. There's a constant flow of materials coming in and out so, it's completely different."

Dowling said he appreciated the active duty personnel making the Nebraska Guards-



**Learning The Finer Points Of Customer Service:** Airman 1st Class Patrick Hynes (seated) processes a couple for a "Space A" flight at the Ramstein Air Base passenger terminal.

## Alaska training makes for well-rounded and grounded Airmen

By Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus  
Staff Photojournalist

Thirty Airmen with the 155th Security Forces Squadron from the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing confronted some very real challenges, June 19-26, when they traveled to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, to conduct their annual training.

The Airmen's training was designed to enhance their skills in combat operations – one of the three primary missions that Security Forces can be tasked to do – through Counter Improvised Explosive Device Awareness Training; Shoot, Move and Communicate; Land Navigation; and Security Forces Combatives Program.

Each day built upon the previous day's training, starting with a day full of classes on IEDs and how to combat them. The classes and training were taught by two contractors from the Asia Pacific Counter-IED Fusion Center, both former members of the military who have seen first-hand what IEDs can do.

"IEDs have been the number one killer of Soldiers, Airmen and Marines throughout our local theaters for several years and we've struggled as a force to try and get our arms around it," said Brian Bess, a counter-IED trainer. "At the end of the day we're saving lives."

Bess said that because the 155th SFS has a lot of experienced Airmen who also work as civilian police, the trainers tailored their instruction so that it's not so cookie-cutter.

For example, following classroom training the Airmen walked through an indoor IED lane designed to provide a hands-on feeling by pointing out IEDs they noticed or stepped on. The IED lane showcased 30 types of IEDs, many of which were buried with pressure plates, trip wires, or explosive formed projectiles with operational buzzers and indicators of where they are located. Other IEDs were hidden by a pile of rocks or identified by a wire leading into a culvert or a car sitting on the side of the lane.

A unique feature of the IED lane was an example of what a make-shift lab might look like where the enemy would build an IED complete with difficult-to-detect false walls for hiding weapons. After each section of the lane, the instructors would point out what may have been overlooked through the walk.

After the indoor IED lane, the Nebraska Airmen practiced looking for IEDs through virtual training made to resemble being in a convoy. Their virtual training consisted of two parts, the Virtual Clearance Training Suite and the Reconfigurable Vehicle Tactical Trainer. Both simulations allowed for Airmen



Photo by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus  
**Field Report:** Airman 1st Class Shannon Costello and Staff Sergeant Michael Morrison, security forces specialists with the 155th Security Forces Squadron from the 155th Air Refueling Wing, Nebraska, report in an Improvised Explosive Device during an IED awareness training exercise, June 22, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

to work on their communication throughout the convoy and get a feel for both vehicles, all while keeping an eye out for IEDs along the way. It helped them realize how hard it is to spot IEDs, while still performing all of the tasks in a convoy, like keeping their eye out for the enemy.

"I think the biggest thing I will probably take back is the IED Awareness Training and being able to communicate with my team during dismounted and mounted operations," said Senior Airman Sean Pozehl, a combat arms instructor with the 155th SFS. "Going through that training you realize how difficult it can be and how dangerous it can be, for not only you but your whole team, so the biggest thing I would probably take away is the techniques they taught us for identifying those dangers."

Following virtual training, the Airmen took what they had learned to an outdoor IED lane at Camp Mad Bull, JBER, Alaska. There, the Airmen were given a mission to rescue a hostage in a building located at the end of the lane while continuing to look for indicators of IEDs.

According to 155th SFS leaders, the training allows the Nebraskans to make mistakes and gain experience safely.

"The goal is to set them up for success, let them make mistakes here in training, let

themselves step on an IED here," said Capt. David W. Strom, operations officer for the 155th SFS. "It's a learning opportunity so that when they go into real environments they learn from those mistakes and hopefully will either lead their men and women better or not step on the IED themselves."

After the Counter-IED awareness training, the unit conducted an exercise called Shoot, Move and Communicate where they worked as small-fire teams to move through a mock village, shooting at enemy targets.

Communication is important in any situation and can be hard to maintain, especially in deployed locations, as well as trusting each other and their leaders, said Strom. The training allowed them to work on those foundational skills that are highly valued in a real situation, he added.

The Nebraska Airmen also worked on building blocks like widening their perspective, being flexible and commanding each other especially in a time with ever-evolving enemy tactics.

"(After 9/11) warfare became irregular, we didn't know who the good guys and the bad guys were," Strom said. "Air bases aren't in the back anymore. Sometimes they're right on the frontlines and right inside the bad guys territory, so Security Forces has had to change

the way in which we train so that we make sure that we have a well-rounded defender that can not only do air base defense, like maybe law enforcement, but can go outside the wire and take the fight to the end."

Strom said the Airmen have a wide variety of skills from their civilian side and many levels of experience to bring to the table.

"The range of experience is so broad, that I think every Airman is going to take away something different, for those who have seen it, have done it, hopefully they're passing that information on now. This is their time to take what they've learned and give that to the Airmen and hopefully they're learning instructor skills, and how to pass that information on and what the right way to do it," said Strom.

"Whereas an Airman who's never seen it before, what they're probably taking out of this is completely different. They're awed that this is for real. They're awed by their mission. This is the first time they've seen an IED or even know what it looks like," he said.

"So, hopefully they're being sponges and taking all that instruction that they're getting and understanding that they're not always going to be at this Airmen level, that someday they're going to have to be doing what these other Senior NCOs are doing and that's passing on this information," Strom added.

Having the annual training not only allows Airmen who are new to gain that experience, it also allows those who have been through similar training to brush up on skills and become more knowledgeable in their field.

"I'm really glad that it's annual training, that we learn these skills every year, brushing up, going over and getting better at my skills – but the thing that I'll probably take away the most is the IED training," said Airman 1st Class Grace Chvatal, a security forces journeyman with the 155th SFS. "I definitely came into this week not knowing anything about it and now I know different types, different locations, and how to look for them and what to do in case you find one."

Along with the training being new for some of the Airmen, being in Alaska allowed everyone to experience a new environment that they would not see in Nebraska.

"Being somewhere else than Nebraska just means having a more well-rounded training as far as terrain, if you always train in the same terrain, the same environment, it's not really doing yourself a favor," said Pozehl. "If you train at different places then you set yourself up to be ready for anything that you might encounter, Alaska has a lot of terrain that Nebraska doesn't have, so it's good to get out in that environment, practice for the unknowns."

## GERMANY continued from page 11.

men part of their team. "The people are great," he said. "They're teaching us a lot and they're not afraid to grab us and do something with us instead of just ignoring us and letting us sit in a corner."

Senior Airman Heather Sempstrott, an aerial port specialist with Ramstein's 721st Aerial Port Squadron, said she enjoyed working with and training the Nebraska Airmen.

"We get groups here each week, but these guys have actually been really helpful," said Sempstrott. "They seem eager to want to help so they can get experience on the tasks they're qualified for and they need to get training on. And even if it's something they already know how to do, they're willing to help, so it's been actually really great having them."

"It gives me knowledge that if I do deploy with them they're going to know what they're doing because I helped them here," she added. "And me going over this stuff – re-teaching them every couple weeks when a group arrives makes me stronger on what I know."

Sempstrott also understands the importance of their job.

"We've got to get the cargo to the users and the people down range who need it and especially with our section," she said. "We deal with hazardous material and the explosives and stuff they need in order to do their jobs there. And then also with (human remains), bringing them home. I know that these guys know how to properly handle that if they were to see it in the future."

"I want to ensure that they're confident and they're not going to mess anything up because they just don't have the experience to actually

do it," she added.

Tech Sgt. Chaz Jensby, noncommissioned officer-in-charge for air transportation, broke down the training the Lincoln-based air transportation personnel got while in Germany. Prior to the trip, Jensby said the 17 individuals slated to go on the trip identified a total of 245 training tasks, whether initial or refresher tasks, which needed to be signed off within their individual training records. At the end of the trip, not only had all 245 tasks been accomplished, an additional 148 tasks were completed.

"The training we got here is stuff that we can't do at home – that's the whole reason for the trip," Jensby said.

"Our career field is somewhat high demand when it comes to deployments, so without this training we wouldn't be properly trained to deploy and therefore help in those situations," he added. "Without this, we potentially could either be undeployable or they wouldn't be as well-prepared to deploy when they get down line. They just wouldn't know how to do things or they wouldn't have seen things. So, here they get to experience all that stuff and do all those things when they go to a deployed location they'll have seen it before, they'll have done it before, so therefore they're more prepared and confident."

Jensby said he was happy with the active duty personnel who not only helped train the Nebraska Airmen, but involved them in the mission.

"This annual tour has been the best that I've experienced just from the pure aspect of training and them making us feel like we're part of

the team," said Jensby. "That's why we're here. We're here to train, but we're also here to work."

### Logistics Readiness Officer

The logistics of becoming a well-rounded logistics readiness officer can be, well, a logistical challenge. But during the May annual training, 2nd Lt Evan Littrell, a recently minted LRO with the 155th LRS, who was recently promoted to first lieutenant, was able to punch a few items off of his lengthy list of training requirements.

Littrell spent the majority of his time at Ramstein working with the fuels section of the 86th LRS. There, he got hands-on experience in a job he would otherwise struggle to get. Littrell worked with the Airmen of the 86th LRS on their process of receiving jet fuel, sampling and testing it to ensure its cleanliness and serviceability, and testing the equipment used to deliver and unload the fuel to aircraft on the ramp.

And although the 155th LRS has a fuels lab, which does many of the same tests, Littrell was able to see the operation first-hand at the busiest military air hub in Europe.

"The fuels lab is a pretty impressive operation here," Littrell said. "It's an experience I wouldn't otherwise get in my daily duties with the Guard."

"The scale of the operation that's running here at Ramstein (is impressive)," he added. "They're taking so many samples off so many aircraft...so for me as a Guard member to come in and experience and participate in that really shows the scale and the breadth of the Air Force mission at Ramstein."

With so many different missions

and airframes that process through Ramstein, clean, serviceable fuel is literally the lifeline of the missions.

"In the fuels lab you're held to a higher standard than anybody else, I believe," said Airman 1st Class Tanner Thompson, a fuels lab technician with the 86th LRS who showed Littrell how they test the fuel. "We're like the lifeline of the fuel. So, if we say that the fuel is bad, then we lock it out and we're the only ones that have keys to do that."

The importance of the fuels technicians and their mission is not lost on Littrell.

"This fuels section has been really good about letting me not just observe, but get involved in doing the operation," said Littrell. "My take away is going to be a greater understanding of the extent of the actual work that's going on. Not just what they have to do, but how they're doing it and the effort that goes into accomplishing this mission every day."

### Vehicle Backlog

Anyone with a vehicle understands it can require a lot of maintenance. Now imagine the maintenance needs of the Ramstein-based 86th Vehicle Readiness Squadron on a fleet of nearly 900 General Purpose light vehicles.

Four vehicle maintenance members of the 155th LRS spent their time at Ramstein helping the 86th LRS whittle down their backlog of GP light vehicles needing repairs. Master Sgt. Bobby Kozisek, vehicle maintenance supervisor for the 155th LRS, said the Nebraska Airmen were able to get eight of the 82-vehicle backlog back on the

road. The repairs included batteries, brakes, ball joints, exhausts, and electrical troubleshooting.

In addition to lightening the workload for the active duty crew at Ramstein, the time in Germany served as an opportunity for younger Airmen to get training tasks signed off on.

"We worked on vehicles helping these guys get ahead and try to knock out as many core tasks as we can for upgrade training," said Airman 1st Class Trevor Halstead, a vehicle maintainer with the 155th LRS.

Halstead, who was enjoying his first ever TDY, said he liked seeing how a unit so far away did things. "It's important to get to other bases just so you can see other perspectives and how they do things," Halstead said. "They have a lot more opportunity to work on stuff – like they have an alignment rack and a bunch of different test machines that we don't have back on our base. It's just good to get training on all of these machines too just in case when you get deployed you know what's going on."

According to Kozisek, the Ramstein vehicle maintenance crew were so backlogged they were working mandatory additional hours. Halstead said the Nebraska Airmen enjoyed trying to take some of the work load off of their active duty counter parts.

"It feels good because a lot of these guys are backed up," Halstead said. "They're working long hours and a lot of these guys are run down and tired – so it's nice for us to come in and kind of take some of that off of them and try to get the most done as possible."

## Hurricane Alley Huskers



Hurricane Irma



Hurricane Maria



Hurricane Harvey

Hurricane satellite photos courtesy of www.nasa.gov

# In The Storms' Wake

## HURRICANES continued from page 1.

and Nuclear) Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) that set up emergency medical treatment facilities in Beaumont and Vidor, Texas, and treated 150 patients in less than a week.

That team, coincidentally, had spent the weekend before the emergency call-ups, practicing to do exactly that as part of a multi-state domestic emergency response exercise at the Mead Training Site.

- ♦100 Soldiers assigned to the Nebraska Army National Guard's Lincoln and Grand Island-based Headquarters and Headquarters Company, and Company A, 1-376th Aviation (Security and Support), deployed in September in support of the Hurricane Irma relief operations in northern and central Florida. While serving in Jacksonville, Florida, the Soldiers provided command and control activities of National Guard aviation elements operating there, while also providing aerial reconnaissance of hurricane damage.

- ♦Two Soldiers from the newly-organized 105th Military History Detachment in Lincoln, who deployed to Florida in September to help the Florida National Guard document and archive the Hurricane Irma relief and recovery operations.

- ♦Several KC-135R Stratotanker flights flown by members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing delivered personnel to Florida and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and critical supplies to Puerto Rico in support of the Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria relief operations.

- ♦One Soldier from the Nebraska National Guard's 72nd Civil Support

Team who deployed to Puerto Rico in October to provide communications support to the battered island after Hurricane Maria.

- ♦Five air transportation journey-men from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Mission Support Group who deployed to the Air Dominance Center in Savannah, Georgia, in October. While there the Nebraska Airmen worked at the U.S. Air Force's primary transportation hub for supplies and equipment moving from the continental United States to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- ♦56 Soldiers and two Airmen from the Nebraska National Guard's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade who deployed in October to the U.S. Virgin Islands to provide command and control support to National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from 31 states working on St. Croix and St. Thomas, which were devastated by Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

- ♦13 Airmen from the Nebraska Air Guard's 155th Security Forces Squadron and two Nebraska Soldiers from the Army Guard's 105th Military History Detachment, deployed to Puerto Rico to assist in the Hurricane Irma relief efforts in mid-November.

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts said the state was proud to be able to support Americans in need through the Nebraska National Guard.

"The men and women of our Nebraska National Guard continue to respond whenever and wherever they are needed. Nebraskans are grateful for the sacrifices made by our National Guard Soldiers and Airmen."



Photo by Sgt. Anna Pongo

**Look At That View:** Sgt. Aaron Aldrige, Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, looks out from the window of a Nebraska National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter after conducting Hurricane Harvey relief missions, Aug. 31, in Texas.

## Nebraska Army National Guard aviators lead way into Texas

■ Nebraska helicopter crews first non-Texas Guardsmen to conduct Hurricane Harvey rescues

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

When it comes to saving lives, there's no excuse for tardiness.

That's especially true during a domestic emergency, where time is of an essence, and those receiving the call are helicopter crews.

Nebraska Army National Guard helicopters crews definitely proved that principle when they deployed to the Texas Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. During a multiple-day operation in late August and early September, seven Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk, CH-47 Chinook and UH-72 Lakota helicopter crews from Lincoln and Grand Island rescued nearly 300 flood-stricken Texans, 44 pets and delivered tons of lifesaving supplies and equipment to those in need.

"The trick is getting there as soon as you can to get to the people who need help as soon as possible," said Maj. Dan Smith, a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter pilot who one of several Nebraska crews that deployed to Texas in August, just as Hurricane Harvey was making landfall.

"When an event like this happens, you've got to get there quick and then you've got to use your experience to save lives," he said.

According to Smith, the first of what would become 37 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers and seven helicopters began to deploy to Texas on the weekend of Aug. 26-27. At that point, Smith said, the hurricane had just made landfall on the Texas coast near Rockport, Texas, and was just beginning to inundate the Houston metro area with historic rainfall from the



**Loading The Support:** Sgt. Erik Servellon, flight medic, and Sgt. Aaron Aldridge, crew chief, load medical supplies into a Blackhawk helicopter, Sept. 3, for transport to a flooded area in Vidor, Texas.

### Hurricane Harvey

stalled storm.

"Initially we were supposed to fly to Oklahoma and stay overnight, but we were then sent directly into Dallas where we were to wait out the storm," Smith recalled. He said during a refueling stop in Dallas at a flight facility, the crew was handed a packet of papers that included airfields, possible landing zones, hospital and other risk assessment.

The next day, the crews prepositioned into Austin, where they received their first mission: delivering much-needed food into Galveston. The Nebraskans were part of a multi-state aviation task force that included aircraft and crews from seven different states.

"Harvey was still a tropical depression. It was just a red, swirling mass on the radars," he said, adding that the two Nebraska helicopter crews were the only two

able to successfully deliver their cargo that day.

"At the time, we had told the folks in Texas, 'You give us a mission and we will show you what we can do,'" Smith said. By successfully delivering the cargo, the two Nebraska helicopters became the only two in the aviation task force available to move into the Houston area as the storms began to lift, he added.

"We were given the mission to push into Sugar Land," Smith said, adding that arriving at the small corporate airport there, the crews met with members of the U.S. Coast Guard who had been working in the area for some time and received their additional operational missions.

The mission essentially came down to this, Smith said: "Save as many people as you can."

"So, we took off and started helping people."

And did they ever. In just a two-day span, the UH-60 crews rescued 290 flood-stranded



Photos by Sgt. Anna Pongo

**Aerial Patrol:** A Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier participates in an aerial survey mission to provide intelligence of flooded area and damages in the effected areas of Texas.

Texas, including eight via hoists, and 44 pets. The rescues included pregnant women, children, elderly and medically disabled people.

During one such mission, which was accompanied by a reporter and photographer from the *Omaha World Herald* newspaper, the mission required the crew to land in several feet of water and then carry residents of an apartment complex out to the helicopter by hand.

"I've never landed in water like that," 1st Sgt. Ron Schroeder, who had also conducted aerial rescues during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, was reported to have said at the time. He later added: "Quite honestly, I didn't realize we could do something like that. Landing in water was definitely a new experience for me."

Typically, Smith said, the helicopters would land and pull

people out of flooded buildings and neighborhoods and then fly them to landing zones, that ranged from fields to parking lots and highways, where a flotilla of boats waited to take them on to evacuation centers.

"It was a pretty chaotic flying situation," Smith said later. "We landed in a lot of odd locations."

Flexibility and paying constant attention to obstacles and other aircraft were essential, Smith added. "Things were just changing by the hour... but that's pretty typical in a disaster situation."

The Blackhawk helicopters crews weren't the only ones to make an impact either. Together the seven helicopters involved in the Texas missions were credited with transporting more than 450 people, and delivering 142,000 pounds of cargo to include 500 pounds of blood to a hurricane-affected hospital.

## Guard staff shifts from exercise into real missions

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

### Multiple Hurricanes

While they may not have been in Texas or Florida flying over the flooding, Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen assigned to the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Operations Center played an integral part in the organization's assistance to two hurricane relief operations in August and September.

Probably most interesting, however, is the fact that the JOC's real world operations actually began before the hurricanes struck as the staff supported a planned major multi-state domestic emergency exercise at the Mead Training Site, Aug. 25-28.

There, the Nebraska National Guard's (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and high-yield Explosive) Enhanced Force Package (CERFP) element conducted a major disaster response exercise designed to test its ability to respond to a domestic emergency.

That exercise also included members of the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, Missouri National Guard's Homeland Response Force, Missouri Task Force 1, and other state and local agencies.

The JOC staff's role in the exercise was to compile information to provide to senior Nebraska National Guard leaders.

"About halfway through the exercise was when Harvey started looking bad," said Capt. Aaron Self,

JOC battle captain. "We'd do briefings where we were throwing in real world stuff that we were tracking."

As the three-day exercise and drill weekend came to an end, the JOC staff prepared for the real world requirements of supporting requests from Texas as Hurricane Harvey made landfall near Corpus Christi and then swamped much of the Houston area with historic hurricane-related flooding.

"We were coming off (of the exercise), so we had the staff," Self said. "But it was challenging because there are so many things that you can't exercise. With the exercise, there were things that were controlled, but with the real world it is uncontrolled. With the exercise, we knew we were dealing with the CST (Civil Support Team) and the CERFP and it was really easy, but this called for a whole staff."

As a battle captain, Self was responsible for helping assist the various staff members in collecting information and developing plans for a variety of possible hurricane relief-related missions that were arriving in Nebraska via the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) system that allows states affected by disasters to request assistance from other states. Those requests, which came to the Nebraska National Guard via NEMA, require significant analysis and plan development



Photo by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

**Preparing The Brief:** Members of the Nebraska National Guard Joint Operations Center staff review and prepare information for the daily Commanders Update Brief. This information allows leaders to make necessary decisions for emergency support missions.

before initiating.

Due to the life-threatening nature of the hurricane response, timelines were extremely tight.

"I don't do personnel. I don't do finance. I don't do aviation," Self said while explaining the role that a battle captain plays. "Those people are focusing on that, but I am facilitating them getting that information. If they need something, I can run it down. 'Do you have what you need? I need this from you.' Taking that and putting together the briefs."

While the staff had the training for the situation, many had never

supported an emergency in real life. In fact, said Self, this marked probably the largest mobilization of Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen since the historic flooding on the Platte and Missouri Rivers in 2011.

"The last time anything this bad hit was 2011," he said. "Nobody in this office has experience to this extent."

That meant that Hurricane Harvey – and later Hurricane Irma and Maria – were learning experiences for everyone involved.

"We are not done," said Staff Sgt. Benjamin Schall, JOC non-

commissioned officer-in-charge about a week after the Hurricane Irma relief operation came to an end on Sept. 17. "We are still compiling vehicle records, flight records, and Soldier's pay."

According to Schall, the value of the lessons learned during the hurricane relief operations can't be overestimated.

"I learned that we have some stuff to work on," said Schall. "This is the biggest event that I have been a part of. We have some things that we need to get in our (standard operating procedures). We have more work to do to improve our foxhole."



**Comforting Those Affected By The Storms:** Sgt. Aaron Aldrige, Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, helps calm a rescued woman and her dogs after picking them up from a flooded area, Aug. 31, in Orange, Texas, during the Hurricane Harvey relief efforts.



Photos by Sgt. Anna Pongo

**Husker Pride:** Aviators wore a “Husker Dustoff” morale patch to identify themselves as Nebraska National Guard Soldiers.

## Working Together Nebraska aviators provide helping hands to flood-stricken Texans

By Sgt. Anna Pongo  
Staff Photojournalist

SUGAR LAND, Texas — The first sight of the flood waters surrounding the Houston, Texas area was eye-opening and shocking. The hay bales, tree-tops and occasional house roofs poking out of vast lakes were the only indication that the landscape wasn’t normally covered in water.

In a couple places, rising out of the muddy waters, a hill offered some high ground for farm animals to retreat to.

The weekend of Aug. 26, as the rain fell and water still rose, Nebraska National Guard helicopters flew toward the Houston area to do anything they could to help the people of Texas who had been struck hard by Hurricane Harvey and the subsequent rains that simply didn’t seem to go away.

The Nebraska Army National Guard aviators soon found themselves immersed in their work, providing much needed help to those who had been most affected by the following floods. That help took many forms. From transporting scores of people out of their flooded neighborhoods, to hauling much needed food and medical supplies to areas isolated by still rising water, the 37 Nebraska Soldiers from Lincoln and Grand Island worked tirelessly to support in any way they could.

“It’s disheartening to see the devastation, but it’s uplifting to see the resiliency of the people of Texas,” said Sgt. Aaron Aldridge, a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter crew chief with Lincoln’s Company G, 2nd Battalion, 104th Aviation Regiment.

No matter the time of day, the UH-60s were constantly flying in and out of the Sugar Land Regional Airport where a temporary base of operations had been set up by the Texas National Guard.



**Helping Texas:** A UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter hovers over a parking lot during a rescue mission. Nebraska Army National Guard helicopter crews helped after Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, Texas, and surrounding areas.



**Supporting the Relief:** Nebraska Army National Guard Sgt. Aaron Aldridge, Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, secures cases of water in a Blackhawk helicopter for transport to an area without drinking water, Aug 31, during the Hurricane Harvey relief operation.

Hurricane Harvey	
	461 People Moved
	44 Pets Rescued
	142,000 lbs of Cargo
	6,000 lbs of Water Bottles
	1,000 lbs of Medical Supplies
	150 Patients Treated

“In an event such as this scale, being able to rely on other states to come help you, that’s a very important thing in a situation like this,” said Sgt. Ryan Polich, a Co. G, 2-104th Aviation, flight medic. “And that’s what we’re here for.”

Though the destruction of life

and property was profound, the resilience and support of the greater Houston and Texas communities inspired the Soldiers who had flown there from Nebraska.

“One thing that sticks out to me is the kindness and generosity of the people of Texas and how supportive they are of us being here,” Polich said. “I’ve never experienced something like this before.”

Each day the front room of the operations center at the Sugar Land Airport was piled high with food donated and delivered by local citizens. This spirit of unselfish giving by the Texas community extended from boxes of Texas-famous brisket to Gatorade, free baseball game tickets, to paying for the service member’s meals when they went out to eat.

“(The community’s) appreciation of us being here is awesome,” said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Tom Morris, a Co. G, 1-104th Aviation pilot. “Bringing stuff to us, because they know that we are stuck here in a small building, and that there are a whole lot of us doing a whole lot of different things. So they want to do their part to help out just like we’re helping them.”



Courtesy photo

**Lighting Up Texas:** A team of Nebraska aviation Soldiers help load a light set into a Nebraska Army National Guard CH-47 Chinook helicopter for the Hurricane Harvey missions in Texas.

## Guard medical team jumps from exercise into real thing

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

Capt. Michael Mitchell admits that even though the members of the Nebraska National Guard's CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and high-Yield) Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP) had their hands full during an Aug. 24-28 multi-state domestic emergency response exercise at the Mead Training Site, they couldn't help but think about the very real world disaster unfolding along the northern Gulf Coast in Texas.

"We knew what was going on and we knew that we had some skills that might be useful," said Mitchell, a Nebraska Air National Guardsman who serves as the medical plans officer for the joint Army and Air National Guard team.

What was going on was that Hurricane Harvey, after coming ashore as a Category 4 hurricane near Rockport, Texas, on Aug. 25, had stalled out over the Houston metropolitan area – the fourth largest city in the United States – dropping biblical amounts of rain onto the region over a 5-day period. By the time the storm had subsided, an area the size of Delaware had received more than 40 inches of rain that caused widespread flooding and mandatory evacuations of thousands of residents.

Mitchell said the members of the media team began to hear about a possible call-up to provide support in Texas even as they worked to treat "patients" on the cracked, windswept plains of the Mead Training Site.

"We received a phone call from the Texas air operations center that they were going to need medical support and that our CERFP medical team was one of two that were being requested," Mitchell said. "We didn't have many details other than the fact that the whole team was going to be needed."

However, as the flooding drug out... so did the order calling for the 44-person team to deploy.

"It took roughly five days from the time that we were alerted until the time that we were deployed," Mitchell said. "Initially, people



**Home Away From Home:** Members of the Nebraska National Guard set up cots at the Jack Brooks Regional Airport in Beaumont, Texas.

### Hurricane Harvey

were really excited to be called up. We constantly train for missions like this, but we seldom get the opportunity to put that training to use in the real world. So, we really wanted to deploy and help people."

"However, the delay really put some stress on the Airmen and Soldiers, their families and their employers," he said.

Finally, on Sept. 2, the team received the word to go.

With most of the team deploying from the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln on the Labor Day weekend, the trip to Texas took roughly two days to complete, arriving at the Jack Brooks Regional Airport in Beaumont, Texas.

Setting up their cots and equipment in the airport terminal, Mitchell said the team soon got involved when they received a request to deliver some medical supplies to a temporary medical treatment facility that had been set up in the parking lot of a hospital in Vidor, Texas, that had lost electrical power. The Nebraska Guardsmen then stayed to assist with one of the shifts, Mitchell added.

According to Lt. Col. Scott Shaddy, the team's commander, the Nebraska Guard doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians and other medical staff members took over the evening shift at the makeshift facility, which consisted



Photos by Tech. Sgt. Denise Mommens

**Welcome To Texas:** Staff Sgt. Jonathan Zgainer and other members of the Nebraska National Guard CERFP team are greeted with "High Fives" from members of the Texas National Guard on the evening of Sept 4 at the Beaumont Baptist Hospital. The Texans had been working at the Beaumont hospital on 12-hour shifts for a few days after Hurricane Harvey hit the area.



**Getting Down To Business:** Senior Airman Morgan Hurley and Master Sgt. Cheryl Dougherty complete administrative paperwork for patients receiving care at the Beaumont, Texas, Baptist Hospital triage site.

of tents set up outside of the hospital. Shaddy later told the *Omaha World-Herald* the work essen-

tially consisted of treating cuts and scrapes, giving tetanus shots and dispensing medicines to people who

had been without them for days.

When the hospital received power after roughly a day, the Nebraska team shifted to Vidor, Texas, where they set up another temporary emergency medical treatment facility in the parking lot of a local high school. There the team provided routine and other medical care for local residents who were unable to receive it at normal medical facilities due to the continuing flooding and power outages.

Over the course of just a few days of operation, the Nebraskans saw and treated more than 150 people between the two facilities.

"The need was definitely there," said Mitchell. "The first team that was deployed was from Texas and they said that they were extremely busy during the first days following the hurricane, but by the time we arrived it was starting to slow down. Even so, we did have an impact in helping people in need."

The team remained on site until returning to Lincoln on Sept. 10.

## Nebraska medics return home from Texas, call hurricane relief mission fulfilling

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton  
Staff Photojournalist

### Hurricane Harvey

The Nebraska National Guard welcomed home Air Guard members mostly from the 155th Medical Group in addition to several members of the Nebraska Army National Guard, Sept. 9, after a five-day deployment to Texas in support of the ongoing Hurricane Harvey relief operations.

"The team really proved to themselves that they are up to the mission," said Lt. Col. Scott Shaddy, commander of Detachment 1, Medical CBRNE (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and high-yield Explosive) Enhanced Response Force Package (CERFP). "We've been told that we are one of the best, if not the best medical element in the country. It proved true on this particular mission."

According to Col. Kathleen Amyot, commander of the 155th Medical Group, the mostly volunteer Nebraska team mobilized and were on their way to Texas within 12 hours of their final deployment notification. Amyot, who deployed as a physician, said once they arrived, the team set up in approximately 90 minutes started taking care of patients.

First stop for the Guard team—who are trained to provide medical triage operations in a variety of environments—was Beaumont, Texas, where they set up their mobile triage facility and provided overnight medical triage support after the

hospital there lost power and water. When utilities were restored the next morning, the team packed up and traveled to Vidor, Texas where they fell in and provided relief for an Army National Guard Unit that had already been there five days.

It was the first time working in a real-world joint environment many of those deployed including Airman 1st Class Aaron Link, an aerospace medic from the 155th Medical Squadron. Link, a Biology student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who was part of the team's hot zone triage team. He got a chance to hone his skills working along side the Texas Army National Guard.

"They do things a little differently, but I just adapted and jumped in."

The team treated 180 people in approximate 48 hours they were in operation, said Amyot. She said a majority of patients they saw were not acutely ill, but suffered from abrasions and lacerations that were infected from being in the water for long periods of time.

The team also treated many patients for upper respiratory problems caused by exposure to mold.

The Guard members are part of the state's larger CERFP, which most recently conducted an emergency response exercise at the Nebraska National Guard's Mead

Training Site the weekend before the deployment. Many of the deploying Nebraska Guardsmen were involved in that exercise, said Shaddy.

"Frankly, the Nebraska Team does very well with exercises, but it's really nice to see the team perform above and beyond with excellence in real-world situations where things shift rapidly and you have to modify things and treat patients a bit differently," said Amyot. "The team was outstanding. I am really, really proud of how they performed."

"This is something I have trained for the last five years to do," said Senior Airman Dominic Pasquinely, a biomedical equipment technician in the 155th.

Pasquinely, who is responsible for maintaining the power grid that runs generators and lights to operate medical equipment, was also on his first deployment.

"When asked," he said, "I jumped at the opportunity to go out and show the world what this Nebraska team is capable of. It was very moving and nice to be part of something where you can see that we are actually helping. Unlike in training, we are touching peoples' lives."

"It was neat to see the direct impact we had on the community and humbling to see what they were going through, said Senior Airman Megan McGahan, an aerospace medic in the 155th. She said the most rewarding part of the deployment was working together as a team, not only with Nebraska Guard members, but also with other



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Denise Mommens

**Caring Touch:** Master Sgt. Kristin Bovinet helps cover a child with a thermal blanket after providing her with medical care at the Texas National Guard CERFP Medical Triage site at the Beaumont Baptist Hospital during the Sept. 4 night shift.

Guard units and with members of the community.

"The volunteers that took care of us were amazing. They brought us tons of food, put us up and did our laundry... no one went hungry. Everyone was so welcoming and so appreciative of us being there."

"One of the common themes I heard from Guard members who returned home was how much sup-

port they received from the people they were helping," said Brig. Gen. Keith A. Schell, Nebraska Air National Guard assistant adjutant general. "It was a big effort by all. The deployment was great training and once again, the Nebraska Guard showed it really knows its craft. Congratulations on a job well done and my hats off to all who participated."

**Final Discussion:** Maj. Hank Piening (left) and Capt. James Fox discuss details of their flight home from St. Croix while waiting for members of the Mississippi Army National Guard to load onto their aircraft, Oct. 16.



## Into the Storm

### Nebraska Air Guard crews support hurricane response efforts through relief flights

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands — Although their missions have been shorter in duration, Nebraska Air National Guard flight crews, aircraft mechanics, and air transportation specialists from the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing have been making an impact during the ongoing hurricane relief and recovery operations by transporting equipment, supplies and Guard personnel into and out of the disaster zones.

“To me, this is what I’ve always seen the Guard being about,” said Maj. Michael “Hank” Piening, a 155th ARW pilot after he led a KC-135R Stratotanker crew to St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, to deliver members of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and then returned with members of the Mississippi Army National Guard’s 298th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion who had just completed several weeks of work in support of the Hurricane Irma and Maria relief and response operations.

“The National Guard has always been about coming together and helping people,” Piening said after the Oct. 15-16 mission. “It’s how we were raised in the Guard. If you need us to do something, and it’s feasible, then we’re going to do it.”

The October mission marked the third time that Nebraska Air National Guard tankers and crews have been dispatched to support the hurricane relief missions. The first came when a Lincoln-based Stratotanker crew helped bring home Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who had deployed to Jacksonville, Florida, in support of the Hurricane Irma relief operation.

A day later, a tanker and crew were dispatched with little pre-notice by the Air National Guard’s crisis action team at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, to pick up water, food and water purification equipment and deliver them to

### Hurricane Maria

Puerto Rico just a day before Hurricane Maria made landfall as a massive Category 4 storm.

“We were lucky that we got in and out as fast as we did,” said Maj. Randy Douglas, 155th ARW current operations officer. “If we had gotten delayed in Puerto Rico, it could’ve been really bad.”

Typically, natural disaster airlift missions in the United States and Territories are conducted by Air National Guard C-130 and C-17 crews from around the country. However, even though KC-135 Stratotankers have significantly smaller payload capabilities, they have been useful during the unprecedented hurricane relief operations that stretch from the Texas Gulf Coast through southern Florida and the Florida Keys to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“People like to use KC-135s because we were quicker and a little more comfortable to fly in,” Piening said. “Getting people, supplies and equipment into and out of disaster zones quickly and efficiently is what we can do.”

“And we enjoy getting to do it... getting to be part of these national efforts,” he added.

For Piening and his seven-person crew who supported the U.S. Virgin Islands mission, the experience was both fulfilling and eye-opening. It also included a significant amount of teamwork between the aircrew, aircraft mechanics and specialists from the 155th ARW’s Air Transportation Office to ensure that the Nebraska brigade’s equipment, supplies and deploying Soldiers were all carefully manifested and then loaded onto two awaiting Air Guard planes.

“It definitely takes a team of crew chiefs, boomers, pilots and ATOC to bring everything together,” said Staff Sgt. Everett Bottass, an inflight aerial refueling specialist who took off time from his studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**Getting The Plane Ready:** (From left) Staff Sgt. Everett Bottass and Tech. Sgt. Isaac Cepek, KC-135R Stratotanker inflight aerial refueling specialists, make final preparations to their aircraft after loading a pallet of equipment belonging to members of the Nebraska National Guard’s 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade before an Oct. 15 flight to St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.



**Little Piece Of Home:** Tech. Sgt. Matt Gullickson removes a Nebraska-themed cover from the engine of a KC-135R Stratotanker during the preflight preparations, Oct. 16.

to be part of the airlift mission. The fact that it was Nebraska Soldiers that the crews were taking made the mission even more meaningful, Bottass added. “It’s always nice to take people you already know. It was pretty cool to see what they were doing to get ready for this mission and then to see them begin to take over from the Virginia Army National Guard, that was pretty cool.”

Of course no mission runs completely as planned. And the October airlift mission was no exception.

Initially, the plan called for one aircraft to depart with 15 brigade Soldiers and the bulk of their equipment roughly 30 minutes prior to a second KC-135, which was scheduled to take the bulk of the Soldiers and the remainder of their equipment to St. Croix. However, just prior to take off, the second aircraft developed mechanical difficulties, requiring the crew to quickly open up additional seats and space so that 10 more Soldiers, including the brigade commander, could deploy on time.

“There’s always something that can go wrong,” said Bottass. “But everyone pitched in and with a little ingenuity, we were able to get things changed over pretty quickly and get underway.”

The flight to St. Croix took roughly five hours to complete. The last 10 to 15 minutes of that trip however proved to be extremely eye-opening, Piening said. As his fellow pilot, Capt. James Fox, took the controls for the final approach into the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on the southern edge of the island, Piening said he had an opportunity to see the damage of Hurricane Maria firsthand.

“Powerlines were down everywhere. The trees were just stripped. And the houses... many of them didn’t have roofs so you could look



**Hitting The Road:** Staff Sgt. Everett Bottass walks to a makeshift passenger terminal to conduct a preflight safety briefing for members of the Mississippi Army National Guard while the Nebraska aircrew prepares their KC-135R Stratotanker for a return flight from St. Croix to the United States, Oct. 16.

right down into what had been peoples’ homes,” Piening said. “The devastation was just so severe that I almost couldn’t believe what I was seeing.”

Landing on St. Croix, the impact was furthered as the airplane was directed to park outside of a makeshift passenger terminal set up in a concrete building visibly damaged and surrounded by remnants of debris left by Hurricane Maria as it stormed past on Sept. 19 with winds in excess of 170 miles per hour.

There, a team of air transportation operations specialists from the Missouri Air National Guard’s St. Joseph-based 139th Airlift Wing who were working out of a makeshift operations center, assisted Bottass and fellow Nebraska boomer, Tech. Sgt. Isaac Cepek, in unloading the Stratotanker using a 5-K loader and other equipment while members of the 67th MEB shuffled into the passenger terminal in the darkening twilight to begin their reception and onward integration processing.

As these operations took place, Air Guard mechanics Tech. Sgt. Matt Gullickson, Staff Sgt. Brett Thorne and Senior Airmen Daniel Ellis began their post-flight inspection and initial preparations for the next day’s airlift mission while Piening and Fox began working through plans for the return troop movement in the morning.

“This is really what it’s all about,” said Ellis the next day. “Members of the National Guard and other military all working together to help

people in need.” Ellis said the key to doing well in an emergency response and relief environment is pretty simple. “Teamwork,” he said. “Knowing people and trusting them to work together to get everything done and overcome whatever challenges occur. You do whatever it takes to get the mission done safely.”

Piening echoed those thoughts. “We’re all on the same team,” he said. “I think that’s the common thing among National Guardsmen... we’re all here to help out and were going to work together to get the missions done.”

Following the final work of the afternoon, the Nebraska Airmen were loaded onto a van driven by a Missouri Air Guardsman and to their hotel, one of the few on the island that had its own power plant and thus its own electricity. The drive across the center of the island— which took approximately 25 minutes to complete — again showed the importance of the work the Guardsmen were involved in. Even though the drive snaked through numerous communities, the darkness of the area left a lasting impression. Occasionally the headlight beams of the van showed damaged buildings, trees and highline wires.

Mostly, though, it was the utter darkness of the houses — broken occasionally by flickering candlelight in windows — that stayed with the Airmen.

“I think the thing that hit me the most was just how dark  
**See RELIEF FLIGHT on 18.**



**National Guard Teamwork:** As the sun sets on a busy day on St. Croix, Staff Sgt. Everett Bottass and Tech. Sgt. Isaac Cepek, KC-135R Stratotanker inflight aerial refueling specialists, talk with members of a Missouri Air National Guard aerial port team about building a pallet of equipment to be transported back to the United States. The Airmen were all supporting the ongoing Hurricane Irma and Maria relief and recovery operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## From PT to Planes

# Aviators go into high gear after drill weekend call-up

By Spc. Lisa Crawford  
Editor

When the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation (Security and Support) Regiment received word they would be deploying to Florida on State Active Duty support as part of an emergency management assistance compact request to aid with Hurricane Irma relief operations, they were already sweating—but not from anxiety.

The Soldiers were in the middle of conducting an Army Physical Fitness Test as part of their scheduled drill weekend, Sept. 8, when official orders came down. Less than 48 hours later, four UH-72 Lakota helicopters, 100 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers and 70,000 pounds of cargo—including two Humvees—were in the air on their way to Jacksonville, Florida.

"We literally went from ground zero in our PTs to on the bird," said 1st. Sgt. William Cary, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation (S&S) Regiment.

According to Cary, this was the first time the battalion had been called for a mission of this caliber, involving Strategic Air movement in cooperation with the Air Force.

Still, leaders were ready to execute on command.

"It's almost like a light switch, and you're instantly ready to help," said Pfc. Whisper Harris of Dannenbrog, Nebraska. "You never think it's going to happen, but when it did we were ready and excited to do something for our country."

Harris, a battalion supply specialist, and Cary both agreed the motivation was immediately high.

"I don't think there was a single person sitting around not doing anything," Harris said. "People took charge and got stuff done."

While the Soldiers are usually separated into their sections at drill, Harris said the deployment preparation was a unique and rewarding team effort.

"This was entirely unified, with all hands on everything," Harris said. "Lots of busy bodies ready to perform any mission, just like we're trained to do. We were ready to assist any way we could."

After learning about the mission, Capt. Veronica Jones, a flight platoon leader, jumped into action to help prepare Soldiers, her family and—eventually—herself.

As the movement officer in charge of the mission, Jones said her job was to help sort through a lot of information to determine



Photo by Col. Eric Teegerstrom

**All Together:** Army and Air National Guardsmen use all of their strength to load a pallet of equipment onto a C-130 transport aircraft, Sept. 10, at the Grand Island Municipal Airport as the 1-376th Aviation (Security and Support) deploys to Jacksonville, Florida.

### Hurricane Irma

what resources might be available in Florida and what equipment the unit might need to bring with them, such as drinking water or tents.

"When you go somewhere that's not a natural disaster, you know what resources are or not," Jones said. "In natural disasters, you don't even know if you'll have an airport to land at. And there's even more work going into planning something that hasn't even happened yet. So we prepped for the worst case, and hoped for the best."

Jones said this mission was unique because of how rare it is for an aviation unit using UH-72 Lakota helicopters to be activated in its entirety.

"Lakotas are non-deployable for a war-time mission, and stateside we typically don't go as a whole unit, just individual aircrews," Jones said. "So, to my knowledge, this is the first time ever that the unit has been activated as a whole."

Beyond just planning what the Soldiers will need as a whole overall, Jones said the leadership helped Soldiers with their individual needs as well, including releasing multiple Soldiers from drill immediately to travel hours back to their home of record to pack and say goodbye to their loved ones.

"The Soldiers' needs must be covered



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Ride To Recovery:** Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 1-376th Aviation Regiment load a U.S. Air Force KC-135, Sept. 11, from the air base in Lincoln headed to northern Florida in support of Hurricane Irma relief and recovery operations. Approximately 100 Nebraska Soldiers were deployed on state active duty orders for this domestic mission.

first," Jones said. "If you don't come prepared for your own troops, you won't be efficient."

One of those Soldiers with a longer trip home was Staff Sgt. William Nolan, a maintenance platoon sergeant with Company A, 1-376th Aviation, who lives four and a half hours away from Lincoln in Bonesteel, South Dakota.

Not just a resident, Nolan is mayor of

the 350-person town and runs a coffee shop with his wife. After being released from drill, Nolan returned home to roast enough coffee to support the town's 125th Anniversary that he would now have to miss.

"I've had a couple of deployments before, so it's nothing new," Nolan said of having to leave unexpectedly and to miss an important event. "(The town is) pretty understanding."

Nolan said he joined the Nebraska National Guard from his hometown of Butte, Nebraska, and ultimately moved across the border when he got married. He chose to stay with the Nebraska National Guard as a full-time career on and off for the past decade because he enjoys the camaraderie and service to others.

"It's good to help out when you can," Nolan said. "Most of my additional duties have been overseas, so to actually help people at home when we get a chance is kind of nice."

With all the logistics in place, Jones was eventually able to turn her attention to her own personal needs as well.

"As a leader, you're so worried about everyone else, and then you still have to pack yourself," she said.

A breastfeeding mother who learned of the mission during her first drill following the birth of her second child, Jones said she wasn't sure what to expect for accommodations while deployed, but she wanted to go regardless, so she prepared for all possible outcomes.

"This is why I joined the Guard," Jones said. "We get to go help the local population and respond to emergencies, and that's what it's all about."

Jones said when she finally left drill on Sunday she mowed her lawn, made childcare arrangements, purchased formula for the first time and finally started packing for the upcoming trip.

"I am very proud of my unit's ability to get here so quickly having never done a mission in such a short timeframe like this before," Jones said. "As Guardsmen we're all eager to help our communities."

Overall, the planning went off without a hitch. The aviation unit mobilized and served seven days on state active duty orders supporting Hurricane Irma relief and recovery efforts in Northern Florida before returning to Nebraska with this new experience under their belts.

"It's been a priceless experience," Cary said. "We proved we can do it, and we'll do it better in the future because now we know what we need to do."

## RELIEF FLIGHT continued from page 17.

it was," said Piening. "You didn't even know you were driving through a city or towns because it was just so dark." On the return trip the next morning, the sun revealed additional glimpses of how much damage and devastation had occurred. Again, the views left the Nebraska Airmen amazed.

Driving along a highway that snaked through hills and various communities, the Nebraskans could now make out how many businesses and homes had been damaged, how many electrical poles had been snapped in two, how many forests of trees had been stripped of their branches, and how people were beginning to put their lives together.

"It was an eye-opening experience to see that much damage and yet to see people trying to go about their everyday lives, either on foot or by car," said Piening about the drive.

"It was way worse than I expected," said Ellis. "Seeing all of the power poles down and seeing the demolished homes and then talking (to officials at the airport) about the damage to the schools and the hospitals, it left a pretty big impression on me."

"I was definitely surprised by the damage," Bottass added. "Everyone hears about Houston and Florida and definitely about Puerto Rico, but I had no idea it was going to be as bad as it was."

The final return trip for the Nebraskans involved transporting several dozen Mis-

issippi Army National Guard Soldiers from the 298th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion from St. Croix back to Jackson, Mississippi.

Once again, the mission involved teamwork and coordination with National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from multiple states to ensure that the equipment, baggage and Soldiers were safely loaded aboard the KC-135.

Following the mission, the Nebraskans agreed that the mission had been well worth the effort.

"I think what you saw on this mission was the community aspect of the National Guard," Piening said. "People from other units that fly other types of aircraft still

have relationships with people in similar jobs in those different units. So much of the coordination and teamwork that you saw was because of the fact that we all know people from different units who we have trained with in the past. That's something you don't always necessarily see in active military units, but is something that really gives us in the National Guard an ability to work together."

"Everybody just steps up to get the job done to help people in need," he added.

Bottass agreed.

"There's just a brotherhood that exists when you go out and help your fellow Americans," he said. "I like it. I really like working with a bunch of people who are willing to help others out when they need it."



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**Huddling Up:** Nebraska Air National Guard Airmen conduct a discussion with members of a KC-135R Stratotanker flight crew while preparing their aircraft for a flight back to the United States from St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, on Oct. 16.

## Newly-organized Guard history unit sends two to Florida mission

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

### Hurricane Irma

While most Nebraska National Guard Soldiers were returning home from Florida after the Hurricane Irma relief efforts, the 105th Military History Detachment was sending two Soldiers into the efforts to tell the story of what had occurred in Florida during the historic storm.

Maj. Andrew Nelson and Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry of the newly-organized 105th MHD left Nebraska on Sept. 21 to help with Florida's collection of Hurricane Irma event stories. They spent most of two weeks in St. Augustine where the Florida National Guard Headquarters is located.

According to the two Nebraska Guardsmen, they worked with the Florida historian to gather interviews of people involved in the efforts, talking with 28 people about their roles in Hurricane Irma relief. These interviews included the Florida adjutant general, assistant adjutant general and the officer-in-charge of Joint Operations.

"It isn't just looking at the good or the bad. It is capturing the whole picture of what happened," Maberry said.

Hurricane Irma was one of the largest hurricanes Florida has been hit by in recent years. Thus, the Florida relief effort required a historic mission.

"Every available Florida National Guardsmen was activated," Nelson said. "It was the

first time that Florida had activated such large numbers of out of state units to help with the response."

All of the components were represented; the Army active duty, Army Reserves, and Army National Guard, Air Force, Air Guard, Navy and Coast Guard were all there to help Florida."

Less than a year old, this was the military history detachment's first real world mission. The unit stood up in October 2016. The 105th Military History Detachment is one of seven history detachments in the National Guard.

"The fact that within a year we got deployed for our first mission is a little mind-blowing," Maberry said. "Being able to put together what we learned at the Military History School into a real world mission just reinforces it for the next time."

The three-person detachment is full of experience. Nelson, an armor officer, has a military public affairs background and is also a journalist for the *Omaha World Herald*. Maberry has her bachelor's degree in anthropology with a minor in classics and works as a clerk for a post office.

Being such a young unit meant that they had a lot to learn about their mission. While neither Soldier is new to historical writing, they both said that it was a challenge from the beginning.

"Our confidence from beginning to end really soared," Maberry said.



Photo by Maj. Andrew Nelson

**For The Record:** Staff Sgt. Sherri Maberry, 105th Military History Detachment, conducts an interview with a Florida Army National Guard Soldier.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Thumbs Up:** Nebraska Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Jed Taff, a crew chief from Company A, 1-376th Aviation Regiment, gives a thumbs up from the door of a UH-72 Lakota helicopter, Sept. 14, to confirm the well-being of a Florida resident whose home was surrounded by floodwaters caused by Hurricane Irma.

## ‘Good Life’ Guard Soldiers conduct unique hurricane mission in ‘Sunshine State’

By Spc. Lisa Crawford  
Editor

When Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts called up the Nebraska Army National Guard to help support Florida as Hurricane Irma battered the Sunshine State as part of an emergency management assistance compact, the Nebraska Soldiers knew this mission would be unlike anything they had done before.

On Sept. 11 about 100 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers – mostly from 1-376th Aviation (Security and Support) Regiment, including four UH-72 Lakota helicopters and crews – headed to Jacksonville, Florida, just as Hurricane Irma made landfall with the state.

“All elements arrived within hours of the storm’s passage and established the first aircraft and aviation headquarters capabilities aside from activated Florida National Guard teams,” said Lt. Col. Thaddeus Fineran, Nebraska state Army aviation officer.

The Nebraska National Guard team was prepared to operate in extremely austere conditions, without power, food, lodging or infrastructure.

“Fortunately, Hurricane Irma did not cause as much widespread destruction as most of the models had predicted,” Fineran said. “Had the hurricane not changed its trajectory at the last moment, our efforts here would have been focused much more on emergency evacuation. That being said, the accomplishments of the Aviation Task Force are very significant, but more from a readiness and reconnaissance standpoint versus a rescue standpoint.”

Once the Florida Army Guard task force deployed south, the Nebraska team fully integrated into the 63rd Theater Aviation Brigade, headquartered by the Kentucky Army National Guard and Florida National Guard Joint Task Force Operations, to receive CH-47 Chinook aircraft from three additional states, including Ohio, Connecticut and Minnesota.

“This capability enabled nearly all Florida Army Guard aircraft to push south to support intensive operations in the Florida Keys, while our task force managed any emerging missions in central and northern Florida,” Fineran said.

The fully-formed Task Force North, with 137 Soldiers, four UH-72 Lakota and five CH-47 Chinook helicopters, stood ready for any requirements Florida needed. The task force worked with ground teams in multiple



**Lakota Alignment:** A Soldier with 1-376th Aviation Regiment (Security and Support) moves the blades of a Nebraska UH-72 Lakota helicopter in together to make more space for other aircraft, Sept. 12, at the Florida National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Jacksonville, Fla.

### Hurricane Irma

counties to conduct search and rescue and reconnaissance operations in flooded areas along the local rivers and the I-75 corridor near Gainesville, Florida. It also supported other Joint Task Force Florida National Guard forces with equipment and personnel movements between staging bases in northern Florida and Joint Task Force locations in southern Florida.

Once on the ground at the Florida National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Jacksonville, the first step when occupying an area – now knowing what infrastructure was available – was to get communications capabilities going according to the team’s pace plan, said Capt. Ryan Carlson, battalion communications officer.

“Communication is crucial to anything you do and we do it in a high-stress environment,” Carlson said. “Lack of communication can lead to mission failure and failure is not an option, especially during real-world missions like this.”

Failure wasn’t a concern for Carlson, however.

“Having just done annual training in July, and having a really good training period, I not only had a good idea of what capabilities we could provide, but a really good idea of what my personnel could accomplish, and in the timeframe they could accomplish it,” he said.

Carlson’s main concern after receiving the initial deployment warning order was to fill any gaps in his personnel, which included finding a substitute for his senior noncommissioned officer who was currently on leave following surgery.

“We’re a ready and able force,” Carlson said. “It’s good to know someone can come in and pick up with what we’re trying to do and how we want to do it. These guys train to a specific Army standard for that reason.”

Carlson filled his gaps with volunteers from other units throughout the state, including Staff Sgt. Shawn (Michael) Ronk, 1-1-34th Cavalry Squadron, who became the senior communications NCO for the mission.

“The Army is all about being able to ‘shoot, move and communicate,’” Ronk said. “Sometimes, though, we might want to think of it more as communicate, move and then shoot. It is the digital age and the military’s use of communications is what provides the efficiency to accomplish today’s missions.”

Ronk said it was easy to jump in to lead



**Hoist Training:** Staff Sgt. Tony Brollini, a flight medic with Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, trains on how to use a hoist in conjunction with a UH-72 Lakota helicopter, Sept. 13, in Florida during Hurricane Irma relief and recovery operations.



**Mission Brief:** First Sgt. William Cary (left) listens as mission plans outlined on a whiteboard are briefed, Sept. 12, during Hurricane Irma relief and recovery operations at the Florida National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Jacksonville, Fla.

another battalion’s team due to the professionalism of the Soldiers, their “great work ethic” and enthusiastic motivation. He said the mission was great for both the Soldiers’ professional development and future readiness.

“We established connectivity for our area TOC relatively quickly with a mostly lower-enlisted team,” Ronk said. “Not only will this experience help the unit here, but in the future as the Soldiers transfer and move to other units they can share that information as they progress through the ranks.”

Another Soldier who gained valuable professional experiences while on deployment was Staff Sgt. Tony Brollini, a flight medic with the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Company G, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion. Brollini typically works with UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, so when he was selected to accompany the 1-376th Aviation (S&S) Regiment on the State Active Duty deployment to Florida for Hurricane Irma relief and recovery, he said he was excited for the opportunity to work with a different aircraft, the UH-72 Lakota helicopter.

“Alpha Company doesn’t have any medics assigned and the battalion only has a couple, total,” Brollini said. “Sergeant (Shawn) Humphreys and I volunteered to help keep support for the mission internal. They’ve never trained with our medics before and we’ve never flown with them before, so this opportunity allowed us to bridge that divide.”

Prior to his first mission with a Lakota,

Sept. 13, Sgt. 1st Class Will Jacobsen, crew chief with Company A, 1-376th Aviation (S&S) Regiment, took some time to familiarize Brollini on proper hoist functions with the UH-72. Brollini conducted his first mission – and first flight ever – in a Lakota helicopter later that evening.

“Flying is flying,” Brollini said after his initial flight. “Obviously the aircraft is different. You’re sitting backwards and you’ve got a lot less room than what I am used to, but everything else is the same.”

Brollini said the real-world mission experience was invaluable and he has already started conversations with the unit to continue cross-training efforts in their aircraft for possible future missions.

“We’re supposed to be an expeditionary type unit where we can pick up in 24-48 hours and mobilize,” Brollini said. “I think this training enhances that.”

Brollini flew in a Lakota for the second time, Sept. 14, during another survey mission to evaluate water levels along the Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers, while ensuring flooded areas were free of stranded civilians. While conducting reconnaissance, Brollini and the other Nebraska National Guard Soldiers did notice multiple civilians in the area and ensured their well-being through friendly waves with “thumbs-up” approvals on their safety.

While there were some areas that did indicate increased water levels, the area was deemed clear of any civilians in distress.

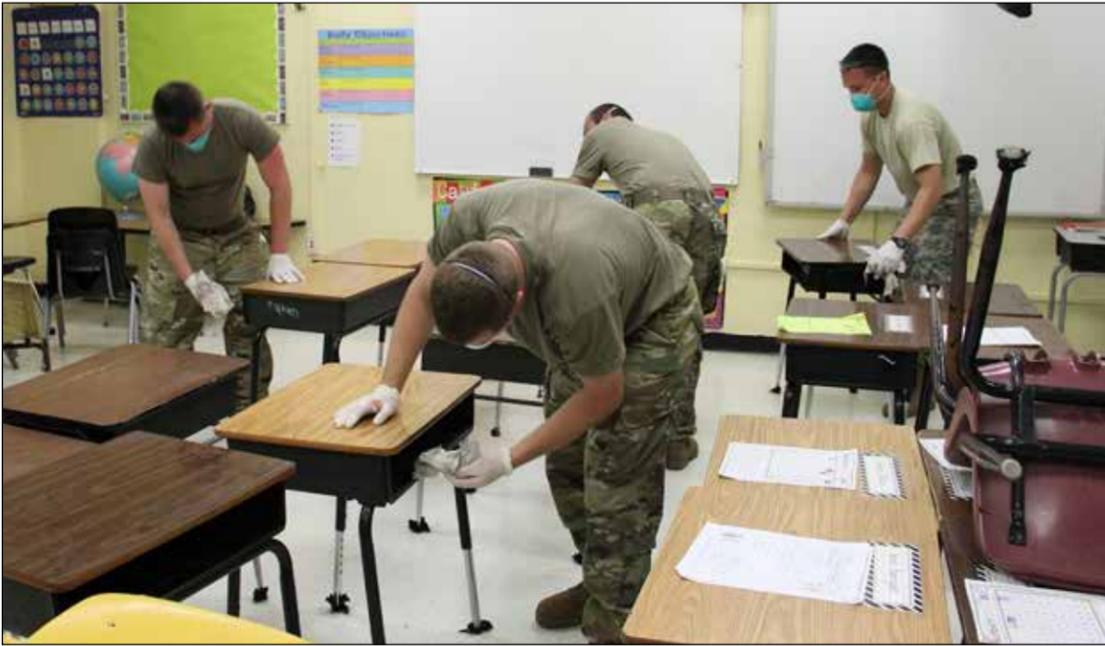


Photo by Maj. Carlos Van Nurden

**School Clean-up Mission:** Members of the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade lend a hand to the U.S. Virgin Islands by cleaning up St. Croix Ricardo Richard's Elementary School.

## 'Hurricane Brigade' takes lead in U.S. Virgin Islands

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska's Army National Guard's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade has long been known as the "Pike Brigade" based upon its unique unit patch designed in the 1960s when the Lincoln-based brigade was reorganized during the height of the Vietnam War.

While the name "Pike Brigade" has stuck over the decades, the brigade probably could be known by a different name as well based upon its history of being called up for Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in 2008.

Nebraska's "Hurricane Brigade" lived up to its name once again this October when the Nebraska National Guard mobilized the brigade headquarters as well as 56 Nebraska Soldiers and two Nebraska Airmen for duty in the U.S. Virgin Islands, which were devastated by Hurricanes Irma and Gustav in September.

"Once again, Nebraska is proud to support our neighbors in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico who continue to recover from these devastating storms by sending trained and ready Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen to provide assistance where it is



**Making A Plan:** Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade staff discuss the next day's mission and personnel shortly after taking over command and control activities for Guard units serving on St. Croix and St. Thomas.

### Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria

needed the most," said Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts in announcing the deployment on Oct. 13.

Along with the 67th MEB deployment, a member of the Nebraska National Guard's 72nd Civil Support Team was deployed to Puerto

Rico to provide communication support there.

According to Nebraska officials, the deployment of the 67th MEB, which took place on Oct. 15-16, involved assisting the U.S. Virgin Islands Joint Force Headquarters in providing command and control support of National Guard units from 31 states that had been sent to the Caribbean Islands to help assist in the hurricane recovery efforts.



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Clearing Debris:** An Army National Guard Soldier carries debris, Sept. 14, during the clean-up of Cecil Field POW/MIA Memorial Park. Nebraska, Kentucky and Florida National Guard members volunteered to clean the park as part of an organized "Chaplains Hike."

## Nebraskans help clean up Florida park

By 1st Lt. Edward Bosland  
Staff Photojournalist

Approximately 40 Army National Guard Soldiers from Kentucky, Florida and Nebraska volunteered, Sept. 14, to restore the Cecil Field POW/MIA Memorial park and clean-up the area around the Cecil Conference Center in Jacksonville, Florida, while aiding with Hurricane Irma relief and recovery operations.

The event – referred to as the "Chaplains' Hike" – was organized by two Nebraska National Guard Soldiers: Capt. Daniel Sauer, a chaplain from Lexington, Neb., and Spc. Chris Sheen, a religious affairs specialist from Wilcox, Neb. It was coordinated with two other chaplains: Capt. Mike Halyard of the Florida National Guard and Lt. Col. Bill Draper of the Kentucky National Guard.

The mission grew out of a need. Sheen had noticed the debris-filled park shortly after the Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers arrived in Florida. Under the direction of Lt. Col. Thaddeus Fineran, Nebraska state Army aviation officer, Sauer and Sheen were tasked with organizing a project that would allow volunteering Soldiers to get away from the hanger and directly support the community.

Sheen and Sauer both felt the



**Devastating Damage:** Dozens of Virgin Islands homes show the massive damage caused by Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. The storms caused massive damage to the islands, including devastating destruction to homes, schools and other crucial infrastructure.

The mission involved coordinating National Guard support to civil authorities in the areas of law enforcement, Level 2 medical care, and reception and onward integration activities of incoming and outgoing National Guard forces on St. Croix and St. Thomas, said Col. Craig Strong, 67th MEB commander.

"This is a good mission for us," Strong said on Oct. 14. "We're excited to deploy and begin helping our fellow Americans who have been affected by these hurricanes."

Others echoed those comments. "I'm excited to be able to put my knowledge to use, to help people and to do a mission that counts," said Sgt. Shalyn Robinson, a supply specialist as she waited to receive her flu shot during the initial processing for brigade personnel for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"It should be interesting," added 1st Lt. Jonathan Smolen, who would be responsible for providing in- and out-processing support for Guardsmen deploying into and out of St.

Thomas. "This is my first deployment so I think this will be a good experience. It should be fun."

Following the deployment to the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Guard Soldiers and Airmen quickly took over their respective duties from members of the Virginia National Guard 114th Infantry Brigade Combat Team that had been responsible for the duty up until then. The Nebraska Guardsmen also had the opportunity to lend a direct hand while helping Guardsmen clean up a number of schools on St. Croix, which had been closed since Hurricane Maria's landfall weeks earlier.

The mission definitely was what Capt. Trevor Ocken, a brigade plans officer, was hoping for as he prepared for what was expected to be a 30-day deployment.

"This is a great opportunity to go help some people who need the help," Ocken said.

"This is why you sign up... to go help people in need."

### Hurricane Irma

impromptu ceremony. "Having in-shape flags is just one small thing the POW/MIAs deserve for their sacrifice, just like having a clean park," Peyton said.

The Soldiers intend to have the flags disposed of in an honorable and appropriate manner, making way for new flags to proudly fly over the memorial. After the cleanup, the Soldiers gathered for either a reflective discussion on how their work connects to the Army Value of Selfless Service, or for a brief sermon over the same topic, complete with prayer and the option of taking communion offered by the chaplains.

"My hope in putting together a group discussion and brief chapel service moment with communion, was to help Soldiers see that an act of selfless service, no matter how small or how large, can make a significant impact," Sauer said. "Every person that pulled a rake, pushed a wheelbarrow or scooped with a shovel was executing an act of selfless service that truly made a great impact the next day when it came to POW/MIA Recognition Day."

"We just stepped in wanting to help and it ended up being that we did so for a purpose," he said.

The Soldiers worked in small groups to remove debris from the park and conference center, picking up large items by hand and using rakes, shovels and wheelbarrows to gather other excess foliage. The Soldiers also repositioned fallen flags from the memorials.

While conducting clean-up efforts, Sheen and Staff Sgt. Alex Peyton, a master intelligence analyst from Kearney, lowered the tattered and faded remains of damaged American and POW/MIA flags, and respectfully folded them in an

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



**Rescuing The Injured:** A team of Missouri Army National Guardsmen practice rescuing a wounded patient during a multi-state disaster exercise, Aug. 28, at the Mead Training Site.

## Disaster Preparations

■ Guard conducts multistate emergency response exercise on eve of hurricane relief operations

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

Members of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard had the opportunity to get a head start on the work they would be doing in support of three separate hurricane relief operations when they conducted a major, multi-state disaster response exercise just days before Hurricane Harvey struck Texas in late August.

Conducted at the Mead Training Site, the Aug. 25-28 exercise involved roughly 600 Soldiers and Airmen from the Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri National Guard as well as local and state emergency response officials.

The exercise was designed to test the Guard's ability to respond to a domestic emergency involving an explosion and the possible release of hazardous chemicals that overwhelms local civilian first responders' ability to support. The training involved such activities as search and extraction operations located within the "rubble pile" and a nearby abandoned concrete Atlas missile site as well as chemical decontamination and medical triage efforts in several nearby grassy pastures.

Among those participating in the exercise were members of the Nebraska National Guard's CBRNE Enhanced Force Package (CERFP) element, the Missouri National Guard's Homeland Response Force, Missouri Task Force 1 and staff members of the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Operations Center in Lincoln.



**Practicing Their Skills:** Members of the Missouri National Guard Homeland Response Force practice shoring up a concrete wall before conducting a search for injured people, Aug. 28, at the Mead Training Site.

According to Lt. Col. Bryan Medcalf, commander of both the Nebraska Army National Guard's 126th Chemical Battalion and the Guard's joint CERFP, the exercise provided his team of Soldiers and Airmen an opportunity to work with members of Missouri's HRF, which would serve as his unit's higher headquarters during an actual multi-state disaster response.

"This is the first time that we've actually trained together like this," Medcalf said.



**Medical Treatment:** Capt. Ryan Decker, a Nebraska Air National Guard flight doctor with the Lincoln-based 155th Medical Group, practices triaging patients as they come out of the decontamination tents.



Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**Lifesaving Training:** A team of Nebraska Army and Air National Guardsmen practice decontaminating a patient during a multi-state domestic emergency support exercise, conducted Aug. 25-28 at the Mead Training Site. The exercise involved roughly 600 Soldiers and Airmen from the Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri National Guard as well as other local and state emergency response officials.

The Nebraska exercise involved a fictitious series of explosions resulting from a pipeline rupture at a local power plant facility that so overwhelms local and state first responders' resources after several days that the Guard's CERFP and HRF are required to provide support as part of their commitments to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Region 7.

Medcalf said even though the exercise was broader in scope than what the CERFP normally conducts, in many ways it was still similar to the missions they've worked on in the past.

"Finding the casualties, transporting them, decontaminating them, medical triage and then get them on their way to the hospital," Medcalf said.

Medcalf said along with integrating the HRF into the exercise, the event also allowed members of the Guard to work with Missouri's Task Force 1, a civilian team made up of experts in the areas of search and extraction. "Getting to have direct contact with members of the team has really been a good experience for our search and extraction folks," he added.

Those Nebraskans who participated in the exercise said it was both a good refresher on their responsibilities as members of the CERFP, as well as eye-opening. "It's been good," said Capt. Ryan Decker, a Nebraska Air National Guard flight doctor with the Lincoln-based 155th Medical Group, as he practiced triaging patients as they came out of the decontamination tents. "I have been to several of these exercises before. Today was definitely a crawl phase.... We are getting everyone re-hacked again to learn the process."

"There's a lot of new folks down the line, so everything takes a little longer and is a bit slower as well learn the whole process," added Decker, who in civilian life is a family doctor in northwest Iowa. "It's going well now... but there's some kinks to work out."

According to Medcalf, one of the values of exercises such as these is that it allows members of the variety of Army and Air Guard units and functional areas



**Anyone In There?** A member of the Nebraska National Guard looks for injured people underneath a slab of concrete during the Aug. 25-28 multi-state domestic emergency response exercise conducted at the Mead Training Site. The exercise involved a fictitious explosion and release of hazardous chemicals.

that make up the CERFP to gain valuable experiences that would be invaluable during a real world emergency. Nebraska Lt. Gov. Mike Foley who observed the training on Aug. 26 said considering the world around Nebraska, that experience could be crucial.

"It sobers you a bit to see just what could happen," said Foley, who also serves as the Nebraska director of Homeland Security. "We all pick up our daily newspapers and read the news about these horrible things that happen all around the world. It seems so distant and so remote."

"When you come out here, it brings a dose of reality to it., a 'Hey, this could happen in Nebraska' ... and then you gain some comfort knowing that there are people preparing for it, who are thinking about it and strategizing about how would we deal with it?" he added.

The fact that most of the Guardsmen who were participating are traditional Guard Soldiers and Airmen like Decker with civilian jobs away from the military adds to the strength of the team, Medcalf said.

"I think that what you get from having Citizen Soldiers doing this is A, they're tied to their community and, B, they all bring extra skills. You've got doctors practicing medicine, you've got all of these

guys doing what they normally do and then coming here and bringing those experiences to improve our responses... it's just excellent, excellent training," he said.

Foley agreed. "What's fascinating about these men and women is 70 to 80 percent of them have other careers in the real world. They have regular jobs and then on the weekends and as needed they give so much of themselves and their time to be prepared for that day that will hopefully never happen but to be prepared for when a disaster might strike."

And for a significant amount of the Guardsmen - in particular the CERFP's medical section - that disaster would prove to be sooner rather than later. Just a week after the exercise, 51 members of the CERFP's medical team were mobilized and sent to Texas to aid in the Hurricane Harvey response mission.

According to Capt. Michael Mitchell, CERFP medical plans officer, the exercise gave the medical team a significant head start on the deployment.

"It really helped get us ready," he said. "We were able to get a lot of good training in regards to working together and understanding various processes that really helped us when we went to Texas."



Photos by Sgt. Jessica Villwok

**Grading The Competition:** A Nebraska Army National Guard "Spurmaster" critiques Soldiers competing to earn their spurs during the 1-134th Cavalry's Spur Ride at Mead Training Site.

## Earning their spurs

### ■Cavalry squadron's newest scouts attempt to earn honors during September exercise

By Sgt. Jessica Villwok  
Staff Photojournalist

For many new Army National Guard cavalry scouts – or Shavetails – the Sept. 8-10 drill weekend was anything but ordinary.

Over a period of 24 hours, new 19D cavalry scouts completed 14 stations covering seven and a half miles of intense training as part of the 1-134th Cavalry's Spur Ride, an event that is held with esteem as a rite of passage.

Dating back to the early formation of the cavalry, new scouts were called Shavetails. As a new Soldier arrived at their posting, they would be issued a horse with a shaved tail as a way of letting other scouts know that the rider was new.

As a scout gained experience and the horse's tail grew back, the Soldier was then considered to be more seasoned. When senior leaders believed that the Soldier had met

the standard, was ready to use the tool of spurs for their horse, they would bestow the honor of spurs onto the Soldier.

Sgt. 1st Class Adam Dack, a 15-year veteran of Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry, said the Spur Ride helps keep the unit's heritage alive.

"Through the Spur Ride we test the Soldiers physically and mentally," Dack said. "We try to stress them to a point where it's not the day-to-day training activity. It's more in depth; it's harder. Once they get tired, we start throwing in the mental aspect and make them think of that stuff. It's all (military occupational specialty) specific tasks, and at this point in time it's more of an esprit de corps thing."

Traditionally the event would start early morning and finish in the evening, but this year was different. Dack, a native of Champion, Nebraska, said the 2017 challenge was a little more stressful for competitors due to the overnight timing



**Function Under Fire:** A Soldier with the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron performs a function check on a .50 caliber machine gun.

element.

"This year we started with the APFT (Army Physical Fitness Test) and we went to the ruck," Dack said. "Then the lanes were conducted



**Spur Masters:** Two soldiers of the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron sport their honored spurs while observing the traditional Spur Ride.



**Finding Their Way To Their Spurs:** Two Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers plot their grid coordinates during the land navigation portion of the Spur Ride.

throughout the evening hours, overnight. That added another level of difficulty.

The Spur Ride is designed by the unit Spurmasters, someone who has gone through the Spur Ride and already holds their spurs. This year the Spurmasters sat down to redesign the event to make it more challenging compared to past years.

As a result, competitors showed their skills by completing multiple tasks including: a modified APFT, long-range surveillance, clearing a bunker, classifying a route, calling for fire, weapons stations, reacting to an improvised explosive device, managing a medical lane, a written land navigation test, a practical land navigation test, a historical written test, and conducting preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS) on equipment.

New scouts look forward the event to earn respect and approval from their peers. This year was no different for Spc. Noah Huber,

Troop A.

"It was pretty intense," Huber said. "The fact that it lasted over 24 hours kind of makes it a change of pace."

Huber said the length of the challenge was most notable, however, it was a way for the lower-enlisted to showcase their skills. "We are supposed to be subject matter experts, and this is our chance to go out and prove that in a pretty grueling way," Huber said. "The cavalry has a strong esprit de corps and a lot of traditions. It's been done in cavalry units since they were riding horses on the plains, and it's a test to show your worth regardless of rank as a trooper. I think it's pretty special."

Huber, a native of Harrisburg, Nebraska, said he most looks forward to being awarded his spurs and reflecting on being a part of the tradition that has long been a part of the cavalry history. He also plans to come back to future Spur Rides and take part as a Spurmaster.

## State Partnership Program 2017

2017 was a banner year in terms of the Nebraska National Guard's continuing relationship with members of the Czech Republic Armed Forces through the National Guard's State Partnership Program. Established in July 1993, the program matched the Nebraska and Texas National Guard with the Czech Republic as a way to assist the Czech in transitioning from a Warsaw Pact military structure to one that would allow it to become a major contributor to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. 24 years later, the relationship has matured to the point that the organizations annually conduct dozens of engagements on a variety of subjects designed to improve the capabilities of all three entities. Here are a few examples of those engagements taken from the U.S. Embassy in Prague's website.



**Standing Tall:** Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard spent a week with the 31st CBRN Regiment in Liberec the end of June. The groups of Soldiers discussed and shared tactics, techniques and procedures for site exploitation, decontamination operations, equipment incorporation and NCO development.



**Firefighters:** Nebraska firefighters from Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing conducted an exchange of lessons on safety procedures, rescue techniques, and firefighting tactics with Czech firefighters from various airbases on Aug. 17-18. The Nebraskans learned how to safely rescue pilots from the Czech Republic's primary fighter jets while Nebraska firefighters in turn taught the Czech firefighters safety procedures on the KC-135.

## Portrait of a Citizen Airman

## Airman puts musical talents, leadership to work as drum major

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

The stands are full of people, shoulder to shoulder, cheering on the Wayne State College football team. The aroma of popcorn and hot dogs float through the air from the concession stands. As the marching band takes the field for the halftime show, Senior Airman Katie Welsh, dressed in gold and black, is in front ready to lead.

She has been working for years for this very moments.

"One of my first memories regarding music is from Kindergarten," Welsh said. "My mom played 'Part of Your World' from the Little Mermaid on the flute."

In 7th Grade, Welsh started playing the flute, just like her mom. When Welsh went to college five years ago, she joined the marching band. Two years ago, Welsh auditioned to be a Wayne State College drum major, which she has



Welsh



**Leading The Way:** Senior Airman Katie Welsh (in white) leads the Wayne State College Marching Band down a college street before an Oct. 28 football game in Wayne, Neb. Welsh is one of two drum majors that lead the band during its various performances.

Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

held since.

Welsh's favorite part of being a drum major is getting to know everyone outside of just the flute section and helping everyone get better.

The white, gold and black drum major uniform isn't the only uniform that Welsh wears. For Welsh, who has been in the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing for five-and-a-half years,

servicing in the military is tradition.

"My Dad has been in for longer than I've been alive, so it has always been a big part of my life," Welsh said. She added that another Wayne State College band member is also a

Nebraska National Guard Airman. They didn't know they had that in common until one drill.

"There are many experiences that you get with the Guard. I have been to Wisconsin, Georgia, Florida, South Dakota and around Nebraska."

Welsh is currently majoring in Music Education at Wayne State College and has been in the school marching band for five years. Welsh plans to move to western Nebraska after she finishes her education to be a band teacher.

"I want to be a 5-12 band teacher because I would get to follow them throughout their whole musical career and see the kids grow up outside of the music too," she said.

Even when the band, the Guard, and classes keep her busy, Welsh said she also finds time to be involved on campus with the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME) as well as Kappa Kappa Psi, an honorary band fraternity that helps set up for different band events.

"It's a lot, but don't give up because it is all worth it," Welsh said. "It is a really big time commitment, but I prioritize what I need to do so I can do the things I want to do."

## Nebraska National Guard officer candidate class graduates during Capitol ceremony

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska National Guard welcomed eight new leaders to the front of its ranks, Aug. 6, during the graduation ceremony for Officer Candidate Class No. 6 at the State Capitol in Lincoln. The graduation ceremony marked the culmination point for the eight officer candidates who had spent the last 18 months proving themselves in multiple ways during the Guard's primary commissioning school.

"It was long and it was hot, but it paid off," newly-commissioned 2nd Lt. Joel W. Tapsoda said shortly after having his new gold bars placed on his dress uniform jacket.

Tapsoda, who will become a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Omaha-based 402nd Military Police Battalion, said the course gave him the skills he needs to get started on the right foot. "They gave me leadership skills, taught me how to fight and bounce back from adversity," he said. "I'm hoping to use these skills to get myself better and be a great leader for the United States Army."

In a dramatic change from past OCS graduation ceremonies, this year's event took place in the historic rotunda of the State Capitol. According to Col. Shane Martin, commander of the 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), the ceremony was moved to the Capitol as a way to celebrate Nebraska's 150th anniversary of statehood.

Surrounded by marble columns and a domed ceiling that towered four-stories above them, the graduates were encouraged to take the moment seriously by the ceremony's keynote speaker, Lt. Gov. Mike Foley.

"National Security and public safety is the single most essential purpose for the government," Foley said. "As government officials, nothing is more fundamental than what we are here to do. Therefore, it is absolutely crucial for all branches of the military to attract and train men and women of the highest character and integrity, not to mention courage and determination."

According to Foley, the nation and the world depend upon the commitment of U.S. military leaders to accomplish their missions with integrity and honor. "The responsibility of what you are accepting should weigh heavy on you," he said.



Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**New Bars, New Mission:** Newly commissioned 2nd Lt. Joel Tapsoda receives his newly-earned gold bars during the Aug. 6 Officer Candidate School graduation ceremony conducted in the State Capitol rotunda. Tapsoda was one of eight Nebraska Soldiers who graduated from the 18-month course.

"Soon you will be commissioned officers in the United States military, the strongest military in the history of civilization. And soon you will take an oath... an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and to bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

"It is an oath to a set of ideals that makes freedom worth fighting for. After you take this oath you are now a member of the profession of arms and you must live everyday as a professional. You may take off that uniform at night... but you never take off the oath. You must wear it high with honor and integrity," Foley added. "I have no doubt you are up for the challenge."

Graduating from the course were Jason M. Dailey, Gretna; Jacob T. Godlewski, Omaha; Joshua D. Kelsey, Lincoln; Thomas J. Oeschlager, Crete; Joshua M. Pryor, Papillion; Rachell M. Rowley, Alliance; Joel W. Tapsoda, Omaha; and Alan S. Wills, Columbus.

Oeschlager was named the recipient of the course's academic and leadership awards, while Kelsey was named the course's second honor graduate. Earning the top honors for Class No. 60 was Rowley, who was the recipient of the Distinguished Honor Graduate award as well as the course's physical fitness award.

According to Rowley, who currently serves full-time at Camp

Ashland as a Basic Leader Course instructor, the course was definitely challenging at times.

"There were a few times I was really tired (and thought) 'Wow, is this ever going to end?'" she said. "I just kept looking toward the future. I knew that I wanted to meet this end goal and was willing to do whatever it took."

That goal, she said, was to increase her impact as a Soldier. "I have been in for 15 years and I have the (noncommissioned officer) side behind me. I wanted to bring that over to the officer corps and just continue to develop and make us stronger."

Due to her current job as full-time instructor, Rowley did not accept her commission during the ceremony, but hopes to in the near future. "The Nebraska National Guard is my life and I want to make sure I pass on all my knowledge, whether it be through the NCO side or hopefully through the officer side."

Tapsoda agreed, saying that he hopes to take the skills he developed in OCS and apply them in his future military assignments. "It's a new door that is open... new opportunities and challenges," he said, adding that he knows that much will be expected of him in the very near future. "Always do my best, to do what is expected from me going forward."

## State's Warrant Officer Corps grows following September graduation

By Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

The Nebraska Army National Guard's Warrant Officer Corps grew by eight, Sept. 24, when the latest class of warrant officer candidates graduated from the Camp Ashland-based course.

"The Warrant Officer Corps brings technical expertise and continuity to our formations," Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac said during the graduation ceremony held at Camp Ashland's Memorial Hall. "It's a major step. I'm glad you made the choice to become one."

Warrant Officer Candidate School is a six-month-long, three-phase course that involves both training and leadership evaluations in classroom and field environments designed to prepare prospective warrant officers for the work and responsibilities they will encounter upon their commissioning.

The course concluded with a two-week final evaluation exercise at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, immediately before the Camp Ashland graduation.

Graduating as members of this year's Warrant Officer Class 17-001 were: Nathan J. Borne-meier, Adam J. Fischer, Benjamin G. Helmink, Joshua M. Mertens, Jason T. Meyer, Ryan A. Pella, Michael N. Springer and Michael S. Wiederspan.

According to Pella, who both came from and will return to the 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne) in Omaha, the graduation was definitely a sight for sore eyes... and feet.

"It's exciting to finally be done," said Pella, who was previously a section sergeant in his unit. "It's been a long journey to get to this point, so it's just a big relief knowing that's done and I can go back to my unit."

Pella said the course definitely prepared him for the challenges that now await him.

"I think I grew as a leader, mainly. I learned more about what it means to be an officer and the important roles that warrant officers play," he said.

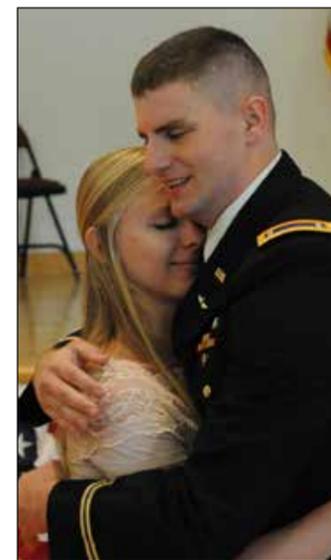


Photo by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

**Graduation Hug:** Newly commissioned Warrant Officer Joshua M. Mertens receives a hug shortly after receiving his new bars during the graduation ceremony for Warrant Officer Candidate Class 17-001. Mertens was one of eight Nebraska Soldiers who graduated from the six-month course on Sept. 24.

Fischer seconded those comments. "Definitely leadership attributes," said Fischer about what he took most from the course. Fischer, a former member of Lincoln's 267th Ordnance Company who will now serve in the 128th Engineer Battalion in Columbus, said the teach, assess and counsel officers who served on the Camp Ashland staff helped him better understand the role that he is now taking on as a warrant officer. "The TAC officers definitely help a lot. They teach you and talk to you about where you need to go. That helps a lot."

And that means, Fischer said, in developing both his expertise as well as a network of support.

"It's a lot about networking... you are the guy people are going to look for for answers when they have problems, and if you don't know the answers yourself, you need to know who to call to get the answers. I think that's what I'm going to take away the most."



**Singing Through A Meaningful Rainstorm:** Spc. Angie Schroder, 43rd Army Band, sings "I'm Proud to be an American" as a heavy rain soaks her during the Sept. 24 dedication ceremony of the new Gold Star Family Memorial at Lincoln's Antelope Park.



**Solemn Salute:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac salutes during the dedication ceremony for the new Gold Star Family Memorial at Lincoln, Sept. 24.

Photos by Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes

## Memorializing their sacrifice

### ■New Gold Star Family Memorial unveiled amid rainy, tear-soaked dedication ceremony at Lincoln park

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

The families of fallen service members have shed too many tears to count.

So, it seems only fitting that, just as the white covering was pulled to unveil the new Gold Star Family Memorial in Lincoln's Antelope Park, a sudden cloudburst of quarter-sized raindrops drenched the assembled crowd of Gold Star families, Nebraska service members, governmental leaders and others.

In a way, the rainstorm seemed to symbolize all of those fallen tears, as if the heavens themselves were joining in mourning the loss of those Nebraskans who had given their lives in service to the United States as members of the U.S. military.

According to Pat Mracek, whose son, Cory, died in 2004 while serving in the Army in Iraq, the Sept. 24 dedication of the Gold Star Family Memorial monument will serve as an enduring reminder of the sac-



Williams



Mracek

rifices made by Nebraska's fallen service members and their families.

"People have said that your loved one is the one who gave the sacrifice," said Mracek, who now serves as president of Nebraska Gold Star Mothers. "While that is true, we have given a big part of our heart and our lives. Our family dynamic has changed forever."

"There are no more birthdays or family celebrations with our loved one," she said. "My son, Sgt. Cory R. Mracek, was killed on Jan. 27, 2004, in Iskandariyah, Iraq. He will be forever 26 years old. On March 16th this year, he would've turned

40. It is so very hard to imagine my son being middle-aged, especially since I have not shared a birthday with him in 13 years. It is hard to visualize what his life might've been like."

The new Gold Star Family Memorial, which was dedicated on National Gold Star Families and Mothers Day, is the first of its kind to be dedicated in the state. It follows similar memorials that have already been erected at 22 other locations nationwide.

The memorial was funded, in part, by the Herschel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, which is seeking to have a memorial honoring Gold Star families placed in every state. Williams, the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient to serve during the bloody World War II battle of Iwo Jima, said the memorials serve an extremely important purpose of helping the American public better understand the lasting sacrifices service members and their families have made on behalf of the nation.

"The period of time and the cause of sacrifice does not change. The loss of loved ones brings the same grief, the same heartache and requires us to remember," the World War II Marine Corps veteran said during the dedication ceremony. "This memorial, here beside me, pays

tribute to those families and those relatives of every relationship to that individual. And we pray that in some way it may soothe the pain and will serve as a reminder of their sacrifices. And give some assurance that this community does remember and that those loved ones will not be forgotten."

The new memorial consists of three black granite stones featuring the cutout silhouette of a saluting American service member. It also features symbols entitled "Homeland," "Family," "Patriot," and "Sacrifice."

The symbols are designed to show both the fallen service members' love of country as well as the void created by their sacrifice. The memorial honors all of those families who have lost a service member since Nebraska was founded 150 years earlier.

Williams said the memorial will help the public better understand what that sacrifice means, particularly those most directly affected by it.

"Few of us can understand the loss of a loved one, particularly a parent, in the armed forces can have on a family... especially the young children," Williams said. "They do not understand anything about the cause of a war, or the reason why their daddy or their mommy or

their brother or their daughter or their uncle didn't get to come home. For them, the loss of a mother or a father, a son or a daughter, or a relative they are close too, is more than just a life-changing experience. It continues to affect them every day of their life."

"We as a people and as a society have sort of failed to recognize that sacrifice that is placed upon our youth," he added. "Maybe this memorial will give them some assurance that they will be remembered. And may it be a lasting source of comfort and peace for the future."

The ceremony also included speeches by Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler, and others, as well as music by the Nebraska Army National Guard's 43rd Army Band and a ceremonial three-round rifle volley fired by an American Legion honor guard.

But the most poignant part of the ceremony occurred just as Nebraska National Guard Maj. Shane York and Master Sgt. Byron Eloge pulled that covering off of the memorial. With the audience taking cover under the trees and the rain cascading down, Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, assisted in the laying of a wreath in front of the memorial as Spc. Angie Schroder sang "I'm Proud to be an American."

### Stories of the Nebraska National Guard

## Mostly forgotten boxing arena once annual sporting mecca

By Senior Airman Trey McNeese-Polivka  
Staff Photojournalist

The roar of a weekend crowd. The sweet aroma of stadium food heavy in the sizzling summer air. Thousands of eyes peering down upon celebrated warriors clashing in a competition of blood, sweat and respect for the honor to be named best of the best.

A football game at Nebraska's Memorial Stadium? No. This particular scene comes from the distant past when Camp Ashland stood as a major summertime sporting mecca in the Lincoln and Omaha areas during the 1920s-1930s.

Such as Nebraska football is now a spectacle awaited by thousands each year, so, too, were the annual Nebraska National Guard boxing matches that occurred during the early years of Camp Ashland, Nebraska. There, thousands of spectators traveled to Camp Ashland to watch the unit boxing contests that unfolded within a concrete boxing arena that still stands, although now mostly forgotten, on the banks of the Platte River.

That arena is actually the second one to stand at Camp Ashland. In 1927 the Guard constructed and used a wooden boxing arena with wooden bleachers that could hold up to 1,000 spectators.

The boxing event was part of the annual games that occurred after the duty day during each of the annual Nebraska

National Guard training encampments that took place every summer during the 1920s-30s. The games included a series of competitions between various Guard units who hoped to win the coveted Governors Cup. The Governor's Cup competition also included baseball, basketball, track, swimming, and wrestling.

Boxing, however, was the main attraction and the game with the most consequences towards winning or losing the Cup. Crowds from Lincoln, Omaha, Fremont and other locations would often travel to Camp Ashland to watch the free-to-the-public competition.

Free, that is, except for the final night of boxing.

According to the July 12, 1939 edition of the *The Ashland Gazette*, "If any soldier knows you and will take you in, it's free entry, otherwise two-bits (a quarter)."

The attendance was around 2-3,000 spectators nightly; with the final day of competitions drawing a crowd of 5-10,000 spectators. The final day was filled with the championship boxing match up's for each of the eight weight divisions.

After 1927 and years to follow, the need for a larger and a more enduring arena to be built was prevalent. The old wooden arena, couldn't last forever and the crowds attracted to these events were growing by the year.

This fact prompted Maj. Gen. Herbert J. Paul, Nebraska adjutant general (1919-39) to say at the time: "The present wooden boxing stadium was inadequate and particularly



Photo by Senior Airman Treyton McNeese-Polivka

**Silent Titan:** Camp Ashland's mostly forgotten boxing arena is actually the second to stand in the spot, replacing a wooden arena beginning in 1935. At its height, the arena would attract thousands of spectators for annual unit boxing matches during summer encampments.

unfit for use." Because Nebraska did not have funds to replace the old wooden structure, Paul requested federal funds, saying, "A new boxing arena was, deemed essential for unit morale."

In 1935, the Works Progress Administration was needed at Camp Ashland. The WPA was instituted by a presidential executive order under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of April 1935 to generate public jobs for the unemployed. With no funds for building the arena, but a vital asset for the camp,

the WPA allotted \$23,000 for construction of an octagon concrete boxing stadium, in replacement of the decaying wooden stadium.

The new open-aided, eight-sided, irregular-shaped arena had four sides measuring 48 feet in length, while the other four measured 69 feet length. The longer sides were to be used as an athletic room, canteen area and storage for machines, tools and vehicles.

The concrete structure was 22 feet high. With 14 rows of seating descended to within 13 feet of the ring, leaving plenty of room for main floor seating as well. In the center of the arena was a 24 square feet concrete boxing ring base. This boxing ring was elevated four feet above the main floor, to give prime viewing to all seated anywhere in the arena.

The primetime event, championship boxing match for each of the eight weight classes, for the Governor's Cup was at night; light fixtures were raised 30 feet above the stadium. With a spotlight over the ring itself, to help illuminate those nose-popping three-round fights.

The concrete arena had a 3,000 person capacity and was only partially built by 1936. An additional \$12,375 was needed before the arena would be completed in 1939.

Today the boxing arena is no longer in use as a boxing arena. This concrete titan is now used as a storage facility and tornado shelter.

# With senior sergeant deployed, West steps up at 92nd Troop Command

By **Spc. Lisa Crawford**  
Editor

During a July 8 change of responsibility at the Nebraska Army National Guard's Penterman Armory in Lincoln, there was one face missing from the ceremony's official formation: Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Cruickshank, the outgoing senior noncommissioned officer for 92nd Troop Command.

Cruickshank, who took responsibility for the 92nd Troop Command in September 2015, was unable to personally attend the ceremony because he is currently deployed with the 402nd Military Police Battalion to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Acting Sgt. Maj. Barry Read volunteered on his behalf, reading a letter penned by Cruickshank to ceremony's attendees, which included his gratitude for the Soldiers of the 92nd Troop Command for their "flexibility and adaptability" especially through the recent core structure changes across the entire Nebraska Army National Guard.

"Continue to take this responsibility seriously by learning and growing as individuals and helping units develop collectively because of it," Cruickshank wrote. "Challenge yourself to be the best you can by testing your mettle when given the opportunity. You will never regret what you learned about yourself from the experience."

As part of the official ceremony, Read passed the ceremonious NCO sword to Col. Eric Teegerstrom, 92nd Troop Command commander, and then on to incoming Command Sgt. Maj. Robert West.

This is the first brigade-level command sergeant major position for West, who currently serves full-time as the range operations specialist at the Nebraska National



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Go West:** Incoming senior noncommissioned officer, Robert West, accepts his new position and the ceremonious NCO sword from Col. Eric Teegerstrom, 92nd Troop Command commander, during the unit's change of responsibility, July 8, in Lincoln.

Guard's Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Nebraska.

"Some of the goals I have for 92nd Troop Command consist of ensuring our leadership capabilities are improved through NCOS," West said. "Sergeant Major (Dean) Reicks has been the person that has stressed, 'Take care of your troops at all times.' It may require you to do things on your own and long hours after troops are in bed, but take care of them first, and they'll take care of you."

West said he believes in the truth of that statement, and feels it can be taught through counseling and mentor programs for all Soldiers.

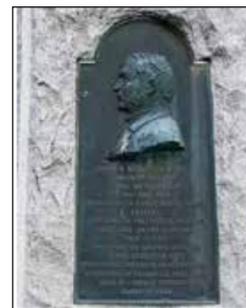
In closing the change of responsibility ceremony, West gave one reminder to the Soldiers of the 92nd Troop Command while under his care.

"You must adhere to the Army values," West said. "Follow them and they will not lead you astray."



Photos by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

**In the Weeds:** Col. Craig Strong pulls weeds from the base of Gen. John M. Thayer's gravesite.



**Thayer's Gravesite:** Gen. John M. Thayer, Nebraska's first Civil War commander, is buried in Wyuka Cemetery. The 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Soldiers took it upon themselves to organize a gravesite cleanup and to lay fresh mulch around the base of the headstone.

# Brigade Soldiers honor Nebraska Guard founder by cleaning Lincoln gravesite

By **Pfc. Elyse Lyons**  
Staff Photojournalist

In 1854, 13 years before Nebraska became a state, a man from Massachusetts arrived in the newly organized Nebraska Territory in search of a new life.

An officer in the Massachusetts State Militia whose father had served in the War of 1812 and grandfather had fought during the American Revolution, John M. Thayer would go on to make his indelible mark on the newly-forming Nebraska Militia when he was chosen in January 1855 to be Nebraska's first brigade commander by Acting Territorial Governor Thomas Cuming.

The impact that Thayer, who would go on to be Nebraska's first commander during the American Civil War and later the state's seventh governor, had on the fledgling Nebraska National Guard would

be profound. It's an impact that is still felt today in the modern Nebraska Army National Guard, particularly the organization's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

111 years after Thayer's death, Soldiers from the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade took time after being released from their Aug. 12 drill to honor the early Nebraska National Guard leader and the heritage of the brigade by pulling weeds and laying mulch at the gravesite of the late general at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln.

"Our lineage of the brigade can be traced back to Thayer and the 1st Nebraska Volunteer Infantry Brigade," said Col. Craig Strong, current 67th MEB commander who organized the volunteer clean-up effort. "Our Pike shirts have 1854 as the beginning date of the brigade because of Thayer."

Thayer led the 1st Nebraska Volunteer Infantry Brigade in the

1862 Battles of Fort Donaldson and Shiloh, the streamers of both still hang from the 67th MEB's organizational colors.

Following the war, Thayer went on to serve as the seventh governor of Nebraska, second governor of Wyoming Territory and as the first U.S. Senator of Nebraska. Thayer lived to be 84 years old.

According to Strong, the clean-up effort came as a result of unit discussion about putting Thayer's name on a brigade leadership award. The Thayer Leadership Award is still in the planning process.

Strong said he also has plans for continuing the preservation and is in the process of planning a wreath laying ceremony for spring 2018. He hopes that as he moves on from being the 67th MEB commander in the future, that the tradition of taking care of the grave continues.

# Military retirees learn more about current Guard, see pay changes

Good day to you all. Wow, what a summer this has been. Torrential rains, storms, total eclipse, and cool summer days. It's been enjoyable and we hope retirement is treating you well.

We just concluded a very successful Retiree Briefing conducted by the Army and Air National Guard at our Joint Force Headquarters on Aug. 20. We heard an update on the Army and Air Guard from Brig. Gen. Rick Dahlman and Col. Bob Stevenson, respectively, as well as briefings on Tricare, Space A, VA benefits, and an update from your NMRC council.

We also had a number of vendors present for the attending retirees and families to visit with as well during the breaks.

All in all, it was a great day, and approximately 85 of your fellow retirees were able to get the latest and greatest news pertaining to retirement issues.

## ■ Defense Finance Accounting Service address changes

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service's addresses changed effective May 1. The old addresses are being discontinued and will be replaced by addresses in Indianapolis.

The new addresses are:

### Retired Pay:

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

### Annuitant Pay:

Defense Finance and Accounting Service  
U.S. Military Annuitant Pay  
8899 E 56th Street

## Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

### DEERS/ID Card Stations

- ♦ G1 - 2433 N.W. 24th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524: (402) 309-8167/8168/8169;
- ♦ "Spirit of 1776" Armory 1776 N. 10th St. Lincoln, NE 68508 (402) 309-7359/7373;
- ♦ Penterman Armory at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln (402) 309-1724/1719;
- ♦ Air Guard (Lincoln Air Base) Bldg 600 Room E209: (402) 309-1542;
- ♦ Norfolk Armory 817 S. 1st St. Norfolk, NE 68701 (402) 309-8900/8908;
- ♦ Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney: (402) 309-7758/7752;
- ♦ 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), 220 County Road A, Bldg. 508, Ashland, NE 68003, (402) 309-7809/7628;
- ♦ Offutt Air Force Base: (402) 294-2374;
- ♦ The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.

Remember, you need two forms of ID when you arrive for your appointment.

Indianapolis IN 46249-1300  
The old PO Boxes in London, Kentucky, will remain open and all mail will be forwarded to the new address for one year. However, sending mail to the old address will add three to five days to the normal processing time.

The telephone and fax numbers are not changing.

Please copy and paste the following web address into your web browser for additional contact information: <https://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary.html>

## ■ Hearing aids now available for dependents

A provision in last year's National Defense Authorization Act

gave the Department of Defense permission to provide hearing aids, at government cost, to dependents of military retirees.

This is great news for retired beneficiaries, who are already eligible for hearing aids through the Retiree At-Cost Hearing Aid Program <http://militaryaudiology.org/rachap-rhapp-locations/>, popularly known as RACHAP.

Now retiree dependents are eligible to use this program too.

Key features of the program:  
♦ Eligible beneficiaries directly purchase hearing aids, utilizing the government contract price through manufacturers (at cost). Available at military treatment facilities (MTFs) only.  
♦ Cost at the MTF is \$300-\$400

### Early Bird Breakfasts

♦ Lincoln, Army National Guard retirees: **First** Monday of each month, 7 a.m., Virginia's Travelers Café, 3820 Cornhusker Highway

♦ Lincoln, Air National Guard retirees: **Last** Monday of each month, 7 a.m., Stauffer's Café, 5600 S. 48th Street

♦ North Platte area retirees: **Second** Saturday of each month, 8 a.m., The Lincoln Highway Diner, 320 Rodeo Rd

per hearing aid; the average savings to the beneficiary is \$1,600 to \$3,600 per hearing aid.

♦ This is a voluntary program for MTFs. This means individual MTFs are allowed to determine whether they will participate.

♦ Currently, there are 27 MTFs participating in the program, representing all three services and located only in the continental U.S. (CONUS).

♦ Capacity is limited at most MTFs. Active duty service members and their family members have priority.

♦ The program is not a TRICARE benefit.

♦ A hearing aid is considered a medical device, and getting one typically requires a series of three or four appointments with a qualified audiologist or technician for an evaluation, fitting, and follow-up. It's a bit more complicated than obtaining a new pair of eyeglasses. It's also more resource intensive, which is why many MTFs may have limited capacity.

Military Health System officials have approved the new policy and indicated they intend to do a supply-and-demand analysis to determine how and where to expand this popular program.

If you are a retiree or retiree dependent interested in the RACHAP program, contact your closest MTF to determine whether they participate and find out how to get an appointment.

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

## ■ Moving?

Have you moved, changed a phone number or added an email address? Please contact us to update your information so we can keep our information current.

As always, thank you for your dedicated military service. The Nebraska National Guard is rightfully proud of its heritage and you are part of that great legacy.

## ■ From the desk of Sgt. 1st Class Erik Singasaas, retirement services NCO

Greetings. We encourage you to call (402) 309-8162 if you have had a change in address or spousal status so we can update the Retiree data base.

Keeping you informed and helping you anyway possible is a very important to me, my section and the leadership of the Nebraska Army National Guard. If you have any questions or need assistance you can reach me at 402-309-8162 or [erik.j.singasaas.mil@mail.mil](mailto:erik.j.singasaas.mil@mail.mil).

Thank you for your service and a BIG thank you to the family members who gave their support.



## Guard Family NEWS You Can Use



## Education benefits available to help achieve professional goals

By 1st Lt. Edward Bosland  
Education Service Officer

It goes without saying that the military has a lot to offer service members in the way of educational benefits. The multitude of programs and services are in fact, one of the primary reasons that many service members enlist, and current service members continue to serve.

The military's financial support, to many, is critical in an era with exorbitant college costs and a demand for an educated work force.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, was a revolutionary piece of legislation when it was passed in the waning days of WWII. It was designed to reward all qualified service members equally, regardless of gender, race, branch or type of service.

It was also tailored to buffer the flood of returning service members seeking jobs, by encouraging them to attend schools for several years, prior to returning to the workforce.

The program was expensive, and criticized, but many attribute the economic prosperity of the 1950s and 60s to the GI Bill. Most importantly, it demonstrated the gratitude of a thankful nation.

Today, the benefits and services that exist for members of each branch are astounding. In August President Donald Trump signed into Law, "the Forever GI Bill." The new version of the GI Bill that no longer expires 15 years after leaving service, but now has no expiration date, can be used at any point in time of a veteran's life.

The GI Bill has multiple programs available depending on one's military service. The Post 9-11 GI Bill could pay annually up to \$22,805 for college plus a housing stipend and \$1,000 for books. A separate federal program, known as Federal Tuition Assistance, can also be utilized, and pays \$250 per credit hour.

The state of Nebraska also supports Guardsmen by providing up to \$225.25 per credit hour to qualified individuals. Other programs exist for apprenticeships, certification

programs, testing reimbursement and student loan repayment.

The Nebraska National Guard Education Team works feverishly to ensure Soldiers and Airmen don't have to navigate the complexities of applying all by themselves. Ms. Robyn Huskey, a well-known name to Soldiers who have utilized Federal Tuition Assistance, states that "working with Soldiers to get them their benefits is the best part of my job!" Ms. Cindy York, the State Tuition Assistance manager, has been helping secure tuition assistance since 1988.

Others in the office specialize in GI Bill and Incentives.

While there are a substantial amount of benefits, and a highly experienced support staff to help provide assistance in acquiring them, many Soldiers do not take advantage of what is available. Have questions about education benefits and incentives? Please reach out to the Nebraska National Guard Education office at (402) 309-8153 or email [edward.d.bosland.mil@mail.mil](mailto:edward.d.bosland.mil@mail.mil).

## Celebrating Families



Photo by Airman 1st Class Jamie Titus

The Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing celebrated its families, Sept. 10, during a 'Hustlin' Huskers Kid's Carnival' held at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln. The celebration was conducted in conjunction with the 70th Birthday of the Air Force.

## A few helpful tips for maintaining fitness with young children

### Military One Source

As a parent of young children, your time may not always feel like your own. Despite your best efforts, it may seem like there's always another mess to clean.

Finding time to exercise... well, let's just say it might not make it to the top of your to-do list.

But here's the thing: you don't have to choose between spending time with your children and physical fitness.

Regardless of your current fitness level, there are ways to include your family in your active lifestyle, which ultimately sets a positive, healthy example for your kids.

Try these ideas for exercising if you have young children:

### Fitness with a baby

- Put your baby in a stroller and take a brisk walk. You'll get some exercise, your child will enjoy a change of scenery, and you'll both get some fresh air.

- Invest in a jogging stroller. Once your child is old enough, a jogging stroller is a great way to pick up the pace and improve your cardiovascular fitness.

- Check out upcoming walks, fun runs or races. See if your community or Morale, Welfare and Recreation program offers a stroller-friendly option.

- Hike with a baby carrier. There are numerous options on the market that allow you to safely strap your child to your chest or back, so you can enjoy a hike.

- Look for a parent and baby fitness class. Check with your installation's fitness center to see if it offers classes designed for parents with young children.

### Toddler, young child

- Take a trip to the park. Visit the playground on an installation or find a park in the surrounding community where you and your child can run, climb, swing and jump.

- Go for a bike ride. Attach a child's seat to your bike and get ready for a good time. Make sure you have the proper safety equipment (like a helmet) before you set out.

- Rent sports equipment. Check with Morale, Welfare and Recreation on your installation to see what equipment is available if you

aren't yet sure of your child's unique interests. This is a way to introduce your child to a wide range of sporting options without spending a lot.

- Go bowling. Not only does bowling provide a great way to get some activity, but your installation's bowling alley may even offer a family discount.

- Go for a swim. Spend an afternoon splashing around with your child and teaching them swimming basics, like floating and treading water. Check with Morale, Welfare and Recreation about swimming lessons.

- Have a dance party. Fitness doesn't have to be a formal activity to be good for your body. Turn on some music and have a family dance party at home.

Remember, every little bit of activity counts — whether it's doing jumping jacks during television commercial breaks or playing a game of tag with your children in the backyard.

Use whatever time and equipment you have at your disposal to prioritize your fitness while still spending time with your family.

Not only will your family's health improve, but your children will learn the types of healthy habits that last a lifetime.

Check with Morale, Welfare and Recreation on your installation for a schedule of swimming lessons, or reach out to Health and Wellness Coaching for other ideas for family fitness activities.

## November National Veterans and Military Families Month

During National Veterans and Military Families Month, we honor the significant contributions made by American service members, their families, and their loved ones. We set aside this month surrounding Veterans Day to hold observances around the country to honor and thank those whose service and sacrifice represent the very best of America. We renew our Nation's commitment to support veterans and military families. They deserve it.

Our veterans are our heroes. Our Armed Forces have preserved the security and freedom that allow us to flourish as a Nation. They have braved bitter winters, treacherous jungles, barren deserts, and stormy waters to defend our Nation. They have left their families to face danger and uncertainty, and they have endured the wounds of war, all to protect our Nation's interests and ideals established during the Founding.

Our military families endure many hardships along with those who defend our Nation. They are separated from their loved ones for months on end and frequently relocated across the country and around the world. They often live far from their extended families, and they

know what it is like to celebrate holidays and milestones with an empty seat at the table. Many military spouses face the task of making ends meet while their loved ones are away and of securing new employment with each change in duty station. Children of service members often grow up living a nomadic life -- periodically calling a new place "home" and adjusting to different schools, trying out for new sports teams, and making new friends. In these lives of frequent change and transition, however, our incredible military families not only survive, they thrive.

It is our patriotic duty to honor veterans and military families. As part of our efforts to answer President Lincoln's charge to care for those who have "borne the battle," I have asked the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to lead the Nation in a month of observances across the country to honor our veterans.

As veterans and military families attend these events, they will see the reforms and improvements that we have made at the VA. Over the last 9 months, we have made important changes that enable better service for our veterans. We have increased accountability and enhanced protections for whistleblowers. We have improved transparency, customer service, and continuity of care.

We are working every day to ensure a future of high quality care and timely access to the benefits veterans have earned through their devoted service to a grateful Nation.

This month, in which Americans traditionally pause to give thanks for our blessings, it is fitting that we come together to honor with gratitude our extraordinary veterans and military families and their service to our country. May God continue to bless our Armed Forces and those families that love and support them.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 2017 as National Veterans and Military Families Month. I encourage all communities, all sectors of society, and all Americans to acknowledge and honor the service, sacrifices, and contributions of veterans and military families for what they have done and for what they do every day to support our great Nation.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand seventeen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-second.

— DONALD J. TRUMP

## Defense Department offers course for using Blended Retirement System comparison calculator

WASHINGTON (DoD News) – Service members eligible to opt into the Blended Retirement System in 2018 can now take a free course to learn to use the online comparison calculator to aid in determining whether the new BRS or the legacy retirement system is a better choice for their circumstances, Defense Department officials said.

The calculator provides individual military retirement benefit estimates for service members who are eligible to opt into the new system in 2018, allowing them to compare options under both systems. Service members using a common access card can access the course through Joint Knowledge Online, and a non-CAC version also is available for active-duty members, officials said.

The Comparison Calculator Course is available in two versions - one is for active-duty service members, and the other is designed to meet the needs of the National Guard and reserve components. Both official DoD comparison calculators and the accompanying courses are the only calculator tools endorsed by DoD, officials said.

Additional resources are available on the Blended Retirement System website.

## PROMOTIONS

### Army National Guard

**Colonel**  
Gordon F. Bjorman  
Craig W. Strong

**Lieutenant Colonel**  
Christopher M. Perrone

**Major**  
Aaron M. Lee

**Captain**  
Trevor R. Bellows  
Corey P. Bretsch  
Emmalena A. Kelly  
Jodi L. Laster  
Peter M. Mathews  
Seth E. Morenzoni  
Nathanael J. Rutherford  
Japrice S. Spears  
Melisa M. Ventre  
Avery L. Walker  
Trent A. Wilson

**First Lieutenant**  
Sarah A. Meyers

**Chief Warrant Officer 4**  
Donald G. Renner

**Chief Warrant Officer 3**  
Dale L. Dishman  
Sean M. Omalley

**Sergeant Major**  
Curtis C. Koehler

**Master Sergeant**  
Sylvia R. Bastian  
Eric S. Gettert  
Joseph G. Serkiz Jr.  
Lucas J. Smith

**Sergeant First Class**  
Richard A. Bates  
Todd M. Bretey  
Matthew M. Hansen  
John C. Moore  
Jason C. Papke  
Earl R. Rawls III

**Staff Sergeant**  
William P. Cozad  
Jordan T. Hopwood  
Lawrence M. Lind  
Brady J. Masters  
Nikolaus J. McCracken

**Sergeant**  
Aaron S. Johnson

Brandon P. Kahnk  
Nicole L. Landon  
Lucas S. Lias  
Mohamed A. Musa  
Kallen T. Nissen  
Jenna S. Osmonson  
Nicholas G. Rucker

**Specialist**  
Gabriel J. Bernhagen  
Daniel L. Betts  
Wyatt J. Brauckmuller  
Sesilia Y. Campos  
Armando L. Chavez  
Austin G. Chitty  
Chase D. Corbin  
Michael W. Cornwell  
Joshua S. Courtree  
Thomas S. Cuevas  
Ethan C. Dannelly  
Jasen V. Davis  
Jeremiah M. Ebel  
Andrew M. Feaser  
Cody J. Fischer  
Dusty C. Fulmer  
Kaleb S. Gamble  
Kip S. Jones  
Cole R. Kahnk  
Aaron D. Kast  
Korey E. Lamb  
Michael V. Larsen  
Sara J. Leonard  
Riley A. Martinez  
Raya M. Neujahr  
Joshua D. Norris  
Jared G. Pohlmann  
Walker J. Prather  
Ibis A. Quintero  
Ashton B. Schaefer  
Skyler D. Vaught  
Bryce D. Wiedeman  
Erin E. Wilson  
Corey J. Winchel  
John S. Woruo

**Private First Class**  
Colton L. Alexander  
Phillip M. Byrom  
Hunter R. Glup  
Tyler W. Hanson  
Dakota R. Harmon  
Tabark M. Kambal  
Brendan L. Kouma  
Kevin J. Molina  
Nathaniel L. Osterhoudt  
Richard N. Piper  
Seth A. Reighard  
Jacob T. Skarp  
Brendan C. Stricherz  
Keenan J. White

**Private**  
Adrian I. Castro  
Bryan J. Halsted Jr.  
Aaron C. Harker  
Mason A. Motter  
Michael D. Urbanec  
Christopher D. Wheeler

**Air National Guard**  
**Lieutenant Colonel**  
Barry R. Veer

**Major**  
Erik B. Zingler

**Captain**  
Christopher X. Castle  
Amanda P. Koepping

**First Lieutenant**  
Taylor T. Ashmore

**Chief Master Sergeant**  
Scott M. Tontegode

**Senior Master Sergeant**  
Steve R. Fisher  
Steven J. Fusco

**Master Sergeant**  
Michael J. Barbur  
Christina N. Krueger  
Deborah L. Moore  
Winston L. Sanniola  
Loran A. Stara  
Jarrod A. Tisthammer

**Technical Sergeant**  
Sean F. Jimerson

**Staff Sergeant**  
Joseph A. Aulner  
Leilani M. Beal  
Tanner A. Boyle  
Dylan M. Burke  
Reid J. Dalton  
Katherine M. Mullins  
Samantha D. Nice  
Tyler L. Peterson

**Senior Airman**  
Bryce L. Hernandez  
Joseph J. Kunza  
Blake C. Pair  
Christian R. Weeks

**Airman First Class**  
Tanner M. Bundy  
Katlin E. Lawver  
John R. Sokolik

## AWARDS

### Army National Guard

**Legion of Merit**  
Col. Curtis Abendroth  
Col. Kevin Hittle

**Meritorious Service Medal**  
Col. Curtis Abendroth  
Lt. Col. John Berry  
Lt. Col. Ross Finley  
Lt. Col. Todd Stevens  
Maj. Ryan S. Earleywine  
Maj. Jason Palatas  
Maj. Chad Thomson  
Maj. Carlos A. Van Nurden  
Capt. Jeffrey Boyden  
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jennifer Kramer  
Sgt. Maj. Scott M. Langan  
1st Sgt. Gerald Bouska  
1st Sgt. Denise Kaiser  
1st Sgt. Jonathan Panipinto  
1st Sgt. Richard Schneider  
Master Sgt. Carl K. Dehling  
Master Sgt. Samuel A. Malone  
Sgt. 1st Class William P. Dewitt  
Sgt. 1st Class Randy A. Garver  
Sgt. 1st Class Christine L. Gonzales  
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Hansen  
Sgt. 1st Class Andrew J. Hytrek  
Sgt. 1st Class DJ Johnson  
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas W. Mitchell  
Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Serkiz  
Sgt. 1st Class Robert J. Ternus  
Sgt. 1st Class Barry D. Urtel  
Staff Sgt. Mitchell L. Adkins  
Staff Sgt. Nicholas Driggs  
Staff Sgt. Matthew Franklin  
Staff Sgt. Cherie L. Hron  
Staff Sgt. Jeremy Rinehart  
Staff Sgt. Dustin E. Schlote  
Staff Sgt. Jason Winer  
Sgt. Jordan Hopwood  
Sgt. Jasmine Main

**Army Commendation Medal**  
1st Lt. Jeremy Ham  
Capt. Ryan M. Carlson  
Capt. Ryan J. McIntosh  
Capt. Daniel C. Sandoz  
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Donald Renner  
Chief Warrant Officer 3 KC Sohl  
1st Sgt. Joseph J. Dunlop  
Sgt. 1st Class Lillie Chambers  
Sgt. 1st Class Chad Couillard  
Sgt. 1st Class Samuel Malone  
Sgt. 1st Class Jenna M. Schneider  
Sgt. 1st Class Courtney M. Westerhold  
Staff Sgt. Mitchell L. Adkins  
Staff Sgt. Travis J. Ayers  
Staff Sgt. Matthew Brown  
Staff Sgt. Sean M. Delancey

Staff Sgt. Justin Eickmeier  
Staff Sgt. Gregory Horner  
Staff Sgt. Jason Kilcoin  
Staff Sgt. Leroy Koenig  
Staff Sgt. Joshua Kushen  
Staff Sgt. Shawn Lane  
Staff Sgt. Thomas Oelschlager  
Staff Sgt. Denier Rivera  
Staff Sgt. Eugene Schroll  
Staff Sgt. Joshua E. Sladky  
Staff Sgt. Kimberly Smith  
Spc. John L. Faughn  
Spc. Adam Miller  
Spc. Robert A. Smith  
Pfc. Caleb M. Gerhls

**Army Achievement Medal**  
2nd Lt. Jonathan Smolen  
Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gregory Nun  
Master Sgt. Gerald Bouska  
Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Hytrek  
Sgt. 1st Class Donald Kemper  
Sgt. 1st Class Michael Uhing  
Staff Sgt. Jamie Bartholomew  
Staff Sgt. Matthew Franklin  
Staff Sgt. Darrin Fulford  
Staff Sgt. Joshua Kushen  
Staff Sgt. Jason Palmer  
Staff Sgt. Eugene Schroll  
Sgt. Tate N. Higgins  
Sgt. Christopher E. Johnson  
Sgt. Jasmine Main  
Sgt. Kevin G. Nelson  
Sgt. Cole Ratkovec  
Sgt. Trevor M. Stahlecker  
Spc. Garret S. Braman  
Spc. Lindsey R. Bright  
Spc. Jason Camp  
Spc. Stephen Cornell  
Spc. Alexander Harms  
Spc. James Parker  
Spc. Zachary L. Sehnert

**Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal**  
Staff Sgt. Jason Kilcoin  
Staff Sgt. Andrew Singsaas

**Nebraska National Guard Legion of Merit**  
Lt. Col. Ross Finley

**Nebraska National Guard Commendation Medal**  
1st Lt. Zackary Klapperich  
Capt. Bernadette McCrory  
Sgt. 1st Class Jason Schiermeyer  
Staff Sgt. Justin McKenna  
Staff Sgt. Thomas Oelschlager  
Staff Sgt. Rachell Rowley  
Staff Sgt. Shawn Sullivan  
Staff Sgt. Robert D. Thompson  
Staff Sgt. Ty S. Tucker  
Staff Sgt. Heath Wragge  
Sgt. Keith B. Jorgensen  
Sgt. Andrew White  
Pfc. Senam Atitsogbui

**Nebraska National Guard Individual Achievement Medal**  
1st Lt. Kelly Emmanlana  
1st Lt. Sarah Filiaggi  
Master Sgt. Gerald Bouska  
Master Sgt. Landen Koopman  
Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Hartman  
Sgt. 1st Class Andrew Hytrek  
Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Mitchell  
Sgt. 1st Class James F. Roark

Staff Sgt. Jamie Bartholomew  
Staff Sgt. Leroy Koenig  
Staff Sgt. Justin McCoy  
Sgt. Paige Larson  
Sgt. Kelly Oliver  
Spc. Eduard Bursuk  
Spc. David Foley  
Spc. Jordan M. Funk  
Spc. Devan L. Graham  
Spc. Ian P. Lamb  
Spc. Dien Le  
Spc. Michael Lindgren  
Spc. Mohamed Musa  
Spc. Taylor L. Vonknorring

**Air National Guard Defense Meritorious Service Medal**  
Tech. Sgt. Adam L. Dupre

**Meritorious Service Medal**  
Lt. Col. Michael W. Holdcroft  
Lt. Col. Jason P. Newham  
Maj. Christopher Lamkey  
Maj. Joshua P. Scott  
Chief Master Sgt. Carl D. Oestmann  
Senior Master Sgt. Jill K. Burmester  
Senior Master Sgt. Scott A. Clayton  
Tech. Sgt. Raymond D. Debaets

**Air Medal**  
Lt. Col. Michael W. Holdcroft  
Maj. Christopher Lamkey  
Maj. Joshua P. Scott  
Capt. Aaron J. Self

**Aerial Achievement Medal**  
Lt. Col. Michael W. Holdcroft  
Lt. Col. Jason P. Newham  
Maj. Christopher Lamkey  
Maj. Joshua P. Scott

**Joint Service Commendation Medal**  
Tech. Sgt. Adam L. Dupre

**Air Force Commendation Medal**  
Lt. Col. Michael W. Holdcroft  
Lt. Col. Jason P. Newham  
Maj. Christopher Lamkey  
Maj. Joshua P. Scott  
Capt. John W. Kupka  
Capt. Kyle J. Linden  
Capt. Aaron J. Self  
Chief Master Sgt. Carl D. Oestmann  
Senior Master Sgt. Steven J. Fusco  
Master Sgt. Scott A. Clayton  
Tech Sgt. Adam L. Dupre  
Tech Sgt. Ryan A. Fitz  
Tech Sgt. Matthew L. Lindholm  
Tech. Sgt. Paul M. Vasa  
Staff Sgt. Robert T. Markve

**Air Force Achievement Medal**  
Lt. Col. Michael W. Holdcroft  
Lt. Col. Jason P. Newham  
Maj. Christopher Lamkey  
Capt. Kyle J. Linden  
Capt. Aaron J. Self  
Chief Master Sgt. Carl D. Oestmann  
Tech Sgt. Adam L. Dupre  
Tech Sgt. Ryan A. Fitz  
Tech. Sgt. Brandy L. Myers  
Tech. Sgt. Paul M. Vasa  
Staff Sgt. Tanner A. Boyle  
Staff Sgt. Trent R. Cannon  
Staff Sgt. Robert T. Markve  
Senior Airman Tanner A. Boyle  
Senior Airman Bradley J. Halweg

## RETIREMENTS

### Army National Guard

Maj. Gen. Judd H. Lyons  
Lt. Col. Ross N. Finley  
Lt. Col. James E. Murphy  
Lt. Col. Roger J. Simpson  
First Sgt. Troy A. Pabst

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher A. Jacobsen  
Sgt. 1st Class Teresa M. Lenz  
Sgt. 1st Class Timothy L. Marquez  
Sgt. 1st Class Robert J. Ternus  
Staff Sgt. Corey A. Hackbart  
Staff Sgt. Nathaniel R. Menagh  
Specialist Matthew R. Dregalla

### Air National Guard

Lt. Col. Matt Etzelmilller  
Lt. Col. John Von Osterheldt  
Lt. Col. Adam Worden  
Chief Master Sgt. Craig Anderson  
Senior Master Sgt. Jill Burmester  
Senior Master Sgt. Lyle Urbanec

Master Sgt. Paul Feltes  
Master Sgt. Kasey Korth  
Master Sgt. Nicholas Siebken  
Tech. Sgt. Elliott Blake  
Tech. Sgt. Raymond Debaets  
Tech. Sgt. Eric Hilton

# Shorttakes

## Air Guard captain earns national leadership award

By Lt. Col Kevin Hynes  
State Public Affairs Officer

A Nebraska Air National Guard officer assigned to the Nebraska National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters has been named the 2017 recipient of the National Guard Association of the United States Theodore Roosevelt Leadership Award for Company Grade Officer.

NGAUS' Theodore Roosevelt Leadership Award for Company Grade Officer was established to annually recognize the achievements and dedicated service of Army and Air National Guard junior officers who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and professionalism in their services to country and community.

This award was first presented in 2006. Capt. Doug Carlson, a 1998 Battle Creek High School graduate, is a plans and programs officer with the Nebraska Air National Guard Joint Force Headquarters. A full-time military technician, Carlson also serves as the organization's government relations officer and is presently enrolled in the Doctorate of Interdisciplinary Leadership program at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska.

According to Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac, Carlson is well-deserving of the national recognition.

"Captain Carlson has taken several ideas and transformed them into action with outstanding results," Bohac said. "He is a great example of why I have so much confidence

in the future of our organization."

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts agreed, saying that Carlson's award says much about the quality of officers and noncommissioned officers serving in the Nebraska Air and Army National Guard.

"Congratulations to Captain Carlson on this major recognition," Ricketts said.

"This award is just another indicator of the types of dedicated leaders we currently have serving in the ranks of our Nebraska National Guard. Captain Carlson's work has added significantly to the Nebraska National Guard's ability to accomplish its mission and maintain its position as a world-class organization."

Carlson's significant accomplishments include co-authoring the Air Mobility Plan for nuclear deterrence and global strike, during which he worked to develop capabilities within the Air Mobility Command that incorporated the conduct of operations before, during and after a nuclear attack on the homeland.

Carlson also helped coordinate the deployment of 941 members to 26 locations



Carlson

world-wide including CENTCOM/PACOM bases.

As a legislative liaison, Carlson has assisted in making important advancements for the Nebraska National Guard in the areas of mission advancement, operations tempo and quality of life issues for Soldiers and Airmen.

He has also assisted with developing new initiatives between National Guard Bureau, National Strategic Research Institute, U.S. Strategic Command and the Nebraska National Guard to conduct studies on Cyber capabilities, review legal considerations and governing authorities. Carlson also testified in front of the state legislature in support of a Legislative Bill that provides reemployment rights to Nebraska National Guard members when called to state active duty.

Carlson was selected to serve as National Guard Association-Nebraska executive director while a lieutenant, having already served as a Board of Governors member.

During his tenure as executive director, he researched options and led the effort to create the Nebraska National Guard Foundation, of which he presently serves as the president. In 2016 this foundation raised over \$100,000 and expended more than \$40,000 of those funds to directly support the needs of 41 Soldiers and Airmen.

Carlson was officially presented with the award, Sept. 10, during the National Guard Association's national conference in Louisville, Kentucky.



## Guard band kicks off 150th celebration

The Nebraska Army National Guard's 43rd Army Band kicked off Nebraska's 150th "Salute to the Good Life" event on Sept. 22 by playing a nearly hour-long concert in front of the State Capitol. The concert also featured an aerial fly-by salute flown by the crew of a Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter.

## Street Talk

“What do you do to stay physically fit during the fall and winter months?”



**Pfc. Raya Neujahr**  
Medical Detachment

*“I run outside until it gets too cold. I mean, unless there’s ice, I’ll continue to run outside. I do try to eat better during the winter.”*



**Lt. Col. Spencer Hansen**  
155th Mission Support Group

*“Hunting in the fall, walking the dog and start moving inside to work out in the gym.”*



**Master Sgt. Casey Svitak**  
155th Force Support Squadron

*“I try to hit as many holiday 5Ks as possible.”*



**Sgt. 1st Class Scott Kennec**  
Defense Cyber Operations Element

*“Just the usual. I go to the gym, eat right. There is no magic pill. Continue to work out four times a week.”*



**Capt. John Kupka**  
155th Logistics Readiness Squadron

*“I replace one meal a day with something green and try to make it to the gym five times a week. Even if it’s just for 30 minutes.”*



**Spc. Jackson Stoneman**  
267th Ordnance Company

*“I watch what I eat more carefully. It’s hard to run in the winter, so I’ll do body weight cardio indoors. Burpees, mountain climbers and other stuff like that.”*

## Nebraska Air National Guard: Into the wild blue once again

September marked the 70th Birthday of the United States Air Force as a separate service, but the USAF’s roots go much further to its days as part of the U.S. Army Air Corps.

102 years ago Americans were volunteering to join French forces fighting in World War I as members of the Escadrille d’Lafayette.

Even though the United States had yet to enter the war, these brave American volunteers were testing the boundaries of manned flight and conducting experiments that would one day make air power a formidable part of warfare.

As aerial warfare pioneers, they provided Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) support to ground armies and artillery. They soon demonstrated the functionality of military air power through interdiction bombing strike missions and air-to-air combat.

This was especially true several months earlier on Sept. 2, 1914. Paris was on the verge of falling to the Germans when an allied aircraft spotted a weakness in the enemy line and directed the French counter-attack to that point of weakness, decisively changing the war’s outcome.

War is a crucible that accelerates innovative use of any new technology.

In World War II, aerial warfare concepts were tested again as massive formations of Allied and Axis aircraft engaged in air to air battles in the skies over North Africa, Europe and the Pacific Theater.

The United States and its allies eventually attained aerial supremacy, winning control of the “high ground” of the sky. Air superiority has been a U.S. doctrine ever since, with the result that no American ground troop has been killed by enemy aerial attack since 1953.

### Another Voice

Colonel

### Bob Stevenson



America doesn’t go to war without Air Power.

One year before the U.S. Air Force became a separate service in September 1947, a group of WWII veterans formed the Nebraska Air National Guard in Lincoln, the second oldest Air National Guard unit in the nation. These Nebraska Airmen were dedicated to defending freedom and vowed to stay ready as citizen warriors.

Though its mission has changed, that culture and deep ties to our militia roots remains.

The Founding Fathers probably never imagined today’s Air Force, but they firmly believed in the idea of a militia made up of Citizen Soldiers, and now Airmen, and grounded that concept in our Constitution.

The founders knew a militia of neighbors would stand with each other because they had shared interests.

Today, your National Guard is the connective tissue between the military and most communities in the U.S., just as the Founders intended.

The nearly 5,000 Soldiers and Airmen of the Nebraska National Guard are your neighbors and friends who always stand ready to answer our governor’s call when natural or man-made emergencies overwhelm local first responders.

Our nation has changed drastically in 241 years as the world has grown smaller and flatter. The ocean barriers that once protected our continent from foreign invasion now offer far less protection and time to respond to continental

ballistic missile threats.

Future hypersonic weapons will diminish that protection further.

Faster still, threats — ranging from broad expensive annoyances to specifically targeted life threatening events — now can arrive from

anywhere at the speed of light in the form of cyberattack on our ever-expanding technology infrastructure.

These threats shake the trust and confidence in our systems of government and business.

To meet those threats and support our nation’s policies globally, the Nebraska Air National Guard is answering our nation’s call every day.

We regularly provide deployed and home station base/combat mission support in the areas of security, communications, intelligence, logistics, civil engineering and air refueling.

We also have an experienced corps of global ISR expert instructors at Offutt Air Force Base as well as any number of other specialties that are vital to our nation’s interests. And we do it at a bargain price for the taxpayer.

Our Citizen Airmen bring specialized experience and skills to our state and nation. Our culture of responsibility, leadership and integrity add value to the civilian workforce and community.

To the families, neighbors and employers who support our members, we say thank you.

Now more than ever, your Nebraska Guard stands ready, whenever and wherever needed.

**Editor’s Note:** Col Bob Stevenson served as the commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln from August 2014–August 2017. This commentary was written to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Air Force.

## Fit for life, not fit for two weeks

Since its inception, I’ve heard multiple people refer to Fit for Life as “Fat Camp,” and every time I simultaneously cringe and cry a little inside.

Having been overweight most of my adult life, getting into — and staying in — shape has always been a struggle. Just to enlist took me more than a year to lose about 60 pounds. And I’ve fought to keep most of it off since my basic training graduation.

That is why I volunteered in July to participate in the Army Guard’s third iteration of Fit for Life, an intense physical fitness training program for Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers struggling to meet height and weight standards, or to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test.

Fit for Life is not a so-called Fat Camp, but instead a motivational, inspirational and educational training the Nebraska Army National Guard has created to help struggling Soldiers — Soldiers like me — reboot their fitness.

The two-week training begins with a weigh-in and an APFT, then the Soldiers complete two-a-day group workouts and attend classes to better their physical fitness, nutrition, finances and mental health.

During one of my classes, a Soldier asked Chief Warrant Officer 2 Adam White about when he begins training for an APFT.

His first answer was simply, “Now.” He went on to explain that, because he doesn’t really enjoy running, he’ll start working harder on

### A Different Perspective

Editor, Prairie Soldier

### Lisa Crawford



Life Soldiers passed their initial APFT. By the end, 20 percent passed and everyone improved in some way. Everyone.

As a Citizen-Soldier especially, living a healthy and balanced lifestyle isn’t always easy. We don’t have mandatory physical training every

morning like many of our active duty counterparts. And our schedules are usually fuller, juggling our military obligations against our civilian employment, school and families.

But the standards are the same and we must do our best to meet — and exceed — our physical fitness requirements.

During our initial briefing for Fit for Life this summer, Brig. Gen. Richard Dahlman, Nebraska assistant adjutant general, said he understood we were sacrificing time away from our families and employers to attend the two-week training, but it would be worth it.

“Take this opportunity. Be a little bit selfish to be a greater Soldier,” Dahlman said. “This is about two weeks of changing who you are and how you feel about yourself.”

I am not the same Soldier who walked into Fit for Life. I never want to be that person again. And I hope everyone reading this will be a little bit selfish, too.

I hope you will make your own physical fitness — nutrition, finance and mental health — a priority as well. That way we can honestly call ourselves true members of the National Guard who are “Always Ready, Always There.”

his run about 30-60 days out. But he warned us that you can’t just train before an APFT, especially since as Soldiers we should always be able to pass and excel physically at all times.

“There’s a reason it’s called Fit for Life and not Fit for Two Weeks,” White said. “This is just your starting point where you get the tools. It’s up to you to use them every day after you leave here.”

That’s exactly what Fit for Life was — an intimate starting point to get the proper tools and learn how to use them. I hope commanders who send their Soldiers to Fit for Life understand that the training, while amazing, is not a quick fix, but rather the beginning stages for a struggling Soldier. After Fit for Life, when each participant returns to his or her civilian career and usual drill status, it will be up to the individual Soldiers to keep putting in the work on their own — though hopefully with encouragement and support from their leadership and peers.

This summer’s Fit for Life saw an average drop in weight of only a pound, but it’s not the scale that matters, because this wasn’t a “Fat Camp.” It’s the work that speaks for itself. Only 7 percent of Fit for

# Hurricane missions: 'This is what the National Guard is all about'

**"T**his is what the National Guard is all about."

If there's any one theme that I think encapsulates the work that thousands of Army and Air National Guard Soldiers and Airmen have accomplished and continue to do over the past couple months and three hurricanes, "This is what the National Guard is all about," comes pretty darn close.

Just consider for a moment all that has occurred since Hurricane Harvey first decimated the areas around Corpus Christi and Houston, Texas, in late August. The National Guard has responded throughout the Gulf Coast and the Caribbean Sea after three major hurricanes hit the U.S. mainland and the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

For the first time in my memory, Guardsmen from across the country – often far removed from the devastating effects of these historic storms – have continuously volunteered their time and their talents to help respond to these widely separated yet equally devastating hurricanes that have affected the lives of tens of thousands of their fellow Americans.

The work has been hard, often taking place in remote areas. There, National Guard Soldiers and Airmen have worked hand-in-hand with local emergency managers and first responders to improve conditions so that life can, at least someday, begin to get back to normal.

When you consider all that's been occurring in places like the Texas Gulf Coast, southern Florida and the Florida Keys, in Puerto Rico, and the communities of the U.S. Virgin Islands, it really should fill you with an overwhelming sense of pride in that we – all of us – belong to an incredibly remarkable organization that is doing work that no other organization in the world could do. And we're doing it both well and with a sense of humility and deep pride.

I know. I've seen myself firsthand.

Let me better explain.

After several weeks of working on the Nebraska National Guard joint staff as Nebraska worked to coordinate and fill requests for support in Texas and Florida following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, I had a chance to talk with a number of Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen who had been called up for the relief missions. I did not meet a single person who didn't say they were excited about

the opportunity to serve their fellow Americans during their times of need. Not that I expected any less, but still this outward commitment to putting lives on hold to go do something for others was not only remarkable, it helped reawaken something within me that you sometimes forget about during the day-to-day hustle of everyday life: Pride. Pride in my fellow Airmen and Soldiers; Pride in my organization; Pride in my state.

I'm pretty sure that Nebraska wasn't unique in this aspect, either.

In mid-October, I had my suspicions confirmed when I was unexpectedly invited to accompany an aircrew from the 155th Air Refueling Wing, which had been assigned to deploy Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade to St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, where they would be taking over providing command and control operations for National Guard elements working on both St. Croix and St. Thomas from members of the Virginia Army National Guard's 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

Following a five-hour flight from Lincoln, Nebraska, we arrived on a humid and hazy St. Croix. Meeting us were air transportation specialists from the Missouri Air National Guard's 139th Airlift Wing in St. Joseph, Missouri, as well as Soldiers from several other states.

Because it was already twilight by the time we arrived, it was hard to know the extent of the damage on St. Croix. However, the looks and words of those who had been there for several days or weeks seemed to indicate that we had stepped into a disaster zone of epic proportions. The drive from the airbase to the hotel where we were to stay also relayed little of the damage that had occurred from both Hurricanes Irma and Maria, although the headlights of the van we rode in did occasionally show downed trees, electrical poles or metal rooftops that seemed to have bent backward by incredible forces.

One thing did stand out, however. It was incredibly dark. Few houses or stores had lights, although occasionally some did. Within

## My Turn

State Public Affairs Officer

**Kevin J. Hynes**



a few homes, the flickering light of candles could be seen... but that was all.

Later that night, standing on the shore of what I was sure

was a beautiful Caribbean beach, I looked up to what hills and mountains I could see. Here and there, lights could be seen. But by and large, they seemed far less than what I imagined I should have seen had I been here before the storms had rolled in.

The next morning, as I went for an early morning walk, the damage became much more clear. The hill and mountain ridges that surrounded the hotel were filled with houses, hotels and businesses, all of which had been lightless the night before. Many lacked roofs or showed other significant damage. Vast forests of trees had been stripped of their branches, many lying uprooted by the winds that had passed through.

Even the palm trees had been stripped on their eastern-facing sides.

Later, along the beach I had stood the evening before, one could still see remnants of the storm surge that I had been told had inundated the area during the height of the storms.

The drive back to the air base was equally sobering as more damage than I had ever seen before passed by the windows. Street lights down. Electrical poles snapped in two, the lines they once held now lying on the ground or twisted among the roof-damaged houses and businesses. Lines of cars and people moved about, going to wherever they might be headed that morning despite the damage that had been sustained by their communities, but even those signs of life seemed muted due to the fact that they had to dodge around branches, wires and other debris.

It was a sobering sight and the Nebraska Guard air crew seemed to be both humbled and awed by what they were witnessing.

But here is where my story gets interesting, at least in my mind. Arriving back at the makeshift passenger terminal, we were once again greeted by members of the Missouri Air National Guard who were busy processing the passengers we would be transporting back to their homes that morning: Soldiers

from the Mississippi Army National Guard's 298th Combat Sustainment Brigade that had been working on St. Croix and St. Thomas for the past several weeks.

There, along with other Soldiers and Airmen representing organizations from across the nation, the combined groups of Guardsmen worked together to load our KC-135R Stratotanker, process the passengers and then make sure that everyone had what they needed. Ranks, organizations, backgrounds... none of it mattered. Everyone pitched in. It was simply one team of National Guardsmen working to get important work done in a place that desperately needed important work to get done.

It was almost as if the devastation surrounding the operations had invigorated all involved to simply work a little hard and a little more efficiently.

Which gets me back to my main point. Name another organization, to include our fellow U.S. military organizations, that has a mission like this. Who else could bring together a combined team effort on St. Croix, St. Thomas, Puerto Rico or other locations made up of individuals and units from across the United States, who could – in cooperation with other civilian first responders and emergency management officials – make an impact like this?

Much has been said about the problems of the hurricane responses, which considering the scale of what has happened and what needs to occur, is probably understandable. Many, many lessons were learned from Hurricane Katrina ten years ago, and I'm sure many lessons will come out of these hurricane responses, as well.

However, at this moment I was struck with a sense of clarity that I still haven't shaken. Standing there in the passenger terminal and then later on the tarmac where the Nebraska Air National Guard Stratotanker stood next to a Montana Air National Guard C-130 that had arrived during the night, I felt a feeling of intense pride in knowing that I'm part of one of the most unique and mission capable organizations this world has ever seen; an organization that can both help our nation fight and win wars while at the same time mobilize as a team and move hundreds and even thousands of miles away to help our fellow Americans when disaster strikes.

And that is what being a National Guardsman is all about.



Photos by Spc. Lisa Crawford

## Czech ambassador to U.S. visits Nebraska in October

On Oct. 23, the Nebraska National Guard hosted Czech Ambassador Dr. Hynek Kmonicek at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln for a discussion on the State Partnership Program between Nebraska and the Czech Republic. While in Nebraska, Kmonicek also had the opportunity to meet with Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts and participate in a joint press conference at the State Capitol. The Nebraska and Texas National Guard will celebrate the 25th anniversary of their State Partnership Program relationship with the Czech Republic in July 2018.



## High Flying Huskers



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Prague

**Showing Resolve:** A U.S. KC-135 Stratotanker and two B1 strategic bombers participated in a refueling operation over Southwest Bohemia on Sept. 4 as part of the Ample Strike 2017 NATO exercise. The KC-135, which belongs to the Nebraska Air National Guard, took off from Pardubice Airport and met up in the altitude of 22,000 feet with the B1s flying in from the UK. The Ample Strike exercise involved over 1,300 personnel from 18 militaries and almost 40 planes and helicopters.

## Veterans Crisis Line

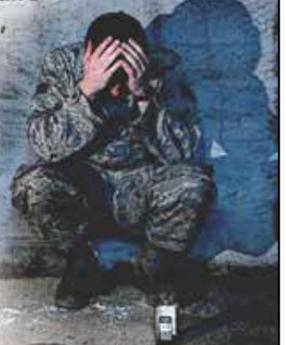


The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text.

Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, chat online, or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Visit the following link for more information on the Veterans Crisis Line.

[www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net) ★ 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)





**Laying Down The Competition:** A Nebraska National Guard Soldier fires his weapon at paper targets during the annual Adjutant General Marksmanship Sustainment Exercise, Aug. 4-6, at the Greenleaf Training Site.

Photos by Sgt. Jessica Villwok



**Brass And Ammo:** A team of support Soldiers prepare magazines with ammunition for the competing Soldiers.



**Kneeling:** A Nebraska Army National Guard Soldier competes in a rifle match during the annual Adjutant General Marksmanship Sustainment Exercise held at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings.

## Retiring sergeant honored as state comes together for annual shooting championships

By Sgt. Jessica Villwok  
Staff Photojournalist

This year's Adjutant General Marksmanship Sustainment Exercise (AG-MSX), more commonly called the TAG Shoot, was bittersweet for Master Sgt. John Snoozy. Set to retire later this year, it marked his final competition of his career.

Snoozy has supported 22 consecutive marksmanship exercises, mentoring and training almost 6,000 Soldiers along the way. His efforts have made the TAG Shoot the most significant marksmanship event for Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

This year's event brought 117 shooters together Aug. 4-6, from across Nebraska to compete in eight live-fire exercises. Both M16 rifles and M9 pistols were fired in individual and team competitions as countless rounds were fired down range. Capt. Joshua Metcalf, the event's officer-in-charge, said competitors had more trigger time this weekend than they would in 3-5 years of annual weapons qualification.

Sgt. Maxwell Maguire from Kearney's Company B, 734th Brigade Support Battalion, swept the individual event competition, taking home top honors in the State Command Sergeant Major Match, Individual Service Rifle Championship and the Individual Service Pistol Championship.

Maguire was also awarded the Gary Anderson Trophy. The prestigious award is named after Gary Anderson, a Nebraska National Guard shooter who competed in three Olympic Games and became the director of the Civilian Marksmanship Program. Maguire's name will be engraved on the trophy and given to his unit to display.

"The best thing about this though is just the

camaraderie you build here," Maguire said. "You get to come out, talk to people from different units, see how they are doing marksmanship training. (I get to) tell them what I know, see what they know, and just build better shooters."

This then allows the competitors to go back to units, and train them up "and come back and do great things," Maguire added.

Taking top honors in the team competition was TCC Gold from Camp Ashland's 1-209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) Training Center Command consisting of Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Murphy, Staff Sgt. Brandon Pedersen, Staff Sgt. Joshua Kushen and Sgt. Caleb Pongo.

Each of the shooters left with medals in the Team Assault Plate Match, Service Rifle Team Championship, General John J. Pershing Team Rifle Match, Combat Pistol Team Championship and the Adjutant General Combat Team Trophy.

Murphy, TCC Gold's team leader, said building a championship marksmanship team takes a lot of hard work and dedication.

"I do a lot of shooting on my own," Murphy said. "Obviously, the Army only lets you shoot once a year for qualification, so a lot of this stuff is done on our own. We purchase our



Photo by Spc. Lisa Crawford

**Snoozy's Service:** Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac pins a Meritorious Service Medal on Master Sgt. John Snoozy during his 22nd – and final – TAG Shoot event. Snoozy is set to retire later this year.

own weapons that are like the military and practice that way."

Some shooters have participated in the competition multiple times. For others, like Spc. Laura Nelms, from the Mead Training Site-based Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 134th Cavalry Squadron, this was their first time competing. A native of Benkelman, Nebraska, Nelms said the Team Assault Plate Match was her favorite part of the competition.

"You get to interact more," Nelms said. "You get to move. It wasn't the same thing you always do."

On the final day of the competition, Maj.

Gen. Daryl Bohac, Nebraska adjutant general, presented the hard-earned awards to the top shooters. Perhaps the most meaningful award, however, was presented to Snoozy for all of the hard work and dedication he contributed to making the event so successful. For his achievements, Snoozy was presented the Meritorious Service Medal.

"After 9/11 and after Desert Storm – most of you weren't around then – our training resources went way down," Lt. Col. Gordon Bjorman, Nebraska Army National Guard state training and operations officer, told the assembled shooters.

"This event became the premiere training event we had for individual weapons qualification in the state, and it's the only weapons qualification program that did advanced marksmanship training. And when we look at what that meant after 9/11 for those first maneuver units that went out to Iraq, went to Afghanistan... They all learned marksmanship here, and a lot of that had to do with Sergeant Snoozy's efforts."

"And his legacy can only be judged by the almighty because when you teach individual marksmanship, you're not teaching people 'Hey we're out here to take lives'. Where we're judged is the unknown," Bjorman said. "Those lives that we saved because someone on maneuver patrol was able to defend themselves and come home."

After Snoozy's legacy was recounted for all the participants, Bohac left his audience with one thought:

"Who's going to be next?" Bohac asked. "Who is going to be the next Sergeant Snoozy?"

## Nebraska culinary team to compete for another national title

By Spc. Lisa Crawford  
Editor

A team of Soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment, 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, will compete March 24, 2018, at the Department of the Army-level of the 50th annual Philip A. Connelly Competition.

"I am very proud of our team," said Staff Sgt. Bryan Campbell, 110th MMB supply sergeant. "We have continued to grow and learn from each time we cook in the field."

The team of Soldiers won the state competition last spring and the regional competition this summer. The team was evaluated for the regional competition during the battalion's annual training, June 10-24, in South Dakota while par-

ticipating in Golden Coyote 2017, one of the largest and longest-running National Guard training exercises in the country.

The Golden Coyote exercise is a three-phase, scenario-driven exercise conducted in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming, which enables commanders to focus on mission essential task requirements, warrior tasks and battle drills.

According to Campbell, the two-week Golden Coyote exercise made for the perfect backdrop for the culinary team to showcase their skills for the regional competition, providing the comfort of good, nutritious meals for hungry medics and support personnel. Knowing this, Campbell said the rest of the battalion supports the Connelly team by doing whatever is asked of them.

"Everyone involved understands

they play an important role in not only the competition but in safely conducting field feeding operations," he said.

The Nebraska team competes annually, and was last named the top National Guard unit at the Department of the Army level in 2016.

Sgt. 1st Class Heather Davey, noncommissioned officer in charge of the field sanitation team, said she thinks the competition is important as a way to highlight "one of the most underappreciated sections of the Army that does a lot of work behind the scenes."

"Besides actually cooking a meal, it's a competition that allows Soldiers to test their knowledge base for their job, field sanitation and cooking procedures and allows Soldiers an opportunity to improve their job skills," Davey said. "Soldiers

just assume they're going to get fed three meals a day and they don't realize all the work that goes into it. I think that having a competition like this gives them a chance to stand out and provides awareness to other Soldiers about how much work they really do. We could not survive in the field without feeding our Soldiers."

Joe Lopez, an evaluator with Infinite Service & Solutions Inc. and a former Texas National Guard member, served as the evaluator for Nebraska's regional competition meal.

"We treat the Connelly not just as an evaluation, but also as a training," Lopez said. "We enjoy coming out here to teach these young Soldiers every aspect of it, and it gives them a great feeling that they've accomplished something."

Lopez said Nebraska has a fine

team that did a great job working together in across all aspects of the competition. His best advice for the team moving forward is to keep their mission top-of-mind.

"Always remember that as a food service person, your number one priority is to take care of the Soldiers," Lopez said. "Feed them a safe, nutritional meal that's going to hold them off until the next meal they get, whether in the field or garrison."

"Our culinary specialists continue to amaze us," Campbell said. "The time, effort and care they put into a meal is amazing, and their record in this competition proves that."

The team's national competition entry will be a lunch meal served during the battalion's March drill weekend at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Nebraska.



**Taking A Break:** Staff Sgt. Darrin Fulford takes a moment to breathe after climbing the last hill of the road march.

Photos by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

# Pike Challenge

Brigade Soldiers attempt to claim 'best of the best' title during fitness challenge

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

Every Soldier knows that his or her physical fitness plays a vital role in their readiness to perform their missions. One Nebraska National Guard Brigade put that concept to the maximum test during their recent annual training exercise in Missouri.

Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, was home to the first Pike Challenge for the Soldiers of the 67th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade on June 19. The Pike Challenge – so named because of the brigade's distinctive "Pike" patch – consisted of 10 six-person teams representing the 67th MEB, 126th Chemical Battalion and 192nd Law and Order Detachment.

Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Smith and Staff Sgt. Jordan Hopwood, both from the 67th MEB, were tasked with creating a physical competition for the brigade Soldiers that consisted of six events, each of which had historical ties to the organization.

According to the organization's commander, the Pike Challenge was an opportunity for the members of brigade to learn more about the organization's history while also competing for bragging rights.

"It was overwhelming the enthusiasm and motivation that everyone had to win," said Col. Craig Strong, 67th MEB commander. He added that the challenge was good for esprit décor and what he calls "Pike Pride."

The first event was 134 partner over burpees. This exercise recalled the role that 134th Infantry Regiment played during the battle of St.



**Foot March:** A team of Soldiers representing the 126th Chemical Battalion in the Pike Challenge at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Lo, France, in July 1944. This was then followed by 67 pull-ups for the 67th Brigade, which draws its lineage back to the 134th Infantry Regiment, and the work that the organization's World War II Soldiers did in pulling themselves over hedgerows to gain control of Hill 122 outside of St. Lo.

Next, Soldiers completed 124 hanging knee tucks for each of the towns liberated or captured by the organization between July 1944 and September 1945.

This was then followed by 159 pushups to represent each of the 134th Infantry Regiment's Silver Star recipients and how they pushed through the difficulty of battle.

Then Soldiers took it to the track to complete a 400-meter buddy carry, which represented the Warrior Ethos and the Soldiers Creed of never leav-



**Never Leave a Fallen Comrade:** Capt. Nathaniel Krcilek, 2nd Lt. Jonathan Policky, Staff Sgt. Jordan Hopwood and Staff Sgt. Heath Wragge buddy carry Sgt. Cole Ratcovek around the 400 meter track.

ing a fallen comrade.

Finally the Soldiers conducted a ruck march along an engineer trail to represent the work that engineers do to impede the movement of the organization's enemies while helping the brigade maintain its freedom of movement during a battle.

As a part of the challenge, the six competing Soldiers could split the exercise at a time and the events had to be completed in the written order. Only one team member could be doing the exercise at a time and the events had to be completed in the written order.

Each team was assigned a grader who counted each event to ensure fairness across the board. The goal was to complete it in the shortest amount of time possible.

When the dust finally cleared,



**Hanging In There:** Spc. Beau Heithoff completes his share of the team's 67 pull ups for the Pike Challenge. Each six-Soldier team could divide the exercise in any manner as long as all repetitions were completed.

a team from the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 67th MEB, were declared the winners of the first Pike Challenge. The team consisted of Staff Sgt. Jordan Hopwood, Sgt. Andrew Broers, Sgt. Cole Ratcovek, Staff Sgt. Heath Wragge, 2nd Lt. Jonathan Policky and Capt. Nathaniel Krcilek

"Just being able to get everyone out there and building something

special at HHC means a lot to me, said Smith. "I want an environment where Soldiers look forward to coming to drill and to any training we have. I love wearing the uniform and I hope others look forward to their time in our own gun club."

Plans are now in the works for the next Pike Challenge, which will be held during the brigade's 2018 annual training in Fort Riley, Kansas.

# Paratroopers travel to Rhode Island for annual Leapfest championships

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

For the fourth consecutive year, the Nebraska Army National Guard sent teams to West Kingston, Rhode Island, to participate in the 34th Annual Leapfest-International Parachute Competition on Aug. 6. The event is the largest and longest standing international static line parachute training event and competition of the year.

Representing Nebraska were two five-person teams from the Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne), while the Mead Training Site-based Company E (Long-Range Surveillance), 134th Infantry Regiment, and the 165th Quartermaster Detachment each took a single five-person team.

According to the Nebraskans who competed in Rhode Island, the exercise has significant benefits. "There are two primary missions," said Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Sitter, readiness noncommissioned officer from Co. E (LRS), 134th Inf. Regt. "The first mission is to build relationships with airborne units. The second is to learn best practices and

latest techniques and procedures. Different ways to do the same operation."

Sitter added that other countries have different jumpmaster procedures, so by participating in the Leapfest, the Nebraska Soldiers were able to see how those units approach and solve similar safety issues.

The competition is designed to test the parachuting skills of the Soldiers. It begins when the paratroopers jump from their aircraft and navigate their parachutes to the ground. Once the Soldiers' feet hit the ground, they are timed until they touch one of the three large Xs. The faster a Soldier gets to the X, the better the scoring.

The difference often comes down to training. "We don't practice nearly as much as some of the other U.S. Airborne teams," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Brad Lamay, a team leader from the 195th FSC (SO) (A). "Like with anything, the more practice you do, the better you are going to be at it."

Nebraska's terrain provides different sets of challenges as well. "Rhode Island had different dynamics from the wind from the ocean, the water hazards, and the trees," Lamay said. He added that when Soldiers jumped, they were over the waters and the trees and had



Photo provided by Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Sitter

**Leapfest Team:** From Left to right: Staff Sgt. Freeman Sandquist, Staff Sgt. Isvi Machuca, Staff Sgt. Luke Katz and Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Sitter.

to steer into the drop zone.

This year's event also had a notable change from past leapfests as well. "Because of the weather, this year we only had one jump instead of two," said Staff Sgt. Luke Katz, training noncommissioned officer from Co. E (LRS) 134th Inf. Reg. "It really deters on the judging because anyone can get lucky once, but it shows our skill with the second jump."

Still, the competitors said the Leapfest continues to be an extremely interesting and challenging event.

"The best part about the competition is the foreign wing exchange," Sitter said, adding that there were jumpmasters from all over the world including Italy, Germany, and Botswana. "You are following jump commands from a foreign jumpmaster in their language."

Sitter, Lamay, and Katz all agreed that they look forward to competing next year.

"Next year is important because it may be the last year to compete as the LRS," Sitter said.



Photos by Pfc. Elyse Lyons

**Boat Wreck Aid:** Spc Christian Magilton and Sgt. Jared Callahan provide aid to a casualty. The team was sent across the Platte River with zodiac boats to rescue two people after their boat 'wrecked' on the sandbank. Callahan used his blouse to keep his patient warm. Magilton and Callahan are members of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance).

## Top Medics

### Medical competition continues to bring out Army Guard Soldiers' best

By Pfc. Elyse Lyons  
Staff Photojournalist

A competition that started in 2003 as a way to bring some competitiveness to weekend medical training continues to bring Nebraska Army National Guard medical Soldiers together from across the state to Mead Training Site.

This year's Sept. 9 Squad Medic Challenge brought together 36 Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard's 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) and Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry, and the 7264 Medical Support Unit from the Elkhorn Army Reserves Site.

The challenge consisted of nine four-person teams that competed against each other while completing nine training lanes, primarily at the Mead Training Site with one in a wooded area at Camp Ashland, designed to test both their medical and physical skills. The lanes consisted of such challenges as crossing water with a patient, treating a patient while under fire, moving a 200-pound casualty, and providing enroute care. The new addition to this year's challenge included crossing the Platte River in a zodiac boat to evacuate patients off a sandbar.

Each lane had a minimum of two graders who assigned point values for each task. Some events had more detailed steps, while other graders were looking for the critical steps of each skill, and others for speed of the task.

"In addition to the lanes," said 1st Lt. Travis Kirchner, "they also have to do land (navigation) in between each of the points to get to their next lane."

While the Squad Medic Chal-



**Knee Deep:** The Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry, team use sled to transport a casualty over a stream before providing medical treatment. The team consisted of Spc. Alexander Webster, Sgt. Jeffery Hergenreder, Spc. Douglas Reiss and Spc. Kate Cole.

lenge is designed to test Soldiers' medical and physical skills, as with any team event, it also tested their teamwork and communication skills. Something as simple as moving a litter can become difficult without good communication.

"These aren't the people we normally work with," said Spc. Christian Magilton, 313th Medical Company. "It is more challenging because you don't really know them, but I am getting to know new people and their skills."

That's especially true when working with Soldiers who don't share the same military or civilian occupational specialty. Soldiers within the units have a wide array of careers and experience.

"Not every Army medic is in a medical field full-time," said Sgt. Jared Callahan. "I am a mechanic, but a medic two days a month. This challenge tests the skills that I don't use every day."



**Checking The Pulse:** Sgt. Jared Callahan does pulse checks on a mannequin casualty during the zodiac boat lane.

Taking the gold at this year's challenge was a team from the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry, consisting of Sgt. Jeffery Hergenreder, Spc. Douglas Reiss, Spc. Alexander Webster and Spc. Kate Cole.

While the weekend was designed to be a competitive training event, it



**Assessing The Casualty:** Spc. Austin Scrodt checks over his team member, Spc. Kellan Garber, before providing care and moving him into a nearby ambulance. Both Soldiers are members of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1-134th Cavalry.



**Focused On The Competition:** Pfc. Jacob Petersen, Ashland, focuses on preparing an IV during the 2017 Squad Medic Challenge at the Mead Training Site. Petersen is a member of the 313th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance).

was actually much more than that. "While it is a competition, it isn't win or lose," said Master Sgt. Brock Domeier, an event grader from 110th Multifunctional Medical Battalion.

"We can use this as a teaching tool for things to work on." He added that knowing the strengths of other soldiers on your team and communicating are vital parts of this event.