

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

PRAIRIE SENTINEL

VOLUME 15

A man in a U.S. Army camouflage uniform stands with his arms crossed on a tarmac. Behind him is a line of Black Hawk helicopters. The man's uniform has a name tag that reads "HAMMO" and a "U.S. ARMY" patch. The background shows a clear blue sky and a paved airfield.

**TAXIING INTO RETIREMENT:
ILLINOIS STATE COMMAND CHIEF WARRANT
OFFICER RETIRES AFTER 42 YEARS**

**TO THE HIGHEST HEIGHTS: AFRICAN-AMERICAN
FLIGHT CREW HOPES TO INSPIRE OTHERS**

**IN MEMORIAM: REMEMBERING COL. (RET) JAMES
A. SMITH**

SPRING 2022

ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD PRAIRIE SENTINEL

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Take it From the Top:

Senior Leaders' Corner

Getting back to the basics



It is my intent as the Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard to put “People First” in everything we do. To do this, we need to get “Back to the Basics.”

This means challenging Soldiers with good effective training, fostering a caring team environment, providing them with the best equipment

we can, taking care of pay and benefit issues, and mentoring the next generation of leaders to one day take our jobs.

Observing and listening to the Soldiers and leaders of this great organization for the last year has given me an expanded appreciation of the dedication and selfless service of our more than 10,000 Soldiers.

It is not easy being a Citizen-Soldier. We juggle family, civilian employment or school, and military training and missions. Add in COVID-19 response and other domestic missions in the last couple years and multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 20 years, and this organization, its Soldiers, its Families and its Employers can be proud of everything we have accomplished together.

You have probably heard about the shift in Department of Defense focus from fighting limited wars and counterinsurgencies to being prepared to deter and, if necessary, fight and win against “near peer” adversaries such as China, Russia, North Korea or Iran.

This means that our next enemy might be able to disrupt the satellite communications we’ve come to rely so heavily upon. It means that cyber attacks might bring down other communication channels. It means we might not completely dominate the air space above us like we did in Iraq and Afghanistan. It means Soldiers will not return to a bunk on a forward operating base. Headquarters and units will need to be mobile and agile. Troops will need to master cover and concealment. Units will need to provide for their own defense.

What does all this mean to the individual Soldier?

It means that we all need to get Back to the Basics! If you do not know how to navigate using just a map and compass, then it is time to pick those tools up again. It means that Soldiers need to be proficient at Skill Level 10 Tasks and be prepared to accomplish

basic tasks in austere environments. It means we need to communicate in the field using secure radio communications, rather than personal cell phones. It means we need to maintain our equipment. It means that physical fitness and mental resilience has become even more important. It means that leaders need to establish proper training plans to ensure their Soldiers are motivated, engaged and practice the skills that will keep them alive in battle.

Most relish the challenge of going Back to the Basics, but it might cause a little angst for some Soldiers.

There are officers and NCOs that have never written a proper unit training plan. If you are one of those Soldiers, don’t despair! One of the great things about the Army is that pretty much everything is written down in doctrine or training manuals. These very often have easy step-by-step directions. Read ADP 6-0 and ADP 7-0. Peruse the Army Training Network (<https://atn.army.mil/>). Look up your unit’s Mission Essential Task List. Check out the Combined Arms Training Strategies. CATS provides templates to build a Unit Training Plan (UTP) based on a unit’s designed missions, functions, and capabilities.

Do some reading – or watching. (There are even instructional videos on ATN.) If you are confused, seek out an experienced NCO, warrant officer or officer to help. No need to be embarrassed. No good Army leader would turn down a Soldier who says “I’m trying to improve in this area. Can you help me?”

The resources are there. The doors are open. You just need to walk through.

One of the very basics is working as a team and helping your fellow Soldiers. Adhering to the Army Values and caring for your fellow Soldiers are at the core of who we are as an Army and as the National Guard.

It is these basic skills and values that help us fight problems such as sexual assault and harassment, suicide and mental health issues, and discrimination in all its forms. It is when people forget or don’t adhere to the Army Values that these issues appear in the first place.

So I challenge you – put People First by going Back to the Basics for yourself, your squad, your platoon, your company, battery, troop, or detachment and your battalion or squadron. This will ensure you, your brigade, and the Illinois Army National Guard are ready for future challenges.

So, no matter what the future may bring, we will be Always Ready, Always There.

In Memoriam

COL. (RET) JAMES A. SMITH

CHIEF OF STAFF, ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS



On behalf of the more than 13,000 military members, 2,200 federal employees, and 230 state employees of the Illinois National Guard and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs (IDMA); I offer my heartfelt condolences to Nilsa and Sam Smith on the death of their husband and father, Colonel (retired) James A. Smith, Jr., the Chief of Staff for the Illinois Department of Military Affairs.

In announcing Colonel Smith's passing, I know he would want our first thoughts to go to his family. Anyone who spent some time with Jim Smith could see how much he loved Nilsa and Sam from the colorful stories he'd tell of his fiery and fun wife and his creative and hard-working son. These stories would usually end with Jim's infectious laughter and a true sense of pride and love of his family.

Colonel Smith always put others before himself and mentored dozens, if not hundreds, of service members and civilian employees. He provided sage counsel to me and to several Adjutants General before me as our Chief of Staff. He mentored civilians, enlisted and officers their entire careers.

Jim believed fervently in speaking truth to power. His advice was not always wanted, but often needed and it was invaluable. He also believed in "fighting like brothers" where two people could argue differing positions fervently and passionately yet hold no animosity. These fights would seldom, if ever, last more than one day and would often end with laughter between friends – and would end as another tale in Jim Smith's library of stories coupled with golden nuggets of wisdom.

Colonel Smith joined the Illinois Department of Military Affairs in 2008 after a military career that spanned 31 years and culminated as the Chief of Staff of the Illinois Army National Guard. He started his career in 1977 as an enlisted Soldier, commissioning in 1982 through the Illinois Army National Guard's Officer Candidate School. He spent his formative years as a young officer in the 3rd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment based in East St. Louis. He would manage the East St. Louis armory as a full-time officer, often interacting with some of the armory's eccentric neighbors and gaining the respect of the community not for himself, but for the Illinois National Guard.

He served in various staff and leadership positions within the 3/130th Infantry before taking command of Co. C, 3/130th Infantry based in Salem. After company command, he served as the 33rd Infantry Brigade's assistant S-3, then commander of the brigade's headquarters company and finally as the brigade S-2. In 1995 he served as the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment based in Joliet and in 1998 he served as an operations and training officer at the Illinois Army National Guard headquarters in Springfield.

In 1999, he was appointed commander of the 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment in Chicago. After two years in command, he was transferred to the 33rd Area Support Group(ASG) in Chicago. In December 2001, he was appointed as deputy commander of the 33rd ASG, where he would help coordinate the unit's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In 2003, he was appointed as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (G-1) where he played an integral role in preparing Illinois Army National Guard units for deployment to Iraq and then Afghanistan before being appointed as the Illinois Army National Guard

Chief of Staff retiring from the military in 2008 and being appointed as the Illinois Department of Military Affairs Chief of Staff that same year.

As the IDMA Chief of Staff, he was vital in coordinating the state's support to the Illinois National Guard's state and federal missions. He served as the main point of contact between the agency, the Governor's Office, and other state and federal agencies that work with the Illinois National Guard.

As the IDMA Chief of Staff, he supported multiple Illinois National Guard deployments, the Illinois National Guard's response to floods, hurricanes and wildfires; the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, and most recently the Illinois National Guard's COVID-19 response as well as law enforcement support missions.

He served at all levels of command and staff as well as multiple key full-time positions. His wisdom arose from his innate intelligence as well as his vast experience, which ran the gamut from the Cold War through historic activations such as the Great Flood of 1993, Hurricane Katrina, and post-September 11, 2001 deployments.

He was proud of being an Infantry officer, a devout Catholic and an unwavering Cardinals fan. He was a strong advocate for Lincoln's ChalleNGe Academy and its cadets, the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund, the Illinois State Military Museum, the National Guard Association of Illinois and, most of all, the Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard and their families.

Colonel Jim Smith's voice will not be heard again in the Illinois National Guard's buildings or training areas, but his spirit will remain within this organization for many generations to come. Please keep his family in your thoughts and prayers.



RICHARD R. NEELY, Major General, ANG
The Adjutant General of Illinois
Commander, Illinois National Guard

HIGHLIGHTING DIVERSITY

High Speed, Low Drag:

Princeton University rower earns Army Aviation wings

Courtesy of Kelly Morris, U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence



Fort Rucker, Ala.—Gabrielle L. Cole, of Chicago, Princeton University athlete and alum, now a second lieutenant with the Illinois National Guard, celebrated the milestone of graduating flight school at Fort Rucker as a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilot at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum March 24, 2022.

Cole earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from Princeton University, and went on to earn her master's degree from the University of Chicago.

She initially returned home after college and worked at a company, but that wasn't enough for her.

"I thought to myself, I'm a little bored. Maybe there's something more," she said.

At that point it seemed like a good fit to join

the U.S. Army National Guard, so she signed up, completed basic training and then went on to become a Black Hawk repairer. Back at her unit, she decided to drop her packet for flight school.

"I mean, who wouldn't want to fly that?" she said, pointing to a Black Hawk helicopter at Fort Rucker. "It really stuns me that people would chose anything else."

"It's just an incredible aircraft--the maneuverability, the functionality, the mission set, is just incredible. There aren't many places in the world where you can fly an aircraft like that and where you can do the things you can do in the Army," she said.

The Army appealed to her because she felt that as such a large branch it was the most

representative of the nation.

"You're going to find every type of person in the Army, and I have and it's been incredible. The number of opportunities you have in the Army far outweigh any other branch I think," she said.

She believed aviation would be challenging – and it has been.

"Definitely the academic portion came easier than the actual flying portion. The flying portion is more of a hand-eye coordination skill, I think, more of a physical body feel than, like, studying or getting into books, which is my happy place or my forte," she said.

She compared being part of an aviation crew with her days as an athlete at Princeton.

Her rowing team won multiple Ivy League Championships, placed in the top three in the NCAA tournament, won the Head of the Charles Regatta, and were invited to Henley Royal Regatta in England. She also won an Under 23 Rowing World Championship in the women's eight.

"Rowing is a pretty high-intensity sport," she said. "The level of fitness you need as well as the amount of coordination with a crew. Within that boat you have eight people plus a coxswain and you have to be perfectly synched up with those other seven people. Just fractions of a second off can completely, like, topsy-turvy the boat. It can cause drag."

"So it's a finely tuned sport as far as teamwork, the dedication, the fitness level, the intensity level, the focus level required to kind of execute effectively. Similarly here. You'd think flying is an individual thing but it's not at



all," she said.

Cole said crew coordination can make or break a mission.

"To be yourself competent, to work fluidly and seamlessly as a team, that type of synergy that you get, you know, the sum being greater than its parts, and kind of fitting everything together that way, I definitely think that the experiences kind of mirror each other," she said. "The focus you need,

the teamwork you need in that environment is definitely something that has helped me out here."

Having now earned her wings, she looks forward to returning to her medevac unit back in her home state and contributing to the team as a Black Hawk pilot.

For anyone who may be thinking about becoming an aviator in the future, her advice is not to say they will put it off until later, because to her later means never.

"Do it, and don't delay," she said.

"The beautiful thing about the Army, I think, is like, they have a path, they have a system that can get you from Point A to Point B. You

just need to decide what your Point B is, and they can get you there."

"I would definitely encourage them to come and be part of this community. It's an incredible community filled with incredible people, with an incredible mission set. I've got to do

things here that I would have never done in my life, so I feel so fortunate," she said. "It's one of the best teams and one of the most diverse and talented teams I've ever been a part of."

"So I would say, come on. The water's warm."



TAXIING INTO RETIREMENT

**State Command Chief retires
after more than 40 years**

*By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs
Photos by Robert Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs*



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –The year is 1980. The U.S. boycotts the 1980 Summer Olympics, President Jimmy Carter signs Proclamation 4771, requiring 18- to 25-year-old men to register for a peacetime military draft and Ronald Reagan is elected 40th President of the United States.

Meanwhile in the small Illinois town of Winchester, 17-year-old David Hammon is enlisting in the Illinois Army National Guard, the first steps on a path to a 42-year military career.

“I was a small town kid interested in aviation, a very costly endeavor,” Chief Warrant Officer (5) David Hammon, of Sherman, Command Chief Warrant Officer of the Illinois National Guard said. “I wanted to be a turbine engine technician and the military seemed to be the way to go.”

Hammon said at first he reached out to the Illinois Air National Guard but ultimately decided to enlist in the Illinois Army National Guard in 1980 as

an aircraft mechanic, serving with the 219th Transportation Company, based at Scott Air Force Base. He would serve in the 40th Aviation Battalion (Attack Helicopter) and the 1144th Transportation Battalion. But prior to

his current position, spent most of his career with 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Decatur.

After 42 years of service in the Illinois Army National Guard, Hammon will retire April 30.

“It’s time to pass the baton on to the next Soldiers in line,” he said. “I’ve been blessed with this opportunity to serve in the Illinois Army National Guard for the past 42 years. I’m looking forward to taking a break as I decide what to do next.”

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

will be missed.

“Chief Hammon has left an indelible mark in the Illinois National Guard, not only in the



aviation community, but also in the warrant officer corps," Neely said. "He has worked tirelessly to cultivate and mentor a new generation of warrant officers in the Illinois Army National Guard."

Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General-Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard said the Illinois National Guard is better because of Hammon's service.

"Chief Hammon has seen and done it all over the course of his long career," said Boyd. "The organization is better today because of his persistence and attention to detail. He knows every warrant officer in the state, knows their story, and has been a catalyst of their success and careers."

Hammon has had a front row seat as the Illinois National Guard has undergone a transformation from an under-funded, under-used program to a fully operational force multiplier today.

"I've served during the lean years. When I first began my career, we had to share flight time with other states. The Army would give each state an allotted amount of 'blade' time and aviators had to share that flight time," Hammon said. "Today, the National Guard is a fully operational combat ready force performing missions at home and abroad."

After a four-decade career, Hammon said his greatest achievement in the Illinois Army National Guard is service to the organization and the people it supports. "I've been on flood response duty and for me



the service is personal," he said. "I have aunts and uncles who live in flood prone areas."

Hammon said in addition to stateside duty, he's served overseas and witnessed the suffering in other countries.

"Those living conditions make you realize just how good we have it in the United States, despite our problems," he said. "The National Guard has afforded me the opportunity to see that first hand. Serving in the National Guard has

opened a phenomenal amount of doors."

Hammon said he's thankful for the opportunity to wear the uniform since 1980.

"I'm totally grateful for the career I've had," said Hammon, who has served in a variety of enlisted, commissioned, and warrant officer positions throughout his career. "I signed up for every deployment that came down the pipe since I was a private and oddly enough I only deployed to Iraq twice, but I've been on training missions overseas to 14 other countries."

Hammon became an aviation warrant officer with the 106th Aviation Regiment in 1996.

"I became a warrant officer to be able to remain in the aviation field due to the restructuring of aviation assets at that time," he said.

After spending parts of five decades working for the same organization, Hammon offered advice to anyone just starting out in the military.

"Stay with it," he said. "Seek out mentors to help you throughout your time in uniform. Think about what you want to accomplish as





long range goals and how serving in the Illinois National Guard helps you achieve those goals.”

Those who have served with Hammon throughout the years describe him as a leader with a simple approach to leadership.

“Mr. Hammon is uniquely rounded as a Soldier, having served in the enlisted ranks, as a commissioned officer, and as a warrant officer,” said Chief Warrant Officer (5) Thomas Black, of Springfield, who has known Hammon for 25 years, and will succeed him as the Command Chief Warrant Officer. “He’s an easy going leader who communicates well and encourages team building.”

Black said that Hammon is a tremendous asset to the Illinois National Guard who is able to bring people together.

“He’s a legend who gets to ride off in the sunset on his terms,” Black said. “I’m fortunate to step into his shoes as the Command Chief Warrant Officer. I hope I’m able to use some of the things I’ve learned from him to make a difference in the organization.”

1st Sgt. Jeff Nordmann, of St. Martin, Minnesota, Company A, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, called Hammon the enlisted Soldier’s Soldier.

“When we deployed to Iraq, our unit clocked 500 hours of flight time,” Nordmann said. “Chief Hammon was always ready for any mission. He was committed to the job.”

Nordmann said Hammon’s retirement will have a huge impact on the Illinois Army National Guard.

“Soldiers can’t gain that experience overnight,” he said. “The loss will be felt for quite some time.”

Chief Warrant Officer (5) Herb Stevens, of

Normal, Illinois, the facility commander at the Kankakee Army Aviation Support Facility in Kankakee, has known Hammon for more than 30 years.

“Dave swore me in as a warrant officer in May 1991,” Stevens said. “We went to flight school together and that was our graduation.”

He describes Hammon as the “guy who could get the things needed to make the mission successful.”

“The thing with Dave is if you mention ‘hey, it would be nice to have this or we need this for our deployment’, he was the guy who could make that happen,” he said. “He was always thinking about the needs of the Soldiers.”

Stevens said the Illinois Army National Guard is better for having Hammon in its ranks.

“We were fortunate to have him around for 42 years,” he said. “He was a mentor to all of us warrant officers which created success in the ranks. Under Dave’s leadership, the warrant officer ranks grew and he made sure the right people were in the right jobs.”



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Wentworth, of Lawrenceburg, Company A, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, said Hammon commands a presence.

“He’s a great mentor, someone you can talk out issues with,” said Wentworth, who is a maintenance test pilot at the Decatur facility. “When I was attending flight school, anytime I had an issue, I could call and talk to Chief Hammon and he would guide me through the issues.”

Wentworth said serving 42 years in uniform is definitely a goal to strive toward.

"He has seen it all," he said. "You really need support from the family and mentorship from fellow Soldiers along the way to last that long."

Hammon spent four years and six months as an enlisted Soldier, 12 years, six months as a commissioned officer and 25 years, three months as a warrant officer.

Hammon has reached the pinnacle in the career of a warrant officer in the Illinois National Guard, but said serving in the Illinois National Guard has taught him is to have more compassion.

"We have it pretty good in the United States despite our problems," Hammon said. "I've witnessed suffering outside of our borders, but serving in the military has created the opportunities to see how people in other countries live."

Hammon said his career would not have been possible without the support of his wife, Michelle, an Army veteran herself.



"I couldn't do my job without Michelle's support," Hammon said. "Marriage is a team effort and there are things I couldn't accomplish without her help and support. She possesses the uncanny ability to handle every emergency imaginable, and to delicately balance all the obstacles that life and the Army throw at her."

Stevens agreed.

"Michelle has always been supportive of both Dave's career and the Illinois National Guard," he said.



Sgt. 1st Class Keith Michels, of Wheeler, 108th Sustainment Brigade, who serves as the aviation life support technician for the Decatur flight facility said any time he talked with Hammon, they always had a great conversation.

"Anytime I talked with him, even if it's just a helmet issue, he was always so personable," Michels said. "Those conversations are so valuable. He is a world of knowledge."

As the aviation life support technician, Michels inspects Hammon's flight gear every six months per the National Guard Bureau's arms inspection regulation. That biannual inspection allowed Hammon to complete his final flight in his original gear.

"The flight gear he was issued when he became a warrant officer is the flight gear he wore during his final flight," he said. "I'm sure that meant a lot to him to be able to do so."

As Hammon reflects on his 42 years of military service, his immediate future plans are to just step back and relax a little, but most of all he wants to thank everyone overall. He said it took a lot of people to get him to this level, and he is truly grateful for the support from everyone over the years.

"I'm leaving my options wide open," he said. "I have no immediate plans. I'll take a knee for a minute and let things settle down. Whatever the future holds for me, I do know I will figure out a way to continue serving."

First to Fly:

ILARNG Aviation selected to test new UH-60V Blackhawks

By Sgt. Trent Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The Illinois Army National Guard has received new UH-60V Black Hawk helicopters, the latest rotary-wing aircraft in the Army's inventory. The helicopters are assigned to the 106th Aviation Regiment, stationed in Kankakee and Decatur.

"We've upgraded from analog to digital technology. The UH-60V gives us a moving map on board for situational awareness. It has been a needed upgrade for a while, and this is the latest and greatest," said Chief Warrant Officer (5) Herb Stevens, the Illinois National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility #2 Commander.

The Illinois Army National Guard was the first to receive the "V" model UH-60 Black Hawk. The updated model allows for enhanced situational awareness, something Stevens says will tremendously benefit Soldiers moving forward.

"This allows us to do different instrument approaches in a digital environment that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is moving to," Stevens said.

Lt. Col. Jason Celletti, the Illinois Army National Guard's State Aviation Officer, said that nearly 60 aviators needed to be trained to fly the UH-60V. This required the aviators to

first become qualified in the Army's previous digital UH-60 model, the "M" model, which was a 6-week qualification course. This was followed by a two-week training support plan to become qualified on the latest "V" model.

So far the Illinois Army National Guard has more than 30 aviators qualified on the UH-60M and about 15 fully-qualified UH-60V pilots.



"We partnered with Army Operational Test Command, Eastern Army Aviation Training Center, and other various organizations throughout the Department of the Army to ensure the success of the "V" program," Celletti said.

During the testing phase, air crews perform instrument and tactical flights to obtain data to ensure that the "V" model is meeting standards and warfighting principles.



"I'm really looking forward to the technology advancements," said Chief Warrant Officer (2) Rachel Jones of the 106th Aviation Regiment. "This will help propel us into a more modern, updated electrical aircraft. It's extremely important when you're

thinking about situational awareness."

"The Illinois National Guard was selected to do this testing for the entire Army," said Stevens. "We're the only operational unit in the Army that has these aircrafts right now. We have two testing events coming up that will help determine if this aircraft is adequate for rest of the Army."

How to save a life:

Soldier's quick actions save elderly woman's life

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The quick actions of an Illinois Army National Guard Soldier saved an elderly woman's life at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, Illinois, July 21, 2021.

Arguably the longest few minutes of his day, Staff Sgt. Nathan Hooker, of Homer Glenn, Illinois, responded to a Code Red, a call of a person in distress, at the cemetery where he has worked fulltime as a cemetery representative since November 2020.

"It was a typical day, we were getting ready for services at the cemetery," said Hooker, a military policeman assigned to the 233rd Military Police Company, based in Springfield. "I did a service for a veteran and transported his remains to the gravesite. I was

driving back to the administration building when a field employee was flagged down by a family who was visiting a gravesite in one of the sections. That's when the Code Red was sounded."

Hooker said the announcement indicated an elderly woman had collapsed near her vehicle, wasn't breathing and was in need of medical services.

"That's when the Code Red went out over the radio system," he said. "My first thought was I have to go. I wasn't too far away so I raced over to the location."

Hooker said when he arrived at the location

of the medical emergency, he saw a woman on the ground by her vehicle and a bystander with her.

"I quickly assessed her and determined she wasn't breathing and her mouth was turning blue," he said. "I began administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation right away."

Hooker said after what seemed like forever, but in reality about a minute and a half, he performed a quick reassessment.

"She still wasn't breathing, so we removed her dentures so they weren't blocking her airway," Hooker said. "After another minute or so, I heard her cough and thought, 'we're getting somewhere'. I kept doing CPR and eventually she started breathing on her own."

Hooker said after she regained consciousness,

she didn't know what happened. At that point, he just kept her calm until the paramedics arrived.

"It was incredible," he said. "Everyone worked together and it turned out really well."

Hooker attributes the outcome to his training as a Soldier in the

Illinois Army National Guard.

"In the National Guard, we receive training in medical and other tactics for our jobs," he said. "This training is not just for use while we're in the National Guard. We go back to our communities and that's where the training kicks in, outside of drill weekend."

"We have amazing heroes in our formations in the Illinois National Guard," said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. "I am proud to lead such amazing Soldiers like Staff Sergeant Nathan Hooker, who stepped in and used his military training to save the life of a person experiencing a medical emergency."



Hooker, who was recently certified as a combat lifesaver, said as Military Police they receive a significant amount of medical related training.

"We emphasize medical training a lot with the MPs," he said. "With all the training I've received, at that moment, I wasn't nervous or scared. I knew what to do and reverted back to my level of training. The more you train, it becomes second nature."

Growing up Hooker wanted to be a police officer or serve in the military.

"Both my grandfathers were World War II veterans," he said of his desire to serve in the military. "I wanted to do something bigger than myself. I wanted to serve my country because I'm very proud of this country. I also wanted the military training and the joys of comradery you get through serving."

Hooker said it wasn't until after graduating from college that either dream became reality.

"After college, I decided I could do both so I talked with a bunch of recruiters and ended up enlisting in the National Guard because I wanted to serve in the military part time and as a police officer full time," he said. "I enlisted as an MP because I thought the training would help get me a job and it did."

Hooker, who deployed with the 233rd to Afghanistan in 2016, served as a part-time police officer for four to five years and most recently worked as a full-time police officer with the Orland Park police department.

As a Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery representative, Hooker has found his passion.

"I absolutely love my job assisting Veterans' families during probably one of the saddest days of their lives," he said.

As part of his duties, much like a funeral director, he plans and organizes the services at the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery and on the day of the service, he greets the family as

they arrive for their Veteran's service.

"We take them to the shelter where the military funeral honors are performed, then escort the remains to their final resting place," he said. "We stay with the remains until they are interred."

Hooker has been a fixture at the National Cemetery even before becoming a cemetery representative. For several years, Hooker served as a member of the Illinois Army National Guard's Military and Funeral Honors team, assisting with the final military salute at Veterans' funerals. Even now, he jumps in and

helps the team if needed.

"Nathan is extremely helpful and jumps in wherever help is needed," said Quincy McCall, the director of the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery. "He will take on a challenge, even if it's not something he's done before."

McCall said Hooker is a great asset to the National Cemetery, and as a result of his quick actions, was nominated as the National Cemetery Administration's employee of the quarter,

prompting a call from Matt Quinn, the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

"He got to speak with Mr. Quinn, the Under Secretary," she said. "I've never received a call from the Under Secretary."

McCall said even though Hooker wasn't chosen as the overall employee of the quarter, she's proud he was chosen as a finalist.

"It's a big deal and he is very deserving of the honor," she said.

Hooker said what could have had a horrible outcome, turned out to have a good ending, and could hopefully encourage young men and women to join the National Guard.

"The training you learn could save lives," he said. "The training you receive stays with you and can be taken back by you to help others in your community."





PATCHED UP:

404TH SOLDIERS HIT MILESTONE IN DJIBOUTI, EARN COMBAT PATCH

By Spc. Kiersten Breunig, 404th MEB Public Affairs

CAMP LEMONNIER, Djibouti –Members of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, headquartered in Normal, Illinois, celebrated a milestone in their military careers as they received their combat patch, for military members serving in hostile conditions, March 17, 2022.

Maj. Gen. William Zana, Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa commanding general, presided over the ceremony, noting the significance of the patching tradition and the importance of the 404th MEB's task-at-hand

as primary staff and leadership with CJTF-HOA. As part of the ceremonial honors, Zana placed the combat patch on Col. Justin Towell, of Edwardsville, Illinois, CJTF-HOA chief of

staff and also the commander of the 404th MEB, as well as the rest of the MEB command group.

"There are these moments in life... the moment you first get married; the birth of your first child; the loss of a close friend or loved one... these moments change who you

are as a person and how you view the world," said Zana.

According to Zana, both the earning of





and the experience that comes along with a combat patch is one of those monumental, life-changing experiences. He reminded the U.S. Soldiers, especially those donning their first combat patch, the respect and responsibility that comes along with their milestone.

The 404th MEB now wears the U.S. Africa Command patch just below the American flag, signifying deployment in a combat zone. Their current combat deployment is with CJTF-HOA, located at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the only permanent U.S. military base on the African continent. The combat patch has been a symbol of military service during combat operations since World War I and continues to serve as an emblem of personal sacrifice.

"You all are going to live through history here," added Zana, regarding the MEB's next eight months in Djibouti, East Africa and the greater continent. "We are serving in Africa during a remarkable time. Over the past 20 years, CJTF-HOA has evolved to meet each new challenge; you are going to watch the task force continue to evolve, witnessing it first-hand."

While in a combat zone the patch is worn in a subdued color. The AFRICOM patch has a light blue oval-shaped embroidered emblem coming to a point at top and bottom, two palm fronds crossed at base proper, surmounted by a blue oval shield edged with a red border bearing the green landmasses of Africa. The use of blue alludes to the commitment to the unity and



coordination of Africa's allies to promote the AFRICOM mission. The palm fronds indicate Africa's hope to achieve unity on the continent and to build partnership throughout the world. Red strands for liberation, and the green demotes prosperity. The landmasses of Africa symbolize the continent's fortitude and the command's area of operation.

In 2012, a chemical brigade was established as the 404th MEB. Over the past ten years the unit has been building the skills, utilizing many training exercises in preparation for a mobilization. As a newly formed unit, this is the 404th MEB's first deployment.

The significance of earning the combat patch was not lost on young Soldiers with the MEB.

"One thing I really appreciate about the Army is the high standard we hold for recognition," said Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. Andrea Polizzi, of Elburn, Illinois, CJTF-HOA and 404th MEB Soldier. "It's a great reminder of our 'why' behind serving and to remember those who came before us. Being here in Africa is an honor and I'm very proud of it."



Sherman Soldier promoted to lieutenant colonel

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



FORT BLISS, Tex. –Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Jeramy Miles, of Sherman, Illinois, the officer-in-charge of the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, was promoted to lieutenant colonel in a ceremony Feb. 15 at Fort Hood, Texas.

The change in the ceremony venue from Illinois to Texas was because Miles is among the approximately 200 Soldiers from the 404th who deployed to support the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in Djibouti.

While deployed, Miles will serve as the Deputy Director of Operations for the CJTF-HOA.

Miles, who has served more than 25 years in the military, graduated from Nokomis High School, in Nokomis, Illinois. He is a graduate of Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois and earned his Master's Degree from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.

He and his wife, Andrea, have two children, daughter Addison, age 15 and son Nicholas, age 12.

He is the son of Jerry and Patt Miles of Fillmore, Illinois.



Springfield Soldier promoted to chief warrant officer 4

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Illinois Army National Guard Soldier Lindsay Glynn, of Springfield, Illinois, was promoted to chief warrant officer four during a promotion ceremony March 25 at the Illinois State Military Museum, Springfield.

Glynn enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in 2001 as a personnel specialist and was assigned to the 623rd Personnel Services Detachment, based in Springfield.

"I am super proud of you," said Col. Lenny Williams, Chief of Staff, Illinois Army National Guard.

"Every single task I throw at you, you get it done in a fantastic manner. Congratulations on your promotion. You have definitely earned it."

She entered the Active Guard and Reserve program as a personnel specialist in the Illinois Army National Guard personnel directorate, followed by assignments as the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team personnel officer; 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade human resources warrant officer and Warrant Officer Strength Manager. She is the Joint Force Headquarters officer in charge.

Glynn deployed from 2008-2009 to Afghanistan with the 33rd IBCT.

"Thank you to all the directors, officers, non-commissioned officers, fellow warrants and the headquarters and headquarters detachment staff for all you do to ensure I am successful," Glynn said. "I'd also like to thank my dad for all the years of love and support. I would be in a different place if not for him."





FROM THE HALLS OF MONTEZUMA

Marine turned Illinois National Guard command sergeant major retires after 32 years of service

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – From the Halls of Montezuma...to the Illinois Army National Guard?

Thirty-two years after earning the Eagle Globe and Anchor during boot camp at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego in 1990, Illinois Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Paul Kindred, of Jacksonville, Illinois, celebrated more than two decades of combined military service during a retirement ceremony March 18 at the Illinois Military Academy, Camp Lincoln,

Springfield, Illinois.

"Today is a bittersweet day," Kindred, who most recently served as the Human Resources Office Sergeant Major, told family, friends and fellow Soldiers. "It's hard for me to grasp that I won't wear this uniform anymore. Twenty-three years of my adult life has been in uniform."

Following Kindred's discharge from the U.S. Marine Corps, he had a break in service, working in a civilian career until his brother

convinced him to join the National Guard.

Kindred joined the Texas National Guard as a software analyst before becoming an engineer and finding his way home to Illinois, serving in a variety of assignments, including 65th Troop Command, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, 766th Brigade Engineer Battalion, and the 198th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion.

"This is a big day for the Kindred family," said Maj. Gen. Eric Little, Director of Manpower and Personnel, National Guard Bureau, in Washington, D.C. "Paul and I go way back to 2003 when we were getting ready to deploy to Iraq."

Little said not only during the deployment, but throughout his career, Kindred has kept him in check.

"I've learned a lot from Paul throughout that entire deployment," Little said. "He has done a great job which has impacted many families, Soldiers and civilians."

Kindred thanked Little for his guidance throughout the years.

"I'm very blessed to have you here," Kindred said. "Your guidance and mentorship throughout my career has meant a lot to me."

Kindred said although he knew his time in uniform was coming to an end, it doesn't make it any easier to end his military service.

"There are a lot of emotions tied to today," Kindred said. "I knew this day was coming

for a couple of months but it was important for me to step aside and retire so other Soldiers can advance in their careers."

Kindred said he is grateful for the leaders in the Illinois National Guard for allowing him to serve this long.

"I am grateful for the opportunities the Illinois National Guard has offered me and my family through the years,"

he said. "I'm extremely grateful for the latitude to do my job as a senior non-commissioned officer."

Kindred saved his final thank yous for his family.

"To my wife, Bobbie, your sacrifice got me here and I'm not sure I could have done it without you," he said. "To my children, Justice, Cameren and Evan, I'm extremely proud of you and look forward to seeing more of your accomplishments in person."

Kindred told the Soldiers gathered he was grateful for each one and offered a piece of advice.

"Leadership is not about a title or designation, it's about impact, influence and inspiration," he said. "To every Soldier I've had the opportunity to lead, mentor or develop, thank you for listening and thank you for allowing me to prove that my guidance was worth your time. To all of you who

got me to this day, I will miss most of all the ability to be part of your lives."

Following his retirement, Kindred will serve as the Casualty Operations Branch chief at Camp Lincoln.



Aurora recruiting team welcomes new first sergeant

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

AURORA, Ill. – Dennis Medina of Chicago, Illinois, was promoted to first sergeant during a promotion ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Aurora, Illinois, March 25.



Medina was born in Brooklyn, New York and lived there until age nine. He initially joined the Marine Corps in 2000, years later finding his way to the Minnesota Army National Guard on June 20, 2010 where he enlisted as an infantryman assigned to Company B, 1st Combined Arms Battalion, 194th Armor in East St. Paul, Minnesota. Shortly after enlisting in the National Guard, Medina began recruiting in

Bloomington, Minnesota.

Medina deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in June of 2011 as a team leader conducting convoy operations in Iraq until December of 2011. Upon his return, Medina was selected for a recruiter position at the Minneapolis Armory. In June 2016 he transferred to the Illinois Army National Guard and accepted a recruiting position at the Joliet Armory.



Prior to his promotion, Medina served as the Company G, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, team leader based in Marseilles and is now assigned as the Company D first sergeant in Aurora. Sgt. Maj. Joshua C. Wittenauer, of Dixon, Illinois, relinquished responsibility of Delta Company to Medina during a ceremony on March 26 in Aurora.

Medina is now in charge of a recruiting team of approximately 10 recruiters and provides oversight of a Recruit Sustainment Program that prepares newly enlisted Soldiers for basic training.

State Safety Officer retires after 41 years of service

By Barb Wilson, photos by Sgt. Tent Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Chief Warrant Officer 5 Mark Adams, of Springfield, State Safety Officer for the Illinois Army National Guard, retired after more than 40 years of military service during a ceremony April 22 at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

“I never thought in 1981, I would be standing here as a CW5,” said Adams, who spent his entire career in the Illinois Army National Guard. “If it weren’t for the Soldiers who mentored me, I would not be where I’m at today, and neither would the Illinois Army National Guard.”

Adams enlisted in the Illinois National Guard on Aug 4, 1981, as an electrical instrument repairer, assigned to the 3637th Maintenance Company, based in Springfield.

In 1997, Adams was assigned to the 126th Maintenance Company, based in Quincy, as a warrant officer candidate in the electronics repair platoon, prior to attending the Warrant Officer Course at Fort Rucker, Alabama in 1998.

Adams has served



in a variety of positions with the 126th Maintenance Company, Company A, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, based in Mattoon, and the 232nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, based in Springfield.

Adams deployed to Afghanistan with Company B, 634th BSB from 2008-2009.

“I have known

Mark Adams

for years,” said Lt. Col. Jason Celletti, of Springfield, state aviation officer, Illinois Army

National Guard. “He has mentored a lot of us through the years and as the safety officer taught us the right way to do things.”

Celletti said that Adams spent the majority of his career keeping Soldiers safe.

“He has affected so many people in his 40 years of service,” Celletti said.

Adams said it’s been a long career, but one he doesn’t regret.

“When I enlisted in 1981, it was as a part-time job,” Adams told friends and family. “Eventually I went full time in the National Guard, and over the past 41 years I’ve worked with a lot of you here today. It has been a great career.”





TO THE HIGHEST HEIGHTS:

AFRICAN AMERICAN FLIGHT CREW HOPES TO INSPIRE OTHERS

By Sgt. Trent Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – The Chicago skyline came into view as the three aviators approached the city. The roaring beat of the propellers played like music from an orchestra. Different paths had led them to this moment, but they were now all together in one place. Representing 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, their esprit de corps had propelled them to new heights and they were hopeful this moment could show other African-Americans their dreams could also come true.

As the child of Ghanaian immigrants, Chief Warrant Officer (2) George Frimpong traveled the world as a kid. Born in London, his family eventually ended up in the United States where he finished high school. His path to citizenship led to a journey that has allowed him to continue to see the world. Now as a pilot in the Illinois Army National Guard, he hopes

to continue to follow his dreams and inform other African-Americans of the opportunities to fly.

Frimpong enlisted in the U.S. Army July 14, 2011 as an active-duty patient administrator specialist. His responsibilities were to perform clinical support for military service members and families. Although he understood the significance of his role, he still had a suppressed, yearning desire to become an Army pilot. His curiosity for aircrafts began at a young age. What was initially his father's passion for aviation soon became his.

"My father had to pause his dreams of becoming an airline pilot to provide for our family," Frimpong said. "He used to put 'Captain' in front of his name on all of his schoolwork because he knew what he wanted for himself. Little did he know that he was manifesting my destiny and even though it

took longer than planned, it still ended up working out perfectly.”

Frimpong began Warrant Officer Candidate and flight school in 2017. Throughout the journey, he explored other career paths before ultimately confirming his passion, aviation.

“There was a period when I was 18 years old in college when I thought that it was my calling,” Frimpong said. “I was easily deterred and ended up dropping out of college and getting a job selling cable. The next opportunity presented itself while I was on active duty, but I let it slip again, chasing other dreams. But what God has in store will always find its way to you.”

While Frimpong was realizing his dreams, another African-American future pilot also began discovering his passion as well. Chief Warrant Officer (2) Aendri Decker of Aurora, Illinois enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in January 2011, his initial military occupation specialty was as an infantry Soldier.

“I was in an infantry unit right outside of Aurora,” said Decker. “I spoke with my readiness non-commissioned officer and told him that I was looking to push myself. I wanted to do all I could for the Army. In my mind that was Special Forces or aviation. He got me information on both, but aviation seemed to move a lot smoother.”

Decker felt his experience as an infantry Soldier would be an asset in his pursuit of

aviation and would help provide a different tactical angle.

“The infantry unit that I was in was a dismounted, reconnaissance oriented security unit,” explained Decker. “We didn’t have a lot of heavy vehicles, but part of that was the air assault piece. I attended air assault school and during training we would rappel off of the side of Black Hawks. That was another unique

experience that involved aircraft. Spending that time kind of gave me some insight and a perspective on seeing how important helicopters can be to the ground force element.”

Similar to Frimpong, Decker’s father also immigrated to the U.S. for better opportunities.

“While I was in Warrant Officer School, one of the training, advising, and counseling (TAC) Officers was Haitian and my father is also from Haiti,” said Decker. “I thought that was really cool. We were in a school house

setting so it wasn’t an ideal place to build comradery, but it was still great for me to see someone with a similar heritage to my own in a key role in the military.”

While attending Warrant Officer Candidate School, Frimpong also noticed how rare it was to come across other African-Americans pursuing aviation.

“My Warrant Officer School class was a very diverse group from the ground warrant perspective, but as far as aviators, there were



no women and I was the only person of color,” said Frimpong. “I did not realize how few black aviators there were in the country, let alone in the Illinois Army National Guard. When I realized that I was going to be one of three currently serving, there was an indescribable pressure that I placed on myself that I could not fail because I was representing the future of black aviators in the state.”

The glaring reality of having so few African-American aviators pushed Frimpong to pursue diversity among pilots and aircraft professionals through

outreach programs and speaking at schools. He began educating his peers on the possibilities of pursuing aviation, drawing inspiration from the Tuskegee Airmen, the first black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Frimpong approached other African-Americans within the Army National Guard to form an all-black flight crew. The first in the history of the ILNARG.

“Mr. Frimpong approached me and explained that he would be flying along with Mr. Decker,” said Sgt. Jonathan Blair of Chicago, a crew chief assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment out of Kankakee. “He asked if I would be able to take the opportunity to come fly with them and shared that it would be an all-black crew. We both understood the importance of us doing this.”

“It was very significant because it symbolized how far inclusion has come in the Illinois Army National Guard, but how far we still must go,” Frimpong said. “There are only 3 Black pilots in the ILARNG and Sgt. Jonathon Blair is the only black crew chief. So, without him, the flight was impossible.”

Blair served as a crew chief in the Marine Corps from 2000-2005, deploying to Iraq during the initial invasion in 2003. He took a break in service to obtain a degree in aerospace engineering from Arizona State University

and worked full-time as an engineer before joining the ILARNG in 2018. He is now an Officer Candidate in the Illinois Army National Guard’s 129th Regiment’s Regional Training Institute (RTI) Officer Candidate School.

On March 31, 2022 Frimpong commanded the

all-African-American flight crew. This symbolized African-American advancement since the Tuskegee Airmen.

“For me it’s a next step to a stronger, better-rounded Army,” said Decker. “When people from different backgrounds,

cultures and experiences come together, you can produce great results. It is an example of what’s possible for African-Americans. I have a new born boy, but I also have two young daughters who are getting to an age where they understand that dad flies helicopters in the National Guard. I enjoy having these open conversations with them. George Frimpong is also really good at marketing aviation to other African-Americans and going out to these schools. He does his flying program with youth and tries to give more exposure to aviation.”

Sgt. Blair expressed the significance of taking advantage of the opportunities available, even if you may be different than everyone else in the room.

“I understand what it feels like to come into a flight unit without having anyone else that looks like you,” Blair said. “It’s important that people know the options and opportunities that they have. The doors are open to you as long as you want to go through them.”

Frimpong credits his mentors and leaders for assisting him in his journey and expressed the importance of asking questions.

“Ask for help and don’t stop asking,” Frimpong said. “There are so many resources available for anyone to find a way into aviation. If it’s your goal, then don’t stop.”



Springfield Soldier promoted to chief warrant officer 4

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois National Guard Soldier David Miller, Jr., of Springfield, donned new chief warrant officer four rank during a promotion ceremony April 7 at the Illinois State Military Museum in Springfield, Illinois.

Miller, the officer in charge of the Automation and Automated Records Branch (AARB) in the Personnel Directorate, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in March 2004 as an intelligence analyst, serving in Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 232nd Combat Sustainment and Support Battalion, based in Springfield. He entered the Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) program in June 2005 as a personnel records clerk in the Personnel Services branch. In November 2009, Miller was appointed as an AGR warrant officer where he was selected to be the officer in charge of the newly created boards branch in the Personnel Directorate.

"You are mild mannered like Clark Kent," said Col. Ronald Bonesz, Director of Military Personnel, Illinois Army National Guard. "You are indeed Superman."

Bonesz told the audience he first met Miller when he came in as the Deputy Director of Personnel.

"I was being introduced to all the different branches in the G-1, most were self-explanatory, but then I get brought up to the second floor to the AARB and my thought was what is that? What do they do? It's the 21st

century, isn't everything automated," Bonesz said. "Of course, the answer is no."

Bonesz said since first meeting Miller, he has a better understanding of the AARB.

"Fast forward to today, I understand what you do. I understand what your team does," he said. "They are a vital aspect of what we do for our Soldiers and the Illinois Army National Guard. You have been an advisor to me. You are a subject matter expert in everything you do and you make me look sharp."

Bonesz thanked Miller's family for their support.

"Thank you for your support of Chief Miller. I have no doubt he's a fantastic father and loving husband," Bonesz said. "Thank you for sharing in this special moment."



Miller told those attending the ceremony, when he enlisted he didn't know what he wanted to do.

"When I enlisted I didn't know what I wanted to do in the Illinois National Guard," he said. "I didn't know much about the military and sure didn't know what a warrant officer was."

Miller said he jumped at the opportunity to work in the personnel office where he met a few warrant officers.

"I got to work with a few warrant officers and when I saw what a warrant officer could be, I knew that's what I wanted to do, what I wanted to be," he said. "They helped me get here today and I hope that I can do them proud."

Miller also thanked his wife, Teresa, son Alex and daughter Elizabeth, along with coworkers from the Personnel Directorate for their support throughout his career.

"You have supported me throughout my career. I am where I am because of you," he said.

HOUSE OF REMEMBRANCE

Illinois House hold its annual Memorial Service honoring fallen Illinois Servicemembers

By Sgt. Tent Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs



Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General, Illinois National Guard, Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard, and members of the Illinois National Guard Honor Team participated in the annual memorial wreath laying in the Illinois House of Representatives. The memorial ceremony, held April 6 this year, pays homage to all Illinois service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice.





Forsyth Soldier retires after nearly 33 years of Service

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. –Sgt. Maj. David Owsley of Forsyth, Illinois, retired from the Illinois Army National Guard after nearly 33 years of military service during a ceremony, April 1, at the Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Owsley, the Plans, Operations and Training sergeant major, Joint Force Headquarters, Springfield, enlisted in the Illinois Army National Guard in December 1989, serving as a traditional National Guardsman for 10 years and as an EMT-Paramedic in the Chicagoland area before entering the Active Guard and Reserve program in 2000.

“I have enjoyed being in a company level unit, teaching young Soldiers to be tactically and technically proficient, doing things young noncommissioned officers are supposed to do,” Owsley told family and friends. “I have enjoyed every minute of being an Infantryman.”

Owsley has served in a variety of AGR positions in the past two decades of military service, including serving as the Operations sergeant major for the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team prior to his

current assignment.

Throughout his career, Owsley has participated in rotational training at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, Germany and the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. He has conducted interoperability training with the Turkish Land Forces at Vincenza, Italy

and the Polish Land Forces in Poznan, Poland and traveled to Honduras, Singapore and Ukraine in support of theater security cooperation exercises.

In addition, Owsley participated in division level warfighter exercises at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and Fort Indiantown Gap,

Pennsylvania, plus brigade level warfighter exercises and combat training capability exercises.

Owsley deployed to both Germany and Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“I was humbled to be asked by Sergeant Major Owsley to be the officiant at his retirement ceremony,” said Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, of Naperville, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Illinois National Guard and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “To give 32 plus years of your life to an organization speaks volumes of the individual and the family.”

Boyd thanked Owsley’s family for the sacrifices made in support of his career.



"Thank you to the family," Boyd said. "Without your support, we couldn't get 33 years of service out of our Soldiers."

Boyd commended Owsley on his 32 years in the Illinois National Guard.

"Part of that 32 years is shaping the next generation. The true testament of a leader, whether you're an officer or a noncommissioned officer, is how well you leave that position, how well prepared you have left that position, how well you teach and mentor your replacement because at the end of the day we will all hang up this uniform," he said. "Thank you for 32 years of service and pride and for building a foundation in this organization that will take us into the years to come."

Col. Eric Davis, Director of Operations, Plans and Training, Illinois Army National Guard, lauded Owsley's technical and tactical proficiencies, and his ability to mentor and lead Soldiers.

"I've had the opportunity to serve with you throughout the years," Davis said. "It is phenomenal to watch as you build and develop young Soldiers."

Davis said leaders mold the technical and tactical proficiencies and mentorship together and provide a vision to subordinates and Soldiers around them and help Soldiers get to success.

"Leaders get them to success and it makes you successful, and in turn, makes the organization successful," he said.

Davis also thanked Owsley's family.

"I know I took him away from you to go to a

lot of different places," Davis said. "I appreciate you allowing him to be a Soldier. But now, the Army is no longer a competitor. It's your time, don't let him off the hook."

Owsley also thanked his family for the sacrifices they have made throughout his career.



"Christy, you came along late in my career. You agreed to the Army when we married," he said to his wife. "You have spent plenty of nights alone at home while I was off being a Soldier. You helped me through when I needed it most."

Owsley shared a message with his three children, Aiden, Vivian and Elliott.

"Life has been hardest on you guys, but I'm looking forward to having lots more time together," he said. "I look forward to seeing what amazing young adults become. If you are fortunate enough to find a career you are passionate about, I say pursue it with your time and talent and if it doesn't love you back, give it 32 years."

Owsley offered advice to the Soldiers and noncommissioned officers of the Illinois National Guard.

"Be a barrel-chested, red-blooded American freedom fighter," he said. "Be competitive with each other. Know your warrior tasks and drills. They're important. They are the cornerstone of



our success in anything we do and it is why the NCO Corps is the backbone of the Army. Teaching those tasks to Soldiers will make them competent and able to survive fighting on the battlefield today."



PASSING THE TORCH

The Illinois Army National Guard's RRB welcomes new commander

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

Photos by Staff Sgt. Dustin Stech, Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – The Illinois Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion (RRB) said farewell to Lt. Col. Paul Metzдорff of Bloomington as he relinquished command to Lt. Col. Joseph Harris, of Springfield during ceremony at Camp Lincoln in Springfield, April 14.

“The Change of Command means a lot to both the outgoing and incoming commanders,” said Brig. Gen.

Rodney Boyd, of Naperville, Illinois, Assistant Adjutant General – Army, and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard. “Paul poured his heart into the position for the past two years and was quite the commander. As Joe comes in and

assumes the role of commander, it’s not going to get easier. He’s stepping in when times are tough. At the end of the day, we have the right person at the right time to make good things happen again.”

Boyd thanked Metzдорff’s wife, Allyson and Harris’ wife, Kate and children, Emily, Liam, and Aidan, for their support and sacrifice.

“To both families, thank you for lending us your Soldiers. Allyson, thank you for allowing

Paul to lead the Recruiting and Retention Battalion these past two years,” Boyd said. “To Kate and the kids, Joe’s going to need your support. This is a tough job, but I know he’s up to the challenge.”

Metzдорff, who becomes the Illinois Army National





Guard's Deputy Director of Personnel G-1, thanked his wife for her support.

"Thank you for being my best friend and making me humble throughout this assignment," Metzдорff said.

Metzдорff also thanked the Soldiers in the RRB.

"Command Sgt. Maj. O'Brien, thank you for being a sounding board for ideas. The recruiting battalion is a noncommissioned officer driven organization," Metzдорff said. "Continue to do what you're doing and keep pushing to accomplish your mission."

Metzдорff, who assumed command of the RRB at the beginning of COVID, said how the unit adjusted to the pandemic is a major accomplishment of his command.

"I came into recruiting command at the



beginning of the COVID pandemic. We quickly evaluated how we were recruiting, and how we would have to adjust to the pandemic and the

restrictions that were put into place."

Metzдорff said RRB was able to make those changes quickly.

"We made those changes, got back out on the street and continued to drive forward in recruiting," he said. "That we were able to do that is a true testament to the courage and resiliency of the recruiting force. While others were still teleworking and avoiding the risk, our recruiters were facing head-on the challenge and the risk by continuing to recruit soldiers into the Illinois Army National Guard. They knew exactly how important it was to meet our end strength objectives."

Metzдорff said one of the highlights of being the RRB commander was recognizing First Sgt. Wittenauer and Sgt. 1st Class Wise as one of the top noncommissioned officers in charge and recruiting and retention noncommissioned officers respectively.

"It was awesome to see that one of our first sergeants and one of our recruiters make it to the national level," he said. "But then to be able to recognize First Sergeant Wittenauer as the top NCOIC of the year for the entire nation and Sergeant Wise as the second place recruiting and retention NCO of the year, that was incredible."

Metzдорff said he has left his mark on the RRB with process improvements and initiatives started while he was in command.

"I hope that some of those continue in the future and I hope that both the leadership, the staff and the field continue to identify areas in which they can improve processes, production and improve how Joint Force Headquarters supports the field. I think if we are constantly evaluating how we do things instead of continuing to do things the same way, we can continue to find new and better ways of doing things and continue to grow as an organization."

Metzдорff said he will miss the camaraderie and competitive nature in the RRB.

"Camaraderie and competition are two very important things to me. Two of the main reasons why I stay in uniform is camaraderie and the competitive nature like is in the RRB," he said. "I will also miss the opportunity to speak with young Soldiers when they are just

first getting into the National Guard at the RSP level. It's refreshing to see the new Soldier's excitement and joy before shipping off to basic training. You don't get to interact with those brand-new soldiers in other areas of the National Guard and I will miss that."

Harris enlisted as a cadet in the Illinois Army National Guard in 2003, and attended Illinois State University where he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Medical Service Corps. He was assigned to Company C, 634th Brigade Support Battalion as a field medical assistant.

He has served in a variety of assignments in the Illinois Army National Guard including the 108th Medical Battalion as the intelligence and training officer, commander of the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 108th Medical Battalion, and officer in charge of the 108th Medical Battalion from 2010- 2014 while also serving as the Commander of the 708th Medical Company in 2013. In 2014, Harris was selected as the Recruiting and Retention Battalion Officer Strength Manager serving from 2014 to 2015. He served as the plans and operations officer in the 65th Troop Command from 2015- 2017.

Harris comes to RRB from the National Guard Bureau, where he has served as the Combat Training Centers Program Manager and the Chief of Capabilities and Resource Integration Branch since 2018.

"I'm honored by the opportunity to lead

the recruiting and retention battalion," he told those attending the ceremony. "Paul, I'm looking forward to taking some of your innovative approaches and flipping the

problem on its head. I'm excited to reconnect with many of you here today and bringing some of what I've learned at the National Guard Bureau here."

Harris thanked his wife and children for their support.

"Kate, thank you for your support," he said, telling the audience she's the

reason he went to the NGB assignment. "She grew up as an Army brat. She gets restless and needs to move every couple of years. Our children have been resilient through these moves. Going to the NGB assignment, they left school on Thursday, we drove to Washington,

D.C. and on Monday, they started a new school. Same thing coming back, we left on a Thursday and on Monday, they became Pretzels in the New Berlin school district."

Harris also addressed the Soldiers in attendance.

"The Chief of Staff of the Army said

recruiting is acquiring talent and is the most strategic activity we do in the Army," he said. "You are the tip of the spear for that most strategic activity because the Soldiers you are bringing in are not just numbers, they are the quality that's going to shape the values and the trust and professionalism of the Illinois National Guard."



Command sergeant major hangs up blouse after 32 years of service

By Sgt. Trent Fouche, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Growing up in the small town of Kincaid, Illinois, Anthony Mollusky Jr. didn't have a lot of options.

With only about 1,500 people, the former mining town had hit rough times. Jobs were drying up and the young man was uncertain about his future. So, he joined the Army. It was the beginning of a 32-year journey that would take him across the world and then back to Kincaid. On Sunday, April 3, during a ceremony at the

Illinois Military Academy on Camp Lincoln in Springfield, he retired with the highest rank an enlisted Soldier can achieve, command sergeant major.

Command Sgt. Maj. Mollusky's last assignment was as the Command Sergeant Major of the 108th Special Troops Battalion based in Chicago. Now an information technology expert in the civilian world, Mollusky recalled what it was like as a young man trying to find himself.

"I didn't really know what I could do by staying in the area and was unsure if college was for me," said Mollusky. "I didn't have a lot of information about finances or student loans, but I figured if I ever did decide to attend college, the Army would eventually pay for it."

Mollusky enlisted into the active Army, serving seven years as a quartermaster and chemical equipment repairer. As the years progressed, he began to desire a change, informing his chain of command that he wanted to work with computers full time. Unable to change his military occupation

specialty, he would transition to the Illinois Army National Guard in 1998, where he joined the same unit that his father, Anthony Mollusky Sr., had once served.

"I was about to get out of the Army because I wanted to do something different," Mollusky said. "I wanted to work on computers and felt that's where my career was heading. It wasn't until I was doing my out-processing that they brought up the possibility of me going into the National Guard. That's how I ended up in the 3637th Maintenance Company, the same unit that my dad had once served in." But the elder Mollusky didn't often discuss his military service. "So I didn't learn a lot of stuff until after he passed away."

For example, while Mollusky's father was

assigned to what was then called the 3637th Ordnance Company, he would be activated on Oct. 10, 1961 in response to the Berlin Crisis of 1961, sending him to Fort Knox.

Anthony Mollusky Sr. had some personal struggles and would pass away from a heart attack



a few months after Mollusky returned to Illinois to transition to the National Guard, leaving behind a lot of unanswered questions.

"During our talks, the Guard never really came up," Mollusky said. "After he got out of the National Guard, he got a job as a welder, until he was laid off. I think my siblings and I realized that we just had to go out and work hard. I have two older sisters and growing up we all had paper routes. ... We knew that we needed to go out and make things happen to be self-sufficient."

Serving in the Army would allow Mollusky to meet his wife, Michelle, someone he credits with being a tremendous supporter since day one.

"I met her at Fort Riley, Kansas in 1992 and in

1994 we were married,” said Mollusky. “She’s been supportive through everything. Through my deployments and annual trainings, there are times where she’s handled things by herself.”



Mollusky deployed to Iraq from 2007-2008 while assigned to the 3637th Maintenance Company. During that time, Michelle would carry a lot more of the responsibilities of raising their children.

“I grew up a military brat, my father retired as a Chief Warrant Officer (3) so a lot of it was normal for me,” said Michelle, his wife. “The biggest advice I can give is to communicate, even about the little things. It’s been a journey and we’ve both grown through it.”



Mollusky would also deploy to Kuwait in 1991, before meeting his wife.

As a family man and leader in the National Guard, Mollusky isn’t necessarily the strict,

stern Command Sergeant Major that people often associate with the rank. Being a father with three children has helped teach him to be patient.

“I tell my kids that things take time,” said Mollusky. “My oldest son is 28 and he works for the Department of Labor. I tell him to be patient and you will be able to move up and excel. My oldest daughter is 23 and has special needs, so I have my wife to support me in helping her. I also have a 19-year old son, who is still trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. Things just take time.”

Although Mollusky will now have an opportunity to spend more time with his biological family, his National Guard family will miss his passion for his job and how much he cared for his Soldiers.

“I first met Command Sergeant Major Mollusky when I took command of the 108th Special Troops Battalion,” said Lt. Col. Timothy Johnson. “His passion for Soldier care was clear. He welcomed me with open arms and we immediately became a team. With over 30 years of experience, he brought a lot to the table as my Senior Enlisted Advisor. His long term relationships with Soldiers and families in our units gave him unique insights that as a commander, I didn’t have. His frank and candid approach when discussing our Soldiers was invaluable. The thing I’ll miss the most about him is his laugh and storytelling. Every drill, trip, and training event was filled with stories about his family and our Soldiers.”

Despite retiring from the Army, Mollusky’s values as a Soldier will continue to carry-over to his everyday life, even though he will no longer wear the uniform.

“I would encapsulate the Army values as simply doing the right thing,” said Mollusky. “As a leader, making sure that you’re looking out for your peers and subordinates. It’s so much more than making sure that Soldiers are in the right uniform for a formation. What I’ll always take away most from being with the STB is being around good people. I’ll remember the great Soldiers and the great job they do.”



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Brig. Gen. Mark Alessia, the Director of the Illinois National Guard Joint staff, and Air Force Brig. Gen. James Silvasy, Chief of Staff, Illinois Air National Guard, along with the 566th Air National Guard Band of the Midwest participated in Polish Constitution Day activities at Daley Plaza, and the Polish Consulate in Chicago May 2. The Illinois National Guard and Poland share one of the longest and strongest partnerships in the State Partnership Program, which was established in 1993.



SADAKO'S WISH

*Illinois Honors Hiroshima during
Asian American Heritage Month*



In observation of Asian-American and Pacific Islander Heritage month, the Illinois National Guard displayed 1,000 hand folded paper cranes and the story of Sadako Sasaki.

Sadako was a resident of Hiroshima when the atomic bombs were dropped. At the age of 12 she was diagnosed with leukemia. After hearing the legend of the crane, she embarked on a mission to fold 1,000 origami cranes before her death. By the time she succumbed to her disease she had folded more than 1,300.

The cranes and Sadako's story were displayed throughout the month of May. At the end of the month, the Illinois National Guard sent the cranes and a letter from the Illinois National Guard's Senior leadership to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Japan.

Raymond Soldier retires after more than a quarter century of service

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Gorup of Raymond retired from the military after nearly 26 years of service during a ceremony May 15 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.



Gorup retired as the Noncommissioned Officer-in-Charge of the Illinois National Guard's Joint Operations Center. He spent 21 years in the Infantry, including a 2008 to 2009 deployment to Afghanistan with the Illinois National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. While in Afghanistan, he mentored an Afghanistan National Army Infantry Company.

Previous deployments included a 2000



Operation Desert Spring deployment to Kuwait with Co. A, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment in support of the No Fly Zone over Iraq; a 2002 deployment with the 66th Infantry Brigade to Germany as part of Task Force Santa Fe after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001; and a 2004-2005 deployment with the 1st Battalion, 131st Infantry Regiment to Fort Polk, Louisiana, where the unit served as the "opposing force" for units rotating through the Joint Readiness Training Center.

Gorup was born in Chicago and is a graduate of Larkin High School in Elgin. He served for



four years in the active Army from 1995 to 1999. He has served as a fire team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, NCO mentor at the company-level, and an operations, exercise, and training NCO. In addition to the 1-178th Infantry, the 1-131st Infantry, and Joint Force Headquarters – Illinois; he has served with the 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment and the 634th Brigade Support Battalion.

Gorup is a highly decorated Soldier. He received his second Meritorious Service Medal upon retirement and has been awarded four Army Commendation Medals, three Army Achievement Medals, and multiple other awards and decorations. He also holds the Parachutist Badge, the Expert Infantryman's Badge, and the Combat Infantryman's Badge.

Gorup lives on a farm in Raymond with his spouse, Molly, and their four sons.

Litchfield Colonel retires after nearly 40 years of service

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – A journey that began when he was still in high school ended this month when Illinois Army National Guard Col. Craig Holan of Litchfield retired from the military after 37 years of service during a ceremony May 14 at Camp Lincoln in Springfield.

Holan joined the Army in his junior year of high school as a split-option Soldier, enlisting in the 82nd Airborne Division and serving three years on active duty before transferring to the Army Reserve's 84th Training Division in 1986. Holan retired as the Illinois Army National Guard's Chief Facilities Management Officer after Commanding the 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade from November 2017 until May 2021. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2008 as the Deputy Commander of the 766th Explosive Hazards Coordination Cell.

When he was still in the 82nd Airborne, he remembered his spouse, Sharon, waiting for him in an empty Fort Bragg, NC, parking lot as he completed a parachute jump in the middle of the night. "Our families serve with us," Holan said. He thanked Sharon and his two adult daughters, Katerina and Elizabeth, for serving with him throughout his military career. He said he was proud

of both his daughters, but particularly proud that Elizabeth, a lieutenant with the Illinois Army National Guard's 634th Brigade Support Battalion, decided to also enter military service.

"The strength of the military is the people," Holan said. "Your strength of character and willingness to fight for those beside you makes the U.S. military the greatest fighting force on earth," he told the fellow military members at his retirement. He said the Army made him a "better Soldier and a better person."

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, said Holan served "incredibly" throughout his life, giving to the Army, the Illinois National Guard and his country from the age of 17 until his retirement. "He should be very proud of his service and his family and friends should be very proud of him."

While pursuing his undergraduate degree in Architecture from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Holan transitioned from staff sergeant to ROTC

cadet. He received his commission as an Engineer officer in May 1989. He served in the Army Reserves' Co. C, 961st Engineer Battalion (Pewaukee, WI) before transferring to the Missouri Army National Guard's Co. C, 110th Engineer Battalion (Lexington, MO) after he completed master degrees in Engineering and Urban Planning from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He served as a heavy equipment platoon leader, maintenance platoon leader, and





National Guard.

Holan transferred to the Illinois Army National Guard in 2005, joining the 766th



Engineer Battalion. He would serve as the battalion's personnel officer, the headquarters company Commander, the operations officer, the executive officer, and as the battalion Commander. After battalion Command, Holan worked full-time as the Illinois Army National Guard's Construction and Facilities Management Officer where he was responsible for projects such as the new Illinois Army National Guard flight facility in Kankakee and major renovations

company executive officer with the Missouri National Guard. He also supported nation-building in Panama as part of the Missouri

at the Illinois National Guard headquarters in Springfield. While CFMO, he completed U.S. Army War College earning his master's degree in strategic studies.



Holan's military awards and decorations range from the parachutist badge to the Legion of Merit.

As a civilian, Holan is an accredited member of the American Institute of Certified Planners. He is the Director of Facilities Management for Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville. He has been married to Sharon for 36 years.

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Chicago Colonel retires after more than 30 years of service

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – A dream that began with playing with toy Army men as a child and continued as the Hyde Park Academy Junior ROTC battalion commander ended this month after more than three decades in the Illinois Army National Guard including a brigade command and a combat tour in Afghanistan.

Col. Nick Johnson, a native of Chicago and resident of Evanston, retired from the Army with more than 32 years of service during a May 14 ceremony at Illinois National Guard headquarters on Camp Lincoln in Springfield. He started as a Simultaneous Membership Program (SMP) cadet with the Illinois Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment while enrolled in the ROTC program at Chicago State University. He was commissioned as an Infantry officer through ROTC in 1992.

He supported military operations and exercises in Panama, Poland, Germany, the Republic of Korea, Afghanistan, Jordan, and Ukraine during his career. Recently, he assisted the Polish military in setting up the Polish Territorial Defense Force, which has many similarities to the National Guard in the United States. In addition, he played a critical role in the Illinois National Guard's COVID-19 response as the deputy commander of the Illinois National Guard's Joint Task Force.

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

said Johnson served "incredibly" throughout his career. "He should be very proud of what of what he has given to the Illinois National Guard, the Army, his state, and to his country throughout his life," Neely said.

The early part of his career was with the 1-178th Infantry, where he held two company commands (C Company and the headquarters company) and the battalion command. "The 178th Infantry is his home," Neely said.

Johnson is an active member of the 8th Infantry Association, which celebrates and



commemorates the history of the Illinois National Guard's all-African-American Fighting 8th Infantry Regiment. The 8th Infantry Regiment fought in the Spanish-American War, World War I and World War II. In World War I, it fought as the 370th Infantry Regiment – under French command because of institutional racism in the U.S. Army at that time. The regiment's valor during the war is celebrated by the Victory Monument at Martin Luther King Drive and 35th Street in

Chicago. The 1-178th Infantry holds the lineage to the 8th Infantry Regiment. Several members of the 8th Infantry Association attended Johnson's retirement ceremony and served with him in the 1-178th Infantry.



After command of the 1-178th Infantry, Johnson went on to serve as commander of the 244th Digital Liaison Detachment and then brigade commander of the 65th Troop Command. He has held multiple staff assignments in logistics and operations from the battalion level to the state headquarters level. He deployed to Afghanistan with the Illinois Army National Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team from 2008-2009,

where he served as the operations officer and



executive officer of the Counter Narcotics Infantry Kandak Embedded Training Team.

Johnson said his career fulfilled a "lifelong dream of service." He thanked

many people in his comments, but singled out Susan King-Wieczorek, the Gold Star Mother of Sgt. Robert Weinger. He discussed how much "Momma Sue's" friendship has meant to him since March 15, 2009; the day her son, Spc.



Norman Cain and Sgt. Christopher Abeyta were killed in Afghanistan when their vehicle was attacked by a roadside

bomb. Another Soldier serving under Johnson, Sgt. Lukasz Saczek, was in the vehicle with the three Soldiers on March 15. Sgt. Saczek died from noncombat-related injuries on May 10, 2009.

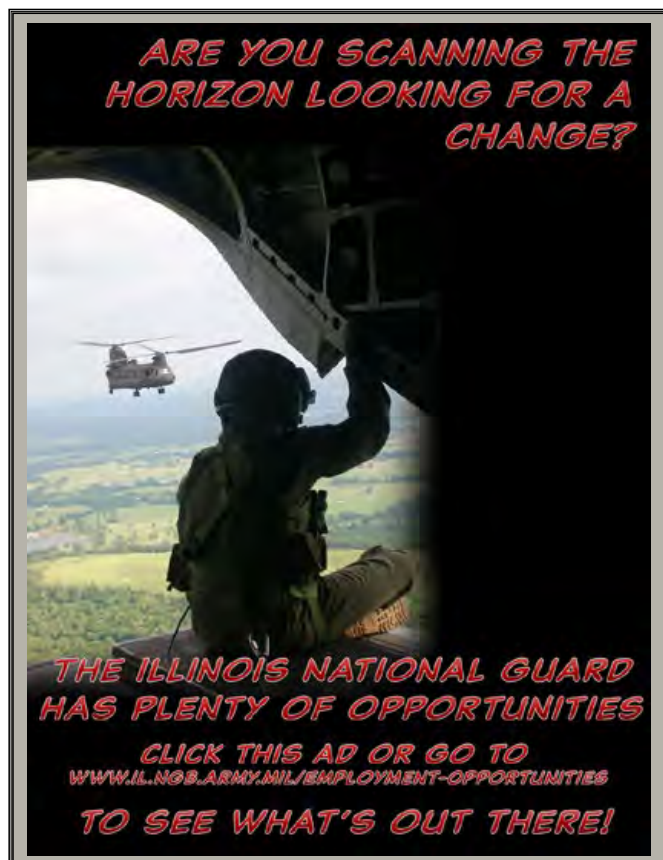
Johnson also thanked several of the senior NCOs he served with, particularly in the 1-178th Infantry. "I truly stood on their



shoulders. I'm glad their shoulders were broad and strong."

Johnson's military education ranges from the U.S. Army Infantry Officer Basic and Advance courses to the U.S. Army War College, where he earned a master's degree in strategic studies. His civilian education includes a bachelor's degree in sociology from Chicago State University, a master's degree in counseling from Governors State University and a doctorate in clinical psychology from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology.

As a civilian, Johnson is a clinical psychologist with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs at the Naval Station Great Lakes' Recruit Evaluation Unit. He is the father of an adult daughter, Ashley, and grandfather to Elijah.



AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

National Guard Association of Illinois names Tammy Duckworth legislator of the year

AND THE AWARD GOES TO...
THE HONORABLE TAMMY DUCKWORTH
FOR
NGAI'S LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR

By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – The National Guard Association of Illinois honored U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth as the NGAI Legislator of the Year during its annual banquet and awards ceremony at the Wyndham Springfield City Centre, Springfield, Illinois, May 20.

"I'm so honored to receive this award from an association that has meant so much to me since I joined the Illinois National Guard so many years ago," Duckworth said via

a pre-recorded message. "As your senator, I work hard to make sure our service members, veterans and families have the support they deserve."

Duckworth, who serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and is the chairman of the Airland subcommittee, said she is proud some of her provisions were included in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

"One of the provisions included



requires the Air Force to maintain a sufficient fleet of C-130s to ensure there is inventory to carry out critical missions both domestically and overseas,” Duckworth said. “This will ensure the 182nd Airlift Wing’s, based in Peoria, mission will remain for years to come. It also means that our National Guard units across the country, in Illinois and in Peoria have the ability to respond to new emergencies and domestic missions.”

She said this will also protect the jobs of 1,250 Airmen and approximately 370 full-time employees in Illinois.

Another provision included in the NDAA addresses the scourge of military hunger among service members.

“As someone whose family relied on public nutrition programs after my father lost his job and who served in uniform most of my adult life, I’m so glad we’re working on policies so our service members and families have enough to eat,” she said. “But our work is not done. I’m working with the leaders of the Illinois National Guard on further improvements.”

Duckworth, the first female double amputee of Operation Iraqi Freedom, thanked the members of the Illinois National Guard for the great work they have done in supporting and defending the citizens of this country around the world and within the state of Illinois.

“For the past two years, the Illinois National Guard has been at the forefront of responding to calls for assistance from the state of Illinois to support the COVID-19 response efforts,” said Duckworth, who retired as a lieutenant



colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard. “Deployments continue around the world and the Soldiers and Airmen of the Illinois National Guard have responded and performed with professionalism.”

Duckworth said with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the role of the ILNG remains critical for the region.

“The State Partnership Program with Poland has been a success for decades,” she said. “It is even more important for the region now that Putin is threatening the region.”

Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard said Duckworth’s work as a U.S. Senator supporting service members, veterans and families is the reason she was selected as the NGAI Legislator of the Year.

“She gets it. She has worn the same uniform as we do. She has served in the same formations,” Neely said. “It makes my job as TAG a lot easier when I walk in a room and explain our issues at hand to someone who has worn the uniform.”

The NGAI also announced Erin Nilles as a recipient of a \$2,500 scholarship. Nilles, daughter of Illinois Air National Guard Master Sgt. Joshua Nilles and

his wife, Marcella, of Venedy, Illinois, will attend Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and major in dental hygiene. Nilles is a technician with the 126th Maintenance Group at Scott Air Force Base.

“Thank you for this scholarship,” Nilles said. “This will help me on my path to become a dental hygienist.”



Former U.S. Congressman and retired major general William L. Enyart, who served as the 37th Adjutant General of Illinois, delivered the keynote address.

"Senator Duckworth wanted me to express to you the very great honor she feels being named the NGAI Legislator of the Year," Enyart said. "Having one of our own serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee is of critical importance to us. Her selection is a well-earned honor for her. She is truly an advocate for the National Guard, Illinois and national security."

Enyart talked about the connection between the Illinois National Guard and the Ukrainian military.

"There has been mention of the Illinois National Guard training the Ukrainian military recently and maybe a word or two about the California National Guard training the Ukrainian military. But we were there at the beginning," he said. "The Illinois National Guard's support to Ukraine begin in the last century when we sent a platoon size element to Ukraine in 1999. That was our beginning with Ukraine."

Enyart explained that the State Partnership Program with Ukraine's neighboring country Poland began in 1993 and at times supported Ukraine and assisted the California National Guard with their SPP with Ukraine.

"With our training and assistance, Poland and Ukraine in the late 1990s formed the Polish Ukrainian Peace Force Battalion," Enyart said. "Those same units saw service in Kosovo with Soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard's 106th Aviation Regiment in 2008-2009."

Enyart said the Ukrainian Soldiers and officers were becoming well acquainted with the Illinois National Guard by that time.

"When I visited the Illinois National Guard Soldiers in November 2008 in Kosovo, it was

the Polish and Ukrainian Soldiers who took me on patrol in a 12 inch snowstorm," he

said. "Even before the 2008 deployment, the Illinois National Guard sent battalion size units to NATO Peace Shield exercises in Yavoriv, Ukraine in 2000 and 2001. Yes, Yavoriv, the same city which was hit recently by Russian cruise missiles."

Enyart stressed the training assistance did not end in 2001.

"In 2005, we sent an element to act as observers and controllers

for NATO war games that took place at the then-new Ukrainian War College," he said. "It was a challenge in the early days."

He told the audience the Soldiers from Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, which deployed to Ukraine in 2020 continued to build on the foundation the ILNG has laid for the past 23 years.

"The Pentagon thought Putin's grand land grab would succeed in very short order and most believed Ukrainian's military would collapse under an armored assault," he said. "But Ukrainians have shown what well-trained and well-led Soldiers can do in defending their homeland from an autocratic aggressor."

Enyart said the training, mentoring and fellowship the Illinois National Guard has provided the Ukrainian military has played a critical role in the successful defense of their homeland.

"This story is like a lot of untold stories. Few may know what we did, but we know," Enyart said. "You do the things that you do every day. Guardsmen do those not for fame but for pride. Pride in defending freedom and democracy, pride in protecting our neighbors from flood, fire and hurricane, and pride in knowing we are always ready, always there. Thank you for the untold story that we in the Illinois National Guard live every day."



WE ALL SERVE!

Illinois ESGR holds annual banquet to honor employers throughout the state



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By Barb Wilson, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs

SPRINGFIELD, ILL. – The Illinois Employer Support to the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) committee paid tribute to employers during the annual awards banquet in Bloomington, Illinois, May 13.

The employers, each nominated by an employee who serves in the National Guard or Reserves, were presented various awards for their commitment to their employees and their commitment to military service.

Thompson Middle School in St. Charles, Illinois, and Memorial

Behavioral Health Center in Springfield, Illinois, both received the Seven Seals Award. The Seven Seals award is presented in recognition of significant individual or organizational achievement, initiative, or support that promotes and supports the ESGR mission.

"The Seven Seals award recognizes the efforts of more than 4,800 volunteers who carry out ESGR's mission across the nation daily," said Michael Holub, state vice chairman, Illinois ESGR committee. "The Department of Defense awards honor the sacrifices made by so many employers year



after year."

Several Illinois employers received Above and Beyond awards. The Above and Beyond award is given in limited numbers and presented annually by ESGR members. It is designed to recognize those employers who have gone above and beyond the legal requirements of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act in granting leave to their Guard and Reserve employees for military duty.

Medcor, from McHenry, Illinois, was nominated by Army Reserve Maj. Benjamin Backsmeier.

"Medcor is extremely supportive of my military service," Backsmeier said in his nomination. "They go above and beyond every time I am called for military obligations. They stay in contact with me and my family to ensure they are taken care of and supported."

Ben Petersen, who accepted the award on Medcor's behalf, said Medcor was honored to receive the award.

"The amount of sacrifice these men and women make to serve our country is greatly appreciated," he said. "We appreciate every single person here who serves and we are certainly honored to be here tonight."



Mueller Company, of Decatur, Illinois, was nominated by Cpl. Gabriel Mociran as a result of his recent deployment to Saudi Arabia.

"I was reassured not to worry about anything and that my job was safe upon my return,"

Mociran said in his nomination letter. "Mueller is very accommodating toward the Reserves and are true patriots."

Accepting the award on behalf of Mueller was Austin Cox and Levie Marcum.

"It's an honor to accept this award on behalf of Gabe's deployment to Saudi Arabia last year," Cox said. "Mueller really respects his service and all who serve in the military."

Wildwood Church, located in East Moline, Illinois, was nominated by Lt. Col. Brian Smith.

"They bring meals and offer to babysit while I'm away serving in the military," Smith said.

"They pay my normal salary regardless of

how many weeks I'm away. They demonstrate their appreciation for my service in so many ways. I cannot imagine a more supportive employer."

Allen Knott, an elder at Wildwood Church, accepted the award on behalf of the church.



"We are very pleased to have Brian with us the past five years," Knott said. "We are very supportive of his commitment to the military and very thankful for all that has been done for him and his family."

Leidos, a company with approximately 43,000 employees, headquartered in Reston, Virginia, was nominated by Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Michael Ferrer, for supporting his commitment to the Illinois National Guard.

"Leidos sends care packages to deployed co-workers," Ferrer said. "They did it for me when I was deployed last year. This is a great motivator to support our people from afar."

Kathryn Lucas, who accepted the award on behalf of Leidos, which has nearly 800 employees in Illinois, said Leidos is proud to employ veterans, including herself.

"About 61 percent of my team are veterans," Lucas said. "Leidos is proud to support our employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserves."

Nussbaum Transportation, based in Hudson, Illinois, was nominated for the Above and Beyond Award by Staff Sgt. Jerrid Keith.

"I had no idea I would be leaving on deployment within a few months of starting work at Nussbaum to do some mandatory training in Texas," Keith said in his nomination letter. "The team was helpful and reassuring



while helping me prepare. They sent a care package while in training which meant a lot to me by reaching out to my brother and uncle who both work at Nussbaum to personalize the care package. They are truly an amazing company

to work for and they welcomed me back with open arms."

James Grier who accepted the award on behalf of Nussbaum Transportation said it was an honor to accept the award.



"I'm honored to receive this award on behalf of Jerrid," Grier said. "It was fun putting together the personalized care package to send to him while he was in Texas. He was in a location where the living conditions were not ideal so we were able to have fun with the contents."

The Park Ridge, Illinois, Police Department was nominated for the Above and Beyond Award by Illinois Army National Guard Capt. Emery Taylor.



"The Park Ridge Police Department is a phenomenal in supporting me during required drill dates, annual training and while I was deployed in Afghanistan in 2019-2020," Taylor said. "It's truly inspirational to see employers care so much for someone

when a deployment can be a detriment to productivity and budgeting."

Taylor said the department created a care package program that each shift would cover

a select item on his wants and wishes list to be delivered to him in Afghanistan.

"My co-workers took turns to oversee that life events and special moments were looked after for my family and for me," Taylor said. "Without their continued assistance, I am certain my military obligations would not be as easy on me as they have been in the past."

Park Ridge Police Chief Frank Kaminski said neither he nor the department deserves awards.

"The award goes to Emery. He's the one who was away from his family for the year," Kaminski said. "He's family. We're going to take care of what he and his family needs while he's gone."

Kaminski said the department is grateful to be honored and privileged to help Taylor during the time he was gone serving our country.

Employers receiving the Pro Patria award included Precise Construction Services. Recipients have demonstrated the greatest support to Guard and Reserve employees through their leadership and practices, including adopting personnel policies that make it easier for employees to participate in the National Guard and Reserve. Only three employers can receive the award in each state – one small employer, one large employer, and one public sector employer.

Precise Construction of Vandalia, Illinois, was nominated for the Pro Patria award in the small employer category by Tech. Sgt. Dustin Sievers.

Early in Sievers' employment Precise Construction, Rick Cripe made an investment in meeting Sievers' wife and daughter, spending several weekends with the family getting to know them on a personal level.

"By doing this, he established a relationship with my family to support them when I'm gone for military service. He has gone so far as to

allow the use of the company aircraft to fly my wife's elderly mother home for the holidays," Sievers said. "Last year I contracted COVID while on annual training and it lasted nearly all of September.

He kept me on full pay status during this annual training as well as previous training and did not use any of my sick time or vacation time."

Sievers said this was important since he's the only corporate pilot for the company.

"He has the

ultimate respect for my service and fully supports the military," he said. "He has done so much for me and my family as I serve in the military."

Precise Construction is also a Secretary of Defense Freedom Award semi-finalist this year.

Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), with headquarters in Decatur, Illinois and Chicago, received the Extraordinary Employer Support (EES) award. The EES award was created to recognize sustained employer support of National Guard and Reserve service. Only prior recipients of the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom award or the Pro Patria award, who have demonstrated sustained support for three years after receiving one of those awards, are eligible for consideration at the committee level.

Nominated by Maj. Andrew Marchese, ADM demonstrated their support in a multitude of ways from their active recruitment of transitioning and veteran service members to their ADM-veteran employee resource group for vets.

"This award is a continued sustainment piece," said Marchese in accepting the award on behalf of ADM. "They have created sustained recruiting and retention for veterans and support for its service members. ADM will continue its best practices for all who work for them."



McDonough selected as new AAG - Air



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard, has selected Colonel Dan McDonough, the Commander of Peoria's 182nd Airlift Wing, as the next Assistant Adjutant General – Air and Commander of the

Illinois Air National Guard.

The selection will come with a promotion to brigadier general.

Col. McDonough will replace Maj. Gen. Pete Nezamis, who will retire later this summer with 37 years of military service to our nation and the state of Illinois. A change of command ceremony is planned for June 4 immediately following the 182nd Airlift Wing change of command when Col. McDonough relinquishes command of the wing to Col. Rusty Ballard. Maj. Gen. Nezamis has led the Illinois Air National Guard since January 2019. He will retire later this summer.

"Pete Nezamis lead the Illinois Air National Guard through one of the most challenging periods in our nation and National Guard history including the unprecedented COVID-19 response and law enforcement support missions throughout the state and Washington, D.C.," Maj. Gen. Neely said. "General Nezamis served nationally performing duty for the United States Strategic Command and as Chairman for the Strategic Planning System Committee Midwest Region, providing strategic executive level input to the Director of the Air National Guard, all the while, the Illinois Air National Guard maintained among the highest readiness rates in the nation, supporting multiple overseas contingency operations, and leading the charge

on modernization and innovation throughout the Air National Guard. General Nezamis is someone who quickly rose through the ranks to Wing Command at an early age and was pivotal in the relocation of the 126th Air Refueling Wing in 1999. Pete has truly etched his name in the annals of Illinois National Guard history."

Like Maj. Gen. Nezamis, Col. McDonough is a command evaluator, instructor, and pilot with well over 5,600 flight hours. He has led the 182nd Airlift Wing since November 2017. Prior to taking command of the 182nd Airlift Wing, he served as the commander of the wing's Operations Group since March 2006. Under his tutelage, the 182nd Airlift Wing has maintained the highest C-130 mission capability rates in the Air National Guard for the past 13 years. The wing's C-130 mission capability rate of 82.61 percent this past year was the best in the U.S. Air Force. This past year the wing won its 10th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award. Its maintenance process has been exported to units in five different states and Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

"Colonel McDonough's leadership and accomplishments speak for themselves. His experience serving at every level of command including wing command will serve him well as he leads the Illinois Air National Guard and its three wings while assisting Major General Neely in fulfilling the many vital missions of the Illinois National Guard as a whole," Maj. Gen. Nezamis said. "I'm proud to hand the reins over to such an outstanding officer and leader."

Col. McDonough said he is honored to take command of the Illinois Air National Guard's more than 3,000 Airmen and its three wings.

"There are many challenges and opportunities ahead for the Air National Guard and I look forward to working with our outstanding Airmen and civilian employees to ensure we are well positioned to meet and overcome those challenges and remain ready and relevant now and well into the future," McDonough said.

MEMORIAL DAY IN THE SECOND CITY

The Illinois National Guard helps celebrate Memorial Day in Chicago

By Airman Avery Litton and Staff Sgt. Paul Helmig, 182nd Airlift Wing Public Affairs





U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael Loh, the Director of the Air National Guard, and Brig. Gen. Rodney Boyd, Assistant Adjutant General - Army, Illinois National Guard, with members of the 108th Sustainment Brigade, the Army's 484th Band and numerous other military dignitaries participated in Chicago's Memorial Day celebrations May 29, 2022. Activities started with a Gold Star breakfast, followed by the parade, the wreath laying ceremony at Daley Plaza and a mass enlistment ceremony.



THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March

1

170th Fighter Squadron activated for Korean War

1951: March 1, 1951 marked the entry of the 170th Fighter Squadron into Federal Service for the Korean War. The 170th was released from active duty and returned to Illinois state control on 1 December 1952.



1

Sgt. Simone Robinson

2009: Sgt. Simone Robinson, 21, of Robbins, Illinois, a member of Co. E, 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Crestwood, Illinois, died from wounds suffered when a suicide bomber attacked her security post in Kabul, Afghanistan, Jan. 17, 2009.



15

Sgt. Christopher Abeyta, Spc. Norman Cain and Sgt. Robert Weinger

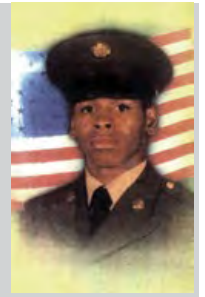


2009: Sgt. Christopher Abeyta, 23, of Midlothian, Illinois, Spc. Norman Cain III, 22, of Mount Morris, Illinois, and Sgt. Robert Weinger, 24, of Round Lake Beach, Illinois, died of wounds suffered when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device near Kot, Afghanistan. All three men were assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment based in Woodstock, Illinois.

17

Staff Sgt. Ivory Phipps

2004: Staff Sgt. Ivory L. Phipps, 44, of Chicago, Ill., died in Baghdad, Iraq, of injuries sustained from a mortar attack. Phipps was a member of the 1544th Transportation Company based in Paris, Illinois.



27

106th Cavalry activated for WWII's Normandy Campaign

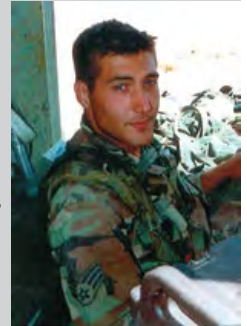
1941: Four years after its induction, the 106th Cavalry Group shipped out for Britain. The unit landed in Normandy, France in late June, and entered combat on July 4th attached to the U.S. VIII Corps. The 106th saw action in Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland, and Central Germany.



29

Staff Sgt. Jacob Frazier

2003: Staff Sgt. Jacob Frazier, 24, of St. Charles, Illinois, was killed in action when the convoy he was travelling in was ambushed near Geresk, Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Frazier was a Joint Tactical Air Controller assigned to the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron of the 182nd Airlift Wing based in Peoria, Illinois.



April

3

Wilson signs declaration of war against Germany

1917: President Woodrow Wilson signed the bill declaring a state of war on Germany, officially entering the United States in WWI. Over 100 years ago Illinois soldiers began their generation's road to war, with a force 28, 215 strong. For the first time the Illinois National Guard was on the world stage. For the first time Illinois Soldiers fought with the armies of other nations: the French, the British and the Australians. For the first time, Illinois Soldiers suffered from the effects of chemical warfare. Before the Armistice was signed, the 33rd fought at Hamel, Chipilly Ridge, Gressaire Woods, the Somme Offensive, Verdun, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and St. Mihiel.

9

**Pvt. 1st Class
Dexter Kerstetter
earns Medal of
Honor at Luzon**



1945: Private First Class Dexter J. Kerstetter of Company C, 130th Infantry advanced alone ahead of his platoon on the Philippine island of Luzon. Using expert marksmanship he cleared pockets of enemy resistance in several bunkers and caves. In one instance, he scaled the side of a cliff to reach an enemy cave. He eliminated those inside with grenades and rifle shots fired from the hip. In total, Kerstetter killed 16 Japanese that day. For his determined effort in knocking out these enemy installations he received the Medal of Honor.

29

Sgt. Landis Garrison

2004: Sgt. Landis Garrison, 23 of Rapids City, Illinois, died of non-combat related injuries while serving at Abu Ghraib, Iraq. Garrison was assigned to the 333rd Military Police Company based in Freeport, Illinois.



May

6

**123rd Called to the U of I campus for
support to law enforcement**

1970: Following the US entry into the Vietnam War and the Kent State shootings of May 4th, students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign organized a strike in protest. As the protest turned violent with storefronts being vandalized, the ILNG was called to support law enforcement. 1st Battalion, 123rd Infantry arrived on May 6th to assist. Illinois Governor Richard Ogilvie called in an additional 3,800 Soldiers on May 9th to gain control of the ten other colleges that were shut down around the state.



9

The birth of the Illinois National Guard

1723: The first muster of the Illinois Militia, what would become the Illinois National Guard, took place near what is now Kaskaskia, Illinois.

The Illinois National Guard has been a major contributor to every major conflict in our nation's history. For nearly 300

years, just as in the days of the militia, before we were even a state, the Illinois National Guard has a contract with the citizens of Illinois, providing a ready and relevant force to respond to any accident or incident that should arise, state or federal.



10

**Sgt. Lukasz
Saczek**

2009: Sgt. Lukasz Saczek, 23, of Lake in the Hills, Illinois, died from injuries sustained during a non-combat related incident. Saczek was assigned to Co. D, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment based in Woodstock, Illinois.



18

**Sgt. 1st Class
William Chaney**

2004: Sgt. 1st Class William Chaney, 59, of Schaumburg, Illinois, died in Landstuhl, Germany, from complications following surgery. Chaney was assigned to B Company, 1st Battalion, 106th Aviation Regiment based in Chicago.



25

Spc. Jeremy Ridlen

2004: SSpc. Jeremy L. Ridlen, 23, of Paris, Ill., died in East Fallujah, Iraq, from small arms fire after a dump truck on the side of the road was detonated a his military convoy passed by. Ridlen was assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company based in Paris, Ill.



**THE PRAIRIE SENTINEL
1301 NORTH MACARTHUR BOULEVARD
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62702**

**DSN: 555-3569
PHONE: (217) 761-3569
FAX: (217) 761-2988**

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