

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 17

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Riding for All Illinois
Fallen Service Members

**ALWAYS REMEMBER, NEVER FORGET
ILLINOIS SOLDIERS RIDE WITH POLISH
PARTNERS TO REMEMBER THE FALLEN**

FALL 2022

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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Take it From the Top:

Senior Leaders' Corner

Taking on harmful behaviors in the Illinois National Guard

Albert Einstein once said that “The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”

While I’m no genius, I’ll one-up Einstein and replace “thinking” with “actions.”

Consider the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment, discrimination and prejudice, suicide, and counterproductive leadership within our ranks. The military has tried to address these issues by using the same types of training year after year. Unfortunately, these problems still exist. We’ve made some progress but have failed to significantly move the needle toward positive change.

The Task Force Restore Trust pilot training was an attempt to change our thinking – and actions. It represented a change in how to approach these issues. By the end of October, 12 units had participated in the pilot training. We gleaned great information from these units and, based on this data, we’ve decided to end the Task Force Restore Trust pilot and begin the transition to our new prevention workforce as a more permanent solution.

With Integrated Prevention Officer Matt Palisano in place and with most of his prevention workforce professionals already hired, now seems to be the right time to start that transition to this new team. Matt was the former psychological director at the 182nd Airlift Wing and is well-qualified to lead this new and innovative effort.

Task Force Restore Trust was intended to give the integrated prevention workforce a head-start in its work to begin to address these corrosives within our ranks.

This training was developed using existing research and empirical data and was led by Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg, our Deputy Adjutant General – Army and a successful corporate change agent in his civilian life. The Soldiers involved in the task force were invested and often had intimate knowledge of the problems we are trying to address. These Soldiers also brought a passion to help the ILNG and address issues in a new way while giving of themselves.

We set up this training using a data-driven approach and are assessing it also using an empirical approach. The best short-term assessment we could use are surveys taken before the training and surveys taken after the training. Long-term, the best information we can use will be whether these harmful behaviors decrease or increase within our ranks, but we can’t wait to begin assessing our efforts.

The results we have seen between pre- and post-training



surveys are encouraging, but uneven in places. This is to be expected. Rarely when you try something genuinely new will it be overwhelmingly successful. It needs to be evaluated and tweaked. Parts will need to be cut and thrown away and other parts enhanced as we transition to the full-time prevention team.

Overall, Soldiers and leaders found the Task Force Restore Trust pilot program training to be more effective than the current Illinois Army National Guard training. The pilot also received overwhelming positive feedback from the battalion and brigade commanders whose units participated. The survey results indicated that the training could be used

to improve trust, confidence, and comfort within their units. All units showed an increase in trust following the second pilot training, but after the first pilot training two of the 12 units reported a decrease in trust. A significant finding from the initial training events was the increase in confidence in the leadership and the unit when leadership was actively involved in the training.

We are still analyzing the data, but every other sub-area of each of the harmful behaviors saw positive results except confidence that fellow Soldiers would address sexual assault/sexual harassment if it were occurring.

As the commander of the Illinois National Guard and as a father, I want to know what we can do to increase the number of Illinois National Guard service members who will intervene should they see a sexual assault developing or sexual harassment occurring. This speaks to the character of the individual as well as the culture of the organization.

It takes courage to intervene. It takes courage and integrity to live up to the Army and Air Force Values. We as leaders need to do all we can to instill that courage and confidence in ourselves and our fellow service members.

Sometimes doing the right thing is difficult. Sometimes the right thing is clouded by a haze of loyalty to others rather than to the organization. I challenge you to do the right thing no matter how difficult.

We will do what we can to improve the training and to improve the culture to help prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment, discrimination and prejudice, suicide and counterproductive leadership within our ranks. However, ultimately it is going to take courageous individuals taking action at pivotal times.

Take action against harmful behaviors.

HIGHLIGHTING DIVERSITY

Illinois Soldier honored as Latina Style Distinguished Military Service recipient

CHICAGO –Thelma Barrios, the daughter of a Mexican immigrant, was just four-years-old when she moved to Chicagoland from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. When she arrived in Illinois, she didn't know a single word of English.

Master Sgt. Barrios is now the senior human resources noncommissioned officer for the more than 1,700 Soldiers of the 108th Sustainment Brigade ensuring the right people are in the right positions for the Army National Guard command. She was selected as a national 2022 Latina Style Distinguished Military Service Award recipient – one of only 21 service members from across the nation selected for the honor this year.

Although she was born in Laredo, Texas, she'd spend the majority of her childhood up until the age of four in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, when her mother moved to Chicago with Barrios and her three siblings.

"I remember getting off of a Greyhound bus in Chicago," Barrios said. "It was snowing, and it was the first time I had seen snow. Funny story is in Spanish snow means "nieve," which also means a frozen dessert, similar to ice cream. I asked my mom what the white stuff was, and she told me nieve. I grabbed a handful and started eating it. I quickly learned that it wasn't ice cream."

"Master Sgt. Barrios' family is among thousands who came to the United States for the opportunity for a better life," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "Through hard work and determination, she was able to provide a better life for herself and her family. We are proud to have such an extraordinary Soldier in our ranks."

Barrios enlisted into the Illinois Army National Guard in 1999, originally expecting to just serve her initial contract and earn enough money to pay for college. She never expected to continue to serve for this long or be recognized for her service.

"I was a 23-year-old single mother working a midnight shift, while still going to college full-time," Barrios said. "I can remember working late one evening and being totally exhausted. I passed an Army National Guard sign that said that 100 percent tuition would be paid by joining. It was still one of the hardest decisions that I had to make at that time because my daughter was only three years old and it meant I'd have to leave for training."

Barrios' mother, Martha, was supportive of her ambitions and watched her daughter, also named Martha after her grandmother, when she shipped off to basic combat training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina a month later. "I knew that obtaining my college degree was something that I really wanted to do and it was important because it meant I'd be the first in my family to do so."

Barrios would graduate from Robert Morris University in Chicago with a bachelor's degree in business

administration management. She has worked full-time for the Illinois Army National Guard as an Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Soldier since 2009. She now lives in Manhattan, Illinois, with her husband, Jake Poor. She has five adult children, Martha, Miguel, Ricardo, Cecilia and Mario; and four grandchildren, Ari, Jade, Mariah and Jaylin.

In her spare time, Barrios volunteers for the National Guard Association of Illinois,

as the only Latina elected representative. She also serves her community by volunteering her time to the Guardian Angels Community Services (GACS), the Groundwork Domestic Violence Program (Safe Haven and Mentorship Program), a Court Appointed Special Advocate for Children (CASA Volunteer), and the Illinois Foster Adoptive Parent Association (ILFAPA).

Barrios' influence extends through all echelons of the Illinois Army National Guard, as well as her community. As the brigade's senior human resources noncommissioned officer, she has mentored and guided countless individuals on career management, both in the civilian and military fields. As a trained military equal opportunity leader, she has been instrumental in the implementation of the Brigade Diversity and Inclusion mentoring program.

Over the years, Barrios has gained the respect and admiration of the Soldiers around her, particularly junior enlisted Soldiers.

Barrios takes great pride in her Latin heritage and wants other Latinas to know that they can accomplish their goals as well. "Our formations are composed of so many demographics and is so culturally diverse."

Barrios said that the award can be encouraging to those that come from similar backgrounds. There are others that "didn't know a single word of English" when they arrived and they too can accomplish a lot, she said.



Coles County Sheriff retires after 21 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard

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

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Coles County Sheriff Tyler Heleine, the first sergeant of the East St. Louis-based 1844th Transportation Co., retired Saturday, Sept. 10, after more than 21 years of military service with the Illinois Army National Guard. His retirement ceremony was held at National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln, Springfield.



“If you take care of Soldiers first, everything else will fall into place,” 1st Sgt. Heleine said during the ceremony.

Heleine enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard’s 1544th Transportation Co. in August 2001, a year before he graduated from Paris High School in 2002. He would spend the majority of his military career in the 1544th Transportation Co. including the unit’s 2004 to 2005



deployment to Iraq where he was promoted to sergeant and earned a combat action badge.

From 2016 until 2019 he served as a senior instructor and branch chief with the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute)

based in Springfield. In January 2019, he was selected as the first sergeant for the 1844th and served as that unit’s senior noncommissioned officer until his retirement.

Lt. Col. Mike Barton, the Commander of the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, called Heleine a “truth teller.”

“I could always rely on 1st Sgt. Heleine to give me the straight truth about what was going on in the unit and as the battalion commander, I needed that information.

While my background on what was going on with a Soldier in the unit might go an inch or two deep, 1st Sgt. Heleine’s understanding goes about a mile deep.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Mary Groy, the Command Sergeant Major of the 232nd CSSB, praised Heleine’s ability to improve processes and improve other Soldiers. “He mentors other first sergeants,” Groy said. “He’d always give a course of action to make a Soldier better.”

Heleine was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal upon his retirement, adding that to a long list of awards and decorations he has earned throughout his career.

1st Sgt. Heleine thanked his spouse, Heather, and his family for their support of his military career. The couple lives in Ashmore, Illinois, with their 2-year-old son, Jagger.





Climate Change

Task Force Restore Trust aims to reduce harmful behaviors and change the cultural climate of the ILNG

By Cpl. Shaylin Quaid, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

The Illinois Army National Guard supports the Secretary of the Army’s objective of maintaining positive command climates and reducing harmful behaviors within the organization. In February of 2022, Task Force Restore Trust was formed to tackle four predominant negative behaviors that can affect the morale and cohesion of Soldiers: counterproductive leadership, discrimination, suicide, and sexual harassment/assault (also referred to as the 3+1). The program aimed to mitigate these behaviors by developing effective training that gives leaders the tools to implement positive and proactive solutions. The end goal was to set a foundation for organizational trust, safety, and respect while shifting from reactive to proactive responses to harmful behaviors. The task force will now pass on those lessons learned to the Integrative Prevention Team, which is looking at innovative ways to prevent harmful behaviors from occurring.

The effectiveness of Task Force Restore Trust was measured in a pilot stage from August to November of 2022 within various units in Illinois. The pilot consisted of four classes specifically tailored to each harmful behavior, and each training included a survey to collect data before and after the instruction.

“As of right now, the data collected shows what the Task Force is doing is working. We continue to collect data on the effectiveness of our training, and the data is promising,” said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brandon Defenbaugh, Task Force Restore Trust’s Sexual Harassment/Assault Team Lead.

Brig. Gen. Justin Osberg, the Executive Sponsor of

Task Force Restore Trust, has served as Deputy Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois Army National Guard since 2021 and has more than 29 years of service.

The Illinois Army National Guard maintains a force of roughly 13,000 Soldiers who balance service to their country and involvement in their communities. Osberg ideated Task Force Restore Trust to address negative behaviors in the Illinois Army National Guard’s culture proactively, and maintain a foundation of trust in the organization.

“We believe that if you have trust in the organization, trust in the leaders, trust in your peers and your subordinates- you can mitigate all of those harmful behaviors,” Osberg said.



Task Force Restore Trust intentionally veered from the military's typical "death by PowerPoint" teaching style and instead encouraged Soldiers to truly think about the topic at hand during guided large and small group discussions and scenario-based activities.

"Much of what we are doing is focused on engaging activities, with very little classroom instruction, and the training, led by passionate facilitators, is meaningful, real, and impactful," said Defenbaugh. "Many [Soldiers] say this is the best training they've received since joining the military."

Sgt. Christina Spence is a member of the Task Force and echoes Defenbaugh regarding the impact of the program's activity-based training.

"The Sexual Assault/Harassment working group has an activity where the audience is given four colored cards," said Spence. "A scenario is read to the audience in which there are intentional pauses, and everyone raises the card they think best matches the situation. This is a great eye-opener because people realize they are not all on the same page about what is considered crossing the line."

Many of the Task Force Restore Trust members have



volunteered their time to the program as they have experience with these negative behaviors themselves. In Staff Sgt. Keith Albaugh's more than two decades in the Army, he has lost 37 friends to war and 43 to suicide.

"Our training has been impactful in each unit. You can see it in the faces of the Soldiers and leaders, you can feel it in the room, and you can hear it in discussions after the training has concluded," said Albaugh. "Our open dialogue approach allows Soldiers to share their personal stories, to talk openly about their feelings, and to, maybe for the first time, realize that it is okay to not be okay."

Many members of the Task Force and Illinois Army National Guard are excited to see the lasting change this program can make to their unit culture, especially Spc. Elora Brandon, who serves on the Discrimination Working Group.

"I feel privileged to be a part of a huge movement toward a healthier force. In the future, I hope the Task Force highlights and provides a solid base for what the Illinois National Guard needs to accomplish to ensure all Soldiers feel heard and understood, regardless of their rank," Brandon said.



Ultimately, Osberg intends for the program to provide training solutions to unit-level leadership that can fit their needs.

"We want to build a toolbox that is available to company command teams that allows them to employ training to mitigate harmful behaviors in their units based on their unit's needs, and address harmful behaviors specifically seen in their units," Osberg said.

In March of 2023, Task Force Restore Trust is set to disband and leave behind a framework of long-term solutions and training for leaders to mitigate behavioral risk in Illinois Army National Guard units.

Au revoir, Commandant:

RTI Commandant retires after nearly 30 years in uniform

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Twenty-eight years after she found her place in the Illinois Army National Guard, Command Sgt. Maj. Mary Dixon, of Chapin, Illinois, retired Sept. 30.

Dixon, who enlisted in 1994 as a petroleum supply specialist assigned to the 258th Quartermaster Company in Beardstown initially joined for the education benefits, but once she arrived at basic training, decided she wanted to go on active duty.

“I enlisted for the education benefits the National Guard offered,” Dixon said. “Once I got to basic training, I knew this is what I needed to do. I was ready to go active duty.”

However, Dixon’s career path kept her closer to home as she instead applied for a federal technician job at Camp Lincoln.

“While I was on annual training at Camp Darby, Italy, I talked about my plans with then-Sergeant First Class Peggy Bates,” Dixon said. “She talked to me about federal technician jobs and helped me apply for my first couple of positions.”

Dixon began her first federal technician job as a shipping clerk in Supply and Services at Camp Lincoln in late 1995.

“I am very fortunate. The career path I took led me here,” she said.

Dixon, the Commandant of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), will retire from the Illinois Army National Guard, but will remain in her federal technician job as the chief of administrative services within the G-6 directorate, with oversight of the Department of the Army photo lab, the print shop, the state mail services, and as the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act officer.

Dixon said she will miss the camaraderie of training and sharing like experiences with fellow Soldiers but offered a piece of advice for those still serving.

“The Illinois Army National Guard has given me the strength and confidence to give everything I could to the organization and my fellow Soldiers,” she said. “For those who are still serving in the National Guard, regardless of your rank, take care of your fellow Soldiers, whether they’re your battle buddy or a subordinate, focus on what’s right and everything else will work out.”

While things change over the course of a career, Dixon said she thinks the training changed the most since she

first enlisted.

“When I joined, the military was very much in the Cold War-era attitudes. It was pre-September 11, so training was very different – we were training to fight a nation-state war,” she said, adding the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 changed how the National Guard trains its Soldiers and Airmen. “We had to learn a new way to train because we were fighting an enemy that was everywhere.”

Dixon has deployed once in her career – with the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) A-7 to Ghanzi Province, Afghanistan in 2011 as the senior logistics noncommissioned officer.

“The deployment helped reinforce the ideas of selfless service,” Dixon said. “I had the training I needed to do the job and the deployment allowed me to prove that to myself.”

Dixon said she volunteered for the deployment.

“I realized with the units I served in, if I don’t volunteer, a deployment isn’t going to just happen for me,” she said.

Dixon called the deployment successful, and the team stays in touch with each other.

“One of two things happen with a deployment, either you want nothing to do with anyone you deployed with, or you want to remain part of each other’s lives,” she said. “Our 18-person team is the latter, we like having reunions and being part of each other’s lives.”

Dixon said she made lifelong friendships with others on the deployment, particularly Sgt. Maj. (retired) Sharon Hultquist. The two were the only women Soldiers on the team. However, that didn’t hamper her ability to get the job done.

“She was an excellent battle buddy,” Dixon said. “I could bounce ideas off her. We crossed paths after the deployment, and she has remained a great friend and a great influence on my career.”

Dixon said Col. (retired) Michael Haerr, commander, BEST A-7, allowed her the freedom to get the job done.

“He gave me the latitude during the deployment to manage our shop the way we needed to in order to get the job done,” she said.

Dixon said for her fellowship and the camaraderie of serving with others is the most meaningful part of her military service and offers advice to young people who



may be looking to serve in the military.

"I think everyone should serve at least one term in the military," Dixon said. "The relationships you build will last a lifetime and, at least for me, military service will provide you with a purpose and direction."

Dixon said to find a profession you enjoy and most likely you will find a similar position in the military.

"There are literally thousands of positions in the military, most which will translate into a civilian career as well," she said. "If you find something you enjoy, something you're passionate about, everything will fall into place."

Among Dixon's most memorable experiences of serving in the Illinois Army National Guard is the 'super camps' once conducted by the 129th RTI.

"In the early days of the RTI, we conducted super camps, which would last about a month," she said. "Everyone packed up the entire schoolhouse, all the RTI's courses, and moved to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, for training."

She called the super camps amazing. "Things went wrong, and you had to figure out how to fix it," she said. "It was hard, but you really learned to work as a team."

Among the special people Dixon has served with throughout her career she singled out Master Sgt. (retired) Gary Staggs, who was the senior supply sergeant at the RTI.

"He gave me the leeway to do the job," she said. "I ran the food service program and he trusted me to do the job. If I had questions, he'd be there to answer but he gave me a lot of latitude to run the program."

Although Dixon served most of her career as a traditional Guardsman, she served one tour in the Active Guard and Reserve program, helping to stand up the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 44th Chemical Battalion, based in Macomb, Illinois.

"I am grateful for the AGR experience," she said. "It gives me a greater appreciation to support the Soldiers serving in the field."

Dixon's husband, Matt, and two children, Rebecca, age 24 and Benjamin, age 15, have been supportive of her career.

"I have an amazingly supportive family," she said. "I know I can't give them the time back I missed, but I can use the rest of this time to reinforce the bonds we have made. I appreciate everything they did, there is no way I could have done what I did without their support."

Dixon thinks her military service has had a lasting positive impact on her children.

"I think because of my military service, my children have an appreciation for hard work and the necessity to finish the job," she said. "They know if you make a commitment, you need to follow through until the end."

Dixon's time in uniform may be winding down, but the extra time she will have won't be wasted.

"I'll have more time with my family," she said. "I've missed a lot of family things."

Dixon has purchased a vacant building in Chapin and has dubbed it her 10-year project. She plans to renovate the building and open it as an event venue.

Dixon is also actively involved in the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post in Jacksonville and said she will have time to be more involved.

"The VFW saved me after the deployment," Dixon said. "I reached out to them after I came back wanting to transfer my membership to the local post. At my first meeting, the then-adjutant wheeled his walker over to me and asked if I was coming back to the next meeting. I said yes, and he handed me this notebook and said, good you're the adjutant now."

Dixon said the members there, all Vietnam veterans and older, welcomed her into the post.

"A few years later I was asked to be the post commander because they said we needed younger members and fresh ideas," she said. "More recently I served as the quartermaster, which is the organization's finance officer, and I am currently the Senior Vice Commander."

Serving in the VFW and its auxiliary is a family event, Dixon said.

"Matt also served in the Illinois National Guard, but never deployed, but has taken on the role of standing up the post's new auxiliary, and is serving as the president," she said.



The two met while volunteering on the state honor guard – at a time when it was an all-volunteer joint unit with the Air National Guard and had about eight active members.

“We performed a few funerals, but it was mostly drill and ceremony,” she said, adding the early honor guard laid the groundwork for today’s Funeral and Honors teams.

Dixon isn’t the only member of her family who has served in the military.

“I had a brother who served active duty in the Army and a brother and sister who served in the Navy,” she said laughing. “I’m the only one who served in the National Guard.”

It is through her service Dixon has come to appreciate certain military traditions.

“Everyone likes to be recognized for the work they do,” she said. “Whether it’s a promotion or an awards presentation, it’s important Soldiers are thanked publicly for their hard work. Honoring them for their accomplishments allows others to see the results of hard work and dedication and gives them goals to work toward.”

Dixon has served alongside several Guardsmen over the years, but has served with three, in particular, for extended periods of time. Through these assignments, friendships were born.

Staff Sgt. Samantha Singer, of Toulon, first met Dixon in 2008 when they went to annual training in Oklahoma and describes her as a phenomenal leader.

“She puts the care and welfare of Soldiers first and foremost,” she said. “She knows the rules and regulations like the back of her hand, which ensures good training.”

Singer, a traditional National Guard Soldier, is a supply sergeant assigned to the 3625th Classification and Inspection Company, based at North Riverside, recalls one particular set of circumstances that has helped solidify a decades-long friendship.

Singer said she and Dixon were among a group of Illinois National Guard Soldiers participating in Exportable Combat Training Capabilities (XCTC) missions in Oklahoma and she was sharing a room with Dixon.

She recalled one evening when she was outside on the phone with her mother and Dixon comes out – telling her there’s a spider in the room and she needs to come and kill it because she’s terrified of spiders. Other issues forced a move from the hotel, but graduation weekend at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, left barely any rooms available.

“The entire annual training was chaotic, but then-Sgt. 1st Class Dixon handled it all with professionalism and a positive attitude,” Singer said. “We have been friends since.”

Dixon later hired Singer as a temporary federal technician in Springfield.

“I worked for her for a while at the RTI and then our careers as both Soldiers and federal technicians took different paths, but we reconnected when she served as the command sergeant major of the 108th

Multifunctional Medical Battalion (MMB) in Chicago,” said Singer, who, as a federal technician, is a budget analyst for the Construction Facility Management Office at the Galesburg Armory.

Dixon’s service alongside Lt. Col. Matthew White of Arlington Heights, executive officer of the 108th Sustainment Brigade, began when Dixon was selected as the 108th MMB’s command sergeant major and White served as the executive officer, later becoming battalion commander. Together with Dixon, the two served as the 108th MMB’s command team from 2016-2019.

White said he would characterize Dixon as the epitome of Army values, a person of courage regardless of the consequences and someone who advocates diversity and inclusion.

“She excels in all she does,” White said. “She has a clear vision of where she wants the organization to go. Her innovation in creating the Best Warrior Competition in the battalion as well as creating leader books for the battalion’s junior noncommissioned officers impressed me. In fact, the leader books were identified as a best practice and shared throughout the brigade.”

White said Dixon has a passion of advocating for Soldiers.

“Command Sergeant Major Dixon truly cares for those she serves with and those in her charge,” White said. “Her number one priority was junior leader development and helping junior Soldiers in advancing both their military career and civilian career.”

“She is one of the best noncommissioned officers with whom I’ve served,” he said.

The current senior enlisted leader of the 108th Sustainment Brigade, Command Sgt. Maj. Kehinde Salami, agrees with White.

“She is my go-to person when I have an issue and she has never guided me wrong,” he said. “I know I could always go to her even if it was to bounce ideas off her and I never questioned her judgement.”

Salami met Dixon in 2008 when he transferred from the U.S. Army Reserves into the 108th MMB.

Salami was assigned to the force health protection section with Dixon when he came into the Illinois Army National Guard. He had an issue with promotion paperwork to sergeant first class. Salami said Dixon was able to straighten out the paperwork which allowed him to get promoted.

“She is a wonderful leader who cares about Soldiers and those around her,” he said. “She is an excellent leader and very organized.”

Salami said the Illinois National Guard is losing a great Soldier with Dixon’s retirement.

“We are losing a wonderful leader,” Salami said. “I know she’ll still be working as a civilian employee, but the Illinois National Guard is going to miss her as a Soldier.”

FLYING HIGH

By Lt. Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 18th Airlift Wing Public Affairs



The 182nd Airlift Wing's vice commander, Asheleigh Gellner, was promoted to colonel during a ceremony at the Wing in Peoria, Illinois, Sept. 11, 2022. Gellner was pinned by members of her family and sworn in by Col. Rusty Ballard, the Wing commander. Gellner a 22-year veteran, was selected as the vice commander in August and transferred to the wing after graduating the U.S. Naval War College. She is a Senior Air Battle Manager with more than 1600 flight hours in the Boeing E3-B/C AWACS aircraft.



ALWAYS REMEMBER, NEVER FORGET

*ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD MEMBERS, POLISH PARTNERS,
PARTICIPATE IN 500-MILE BICYCLE RIDE TO 'ALWAYS
REMEMBER' OUR FALLEN*

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

For 17 years Polish and Illinois National Guard Soldiers fought together in Iraq and then Afghanistan. Last week they rode more than 500 miles together honoring warriors killed in post 9/11 conflicts.

The grueling 5-day, bicycle ride through Illinois, called the Gold Star 500, began six years ago when a group of active and retired Illinois National Guard members formed an organization called Gold Star Mission. The goal was to “Always Remember, Never Forget” the approximately 300 Illinois service members, including 34 Illinois National Guard members, killed overseas since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The 500-mile bicycle ride was the organization’s first and remains its main event to honor fallen service members and recognize their families.



The Polish learned of the organization and the Gold Star 500 through the Illinois National Guard’s State Partnership Program with the Polish military. Sixteen Polish riders including seven Polish Army Soldiers, six Polish students and three Polish Gold Star Family members participated this year with an eye toward establishing a similar event in Poland. The ride started on Sept. 20 at the Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. About 520 miles later, it ended at the Great Lakes Community Center next to Naval Station Great Lakes in North Chicago on Sept. 24.



“It was an exciting and emotional event,” said Polish Maj. Gen. Cezary Wisniewski, the Deputy Commander of the Polish Armed Forces. Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Maj. Gen. Wisniewski greeted the Polish and American riders at the end of the Gold Star 500 after attending a State Partnership Program symposium at the Illinois Army National Guard’s Marseilles Training Area on Sept. 23.

General Wisniewski said that since Illinois National Guard and Polish Soldiers fought side-by-side, it is fitting that they would share ideas on ways to honor our fallen. General Neely said that organizations like Gold Star Mission work hard to keep the memories of fallen warriors alive. “They focus on how they lived, not just how they died,” he said.

The event also introduced U.S. military Gold Star Families to their Polish kindred. “We have established lifelong friendships and have met an entirely new military family,” said Vonda Rodgers of Bloomington, the mother of Army Ranger Sgt. Joshua Rodgers, who was killed in action in Afghanistan on April 27, 2017. Rodgers said that the Gold Star Families have gotten to know the Polish Gold Star Families over the past week and “We are committed to growing together.”

Lidia Kordasz, whose husband Polish Army Lt. Col. Grzegorz Kordasz was killed in 2016, learned of the Gold Star 500 and Gold Star Mission through Illinois Army National Guard veterans who had deployed

with her husband to Afghanistan in 2012 as part of the Bilateral Embedded Support Team (BEST) A9. Their son, 14-year-old Michal Kordasz, rode the 500 miles to honor his father and other Polish and American fallen Soldiers. Lidia Kordasz said that the bonds of friendship between Gold Star Families transcend international borders.

While the language barriers made communication



difficult at times, the Gold Star Families were able to connect at a deeper level, Rodgers said. "Hugs, laughs, smiles, tears – these need no language."

Illinois Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. David



Schreffler of the 183rd Wing rode in honor of Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Joshua Harris, who was killed in Afghanistan on Sept. 17, 2008. He is also a member of the Sgt. Joshua Harris Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2868 in Brookfield, near where Sgt. Harris grew up. He



was greeted at the end of the Gold Star 500 with a hug from Harris' step-mother and Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator Jean Harris.

"It's special to me – honoring Josh and the friendships I've made with his family," Schreffler said. He recalled something Jean's late husband and Joshua's father, Bill Harris, said to him a few years back. "Bill said 'You can be bitter, or you can be better.' This is me getting better."

Illinois Army National Guard Lt. Col. David Helfrich, the co-founder and past president of Gold Star Mission, said the organization has been successful because there is a need for it. He said it was an honor to have the Polish participate this year. "We shared battlespace with the Polish and now we are sharing how we help keep the memories of our fallen alive." In addition to sponsoring events to recognize fallen service members, Gold Star Mission also presents scholarships in the names of those Illinois service members.

Rodgers said, no matter what nation they are from, Gold Star Families share a concern for the well being of service members and veterans. Gold Star Family members will get approached by veterans who feel guilty that they came home from war when their loved ones did not.

"We do not want you to feel guilty," Rodgers said. "What we do want is for you to love your people. Love them harder than you loved them before."



Bienvenidos:

Illinois Soldiers and Airmen provide humanitarian aid in Chicago

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

CHICAGO - Approximately 75 Illinois National Guard service members were on state active duty assisting the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) in providing humanitarian aid to asylum seekers across the Chicagoland area.

to Chicago, the Governor said. More than 60 percent of the Soldiers and Airmen activated were Spanish speakers. The Governor’s proclamation enabled the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and other state agencies, in close coordination with the City of Chicago, Cook County, and other local governments, to ensure the individuals and families receive the assistance they need. This includes transport, emergency shelter and housing, food, health screenings, medical assessments, treatments, and other necessary care and services.



Governor JB Pritzker issued an emergency disaster proclamation on Sept. 14 and activated members of the Illinois Army National Guard’s Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade and Peoria-based 182nd Airlift Wing. The majority of the brigade’s Soldiers came from the North Riverside-based 3625th Classification and Inventory Company (CICO) and 1970th Quartermaster Co. The activation was to ensure all state resources were available to support asylum seekers arriving nearly daily



Sprinkled with Success:



Col. "Doughnut Man" Dan Reichen retires after more than 30 years in the Illinois Army National Guard

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

Those who worked with Col. Dan Reichen of Springfield over his three and a half decades in uniform said he always had a smile on his face, was great at building teams, never pretentious, and was often both good hearted and sustaining.

And, like sweet fried dough, he also had a way easing stressful situations and jobs.

So perhaps the moniker he earned from occasionally bringing Krispy Kremes to his friend's house might be a contrite, but oddly fitting, way to sum up a 34-year military career that has now come full-circle. To Lt. Col. (ret.) Dave Malenfant's children, the combat veteran will always be 'Dan Dan the Doughnut Man' or 'Doughnut Dan' - and he was always energizing people, lifting their moods, reducing stress, and pulling people together to accomplish the mission.

On Saturday, Sept. 17, Col. Dan Reichen officially retired from the Illinois Army National Guard during a ceremony at Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln, Springfield. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for his 34 years of military service.

"He was always down to earth, always about the Soldier and helping those under him achieve their goals," Malenfant said. "He reminds me of the way (General) Omar Bradley's Soldiers described him, a real Soldiers' leader."

The colonel's 34-year military career started when the military was preparing to fight the Russians during the Cold War. It transitioned to the Global War on Terror when Reichen earned an Air Medal and a Combat Action Badge in 2005 while deployed with the Polish-led Multi-National Division Central South in Iraq. And now the military is modernizing to potentially face "near-peer" adversaries, like.... Russia. "My career has definitely gone full-circle," Reichen said.

"He's compassionate, intelligent, articulate, and very personable - never 'hoity, toity' like some officers get when they make colonel," Malenfant said.

"Dan Reichen could make any environment fun," said Col. Randy Edwards, the Illinois Army National Guard's Plans, Operations, and Training Officer (G-3). Edwards



recalled working for Reichen under then G-3 Col. Rodney Thacker. "We had state active duty operations responding to a winter storm and, at the same time we had multiple units going out the door on federal missions. It was chaos. But Dan has a way of bringing down the stress level, looking at the problem, and finding a way to divide and conquer the multiple issues."

"I joined when I was 17. My mom (Dorene) had a hard time signing the paperwork. But from the time I was 9, 10, 11 years old, I always had it in my mind that I was going to join the Army," said Reichen, who was the youngest in a family of four older sisters growing up in Waltham Township, population 634. The township is in a rural area near Utica about five miles north of Starved Rock State Park. "I had 16 in my grade school class," he said.

For the first six years of his career, Reichen was an enlisted Soldier in what was then the 233rd Engineer Co. based in Marseilles. He was a private first class when the unit was activated on state active duty to help the people of Plainfield, Illinois, following the Aug. 28, 1990 tornado. The tornado killed 29 people, injured more than 300 and destroyed thousands of buildings in the Will County village.

The community, first responders, and the Illinois National Guard all came together to help, Reichen said. Wearing the uniform and responding to help fellow Illinoisians and Americans in need made him extremely proud of his National Guard service, he said. "I have always been and will always remain proud of the Army - more specifically, the Illinois Army National Guard."

When the time came for him to attend his first NCO leadership course, his company leadership pointed him towards Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School instead. He graduated from OCS and was commissioned in 1994, a couple years before

he completed his international business degree at Illinois State University in Normal.

Col. Reichen said his time as the Recruiting and Retention Battalion Commander was his most rewarding job. Command Sgt. Maj. (ret.) Mike Donaldson served as Reichen's top enlisted Soldier during his three years in battalion command from 2013-2016.

"He took the time and



listened. He was willing to discuss anything and made his decisions on the facts put in front of him," Donaldson said. "At the time, recruiting was strong, but retention was always an issue. We created the retention teams that are still there now."

Recruiting and retention is a highly stressful, numbers-driven job, Donaldson said. "He knew when it was time to get serious and get to work, but he also liked to joke around and that helped reduce the stress. He is very fun to be around. I'd poke him, then he'd poke me." Much of that joking revolved around professional sports. Reichen is a diehard Chicago sports fan. Donaldson - not so much. "I like the (Denver) Broncos and (St. Louis) Cardinals."

Near the end of his tenure as Recruiting and Retention Commander, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. "At the time, he probably got the better of me. He went to the victory parade and everything - and described it all," Donaldson said. Despite their (fan) differences, they remain close. "I am genuinely happy to call him my friend."

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Thomas Watson has known Col. Reichen for the past 15 years. "It doesn't matter what he has going on in his life. He asks about you and your family," Watson said.

Reichen challenges his subordinates and builds their confidence. "He likes to take on challenging projects. He brings the team together and is very good about keeping them on task," Watson said. Everything Reichen does, he does as a team, he added. "He doesn't do anything without his staff. He always has the staff behind him."

During his tenure as the Deputy Plans, Operations, and Training Officer (Deputy G-3), the staff was tasked with the

the transition of many Title 32 military technician jobs to Title 5 civilian jobs.

"Again, he kept the 'people-first' mentality through the process. He cares about people and how they are going to be affected down to the lowest rank. It's just who he is. He cares."

Several people said that Reichen was very good at bringing down the stress levels. "He's just a character," Edwards said. "He's the type of personality that draws people towards him - that brings teams together. I don't think I've ever seen him in a bad mood."



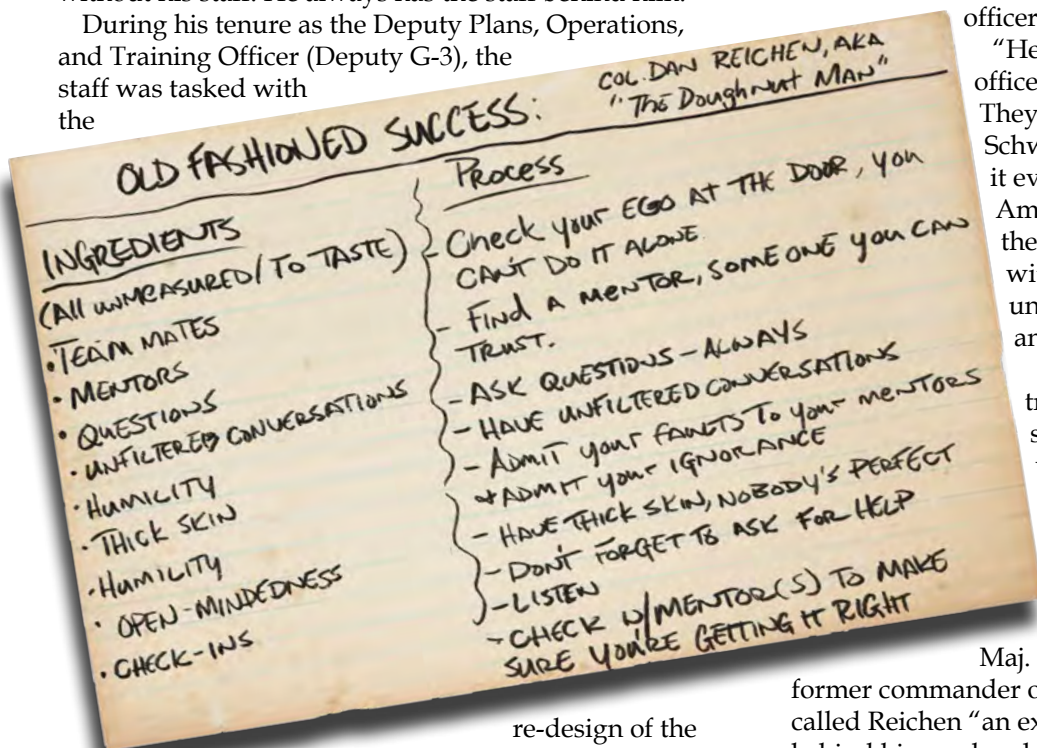
Col. (ret.) Joe Schweickert, the former Illinois Army National Guard Chief of Staff, recalled Reichen using some of his trademark dry humor during the 2007 Torgau Exercise, which the Illinois National Guard's 244th Army Liaison Team (now 244th Digital Liaison Team) conducted with other countries including about 180 Russian Soldiers and officers.

"He told a joke to all these Russian staff officers and not one of them laughed. They all just sat there stone-faced," Schweickert said. This, of course, made it even funnier to Dan and his fellow American Soldiers. But by the end of the exercise, he was able to bond even with the humorless Russians, trading uniforms with his Russian counterpart, an officer named Andre.

"Think about that - in 2007 we were training with the Russians," Reichen said. "Obviously, we are not training with the Russians now. We are training and adapting our National Defense Strategy to face near-peer adversaries like Russia and China. Like I said, my career has gone full circle."

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Michael Zerbonia, the former commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, called Reichen "an exceptional leader who gets Soldiers behind him and makes sure the Soldiers have what they need to excel."

"He's no one-trick pony," Zerbonia said. "He had a skillset that could move around to many different positions, and he was able to adjust and excel to where he was placed." Reichen served as the officer-in-charge of an



re-design of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, which involved moving 14 units. "His number one criteria was on the demographics and turbulence on the Soldiers - not just the Soldiers, but their families. Every job he took, he put people first," Watson said.

As the Human Resource Officer, Reichen helped guide

Air Defense Battalion, the Logistics Officer for the 108th Sustainment Brigade, G-35 Force Integration Officer, the Recruiting and Retention Battalion Commander, an intelligence analyst for the Multi-National Division in Iraq, the Deputy Plans Operations and Training Officer, Deputy Brigade Commander, The Personnel Officer (G-1), the state Director of Human Resources, and the Commander of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute).

Reichen would always say what's on his mind and would often use humor to disarm people. "He had a way of being brutally honest and not stepping on toes," Zerbonia said. "He's just an overall quality individual who dedicated his life to the Illinois National Guard. He made the organization better."

The secret to his success was having outstanding noncommissioned officers and warrant officers behind him, Reichen said. "You can't have a successful career without learning from your subordinates, your peers, your superior officers and, of course, your mentors."

"Col. Reichen is a people person," said Command Sgt. Maj. Mary Dixon, the Commandant of the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) and Reichen's senior enlisted leader for the last two years. Dixon said she has seen Reichen help Soldiers work through difficult personal challenges while still accomplishing the unit's mission.

"It is easy to be hard-line," Dixon said. "Col. Reichen was able to see the shades of grey and manages the staff to meet everyone's needs and to accomplish the mission. He was able to navigate through the desires of the Soldier and do what is best for the Soldier and what is best for the unit." That balance between compassion

for the Soldier and getting the job done helps build an effective team, Dixon said.

However, Col. Reichen was sometimes kind, because it was right. When he was the Human Resource Director earlier this year and the region was hit by a

big snowstorm, the colonel plowed off the driveway and walkways for the family of one of his deployed Soldiers, Schweickert said. While he joked about wanting to try out his new Bronco, Schweickert said he was just being compassionate. "He a nice guy - always asking how people's families are doing. Even when there were disagreements, he always put it in friendly terms."

Watson said that Reichen's easy-going manner and sense of humor sometimes conceals a very competitive nature. "He was not afraid to challenge his staff. He wants to win. He wants to accomplish big things." Reichen is an avid hunter and sometimes his competitive nature would creep into the stories he told about hunting deer. "He'd get so excited," Watson said. "He'd describe it in vivid detail."

"Dan has been successful at all levels of command and staff. His keen intelligence and calm demeanor have been invaluable to the Illinois National Guard, not just when he was on duty, but also through his active involvement and leadership in the National Guard Association of Illinois and the National Guard Association of the United States," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard.

"Most recently as the Director of Human Resources, he helped see the Illinois National Guard through the complex and varied labor issues brought forth by the global COVID-19 pandemic. He also saw the 129th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) through a highly successful accreditation process last year, also working through COVID-19 challenges."

"His list of accomplishments over nearly 34 years are too numerous to mention. In all his assignments he has improved the organization from logistics, to operations, to personnel. His thoughtful well-informed insights, his expertise, and his occasional dry sense of humor will be greatly missed in leadership and staff meetings. We wish Dan the best as he transitions from the military and spends more time with his spouse, Paula, and their two adult children, Abby and Zach," Neely added.

Reichen now is working in a human resources job with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "I loved working for the Illinois National Guard and serving the citizens of Illinois and the people of America. And now I love serving and giving back to veterans," he said.

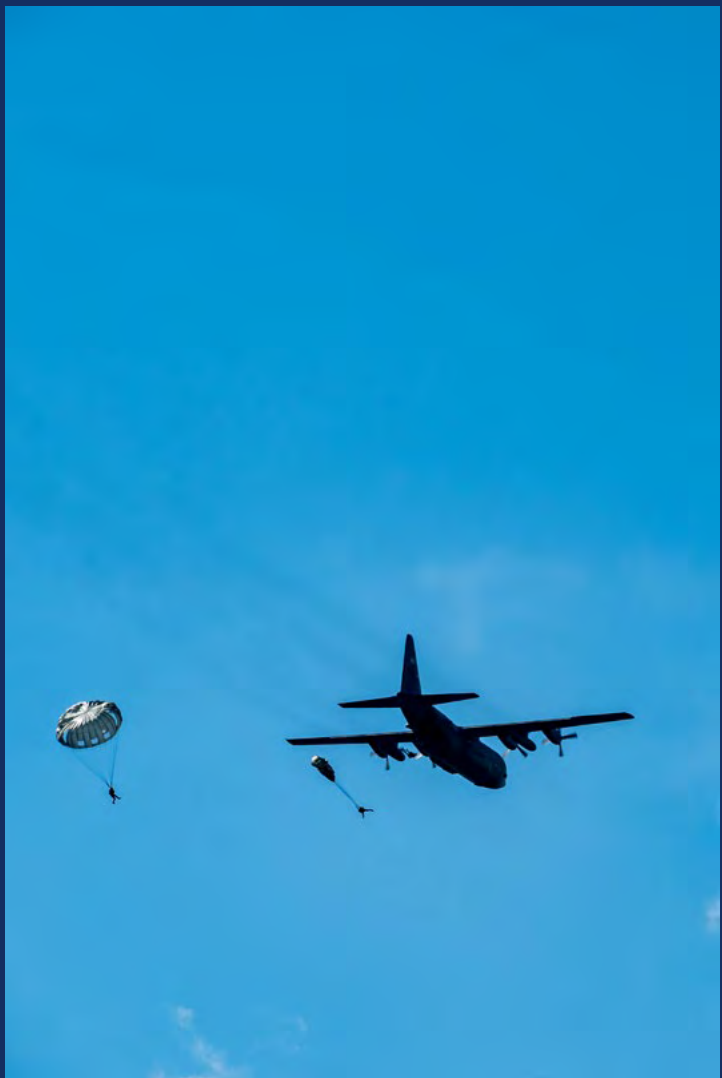


ALL IN THE FAMILY

182nd Airlift Wing holds family day at the Wing to promote resiliency

By Staff Sgt. Jason Grabiec, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs





Whiteboards, Reese's and Wisdom

Col. Eric Davis, who rose to Master Sergeant before commissioning, was known for his intellect, caring for Soldiers, toughness, and love of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and white boards retires after 35 years

Words of Wisdom

★ POSITION YOURSELF FOR SUCCESS

-THINK YOU CAN + TRY

-DON'T SELF-ELIMINATE BY TAKING YOURSELF OUT OF AN OPPORTUNITY THAT PRESENTS ITSELF

★ MAKE THEM TELL YOU 'NO' BUT GIVE THEM EVERY REASON TO SAY 'YES'

-BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF

★ SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

-BE TACTICALLY + TECHNICALLY CORRECT

-KNOW YOUR JOB AND YOUR PROFESSION

-LEARN FROM YOUR FAILURES + MISTAKES

★ BE CURIOUS + WORK HARD TO SATIATE THAT CURIOSITY (IT CAN ONLY MAKE YOU SMARTER)

★ TAKE TIME TO SAVOR THE SWEET THINGS IN LIFE

-LIKE A REESE'S PEANUT BUTTER CUP, GRATITUDE + ACKNOWLEDGING THE HARD WORK OF OTHERS ARE GREAT TASTES THAT TASTE GREAT TOGETHER

★ TAKE TIME TO TEACH + MENTOR OTHERS

-IT'S TIME WELL SPENT

-IT SAVES YOU TIME IN THE LONG RUN BECAUSE YOU'RE MAKING BETTER, SMARTER LEADERS AND PROBLEM SOLVERS

-IT'S OKAY TO NOT LIKE BANANAS. YOU'RE NOT ALONE

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

When Colonel Eric Davis of Mount Pulaski called his team into his office, his Soldiers knew his thoughts would flow feverishly as every space on his white boards filled with dry-erase marker.

Now it will be up to those he mentored to fill those white boards with thoughts, ideas and connections as the combat veteran hands over his dry-erase markers and retires after more than 35 years of dedicated service to the U.S. Army and Illinois Army National Guard.

"He's a problem-solver," said retired Sgt. Maj. Andrew Weldon, who first worked with Davis in the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and later when Davis was appointed as the Plans Operations and Training Officer (G-3) for the Illinois Army National Guard. "You know the movie, A Beautiful Mind? We'll that's what it was like. He sees it and figures it out. He was showing us how he was working it out on those white boards."

Retired Maj. Gen. Michael Zerbonia, who commanded the Illinois Army National Guard, said that Davis was among

the “most professional, knowledgeable, and doctrinally correct officers” he’s ever worked with and “one of the best G3s the Illinois Army National Guard has ever had.”

“He looks at a problem. Then he looks at many different ways to solve that problem and finds a solution that is best for the organization and best for the Soldiers,” Zerbonia said. Davis’ high-intellect and analytical mind was coupled with a rock-hard core. “He’s an officer I would go to war with – any day,” Zerbonia added.

Davis essentially has had two careers, reaching the rank of master sergeant before accepting a direct commission. Davis was an enlisted Soldier and NCO for nearly 14 years, the majority as cannon crewmember in the Illinois Army National Guard’s B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery based in Macomb. He would be promoted to master sergeant in the battalion’s headquarters battery based in Milan, before being direct commissioned as a second lieutenant and returning to B Battery as a fire direction officer.

“As a senior NCO, Master Sgt. Davis demonstrated the abilities to lead and develop Soldiers, so I encouraged him to assemble a commissioning packet. As I followed his career path, I knew he made the right decision to accept the challenge and has affected many lives as both a senior NCO and field grade officer,” said State Rep. Dan Swanson, who endorsed Davis’ direct commissioning packet as Commander of the 2-123 Field Artillery Battalion. Swanson retired as a lieutenant colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard and now represents the 74th District in the Illinois House of Representatives.

“I looked at my Army career and thought about how long I’d be allowed to do this. I was still young for an



E-8. I enjoyed it and knew I wanted to stay at it,” Davis said. “Accepting a direct commission was an opportunity to stay longer in the Army.”

Years of experience as a noncommissioned officer certainly broadened his intellect.

“Colonel Davis has more vast knowledge than anyone I’ve met,” said Sgt. 1st Class Erin Connelly, who works as the noncommissioned officer for the Force Integration and Readiness Office under the G3. He’s a history buff obsessed with the Lewis and Clark expedition, but also has random knowledge about lawnmowers,

Connelly said. He scuba dives, rides motorcycles, is a carpenter, blacksmith, and painter.

Brig. Gen. (retired) Alicia Tate-Nadeau, now the Homeland Security Advisor to Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, has known Davis since he was promoted to captain in 2005.

“Even as a young officer, Eric exuded the traits of an excellent officer. He was tactically and technically superior to his peers and lived the ethos of an Army

officer in and out of uniform,” she said. “Eric has always been a leader who leads from the front never asking more from his Soldiers than he would do himself. It is a rare breed to find an officer like Eric who could think and lead at the tactical, operational and strategic levels.”

Davis said he doesn’t think of himself as any more intelligent or intellectual than others. “I tend to think of myself as curious. I like to dig in, to understand something – to know it,” Davis said. “If you are curious and work

to satiate that curiosity, you can’t help but get smarter.”

Those who have worked with Davis soon realize that his intellect goes beyond just taking in information. “He knows exactly how deep he needs to go,” said Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army



of the Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. "He delves in just so he understands the problem without getting bogged down in useless data."

Davis has wide range of knowledge and the ability to accurately and efficiently analyze



information, but it is his mentoring that makes him a "true model of a leader," Boyd said. "He has done a heck of a job mentoring others and, as a result, we've had a smooth transition as he retires."

Most people that meet Davis automatically recognize his intellect, but as they get to know him, they learn how he genuinely cares about his Soldiers. "He is all about developing and mentoring people. He's demanding, but fair," Weldon said. "He also checks in on you and your family."

"He is, hands down, the most selfless officer I have ever worked with," Connelly said. Davis was the first officer to help her map out her career and life (on a white board color-coded with different potential paths, of course). "If you are married, he learns your spouse's name. He learns your kids' names," she added.



Connelly isn't married and doesn't have any (human) children, so Davis learned the name of her Doberman Pinscher, Rohan, and her pet rabbit,

Declan. "He even shared some rabbit care ideas. He had raised rabbits as a kid," Connelly said.

When Connelly was sick at home with the flu and shingles, Davis had Hy-Vee deliver oranges and

Gatorade to her home. "He cares to the lowest level how everyone is doing and their thoughts on things," Connelly said. "He seeks out other points of view as a way to expand his mind and thinking."

Davis built Weldon a liquor cabinet made to look like a military footlocker. "He cared so much about the quality that he looked up the original GSA contract for lockers, so he had the right paint code," Weldon said. "That's the kind of attention to detail he put into the gift. That's how much he cares."

Davis' caring and compassion for Soldiers includes hand-written cards to those struggling and weekly visits to everyone's desk. It can certainly be traced to his years as an enlisted Soldier and NCO as well as the Army's emphasis on teamwork and looking after your troops, but Davis also worked with the chronically mentally ill for about 10 years before he started working full-time for the Illinois Army National Guard in 2002.

Davis said caring and compassion are certainly important in a mental health care setting, but these traits are important everywhere with everyone - and it is important to help people "figure out how to solve their own problems."



Those who worked with Davis knew never to mistake caring for weakness. "I have watched him annihilate staff. He makes them do their jobs," said Lt. Col. Jason Carter, the deputy G-3 who has worked with Davis for several years. "He's highly intelligent, able to digest information and then recall that information in perfect situations," Carter said. More than once that "perfect situation" was during a briefing when a staff officer or NCO hadn't done all their homework.

"He was tough on everyone," Carter said. An intelligence officer who hadn't properly done his or her research faced a particularly tough challenge briefing Davis. "If you were an S-2 and weren't prepared - he's coming at you." But then he'd "definitely take the time to educate you," Carter added. "He'd sit down and help you work through it." His goal was to improve the Soldier and the organization. "He's definitely a teach,



coach, mentor type of leader.” Besides, those who worked with Davis soon learned his kryptonite. “Give him a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup and a piece of 550-cord. That will make him happy – at least buy you a couple

minutes,” Carter said. “He could sit there for hours eating Reese’s and tying knots in 550-cord – all the while working and barking orders.”

If you want to make the colonel happy, offer him a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup – not a banana. “I do hate bananas. I hate the smell, the taste, the texture,” Davis said, with a look of disdain. In the rough and tumble world of combat arms, knowledge of a deep-seated hatred of this particular fruit would be used to ease tensions in humorous and good-natured taunting, Weldon said. At times, a banana would appear on Davis’ area in the operations center. “He’d launch that banana across the TOC.”

His abhorrence of bananas is one of the few things Davis cannot explain. “The funny thing is, I do like banana bread. I just hate raw bananas.”

While he may have banned bananas from his home, this has not precluded Davis from having a happy married life. Davis and his spouse, Bonnie, have been

married for 32 years and have five adult children; Kyle and his spouse, Cheyenne; Joel and his spouse, Shelby; Lindsey, Joshua, and Liam. Bonnie Davis has helped her husband through multiple years of difficult and challenging assignments including the 2011 Bilateral Embedded Support Team A7 deployment to Afghanistan with the Polish. In addition to managing a Wal-Mart and previously a local grocery store in Mount Pulaski, Bonnie often

picked up the slack when Eric was on military duty. “She has been very supportive of my military service through our 32 years of marriage, she is simply amazing, and I love her very much,” Davis said. Zerbonia put it more succinctly. “Bonnie is a saint,” the general said.

Davis grew up as the oldest of four children. His father, Ed, owned and operated a small heating, electrical and plumbing business, Davis Electric in Rushville, Ill.. His mother, Eleanor, worked for the Illinois Department of Public Health’s lead abatement and mitigation team.

Neither Ed nor Eleanor served in the military, but they gave their son a piece of advice that served him well throughout his 35-year military career.

“If you are going to take the time to do something, then take the time to do it right,” Davis said.



Murphysboro unit runner-up in Army Award for Maintenance Excellence

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –A Murphysboro-based Illinois Army National Guard unit has been selected as the runner-up in the small unit category, National Guard Bureau-level (NGB) Army Award for Maintenance Excellence (AAME) competition.

Forward Support Company (FSC), 123rd Engineer Battalion, took top honors in the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence at the regional competition in July before being selected as the runner-up at the NGB competition in September.



“The Soldiers in FSC, 123rd Engineer Battalion are professionals. Many of the Soldiers in the unit are employed full-time in field maintenance shops and used this experience to make the unit successful,” said 1st Lt. William Yakes, of Chatham,

commander, FSC, 123rd EN Bn. “We have subject matter experts in the Global Combat Support System, which is a web-based automated logistics system, supply activities, and maintenance operations in the unit.”

Yakes said the unit owes much of its success as well to its maintenance warrant officer and the unit’s full-time staff.

“Our maintenance warrant officer, Chief Warrant Officer (3) William Ellis, used his 20 years of military experience, his passion, and considerable time to assemble the AAME package, ensuring it captured everything we have done and met the standard for submission,” Yakes said. “The full time staff made the AAME packet one of their priorities among all the other competing priorities that full time staff in units face. Their involvement and dedication were key in the unit’s opportunity to compete with the active component.”

Staff Sgt. Coty Brown, of Murphysboro, FSC’s supply noncommissioned officer, assisted in implementing new maintenance standard operating procedures and processes for the unit.

“The program I took over was a great program, but we worked to greatly improve the overall readiness in the FSC’s command maintenance discipline program to a commendable level,” Brown said. “This hard work directly contributed to the FSC earning the second best overall AAME score from NGB.”

Charleston Soldier honored for more than 30 years of service

By Sgt. 1st Class Kassidy Snyder, Illinois National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Sgt. 1st Class David Keefer, of Charleston, Illinois, was honored for more than 30 years of military service during a retirement ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, October 13.

Keefer enlisted in the Tennessee Army National Guard on December 30, 1991, as an 88M Motor Transport Operator with the 1455th Transportation Company in Dresden, Tennessee. In April 1994 he became a Military Police (MP) Officer with the 438th MP Company in Murray, Kentucky.

He deployed several times on State Active Duty in a Joint Service Operation with the Kentucky State Police for law and order missions at the



Kentucky Derby, Governor’s Ball, many civic events, and several prison riots at Eddyville State Penitentiary. Keefer was also sent to Panama to work on the National Police Force at Ft. Cobbe, Clayton, and Sherman for post closure and transition.

After 9-11, Keefer was sent to federal training to assist in airport security as a police officer at Greater Cincinnati International Airport and Louisville Airport. From there he went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to establish a prison system and collection point for terror suspects and war criminals. While stationed there he was selected for the Detainee Interment Systems and Collection, flying all over the world to bring prisoners to Camp X-Ray and Camp Delta.

In September 2004, Keefer transferred to the Illinois Army National Guard stationed with the 233rd MP Company in Springfield, Illinois, and was quickly selected to become a 79T recruiter in Sullivan, Illinois. He served in the same office for 17 years as a recruiter. In 2019, Keefer became a retention non-commissioned officer and believes it was the most rewarding job he had in the Army National Guard.

Carterville Soldier promoted to sergeant major

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

MARION, Ill. –More than 17 years after pinning on sergeant stripes, Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Fritz Coffey, of Carterville, was promoted to sergeant major in a ceremony at the Illinois National Guard Armory in Marion Oct. 9.

“Today is truly a special day,” said Sgt. Maj. James Beckman, of Moline, operations sergeant major, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery, based in Milan, Illinois.

“Promotion to sergeant major or command sergeant major is an achievement very few attain in their careers. Sgt. Maj. Coffey is an outstanding Soldier and an excellent leader, but most importantly he is a good person. It was my privilege to promote him to sergeant some 17 years ago in Iraq and to

participate today as he is promoted to sergeant major.”

Coffey enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 2000. Over the course of his more than 22 years of service, the Illinois National Guard underwent force structure changes leading Coffey to reclassify into different military occupational specialties. He has held several military occupational specialties and served in different units including maintenance, signal corps, field artillery, military police, infantry, chemical corps and a logistics company that supports and engineer battalion.

Coffey is the Illinois Army National Guard’s communication directorate (G-6)

senior enlisted leader. As the G-6 sergeant major, Coffey develops joint, interagency and interorganizational training for the state’s Command and Control systems,

structures and Soldiers; guides the careers of senior leaders of the signal and cyber defense corps and acts as a liaison between certain units and sections in the state and Training and Doctrine Command and Forces Command. As a traditional Soldier, Coffey serves as a military federal technician at the Marion Armory. He most recently served as the first sergeant of Forward Support Company, 123rd Engineer Battalion in Murphysboro.

Beckman explained the significance of Coffey’s promotion to friends and family attending the ceremony.

“Since that day in 2005, he has progressed through the ranks of sergeant, staff sergeant, sergeant first class, master sergeant and first sergeant,” Beckman said. “With today’s promotion to sergeant major, he is one of about 47 Soldiers to hold that rank at any given time in the Illinois Army National Guard. That is truly remarkable.”

Beckman acknowledge Coffey’s family, friends and fellow Soldiers for their roles in his career.

“Thank you for all you have done to make him the person he is today,” Beckman said. “Sergeant Major Coffey, I know you will succeed as you always have.”

Coffey told family and friends they are some of the reasons he has reached this milestone in his career.

“The only reason I’m here today is because of the people who are in my life,” Coffey said. “There are those who you look up to and strive to be like. They are the reason I’m here today.”

Coffey also thanked his wife Kim and their children for their support throughout his military service.

“You have been there with me every step of the way,” he said. “She has never asked me to stop being a Soldier. I know it’s frustrating sometimes when I’m gone, especially with three children. I appreciate what you do which allows me to do what I love to do. I can’t ask for anything more.”

Coffey is a graduate of John A. Logan College in Carterville, Illinois, and is currently attending the U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy through distance learning. He will graduate in the spring of 2024 with a bachelor’s degree in Leadership and Workforce Development from the U.S. Command and General Staff College.



Maintenance company places 4th for medium-sized units for AAME

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –A Machesney Park-based Illinois Army National Guard unit is preparing to compete in the next level of the Army Award for Maintenance Excellence (AAME) competition after placing fourth in the medium unit category, National Guard Bureau-level (NGB) competition in September.

The 725th Transportation Company took top honors at the regional AAME competition in July before advancing to the NGB-level competition.

“The biggest factor in our AAME success has been our traditional Soldiers,” said Staff Sgt. Emerald Hunter, of

Rockton, 725th’s supply noncommissioned officer. “Our equipment is rather dated, and we are no stranger to breakdowns. The maintenance platoon is always there to save the day. They routinely conduct more repairs and services on drill weekends than we anticipate.”

Despite issues with repairs, Hunter said the maintenance platoon’s morale is something not

matched within the company.

“They are the most enthusiastic group of Soldiers in the 725th,” she said.

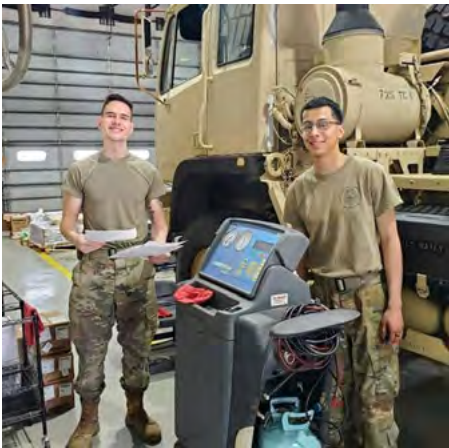
However, it’s not all duct tape and baling wire, she emphasized.

“Our standard operating procedures and practices have also helped us in the AAME competition,” she said. “When we dispatch vehicles, we annotate fuel and fluid usage. When maintenance conducts a service or repair on that vehicle, our logistics specialists log those numbers into the Army’s automated logistics system. This creates an accurate record of the work performed.”

Emerald said the units are judged on a variety of things including mission accomplishments, weapons systems or equipment operational readiness, resource management, innovations and improvements, equipment improvements, production quality control, innovative continuous process, resiliency, and community projects.

“Once the NGB-level results were announced, the clock started ticking on getting revisions made to the Army-level competition packet,” Hunter said. “The unit will use this time to include any maintenance actions taken since the NGB competition.”

The Department of the Army level competition begins mid-November.



Girard Soldier retires after nearly a quarter of a century

By Sgt. 1st Class Cassidy Snyder, Illinois National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Sgt. 1st Class Robert Gasen, of Girard, Illinois, was honored for his military service during a retirement ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, October 13.

Gasen enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in November 1998 with the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion in Springfield, Illinois, as an administrative specialist. He then quickly transferred to the 233rd Military Police (MP) Company to follow in his stepfather’s footsteps to become a MP. Gasen deployed to Iraq from 2003 to 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He served with the 233rd MP Company for ten years, before becoming a full-time Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Soldier in November 2008 and transferring to Joint Force Headquarters.

Gasen spent the early part of his career updating records and assisting Soldiers with their own AGR and promotion packets, as well as running the ID machine, and updating documents for Soldiers who were mobilizing. In 2010, Gasen was moved to the discharge team to process NGB 22s and additional forms for Soldiers who were discharging or retiring. In 2012, he moved to automation NCO where he had a hand in updating records for every Soldier who deployed between November 2008 and June 2017. Gasen transitioned to the 65th Troop Command to serve as the personnel noncommissioned officer (NCO). Gasen then transferred to the G3/5/7 Operations, Plans, and Training office to serve as the force integration readiness office NCO and equipment training NCO working to prepare units for new equipment they were receiving. Finally, Gasen’s last position was in the Recruiting and Retention Battalion where he served as a personnel NCO since 2019.

Some of Gasen’s awards include five Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals, five Army Good Conduct Medals, the Iraqi Campaign Medal, the Illinois State Active Duty Ribbon and Combat Action Badge.



Springfield Soldier retires after 21 years of service

By Sgt. Trent Fouche, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. –It didn't take a lot to convince the 31-year-old recruit to join the Illinois Army National Guard in 2001. Growing up in East Saint Louis, Illinois, Sgt. 1st Class Lonnie Lucas worked multiple jobs, but not yet had a career with an opportunity to grow and develop his skills.



"Before meeting with the recruiter, I already had my mind made up to join," said Lucas, the casualty assistance officer for the Illinois Army National Guard. "I joined a little later in life and was upfront and honest. I was really looking for a career and benefits for my family."

On Oct. 7, 2022, Lucas retired during a quiet ceremony at Mario's Pizza in Springfield after 21 years of distinguished service.



"I want to thank everyone for taking the time to come out today," Lucas said. "But I want to especially thank my wife, Linda, and our children Lonnie Jr., Jared,

Alyah and Lindsey. They are truly the hands behind my success."

During his career, Lucas served in several positions of responsibility. As a traditional National Guard Soldier, he served as a heavy vehicle driver for the 1644th Transportation Company and deployed to Iraq in October 2004. He returned to Iraq in August 2011 as a heavy vehicle driver with the 1344th Transportation Company.

"My deployments really brought me close to my battle buddies," Lucas said. "It encouraged me to want to continue to serve. I still keep in touch with a lot of those Soldiers. I truly developed some genuine friendships during that time."

Lucas has been awarded numerous awards and citations for his outstanding service including the Bronze Star Medal, Army Commendation Medal and Army Achievement Medal.

He credits his leadership and mentors for putting him in a position to be successful.



"My career has been supported by great leadership," Lucas said. "I've learned so much from a lot of people. It's not just about discipline, but giving your Soldiers the confidence to be successful. When I joined the Guard I had a mentor who would really stress the importance of non-commissioned officers looking out for their Soldiers, not just during drill but when they're off the clock as well."

In his new role, Lucas serves as a readjustment counselor for the Department of Veteran's Affairs and is actively working toward his Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) certification.

"I'm so grateful for time in the Illinois Army National Guard," Lucas said. "I was able to get an education and so many opportunities to be successful."

Springfield artillery unit takes 4th in small-unit category for AAME

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, III. –A Springfield-based Illinois Army National Guard unit is one step closer to the U.S. Army’s top maintenance award after placing fourth in the small unit category, National Guard Bureau-level (NGB) Army Award for Maintenance Excellence competition in September.

Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment was selected as a runner-up in the regional competition in July before advancing to the NGB-level competition.



Staff Sgt. Rachel Zoerner, the unit’s supply noncommissioned officer, said last year’s competition helped Battery B with entering this year’s packet.

“Battery B competed in last year’s AAME

competition and that helped the unit gain a better understanding of how to build the entry packet,” Zoerner said.

Zoerner said the unit’s success lies within the knowledge passed down from unit leaders to Soldiers new to Battery B.

“Our Soldiers put their knowledge to work in order to accomplish the mission,” she said. “Without that work, I would have a difficult time filling out the appropriate paperwork.”

Zoerner said the AAME packet outlines in great detail the program guidelines, ranging from basic unit information to how maintenance affects the unit. The four-section packet also includes how the unit conducts its family program and the results of the unit’s Command Maintenance Discipline Program inspection.

“The judges look at how the unit met each section requirement, checks for grammar, readability, clarity and organization,” she said. “The judging is tough but we are provided with feedback after each level.”

Zoerner said if the unit scores high enough in the competition, or the judges recommend it moves, to the next level in the competition, they are able to make changes to the packet before it is sent forward.

“Battery B will be competing in the Army-level competition against active duty units,” Zoerner said. “We are incredibly proud to participate in the AAME competition. We have shown that a combat arms unit with no internal maintenance can and will do great competing in the AAME.”

Sycamore Soldier retires after 22 years of service

By Sgt. 1st Class Cassidy Snyder, Illinois National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion

SPRINGFIELD, III. –Sgt. 1st Class Justin Wolfe, of Sycamore, Illinois, was honored for his military service during a retirement ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, October 13.

Wolfe enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard on March 30, 2000 as an 11B Infantryman. He served in Alpha and Bravo Company, 2/130 Infantry before joining the Recruiting and Retention Battalion (RRB) in March 2004 as a recruiter. During his time as a Recruiting and Retention Noncommissioned Officer (NCO), he worked out of the Lawrenceville, Paris, and Sycamore armories. He was consistently a solid performing recruiter, earning multiple recruiting awards. Additionally, he spent eight years as a Military Science I & II instructor at Northern Illinois University ROTC.



During his tenure, he enlisted more than 250 new Soldiers into the Army National Guard. In 2020, he transitioned to a Readiness NCO for Golf Company, RRB, where he worked to prepare Soldiers for basic training. During his career, Wolfe was able to have an impact on more than 1,000 Soldiers.

Some of his awards include three Army Commendation Medals, three Army Achievement Medals, seven Army Good Conduct Medals, and the Expert Recruiting Badge.

Bourbonnais Soldier retires after 29 years of service

By Cpl. Justin Malone, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

CHICAGO – Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Charles Chinski of Bourbonnais, Illinois, retired after 29 years of military service during an Oct. 16 ceremony at the Illinois National Guard’s Northwest Armory in Chicago.

Chinski enlisted in the Army in 1993 and served as an infantryman at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii until 1996. After three and a half years out of military service,



Chinski joined the Illinois Army National Guard in December 2000.

“I could not get the desire to put the boots back on out of my system,” said Chinski. “It was an

easy decision.”

Over the next 10 years Chinski deployed to Germany in 2002 in support of Task Force Santa Fe; to Fort Polk, Louisiana, in 2004 in support of Operation Cajun Fury; and to Afghanistan in 2008 in support of Task Force Bayonet.

While Chinski laments he missed the birth of his first child during his 2002 deployment with the Illinois Army National Guard, he said his fellow Soldiers are his second family.

“I have had several excellent mentors,” said Chinski. “And the comradery from superiors, peers, and subordinates alike, they are all my brothers and sisters.”

Chinski became a full-time Soldier once again in 2008 in the Active Guard Reserves, or AGR, program, where he served as the training noncommissioned officer for Company C, 1st Battalion of the 178th Infantry

Regiment in Kankakee. Later he served as the readiness noncommissioned officer for the unit.

Chinski said his mentors, and peers in the AGR program, helped him succeed.

“Far too many to name,” he said. “But, at the end of the day, we all came together to support each other and take care of Soldiers.”



As he looks back on his career, Chinski said he is proud to have served through a time where the National Guard fundamentally changed from a strategic reserve to an operational force.

“We proved to be a vital, fighting, force multiplier to the active Army,” he said.

Beyond the comradery, Chinski said the Illinois Army National Guard is a rewarding career for both full-time and part-time Soldiers.

“Our technology keeps advancing,” he said. “Opportunities for Soldiers to get trained in multiple Military Occupational Specialties, promotions, retention bonuses are all great for Soldiers and their careers. Oh, and there is the college money.”

Chinski’s advises younger Soldiers with their career ahead of them to take care of one another.

“Mental health, physical health and spiritual health go hand in hand,” he said. “Seeking help is not a weakness. It is the bravest, strongest thing you can do.”



Sergeant Major retires after 31 years in uniform

By Staff Sgt. Alejandro Valdes, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Sgt. Maj. Jason S. Coffey with the Illinois National Guard's 244th Digital Liaison Detachment, retired Oct. 15 after 31 years of service during a ceremony at the Illinois National Guard's Northwest Armory in Chicago.



Coffey, of Galion, Ohio, enlisted in the active Army in 1992 and completed Infantry training at Fort Benning, Georgia, in October 1992. Coffey most recently served as the Chief Operations

noncommissioned officer for the 244th Digital Liaison Detachment, 65th Troop Brigade, Illinois Army National Guard.

His military assignments included 1st Brigade 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg North Carolina; 66th Brigade, 35th Infantry Division Illinois Army National Guard; 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Illinois Army National Guard; and the 244th Digital Liaison Detachment 65th Brigade, Illinois Army National Guard.

Over his career Coffey served in a variety of leadership positions including Fire Team Leader, Squad Leader, Platoon Sergeant, Scout Platoon Sergeant, First Sergeant, and Chief Operations NCO.

Coffey said learning from his own mistakes has been one of the biggest lessons he has learned during his long career.

“Being able to recognize your own mistakes and learn

from them is one of the most important lessons,” said Coffey. “Make mistakes, recognize them and move on. I hope that some of my leadership traits will carry on and Soldiers have learned from success or learned from the mistakes.”

During the retirement ceremony, Col. Max Casteleyn, the 244th commander, said Coffey's experience will be missed.

“What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven in the hearts of others,” said Casteleyn. “For 31 years, you have trained, cared, and lead with empathy. For 31 years, you have sacrificed time with family and you have been a part of the nation's one-percent willing to wear the uniform and live by the Soldier's creed. Now it's your turn to sit back and relax.”



Coffey said the comradery with his fellow Soldiers kept him in uniform for 31 years.

“I hope that some of my leadership traits will carry on and Soldiers learned from it,” said Coffey. “I hope the same drive and care will carry on. It's still a huge need to ensure our country's security and way of life. I hope the soldiers look at it the way I did and that they continue to take care of each other.”

After retirement, Coffey said he looks forward to spending more time with his wife, Kristine, and his son, Collin.



Maroa Post Office honors fallen Illinois Soldier, Spc. Jeremy Ridlen

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

MAROA, ILL. – On May 23, 2004 Illinois Army National Guard Spc. Jeremy Ridlen, of Maroa, Illinois, was killed in action while serving with the 1544th Transportation Company deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On Oct. 25, Ridlen's sacrifice was memorialized as the Maroa, Illinois, post office was renamed the Spc. Jeremy Ridlen Post Office.

"As a child, Jeremy must have visited the Maroa Post Office hundreds or thousands of times," said Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard during the Jeremy Ridlen Post Office dedication ceremony at the Maroa Fire Department. "From this day forward, his name will be memorialized in that post office in this community for years to come. Anyone who comes into that building will know a hero once came through those same doors."

The dedication ceremony was born of an idea from Maroa resident James Keith, who approached U.S. Congressman Rodney Davis at an event in Macon County.

"James came to me and asked what can we do to honor Jeremy Ridlen," Davis said. "This is one small token of our appreciation to Jeremy Ridlen and the many brave men and women in the military who have stood up to protect our freedoms."

After high school, Ridlen, and his twin brother Jason, who graduated from the Maroa-Forsyth High School, attended Illinois State University. Both enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard, and both were assigned

to the 1544th Transportation Company, based in Paris, Illinois.

In 2003, the unit was activated in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and after spending a couple of months training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, the 1544th deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, arriving in country in February, 2004. The 1544th was assigned to provide security for convoys moving throughout Iraq, specifically in an area called the Sunni Triangle. On May 23, 2004, the 1544th convoy was struck by a vehicle packed with explosives and small arms fire.

Davis spoke directly to the Ridlen family, including father Edward, mother Cheryl, sister Amanda, and twin brother Jason. "By designating this post office in Jeremy's honor, it will serve as a reminder to those generations who come after us, and who walk into the Maroa post office. They may not know Jeremy, or the Ridlen family, but they will see the plaque

honoring his service, his commitment, and his sacrifice," Davis said. "Maybe that will be the reason they go home and decide to research who Jeremy was and what he meant to this community. That will be the long-lasting legacy of Jeremy's sacrifice."

Davis, whose term in Congress ends in January, said events like this is one of the best parts of his job.

"I've met presidents in the White House and royalty, but all that pales in comparison to take an idea, turn it into legislation, and signed into law by the President of the United States.

"This is the long-lasting legacy of an idea to honor a hero who walked among us," Davis said.

Davis thanked the Ridlen family for their sacrifice.

"Thank you for allowing Jeremy to protect all of us and for allowing us to honor

him today," Davis said.

Among those in attendance at the dedication ceremony were several Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers and veterans of the 1544th who served with Ridlen, including Sgt. 1st Class Phillip Tuttle, who served with Ridlen in



Iraq.

"From the day I met him, Jeremy exhibited those traits that make him a true hero," Tuttle said. "He had the courage to always be himself no matter the problem and had the dedication to improve himself and those around him."

Tuttle said Ridlen did that quietly, letting his faith and actions speak louder than any boasting could have.

"Unfortunately, we seldom appreciate those individuals until they are no longer around us," he said. "This will serve as a reminder to future generations of what a true hero looks like long after we're gone."



Tuttle said the renaming of a post office could not be a more fitting memorial to Ridlen, especially given the 1544th's mission in Iraq.

"Most units assigned convoy security missions arrived at a staging yard and were given whatever convoy was staged and ready for movement at that time," Tuttle said. "The 1544th though was directly assigned to Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) contractors who were in charge of transporting the mail throughout central Iraq to bases for the troops."

Tuttle said KBR dubbed themselves the Iron Pony Express and quickly adopted the 1544th.

"Due to the daily missions, those Soldiers and KBR contractors became a family, regardless of the fact we weren't all serving in uniform," he said.

Tuttle said Ridlen served as a gunner for his convoy team.



"Gunnery for these teams often had to make life and death decisions in a blink of an eye and were trusted to do so without the input of the convoy commander or

the person in charge," Tuttle said. "Throughout all this Jeremy never wavered in his demeanor or his courage under fire. He continued to be steadfast and seek opportunities to help fellow Soldiers."

Tuttle said on May 23, 2004, Ridlen continued to show his dedication to helping others by volunteering to take the place on a gun team for a Soldier who was sick.

"With the convoy under attack, Jeremy remained in his gun box and returned fire," Tuttle said. "Those traits he exhibited his whole life showed up on that day to make sure the convoy was able to move out of the area safely. That courage makes him a true hero."

Bernice Joseph, customer relations manager for the U.S. Postal Service, told those in attendance that a very special set of circumstances and events must occur in order for a post office to be dedicated in honor of someone.

"Today's dedication would not be possible without the heroism of Specialist Jeremy Ridlen who left an enduring mark on our society and who represents the very best of America," she said. "His duty to his country is a reminder that liberty at home must be defended and our freedom is something we must respect and earn every day of our lives."

Joseph said the dedication to Ridlen will serve as a testament to his bravery and a constant reminder to all those who have given their lives in service to their country.



"Through his valiant service, Specialist Ridlen has helped ensure our rights and freedoms are secure in our homes and in the places we work," she said. "Jeremy will be immortalized in the community in which he attended high school. His legacy of service to his country will be permanently honored with the renaming of the Maroa Post Office as the Army National Guard Spc. Jeremy Ridlen Post Office."

Joseph said the entire U.S. Postal Service and its nearly 500,000 employees are privileged to have the name and spirit of Jeremy Ridlen forever associated with the Maroa post office.



The Other Side of the Mountain

Maj. Elaine Nussbaum, the 'Mama Bear' combat leader, retires after more than 20 years of service

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

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Maj. Elaine Nussbaum of Bloomington has a sing-song voice, infectious laughter, and a smile that stretches across her face and never seems to go away – even after working a 20-hour day.

She is a 4-H Club alum, has competed in multiple scholastic bowl tournaments, performed with Illinois State University's Gamma Phi Circus, sings in her church choir, and played parts in Bloomington-Normal community theatre – although she has never been cast as a tough, determined, and combat-tested Army leader.

And that is exactly who she was for more than two decades in the Illinois Army National Guard.

Nussbaum officially retired after 22 years of service on Friday, Nov. 4, during a ceremony at the Illinois National Guard's headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, Ill. During the ceremony she said that she does not "look or run or even sound like a Soldier."

That did not matter to the Soldiers who served with Nussbaum. They described an officer who led with authentic caring and kindness, who would work "crazy" long hours to ensure the troops had what they needed, and who would surprise those celebrating, or struggling, with small empathetic gifts. When she corrected Soldiers, it was always with respect and an eye toward personal and professional growth. They described an officer who lived all the Army Values – Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless-Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.

"To me, she is the epitome of what a leader should be in the military," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Amanda Camden, who has worked with Nussbaum in logistics for several years and been on multiple exercises with her. "I think she was born that way. Her thoughtfulness, her compassion – it is who she is at her core."

Camden's 13-year-old dog, Sadie, died two weeks before the Eager Lion exercise in Jordan this year. Nussbaum brought her a small stuffed animal that looked like Sadie. When her 8-year-old cat, Ollie, died during the exercise, Nussbaum was there to just listen. "Yes, they were pets. But she understood what they meant to me."

"Maj. Nussbaum has influenced me to be an empathic leader, look for the positive before giving up, take the time to think of others, and to take pride in everything I do," said 1st Sgt. Eric Daggett, who worked with Nussbaum in the Illinois Army National Guard commercial transportation office. "She is the smartest, kindest, most dedicated person I know," he added. "Whenever I encounter an unfamiliar challenge, am ready to throw in the towel, or am dealing with Soldier issues, I will always reflect on Maj. Nussbaum's influences. She has truly made me a better person."

Nussbaum started her career with the Paris-based 1544th Transportation Company, joining the unit as a Simultaneous Membership Program Cadet contracted

with the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Illinois State University in Normal, Ill. She graduated with



a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and commissioned as a second lieutenant in 2003.

Nussbaum graduated from the Transportation Officer Basic Course in 2004, received two weeks of deployment training at Fort Bliss, Texas, and was thrust into one of the most challenging combat deployments in the Illinois National Guard's modern history – the 2004 deployment of the 1544th Transportation Company to Iraq.

"She wasn't afraid – no, she was afraid. We all were. Anyone who says they weren't afraid is lying. But she didn't show her fear. She was a strong person for her Soldiers," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 (retired) Raymond "Keith" Butler, who served as one of the senior NCOs with Nussbaum on the 2004 deployment. "She listened to her NCOs, showed confidence in her Soldiers, and worked tirelessly – tons of hours – to take care of her Soldiers."

Five 1544th Transportation Company Soldiers were killed in action during the deployment: Staff Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps, 44, of Chicago, Ill.; Spc. Jeremy L. Ridlen, 23, of Maroa, Ill.; Sgt. Shawna Morrison, 26, of Paris, Ill.; Spc. Charles Lamb, 23, of Casey, Ill.; and Sgt. Jessica L. Cawvey, 21, of Mahomet, Ill. Many more of the company's Soldiers were wounded.

Nussbaum had to wait to deploy until after graduating from her officer basic course. Both Phipps and Ridlen were killed in action before she arrived in theater. Just days before Nussbaum left, she attended Jeremy Ridlen's funeral services in Illinois where she talked to Jeremy's twin brother, Jason, also a Soldier in the 1544th who had escorted his brother home from Iraq. "He gave us helpful hints – information we could use in theater. I was amazed by the selflessness. He was mourning his brother, and he was concerned about us. We had some truly incredible people in that unit."

"I would not take back a day I spent in the military except those days when we lost brothers and sisters," Nussbaum said. "I'm kind of protective of our five brothers and sisters. They were not just random people or numbers to us."

She is also protective of those who survived the deployment and carry on the legacy of the unit. "There was so much focus on the horrific losses. (The media) never talked about how the Soldiers kept on going – going back on mission the very next day after an incident. They didn't talk about what they accomplished. There was never any talk about how our Soldiers came back and worked great jobs, or started families, or went to school. Or, as a unit, how great they did at (Fort Chafee, Arkansas' Exportable Combat Training Capability) or (Fort Irwin, California's National Training Center) or learning to use and maintain new equipment. They never focused on the positive stuff – the competency, strength, and resiliency of our Soldiers," Nussbaum said.

"Her leadership style has always been maternal," said Lt. Col. Bradley Roach, the commander of the 6th Battalion, 54th Security Forces Assistance Brigade. When Nussbaum was the commander of the 1544th Transportation Co. after the deployment, Roach was the commander of the then East St. Louis-based 1344th Transportation Co. The two became close friends as they worked together to improve training for their units. Nussbaum is the Godmother of Roach's 4-year-old daughter, Rosalyn, and still regularly plays Bunco with his wife, Rachal.

Nussbaum might be a kind soul with the tendency to see the best in people, but "don't mess with her Soldiers," Roach warned. Or, as Butler said, "If you poke mama bear, watch out."

There are multiple stories of Nussbaum coming to the defense of her Soldiers. There was the time during the 1544th deployment when she pulled her tired and weary Soldiers from a ceremony rehearsal. There was the time when she walked out on a senior officer when the idea of re-designating the 1544th was raised. As a logistics officer, she went through great lengths to ensure that Illinois National Guard Soldiers received adequate contracted lodging, meals, and laundry service during multiple state active duty missions in 2020.

But the most famous story is how "Major Nussbaum can take a punch."

After she was commissioned, but before the 1544th Transportation Co. deployed, Nussbaum volunteered to serve as the designated driver when some of the unit's NCOs decided to have a few drinks at a local bar after a day of training. As the night went on, a group of men decided to pick a fight with the Soldiers. Nussbaum tried to get the Soldiers into the car and away from the situation, but when it became apparent that the two groups were squaring off, Nussbaum jumped into the middle of it trying to break it up. She got hit, directly in the face, by an errant blow. She was mostly unfazed by the blow to the face and finally succeeded in getting her Soldiers home safely. But she sported a spectacular shiner for a couple of weeks.

"She will, without hesitation, jump right in the middle of it when it comes to protecting her Soldiers," Butler said. That was true in a bar brawl before the deployment and it was true of firefights during the deployment. It

earned her the respect and admiration of the Soldiers, Butler said. "We were really happy to have her with the unit."

"I was fortunate to have exceptional NCOs that made my job a lot easier," Nussbaum said. "I worked hard to learn as much as I could as fast as I could. I knew I could go to my NCOs with questions. They had the knowledge and experience. My biggest fear was making a decision that might get someone hurt."

Sgt. 1st Class Phillip Tuttle, the first sergeant of the headquarters company of the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, who served as one of Nussbaum's squad leaders and later her platoon sergeant was among those trusted NCOs during the 1544th's 2004 deployment.

"Soldier care is her forte," Tuttle said. "She has dealt with some grumpy, high-strung NCOs. She listened to the troops, and if they had issues, she went above and beyond to resolve them. We were, and still are, a tight family. It was really good to get her back with the unit."

Soon after Nussbaum arrived in Iraq, theater policy changed forcing the unit's female Soldiers out of the company housing area and into a big warehouse building with women from many different units. This created a host of problems. The 1544th was driving the roads of Iraq primarily at night protecting U.S. contractor KBR, Inc. and fuel convoys, and the females of the other units were on different sleep cycles. "She just went right to work squashing problems and taking care of our Soldiers. Our Soldiers needed to get rest so they could focus on the mission," Tuttle said.

"She is very thorough in everything she does. She always gives 100 percent," said Sgt. 1st Class Britt Talley, the Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion's resource NCO who served with Nussbaum on the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) A12. The team deployed to Afghanistan from the fall of 2013 to the



Spring of 2014 as a liaison team with our Polish allies. "(Major Nussbaum) takes care of everyone else first, before herself," Talley said. "She will work whatever hours needed to ensure the Soldiers are taken care of."

Nussbaum admitted that she sometimes refocused her "loftier" goals to take care of others. "I reminded myself that we join not just to see what we can achieve as individuals, but what we can do to better the

organization and serve the Soldiers in it. I often realized that perhaps the best place for me to do that was right where I was at that moment."

She said that the Soldiers deserved that sacrifice. "I've been so impressed with their knowledge, their enthusiasm, their endurance - and not just physical endurance. If you set high standards for them, they will meet

and exceed them. They will amaze you," Nussbaum said. "I wanted to be better for them. They earned that. We (as leaders) owe it to them."

She is "just an amazing individual" with a "crazy amount of work ethic," said Col. Kevin Little, the Illinois National Guard's Director of Human Resources and Commander of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade.

"She gave me and other leaders the confidence that her work would be complete, thorough, clear, and most importantly, the confidence that the audience would understand the message or product being delivered," Little said. "She emulates professionalism and creates an environment of smiles, learning, and critical thinking.

She has the heart of a teacher and approached her subordinates, peers, and her leaders with products that require little to no explanation and could be implemented. She is a true professional and an example for all Soldiers, leaders, and staff."

While Nussbaum worked extraordinarily hard throughout her military career to improve herself and

her Soldiers, one thing she couldn't change was her cheerful disposition. In Iraq one of her senior NCOs said she had to get "meaner."

"He asked why I was so happy all the time. I tried for a full day not to smile. I just couldn't do it," she said. Once when 2nd Lt. Nussbaum and her Soldiers were engaged

with the enemy, one of the NCOs overheard her laugh during the radio traffic. Later, he told her that "Either you are too dumb to know what was really going on or you're a lot tougher than we thought."

Her answer: "Yes." At that point in her career, she was working hard to fill her knowledge gap – and, yes, she was and still is a lot tougher than people think.

Nussbaum said she was grateful for her second deployment to Afghanistan as a more seasoned officer a decade after the first deployment to Iraq. The first, she said, "was the wild, wild west the whole time" with danger on the roads, frequent mortar attacks on base, and concerns about the base being overrun. In Afghanistan, her mission didn't have her out on the roads and the forward operating base was more secure at that time. "That second deployment allowed me to reflect."

Her brother, Staff Sgt. John Nussbaum, deployed to Afghanistan in 2008 to 2009 with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, another tough and challenging deployment. Elaine Nussbaum said her younger brother's deployment helped her understand what the families of deployed Soldiers endure. "That was scary."

Elaine and John Nussbaum have compared notes over two decades in the Army



together. They have compared her experiences as an officer to his as an NCO, her experiences as a logistician to his as a combat arms Soldier, and both of their experiences in combat.

"We have spent the last 18 years since I enlisted sharing stories - mundane, funny, infuriating, and terrifying -

seeking knowledge based on our different career paths, giving advice from a different perspective, and even commiserating at times," John Nussbaum said.

"Between the two of us, we know what it's like to be enlisted, an officer, maneuver, support, and sustainment," he added. "We learned different things, learned them in different ways, had different things asked of us, and had different spheres of influence. But together we found knowledge and counsel in those differences by looking to each other for advice about 'what would the other side think?' Or 'how would they do this?'"

Staff Sgt. Nussbaum, who is seven years younger than his sister, was able to teach many of his Soldiers in the Cavalry "to appreciate the difficulties, nuance, and importance of the logistics world and the deceptively large influence it has on all aspects of the military" learned from his sister and Maj. Nussbaum absorbed

a lot about reconnaissance, maneuver warfare, and operations from her brother.

"Between the two of us, we were lucky to have what I would consider the total Army experience," John Nussbaum said. Together they learned "a fuller understanding of the military and a more commanding ability to accomplish our missions, to lead



and care for our Soldiers, to be greater stewards of the profession, and to be more successful for our own sakes," he added.

But the two people in Maj. Nussbaum's family that influenced her the most never served in the military: her father, Michael, and her mother, Therese. "They were both hard-working and patriotic," she said.

Both of the Nussbaum parents were proud of their children's military service. Both parents had fathers who served in World War II and Therese's brothers, Michael and Marty, were Vietnam veterans. "And both their kids deployed twice," Elaine Nussbaum said.

Her father, who died in 2011, was an Eagle Scout who worked in local grocery store. He had a degree in history from the University of Iowa and was keenly interested in his daughter's military experience, even if he was a bit "baffled" by the thought of his cheerful little girl driving big cargo trucks and leading convoys in Iraq.

"We watched all the old war movies and programs on the History Channel, and he took us to the Prairie Aviation Air Show every summer where we toured historical aircraft and first experienced that familiar - now comforting - 'Army smell' of canvas, metal, fuel, paint, damp, and dust. He taught me how to properly fold and respect the Flag, honoring those who served and continue to serve under it," Nussbaum said.

Most who know the family compare Elaine Nussbaum to her mother. They attend Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Bloomington together each Sunday. Therese Nussbaum, an avid reader and fellow 4-H alum, spent over 40 years as a registered nurse who "famously never left work on time" - a comparative fact that drew laughter at her daughter's retirement ceremony.

"She is the most thoughtful, caring person I know," her daughter said. "Every year she took us to the local parades and ceremonies that commemorated the service of veterans like her father, uncles, brothers, nephews, and friends. She taught us to be dependable and prepared, and to respect those who serve and care for others. We



learned the importance of hard work, service, and patriotism early on from both of our parents."

Those who served with Maj. Nussbaum said she has another family, that of the Illinois Army National Guard and the 1544th Transportation Co.

"She is fiercely dedicated to the 1544th. She viewed that unit's Soldiers as her kids," said Lt. Col. (ret.) Rich Munyer, the Illinois

National Guard's Construction Facilities Management Officer, who commanded the 1544th Transportation Co. after its 2004-2005 deployment to Iraq and worked with Nussbaum for several years in the Illinois Army National Guard logistics office. "Elaine will forever be part of the 1544th."

Nussbaum was a member of the 1544th Transportation Co. for 11 years and commanded the unit for three and a half years, from October 2007 until April 2011.

Nussbaum said now that her Army career is complete, she hopes to go back to her original plan to become a

school teacher. Several Soldiers said they have learned from Nussbaum's famous red pen on staff papers and other staff products, but, more importantly, from her coaching and mentoring.

"She was a great educator and had a way of passing on what she had learned to other Soldiers in a way most cannot," Butler said. "As a commander, she empowered the NCOs and junior officers to

lead from the front. She understood that people were not always going to do things 100 percent correct but pushed them to learn from their mistakes."

Nussbaum also kept a hand in teaching throughout the years. For example, she tutored Camden's children, Mackenzie and Chloe, for about seven years. Both graduated high school as National Honor Society students.

"She always wanted to teach. She always thought the military was a stopgap until she eventually became a school teacher," Munyer said. "I hope that's what she does. She'd be a good one. We had her for 20 years."



REMEMBERING TOGETHER

Big Red One and Illinois National Guard commemorate Veterans Day in Chicago together

By Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs and Capt. Billy Lacroix, 1st Infantry Division



CHICAGO – America’s oldest active-duty Division and leadership from the U.S. military’s oldest component commemorated Veterans Day in Chicago together on Nov. 11.

Soldiers from the active Army’s 1st Infantry Division (1ID) were distinguished guests and Illinois Army National Guard Commander Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, from Chicago’s South Side, was the keynote speaker in a historic Veterans Day Commemoration Ceremony at Soldier Field on Nov. 11, 2022.

There is a long history between the 1st Infantry Division, the Illinois Army National Guard, and the city of Chicago.

“Veterans Day recognizes those who have served honorably in uniform,” said Boyd. “Think about all the veterans who set aside their differences to be part of the military team.”

Cantigny Park, the former estate of Col. Robert R. McCormick, is home to the First Division Museum, an institution dedicated to the history of the “Big Red One.” For

more than 60 years, the park has provided fascinating insights about America’s 1st Division past and present. Before McCormick joined the Army’s 1st Division, he served in the Illinois Army National Guard’s 1st Illinois Cavalry.

In 1916, the 1st Illinois Cavalry was called up for service along the Texas-Mexican border in response to the Pancho Villa raid on Columbus, New Mexico. McCormick and the 1st Illinois Cavalry established quarters in Brownsville, Texas. There, McCormick purchased several field kitchens and machine guns for the under-equipped regiment.

Upon America’s entry into World War I, McCormick joined Gen. Pershing’s staff in France. As commander of the 1st Infantry Division’s 1st Battalion of the 5th Field Artillery, he led the unit in providing crucial artillery support to First Division troops in their capture of the German held village of Cantigny. The first American victory of World War I, the Battle of Cantigny, so impressed



McCormick that he changed his estate's name of Red Oaks to Cantigny.

The Illinois National Guard, which will celebrate its 300th birthday in 2023, shares a history with Chicago that goes back a bit further than Col. McCormick. The National Guard's history in Chicago dates to the first colonial militia established to protect colonists in what would later become a city.

The city is also home to the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, which holds the lineage and honors of the all African-American "Fighting" 8th Infantry Regiment. The 8th Infantry first saw action in the Spanish-American War. Like the 1st Infantry Division as well as its Chicago-based Illinois Army National Guard sister battalion, the 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery Regiment; the 8th Infantry also saw action in both World War I and World War II.

But unlike the 1st ID with Col. McCormick and the 2-122nd FA, the 8th Infantry served under French command during World War I. The 8th Infantry was re-designated as the 370th Infantry Regiment and served under the French during the war because of institutional racism in the U.S. Army at that time. Right after the war, Chicago's predominantly African-American South Side fought to have the unit's service recognized in its hometown. The Victory Monument at Martin Luther King Drive and 35th Street was erected in 1927 to recognize the unit's service during the World War I.

Although the 1st ID and the 1-178th Infantry did not serve together in World War I, they served together in Afghanistan from 2008-2009. The 1st Division Museum at Cantigny celebrated this shared history with a presentation on "Task Force Bayonet" on Sept. 15. The 1-178th Infantry formed "Task Force Bayonet" and served under the 1st Infantry Division's 3rd Brigade. Many 1-178th Infantry Soldiers proudly wear the "Big Red One" combat patch on their uniforms almost 15 years later.

"Veterans Day is a day when we recognize those who have served honorably in uniform and pay tribute to the sacrifices they have made for this country," said acting 1st Infantry Division Command Sergeant Major Albert



Serrano. "Ceremonies like this not only bond First Infantry Division Soldiers past and present but celebrate those who have served in uniform."

Boyd and more than three dozen Soldiers from the 1st ID, each branch of the United States military, and local civic leaders took part in the ceremony, which took place in front of "American Doughboy" by Ernest Moore Viquesney. Doughboy was an informal term for a member of the United States Army or Marine Corps, primarily used to refer to members of the American Expeditionary Forces in

World War I.

"Veterans Day is our sacred opportunity to remember and thank veterans of past and present for proudly serving our country," said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "As we honor their bravery and sacrifice, we must demonstrate our gratitude to veterans and their families by ensuring they come home to a city that cares for them and fights for their happiness and prosperity in return."

In addition to Veterans Day, November 11 is also Polish Independence Day, which is celebrated in Poland as well as among the large Polish population in the Chicago area. The 1st ID has some elements deployed

forward to areas of Eastern Europe, including Poland, supporting the United States European Command Enhanced deterrence initiative. The Illinois National Guard has shared a State Partnership Program with the Polish military since 1993 and played a key role in Poland joining NATO in 1999. Illinois National Guard Soldiers fought side-by-side with the Polish first in Iraq and then Afghanistan for 17 years.

Chicago has always been a military-friendly city and it holds a particularly special place in the hearts of those service members who were raised here.

"As someone who grew up here, it's heart-warming to witness this while also seeing Soldiers from across the Division take part in this ceremony is such a monumental and special occasion for me," U.S. Army Capt. Chase Antony said.





Columbian Gold

2-130th Infantry takes part in Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 with Colombian partners

Courtesy of Sgt. 1st Class Alan Brutus, U.S. Army South

TOLEMAIDA MILITARY BASE, Colombia – Bilateral exercises are an important part of building relationships between nations and enhancing the abilities of partner nation armies to work together through various missions and problem sets. Exercise Southern Vanguard 23 (ExSV23), currently taking place at Tolemaida Military Base in Colombia, is U.S. Army South’s premier training exercise designed to accomplish these goals.

“The interoperability, opportunities and experiences for me and my guys can’t be understated,” said U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Nate Myers, a squad leader assigned to 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Illinois Army National Guard said when asked about the exercise. “An example of what we have learned is that here in the jungle terrain we have learned a lot from the Colombians on how to conduct operations from a different tactical formation than we normally do.”

Reciprocally, the Colombian Soldiers are taking full advantage of this learning opportunity ensuring they learn everything they can from their U.S. Army counterparts.

“The importance for us in this exercise is to have the opportunity to exchange knowledge with our partners in the U.S. Army,” said Colombian Army 1st Lt. Simon Mosquera who is working as an Observer, Controller and Trainer throughout ExSV23. “It also allows us to improve in our capabilities in order to save lives and defend our country.

The ability to share best practices for military operations between armies is invaluable for everyone involved but it is not the only thing taking place of value. The friendships and memories being made at the lowest levels are something that will be remembered far into the future.

Colombian Army Staff Sgt. Octavio Munoz, a platoon sergeant assigned to the BRNCA 1 Special Anti-Drug Brigade and Staff Sgt. Myers direct counterpart, talked about the friendships being made at the barracks when the Soldiers are resting from a long day of training. He said, “we have the opportunity to share with each other about our families including our parents, wives and kids.”

Munoz also talked about the U.S. Soldiers learning the traditional Colombian game “Rana” which involves tossing metal rings or coins into the mouths of frog statues from a short distance away. “At first they were not very good but each day they are playing with us in the barracks area and continue to get better,” he said.

“So far it’s been an excellent experience and everyone has been extremely welcoming and friendly,” explained Myers. “I think I can speak for the entire platoon when I say that since getting on the ground we have had the most friendly and welcoming environment and it has greatly contributed to our experience as well as our ability to train here together.”

When the Soldiers assigned to the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team eventually depart back to their home state of Illinois they will take with them knowledge, experiences and friendships that will last a lifetime with many of the Soldiers exchanging email address and have plans to stay in touch through social media in the future.





Renaissance Man

From Navy electrician's mate to Sea King crew chief and rescue swimmer, to information systems technician and air and missile defense systems integrator, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Murdoch retires after doing it all

By Staff Sgt. Alejandro Valdes, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

NORMAL, Ill. -Illinois Army National Guard Chief Warrant Officer 4 Chris Murdoch, an Air and Missile Defense Systems Integrator Warrant Officer with the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade of Normal, retired after 30 years of military service during a ceremony at the Illinois National Guard's Normal Readiness Center in Normal, Illinois on Nov. 5.

Murdoch, who grew up in the southwest Michigan town of Paw Paw before leaving to see the world after enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1982, was presented a proclamation celebrating his long career of service to his country and community by Illinois State Representative Dan Brady. Col. Kevin Little, commander of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, presented

Murdoch with a Meritorious Service Medal upon his retirement.

Murdoch comes from a military family. His maternal grandfather fought in the trenches in World War I. His father was a career naval officer and all of his uncles save one served in the U.S. Navy.

After graduating Navy basic training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center in North Chicago, Murdoch attended training as an aviation electrician's mate at the Naval Air Training Center in Millington, Tenn.,

followed by Aircrew Candidate School at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Pensacola, Florida. He then attended Rescue Swimmer School at Naval Air Station North Island in California.

Murdoch joined his first squadron, Helicopter Combat Support Squadron One in 1984 as a Sikorsky SH-3G Sea King helicopter crew chief and



rescue swimmer. He transferred to HC-1 Detachment 6 onboard the USS Blue Ridge (LCC-19) in 1987. While serving there Murdoch accumulated 1,500 hours of helicopter flight time.

In 1990 Murdoch volunteered to attend Flight Engineer training for the Boeing E-6A Mercury Airborne Command Post and Communication Relay aircraft and joined Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Three (VQ-3) at Naval Air Station Barbers Point, Hawaii. While attached to VQ-3, he accumulated more than 1,840 hours of multi-engine heavy jet crew time.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War caused Murdoch to reexamine the way his career and life were going.

“At that point promotion was almost not an option,” Murdoch said. “If you wanted to get promoted, someone ahead of you had to literally die. So, I had to take a hard look at what my career was going to be. I reluctantly left the Navy.”

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Murdoch once again felt the urge to serve his country. A friend convinced him to look into joining the National Guard.

Murdoch spoke with a recruiter and asked about joining with a guaranteed officer candidate school contract, but was informed that he was too old. However, the recruiter asked if he would be interested in being a warrant officer instead of a commissioned officer. He submitted a warrant officer packet and was assigned to the 33rd Military Police Battalion Headquarters Detachment.

While waiting for the packet to be processed, the 33rd MP Battalion was activated and deployed to Iraq where Murdoch served as the Property Book Noncommissioned Officer from June 2006 to Sept. 2007

After returning from Iraq, Murdoch attended the Warrant Officer Candidate School at Fort Rucker, Alabama, and was pinned as a warrant officer in June 2008. Shortly after returning to Illinois Murdoch was called to flood duty as part of the 232nd Combat



Sustainment Support Battalion. He led over 100 Soldiers and Airmen on the Mississippi River near Pleasant Hill in 2008

Kathy Murdoch, Chris Murdoch's spouse, said she visited her husband and some of his subordinates while they were working. They all went out to eat at the one local restaurant. All the locals came up and thanked them.

“It was humbling as a wife,” Kathy Murdoch

said. “Yeah, it was a pain in the butt having my husband gone for the three weeks you were gone and smelling like a manure pile and mud and muck. But it was worth it, him doing that. That's what the National Guard does. It goes in and helps.”

CW4 Murdoch continued to serve, joining the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade in 2010 during its transition from a chemical brigade based in Chicago to a maneuver enhancement brigade and its eventual relocation to Normal.

During his time in the National Guard, he has participated in over a dozen Warfighter exercises, as well as numerous other training activities. His unique dual expertise as both a 251A Army Information

Systems Technician and as a 140A Air and Missile Defense (AMD) Systems Integrator Warrant Officer is rare and valuable. He participated in international exercises in Poland, South Korea, and Malawi and has supported numerous National Guard units, both inside and outside Illinois with his Air Defense and ADA C2 Systems Integration knowledge and expertise.

In 2020, Murdoch deployed to Ukraine for over 10 months as part of the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine. While there he provided doctrinal assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

“Which as we all know they're getting it done over there,” Murdoch said. “So it's good for me to know that I played a small part in that.”





LOOKING SHARPE

Master Sgt. Joseph Seiders awarded the Ordnance Order of Samuel Sharpe

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

Illinois Army National Guard Master Sgt. Joseph Seiders of Farmer City, Ill., received the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps Association's Samuel Sharpe Award during the ILARNG's Commanders Guidance Conference Nov. 16 in Springfield.

Lt. Col. Jeffrey Hicks, Commander of the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Freed presented the award, which is to "recognize those individuals who have served the United States Army Ordnance Corps with demonstrated integrity, moral character and professional competence over a sustained period of time. And whose selfless contributions to the Corps stand out in the eyes of their seniors, peers and subordinates alike."

The national award was approved by the association's president, U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 (ret.) David Cassity and requires endorsement by the nominee's battalion commander or a GS-14 equivalent.





MAKING THE ROUNDS

Gen. Daniel Hokanson visits Illinois to speak with military and civilian leaders

By Sgt. Trent Fouche, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau made a visit to Chicago on Monday, November 21, 2022. While in town, Gen. Hokanson met with Air Force Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, Army Brig. Gen. Janeen Birkhead, Commander of the Maryland Army National Guard, and business leaders from throughout the country for a luncheon to discuss the skills National Guard service members bring to the workforce and how we can continue to work together to strengthen the economy moving forward. While in town, Hokanson also met with the leadership of Chicago State University and cadets from its ROTC program and soldiers from Illinois' 1970th Quartermaster Company.





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

182nd AW and B 2-238th GSAB host Caterpillar Inc. Military Support Network

By Master Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

Members of Caterpillar Inc.'s Military Support Network visited the 182nd Airlift Wing and B Co. 2-238th General Support Aviation Battalion in late November. The group was given a tour of the flight facilities and briefed on the capabilities of the C-130 Hercules cargo plane and the CH-47 Chinook helicopter. The visitors spoke with unit and Wing leadership, pilots, crew chiefs and loadmasters and some were offered the opportunity to virtually fly the C-130 in the Wing's flight simulator. The civic engagement tour gave Caterpillar personnel insight into the skillsets, capabilities and mission of the Illinois National Guard and its service members.





THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September

5 Spc. Charles Lamb and Sgt. Shawna Morrison

2004: Spc. Charles Lamb, 23 of Casey, Illinois, and Sgt. Shawna Morrison, 26, of Paris, Illinois, both died from wounds suffered during a mortar attack in Baghdad, Iraq. They were assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, based in Paris, Illinois.



16 202nd Coast Artillery inducted into Federal Service for World War II

1940: The 202nd Coast Artillery became the first National Guard unit of the 6th Corps Area to be inducted into Federal Service for World War II. Under the command of Colonel Charles C. Dawes, the 202nd arrived at Fort Bliss, Texas on September 22nd. They established a tent encampment at the base of Sugarloaf Mountain. The unit saw action in both Europe and the Pacific. For the European combat they earned three Croix de Guerre. Battery A, 2nd Battalion received a Philippine Presidential Unit Citation.

17 Sgt. Joshua Harris and Staff Sgt. Jason Vazquez

2009: Sgt. Joshua Harris, 21, of Romeoville, Illinois, and Staff Sgt. Jason Vazquez, 24, of Chicago, died of wounds suffered when the vehicle they were in struck an improvised explosive device in Gerdia Seria, Afghanistan. Both men were assigned to B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery Regiment based in Robbins, Illinois.



20 Illinois musician earns Medal of Honor at Battle of Lexington

1861: During the Battle of Lexington, officers in the 1st Illinois Cavalry were forced to augment the infantry with musicians and other non-combatants. Musician George H. Palmer volunteered to fight in the trenches. When granted permission, he immediately went in with the other augmented Soldiers of the regiment. During the heavy combat he led an infantry charge against a Confederate field hospital, and succeeded in capturing it and the rebel snipers that occupied it. For his distinguished act of bravery he received the Medal of Honor.



29 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team Finishes Mobilization

2009: The 33rd IBCT mobilized during the summer of 2008 as Task Force Phoenix VIII in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Their primary mission was to train and mentor the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police Force. The Soldiers mobilized to assist the emerging government of Afghanistan as the country struggled to recover from nearly 30 years of conflict. The last welcome home ceremony was on September 30, 2009. This was the largest mobilization of Illinois National Guard Soldiers since WWII.



October

1 Air National Guard unit activated for the Korean War

1950: Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Hates, the 1903rd Aviation Engineer Battalion entered Federal Service in Chicago for the Korean War. Their first assignment took them to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for infantry and engineer training. The 1903rd served multiple airfields in Korea until their return home in 1954.



6

Sgt. Jessica Cawvey

2004: Sgt. Jessica L. Cawvey, 21, of Mahomet, Illinois, was killed in action when an improvised explosive device detonated near her convoy vehicle in Fallujah, Iraq. Cawvey was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company based in Paris, Illinois.



3

Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Wehrly

2005: , Sgt. 1st Class Kyle Wehrly, 28, of Galesburg, Illinois, was killed in action when the vehicle he was traveling in encountered an improvised explosive during patrol operations in Ashraf, Iraq. Wehrly was assigned to Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 123rd Field Artillery Regiment, based in Macomb, Illinois.



12

Spc. James Grijalva

2005: Spc. James Grijalva, 26, of Burbank, Illinois died from a non-combat related injury in Baghdad, Iraq. Grijalva was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment based in Urbana, Illinois.



11

WWI ends with 11th hour armistice

1918: After occupation duty in Luxemburg, the 33rd Division returned to the United States and mustered out of federal service in late spring 1919. General Bell gave these parting words at Camp Grant,

"...duty to God, to country and to home, well done,

is the highest standard humanly attainable. The officers and men of the 33rd Division did their duty superbly. Their deeds and the example which they set are imperishable. Illinois may well be proud of her sons, both the living and the dead."



27

Staff Sgt. Kevin Greico

2005: Staff Sgt. Kevin Greico, 35, of Bartlett, Illinois died from wounds sustained when a suicide bomber detonated explosives as Greico was preparing to enter a building in Baghlan, Afghanistan. Grieco was assigned to Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery Regiment based in Sycamore, Illinois.



12

Spc. Ashley Sietsema

2007: Spc. Ashley Sietsema, 20, of Melrose Park, Illinois, was killed from wounds suffered when the vehicle she was in was involved in an accident in Kuwait City, Kuwait. Sietsema was assigned to the 708th Medical Battalion, based in North Riverside, Illinois. 1544th Transportation Company based in Paris, Ill.



November

2

1st Lt. Brian Slavenas

2003: 1st Lt. Brian Slavenas, 30, of Genoa, Illinois, was killed in action when the CH-47 Chinook he was in was attacked near Fallujah, Iraq. Slavenas was assigned to Company F, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, based in Peoria, Illinois.



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